Behind the Scenes:

Exploring Participatory Drama-Based Research with Youth

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Abstract

This study examines the use of drama-based research methods with a group of youth in the GTA, drawing on their experiences within the process. Through this study, I set out to examine the overarching research question: How can youth in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) take part in the process of participatory, drama-based research? In examining how youth participate in this process, I identified two themes: *Constructing Knowledge* and *Becoming Performers*. In examining how the youth described their experiences during this process, I identified two additional themes: *Building Community* and *Impacting Change*. Taken together, these findings provide important insights into how youth can participate actively in research processes using drama, which will help inform future research pertaining to child and youth-centred research practices.

Résumé

Cette étude examine l'utilisation de méthodes de recherche basées sur l'art dramatique avec un groupe de jeunes de la région du Grand Toronto, en s'appuyant sur leurs expériences au cours du processus. Dans le cadre de cette étude, j'ai entrepris d'examiner la question de recherche fondamentale: Comment les jeunes de la région du Grand Toronto peuvent-ils participer au processus de recherche participative basée sur le théâtre? En examinant la manière dont les jeunes participent à ce processus, j'ai identifié deux thèmes: Construire le savoir et devenir interprètes. En examinant la manière dont les jeunes ont décrit leurs expériences au cours de ce processus, j'ai identifié deux thèmes supplémentaires: la création d'une communauté et l'impact sur le changement. Pris ensemble, ces résultats fournissent des informations importantes sur la manière dont les jeunes peuvent participer activement aux processus de recherche en utilisant le théâtre, ce qui contribuera à éclairer les recherches futures sur les pratiques de recherche centrées sur les enfants et les jeunes.

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Chapter One: An Overture

> "So, I should tell you that I used to think research was about percentages and stats ... that's what we learned in school. I didn't realize that it could actually be about listening to people and actually, like, making something" (Dani, Focus Group, November 28th, 2017)

This study focuses on methodology. It examines the use of drama-based research methods with a group of youth in the GTA, drawing on their experiences within the process. The purpose of this research was to understand how drama-based methods can be employed in an education-focused participatory research project with youth. The information generated from this study is intended to: [1] provide insight and understanding into how youth can participate actively in a research process through the use of drama; and, [2] inform future research pertaining to child and youth-centred research practices.

In this introductory chapter, I give a brief overview of the background and context of drama-based research in education (which I further discuss in Chapter Two). After contextualizing the research, I explain my research objectives and a rationale for my research and provide an overview of the design of this study. Following this, I situate myself as the researcher, and discuss my prior experiences and biases upon entering the study. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the significance of this study.

Background

This project focuses specifically on the use of participatory drama-based research methods with youth. Drama-based research methods are situated within the broader field of

qualitative inquiry, a body of activities that "locate the observer in the world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 4). Participatory research methods are those that provide agency to research participants, ensuring their needs are a priority in the research process, and are often used with marginalized populations, with children, or when projects involve goals of change. In participatory research, the participants' involvement within the research process can range from consultation, to collaboration, to ownership over aspects of the project including research design, data generation, analysis, and dissemination (Aldridge, 2015; Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015). Drama-based, participatory research methods fall under a broader umbrella of 'performative inquiry,' which Butler-Kisber defines as the "use of performance/dramatization as a mode of inquiry that addresses social issues with goals of change" (2010, p. 136). Fels (2015) adds that this type of inquiry offers researchers "the opportunity to make visible political, social, economic, cultural, communal, and individual injustices, conventions, expectations, presumptions, ambitions" (p. 152).

As will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two, qualitative researchers in education and the social sciences have been identifying ethical and methodological issues with the generation and representation of data in traditional research practices, and looking to innovative artistic and performative methods to meet their needs (Bochner, 1997; Douglas & Carless, 2013; Jones, 2006; 2012; Morgan et al., 2013; Spry, 2011). There are a variety of ways researchers undertake this work, including through performance literature and interpretation of performance texts, performance ethnography, and autobiographical performance (Pelias, 2008). Specific methods of inquiry include ethnodrama (Saldaña, 2008, p. 195-196; Belliveau, 2006), reader's theatre (Donmoyer & Donmoyer 2008; Flynn, 2004; Konzal et al., 2002), and playbuilding (Norris 2009; Tarlington and Michaels, 1995). Performative inquiry offers researchers the ability

to explore data collection, representation and possibilities for social change through 'embodiment' (Pelias, 2008) and can contribute to more enlightened and involved citizenship (Madison, 2005).

Research Rationale and Objectives

Building on my relationships with secondary schools, children's theatre companies, and youth-centred arts organizations, along with my own published work on arts-based research and youth-led initiatives, the objective of this research was to understand how drama-based methods can be employed in an education-focused participatory research project with youth. As will be further discussed in Chapter Two, much of the highly participatory drama-based work in recent years has been done with pre-service teachers and other adults, rather than children and youth (see: Belliveau, 2006; Carter et al., 2011; Shabtay et al. 2019, for examples). There have been studies conducted with children and youth; however, they often take place within school settings, and appear to be more structured and researcher-led than the drama-based work conducted with adults (see: Cahill, 2006; Conrad, 2004, for examples).

Through this study, I set out to examine the overarching research question: How can youth in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) take part in the process of participatory, drama-based research? More specifically, the research sub-questions are: (1) How do the youth participate during this process? and (2) How do the youth describe their experiences during this process?

Research Design Overview

This study draws on the experiences of youth in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), as participants in a drama-based research process. The research took place in two rented rooms in a local school

and library which were used as rehearsal spaces, meeting rooms, and the performance venue for this project.

This study had 29 participants. Of these 29 participants, 26 were youth participants (between the ages of 13 and 17 years of age) and three were adult audience members. All participants resided in the GTA. Of the 26 youth participants, 15 youth participated solely in the 'initial conversations' (semi-structured discussions and focus groups), while 11 participated in both the 'initial conversations' and the participatory drama-based aspects of the research. Of the 26 youth participants, 17 identified as female, one identified as non-binary, and eight identified as male. The three adult, audience-member participants were female.

My data collection was divided into three different parts: I began with initial conversations (focus groups and interviews) with 26 youth in the GTA to provide some initial contextual information for my study. Next, I worked with 11 of these youth volunteers in a devised theatre process to create an original theatrical piece based on the initial conversation data. Following the performance of the piece, I held two follow-up focus groups, one with three adult audience members, and one with five youth participants. I collected several bodies of data, that I discuss throughout the study: the initial conversation data; video-recordings and video stills from the playbuilding process; reflective memos; and follow-up focus group data. As this work is performative in nature, I required the use of video and audio recordings, as well as photographs and stills to document this process, and obtained formal permission from participants and guardians to use and disseminate this work. I used constant comparison inquiry (a form of thematic analysis) to analyze these data to answer my research sub-questions. I discuss my research design in more detail in Chapter Three.

Situating Myself in the Research

As a researcher, educator, and artist, I began this project with experiences that influenced my project design, fieldwork, and analysis. My previous degrees (an Honours BA in Children's Studies, and an MA in International Child Studies) focused heavily on children's rights, youth activism, agency, and ethical practices in research with young people. This educational background not only sparked my interest in youth-centred research practices, but also shaped my understanding of research, and how young participants should be treated within the research process. I entered this project with the strong belief that youth are experts of their own lived experiences, and should therefore be treated as active participants in, rather than passive objects of, research about their lives.

I also entered this project with a strong interest in drama-based research. Before my entry into academe, much of my life revolved around theatre and performance. As a young person, I was engaged in numerous drama programs and classes, playwrighting and playbuilding, performing in theatrical productions, and other artistic and performative initiatives. What I did not formally acknowledge at the time, was that engaging in drama was also engaging in research. Through drama, individuals engage in self-discovery, examine behaviours, explore motives, and make sense of their world. When taking on a new role, I engaged in traditional 'library-based' research to understand the time period, social cues, and author's intent, but also in autoethnographic research, examining my own position, motives and understandings in order to "live truthfully under imaginary circumstances" (referred to by actors as the 'Meisner technique' after Sanford Meisner 1905-1997). Watching theatre, I engaged in textual analysis of the performances, analysing the dialogue, action, space, rhythm, sound, staging and material elements of the performance (Pavis, 2003). When playbuilding, I engaged in devised theatre

which was essentially a highly participatory drama-based research process in which a group of actors work on scenes based on their personal experiences of a certain issue or theme, and the final piece is a collage of ideas, performed theatrically and based on the views and voices of each group member (Norris, 2009; Tarlington & Michaels, 1995; Shabtay et al., 2019). There are obvious connections between these experiences and this research project, which are evidently part of the reason I deeply value and decided to explore further, the use of drama-based research methods with youth. These experiences not only fostered my love for drama but were also part of my early (and ongoing) education in becoming a creative, analytical, and reflexive researcher.

As a former theatre artist, educator, and a scholar coming out of childhood studies, with a deep-rooted interest in children's rights and research with children, it was important to me that this project take a youth-centred, participatory, drama-based approach. This type of research is also predicated on an understanding that there are different realities, ways of being and knowing, and take a constructivist epistemological and ontological approach (Creswell, 2013). Constructivist approaches aim to present an increasing understanding of a phenomenon, which can be deemed as 'transferable' rather than 'generalizable' based on the similarity of contexts, which resonates with the readers' (or viewers') experiences. This research approach takes into account the differences in individuals' lives, and that these differences can influence individual experiences (Given, 2008).

Significance of the Study

This study is about methodology. It provides insights into young people's experiences as participants in a participatory, drama-based research process, offering new knowledge on how youth participated within these processes and how they reflected on their participation. Strides

are being made in the fields of education and childhood studies to include youth as active participants and knowledge-holders in social research, and this study further contributes to the body of knowledge on participatory, youth-centred methods. The information gleaned from this study has the potential to inform qualitative arts-based researchers about the ways in which drama-based methods can be adjusted for use with young people, as well as the challenges of this work. Findings from this study may be of value to researchers studying childhood and youth in numerous contexts and communities, those who are interested in using drama to highlight young people's perspectives in research, as well as those interested in using performative methods to disseminate research findings to an audience outside of academe.

Organization of the Thesis

In this first chapter, Chapter One, I have provided an introduction to my research topic and described the general background and context of the study. I outlined the rationale for the research, and offered an overview of the research design. I also situated myself as the researcher, discussing my connections to the study. Finally, I discussed the significance of the study.

In Chapter Two, I draw upon theoretical literatures and studies that are focused on performative inquiry, the 'new' social studies of childhood, and participatory action research. I discuss how I used these literatures in designing my research project.

In Chapter Three, I discuss the methodological approach to this study. I begin by describing the objectives of my research, my research questions, research sites, participant sample and my recruitment strategies. I detail my data collection processes and the types of data sources: interview and focus group data from initial conversations, video recordings of the dramatic process, video stills (images), reflective memos, and follow-up focus group data. I also

discuss how these data are analyzed through thematic analysis using constant comparison inquiry. Finally, I move to a discussion of the ethical considerations involved in this work, such as rights-informed practices, informed consent, confidentiality, and compensation.

In Chapter Four, I present the key themes answering the research sub-question: 'How do the youth participate during the drama-based process?'. I include examples throughout the chapter, such as excerpts from transcribed video data and video stills to portray the processes I discuss.

In Chapter Five, I discuss the key themes answering the second research sub-question: 'How do the youth describe their experiences during the drama-based process?' This sub-question is answered using transcribed participant responses during a follow-up focus group that followed the drama-based process and final performance. I include examples throughout the chapter, such as excerpts from transcribed audio data, as well as several video stills from scenes that the youth participants discuss, to provide visual representations of the scenes for the readers.

In the concluding chapter, Chapter Six, I provide a summary of the findings and discuss the implications of the study for future research and practice. I discuss the limitations of the study, offering suggestions for future drama-based educational research with youth.

Chapter Two: Exploring the Landscape of Performative Inquiry

In this chapter I focus on three bodies of literature that provide a conceptual context for my study. I explore some of the key theories and methods within these literatures, as well as examples of empirical research conducted in the Global North over the past fifteen years. I begin by discussing key aspects of the 'new social studies of childhood', a school of thought that underpins my study. Following this, I explore the 'landscape' of performative inquiry, an umbrella under which participatory drama-based methods fall. Next, I discuss theories and methods of Participatory Action Research (PAR), and connections this type of research has to the other literatures I have discussed. Finally, I reflect on these three literatures and how these concepts have contributed to my own participatory, drama-based study with youth.

The 'New' Social Studies of Childhood

Not so 'new' anymore, the new social studies of childhood (also called the 'new childhood studies' and the 'new sociology of childhood') emerged in the 1980's along with a global children's rights movement, and the drafting of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989 (Berman & MacNevin, 2017). The UNCRC, which defines 'children' as individuals from birth to eighteen years of age, includes in it the recognition of children's right to have their opinions heard in matters concerning them, which in turn has influenced the way many researchers now approach the study of childhood and youth (Bradbury-Jones & Taylor, 2015; Gray & Winter, 2011).

The new social studies of childhood views children and youth as social actors who are worthy of study in their own right. This approach opposes traditional developmentalist research, which view children and youth simply as 'becomings' (potential future adults) rather than also as

the ‘beings’ that they presently are (Berman & MacNevin, 2017; Prout & James, 2015). The school of thought recognizes that since humans are consistently growing and changing, and that growth and development are influenced by context, the concept of childhood is a social construct (Berman & MacNevin, 2017). Research within the new social studies of childhood works to highlight child and youth agency, including ways that children and youth “influence, organize, coordinate, and control events taking place in their in their social worlds” (Alanen, 2009, p. 170).

Within the new social studies of childhood is the idea of child-centred research – research that situates children and youth as subjects or active participants rather than objects in the research process. This concept is referred to as research *with* (rather than *on*) children and youth (Alderson & Morrow, 2011; Christensen & James, 2017; Farrell, 2005). Many researchers within this field have moved further past viewing children as ‘subjects’ of research to including them as active participants within research processes (Ajodhia-Andrews, 2016; Berman & MacNevin, 2017; Horgan, 2017) as well as researchers and co-researchers in their own right (Alderson, 2008; Bradbury-Jones & Taylor, 2015; Kellet, 2011).

My study is underpinned by a children’s rights framework, drawing on the new social studies of childhood. I work from a starting point of understanding youth as social actors within their society and experts in their lives. I look to them as knowledge holders and active participants within my research. With this in mind, the sections that follow explore the ‘landscape’ of performative inquiry, including its connections to the new social studies of childhood, and participatory action research.

Situating Performative Inquiry as a Qualitative Research Approach

Performative Inquiry is situated within the broader field of qualitative research, a body of activities that "locate the observer in the world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 4). Qualitative research can take a variety of forms. Traditionally, it includes observation, participation, and interviewing, but has grown to include other forms such as narrative inquiry, arts-based research, autoethnography, and action research (Creswell, 2013). Through a series of representations including field notes, conversations, interviews, recordings, photographs, and reflective memos, qualitative researchers interpret and create visibility for diverse knowledge about the world to their readers or audiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). As qualitative studies tend to be smaller in scale, and are context-oriented, issues of voice and reflexivity are of particular importance to qualitative researchers (Butler-Kisber, 2018).

Denzin and Lincoln (2008) argue that qualitative inquiry is "inherently multimethod in focus … reflect[ing] an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question" (p. 7). This means that the use of multiple methods is ever present: a growing crystallization of different directions and methods (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2008). The methodological field is consistently growing and changing and does not privilege specific qualitative methods or practices over others, however, certain methods can be more or less appropriate, depending on research goals (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Participatory approaches, for example, are particularly useful in providing agency to research participants, ensuring their needs are a priority in the research process, and are often used with marginalized populations, with children, and when projects involve goals of change. In participatory approaches, research participants' involvement in a project can range from consultation, to collaboration, to ownership over a variety of different aspects including research design, data generation, analysis, and

dissemination (Aldridge, 2015; Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015). Participatory approaches are further discussed later in the chapter.

Another recent trend emerging in qualitative research is the questioning of set methodologies altogether. St. Pierre (2017) discusses this change, pointing to four 'generations' of qualitative research: [1] radical qualitative methodology of the 1970's and 1980's; [2] engagement with the postmodern; [3] post-qualitative inquiry; and, [4] a new generation which involves 'thinking without method' (p. 37). She discusses how each generation of new researchers upends what the previous generation thought was 'true and real' about research methodology (St. Pierre, 2017, p. 37). St. Pierre points to a growing trend, or 'new generation' of researchers who are "methodology free … lost from the beginning and prefer to stay lost as they 'inquire,' whatever that involves" (2017, p. 42). Another innovative direction for qualitative inquiry, discussed in the sections that follow, is the use of performance-based methods.

The Benefits of Performative Inquiry

Qualitative researchers in education and the social sciences are identifying ethical and methodological issues with representation of data in traditional research practices, and some are looking to innovative artistic and performative methods to meet their needs (Bochner, 1997; Douglas & Carless, 2013; Jones, 2006; 2012; Morgan et al., 2013; Spry, 2011). Douglas and Carless (2013), for example, explain that often reports and articles do not sufficiently represent their data. They note: "[w]e see ourselves as having inhabited this paradoxical place, of feeling we have done good work, but also conscious that some of what we have learned refuses to be packaged, refuses a textual representation and therefore, we also feel we have failed to adequately represent our findings" (p. 54).

Like Douglas and Carless, Jones (2012) discusses issues with data representation in traditional social science research. He explains that because of a tendency for narrative accounts to be uncovered through interviews and turned into written text, narratives often appear linear, when in fact they are "simultaneous layers of past and present—the visual and the spatial … beyond the purely temporal" (p. 2). This concern, as well the desire to have social research reach audiences both within and beyond academia, have prompted some social scientists and educational researchers to look to performative inquiry – a participatory, arts-based form of qualitative research – for solutions.

As described by Butler-Kisber (2010; 2018), performative inquiry refers to "the current burgeoning use of performance/dramatization as a mode of inquiry that addresses social issues with goals of change" (p. 136). Fels (2015) adds that it offers researchers "the opportunity to make visible political, social, economic, cultural, communal, and individual injustices, conventions, expectations, presumptions, ambitions" (p. 152). Like other forms of arts-based research, performative inquiry methods are predicated on an understanding that there are different realities, ways of being and knowing, and take a constructivist epistemological and ontological approach (Creswell, 2013). Constructivist inquiry aims to present an increasing understanding of a phenomenon, which can be deemed as 'transferable' rather than 'generalizable' based on the similarity of contexts, which resonates with the readers' (or viewers') experiences. This research approach takes into account the differences in individuals' lives, and that these differences can influence individual experiences (Given, 2008). Performative inquiry is a participatory process that, unlike many forms of social research, cannot be accomplished solely from an observational stance. Instead, researchers are deeply involved in the creative processes, often as creators or collaborators of performative works. Performative

inquiry involves an 'embodiment' of knowledge, as it involves performers' (who are often also researchers or co-researchers/participants) bodies in generating and presenting their insights (Pelias, 2008). Pelias (2008) notes that this process is different from traditional forms of scholarship where the bodies of researchers often 'slip away' (p. 187).

This type of embodiment requires researchers to be consistently present and reflexive. Schechner (2012) explains that this process is different from theoretical performance studies scholarship and practical performance work but creating a different way to engage with performance. Fels (2012) points to four key requirements for researchers engaging in performative inquiry: "[1] to listen deeply, [2] to be present in the moment, [3] to identify stops that interrupt or illuminate [their] practice or understanding, and [4] to reflect on those stops, in terms of their significance, implications, and why they matter" (p. 53). When using the term 'stops' Fels (2012) refers to moments of risk and opportunity that often arise when a person is surprised by, or awakened to, a new understanding or possibility. Like other forms of visual and other arts-based inquiry, examining these stops through performative inquiry can enable researchers and participants to explore and embody new possibilities associated with social change. The following section explores this concept further.

Embodying change.

One way to explore possibilities of social change through performative inquiry is through 'embodiment'. Pelias (2008) notes that all performance is political because performer's bodies are not neutral. While some directors may attempt to erase issues involving race and gender in their casting, they are unable to eliminate audiences' interpretations of what they see performed.

Because of this, participants interested in interventionist work "find their political bodies a rich methodological source for exploration and advocacy" (Pelias, 2008, p. 188).

Drawing on Conquergood's (1998) triad of mimesis (performance as imitation), poiesis (performance as enlightenment) and kinesis (performance as intervention), Madison (2005) and Pelias (2008) each examine the potential performance has for instigating social change. Pelias describes how this can be done through physical embodiment, stating "whether participants see themselves as participating in order to replicate, construct, or provide alternatives to current constructions … they come to know how embodiment reifies, insinuates, destabilizes, interrogates, and alters their own and others' ways of seeing the world" (2008, p. 187). Madison builds on Conquergood's ideas, explaining how performance can be used in critical ethnography in a 'performance of possibilities': an active, creative work that involves the staging of ethnographic data meant to benefit the research participants, contribute to more enlightened and involved citizenship, and probe questions of identity, representation and fairness. Through a performance of possibilities, participants benefit through voice, subjectivity, and interrogative field (Madison, 2005, p.174).

Madison explains that 'voice' is not simply "being heard and being included", but goes further to present "a historical self, a full presence that is in and of a particular world … that [both] constructs and is constructed by a matrix of social and political processes" (2005, p. 173). She explains that regardless of an audience's enjoyment of a performance, the audience cannot entirely 'undo' or 'unknow' what they have witnessed and experienced through performance because image and voice leave an imprint in a person's consciousness, proclaiming existence and entering into an audience's experience. Beyond this acknowledgement, participants benefit through what Madison refers to as 'subjectivity', as the audience members and performers must

"engage the material and discursive world of the Other" (2005, p. 174), allowing them to see the world from another individual's point of view. Participants also benefit through the 'interrogative field', which is when a performance of possibilities creates or contributes to the identification and interrogation of injustices, and "motivates individuals to some level of informed and strategic action" (Madison, 2005, p. 174).

A performance of possibility allows audience members to see themselves as agents of change through empathy and intersubjectivity. While engaging with a performance of possibility, Madison (2005) explains that audiences gain insight into the world of the subjects "to feel and know some of what they feel and know" (p. 175), problematize the categories of 'us' and 'them', understand themselves differently, and are challenged to become "witness, interlocutor, subvertor, and creator" (p. 177). While a defining characteristic of performative inquiry is its aims to explore possibilities and affect change, there are multiple ways researchers and performers (or researcher-performers) may choose to engage in this work.

Engaging in Performative Inquiry

Pelias (2008) examines the three most common directions in which performers focus their inquiry: the literary ('literature in performance'), the cultural ('performance ethnography'), and the personal ('autobiographical performance'). The following subsections provide a brief overview of these directions pointing to some of the key considerations when taking on these types of work.

The literary.

In engaging with performance texts (e.g. scripts), there is a constant negotiation between the literature's art and the performer's art, situating the performer in a position to either feature or resist what a literary work asks (Pelias, 2008). Depending on what the performer decides, the inquiry process can either be driven by, or detached from, the text. Performers whose processes are driven by text "seek entry into the textual world and, in so doing, come to know the characters that live there … giving performers the skills to gain access, to allow others to speak through them, and to inhabit worlds other than their own" (Pelias, 2008, p. 189). Madison (2005) explains:

> The performer is not only engaged, but also strives to become. For the performer, this is an endeavor not only to live in an individual consciousness shaped by a social world, but also to live in that social world as well … the performer must first seriously research all the crucial elements that encompass a cognitive map of the social, economic, cultural, and political practices that constitute that world. Moreover, the performer must be committed—doing what must be done or going where one must go—to experience the felt-sensing dynamic of that world: its tone-color—the sight, sounds, smells, tastes, textures, rhythms—the visceral ethos of that world. (p. 177)

On the other hand, performers whose processes detach them from the text "discover how to keep present a given literary work while they spin away from, or comment upon it. The text, functioning as a launch point for what the performer wants to say, might be approached metaphorically to establish a conceptual overlay that guides an audience's reading" (Pelias,

2008, p. 189). Performers who take this approach provide their own readings of the literary texts, put their own 'stamp' on it, and examine new possibilities for the work. These different approaches to performance literature can be useful in different ways. For example, a theatre group might stage a production of Shakespeare's *The Taming of The Shrew* that is driven by the original text and performed in a manner that attempts to present historical accuracy to showcase the beliefs and ideas held by Shakespeare and his audiences at the time it was originally presented. Another group might showcase a modernized and feminist retelling of the piece, critiquing the original work and re-imagining it for a new liberal-minded audience. In both cases, the culminating performance is an interpretation of the literary work; however, each approach is useful for its own purposes.

The personal.

Autobiographical performance explores a person's life experiences. Autobiographical performers select sections of data from the materials of their own lives and shape a performance piece (Pelias, 2008). As with performance ethnographers (discussed in the next subsection), autobiographical performers face ethical issues, as they must make decisions about which information to present, minimize, or bury, how to create aesthetic interest in the piece (this might include emphasizing moments that 'work' theatrically), as well as selecting, from an ethical standpoint, which details about others can/should be included (Pelias, 2008; Mienczakowski & Moore, 2008). Those who use autobiographical performance must also be aware of the risks of authenticity which include potential stigmatization (Mienczakowski & Moore, 2008). Rowe (2017) discusses this in an autoethnographic piece about an interaction she had with an audience member following a performance about her life experiences, in which he told her "[a]fter

watching you perform, I feel like you will never be happy" (p. 283). Through this example, she explains that this type of work often has more personal risk and vulnerability associated with it, since in autoethnographic performance performers do not have the anonymity that often comes with other research approaches.

The cultural.

Cultural practices also can be represented and examined through embodied performance. Pelias explains that through this process, performance ethnographers gather data (in similar ways to other qualitative researchers, using methods such as interviews, observations etcetera), but instead of creating a report, their findings are scripted and staged in a performance piece. This process is meant to is to "display living bodies who participate in the ongoing process of making culture" on stage (2008, p. 189), and to do so in a way that avoids shallowness and/or exploitation.

Nessler (2018) takes this approach in a process called 'documentary theatre'. Documentary theatre is the process of creating a theatrical performance "contain[ing] or cit[ing] real documents ... [such as] interview transcripts, trial transcripts, information of public record, or other items" (Nessler, 2018, p. 35). Nessler's process involved conducting conversational interviews with people affected by mental illness and constructing the data into monologues that are performed for a variety of audiences to encourage dialogue about mental health issues.

Baer et al. (2019) use a similar approach in creating *Out at School*, a monologue-based play about the experiences of LGBTQ children and families in the Ontario school system. They refer to their process as 'verbatim theatre', since the monologues foregrounded throughout the play are constructed entirely from the words and phrasing from transcribed interviews (p. 419).

For example, one of the monologues in the ninth scene of the play, titled "When it's Unsafe for Trans Kids to be Out", is derived word-for-word from an interview with the parent of a transgender child who was in the first year of her gender transition:

> I was on a field trip and it's like okay, 'Boys line up here and girls line up Here' and then my child was, like, literally standing in between the two lines with this frantic look, and then stood in the girls' line … [T]his was the first year of her transition, when she was only six, and everyone kinda laughed, like, they didn't laugh at her, but they laughed thinking that she was just being funny. But I think that's a difficult situation because not everybody identifies as a boy or a girl, so divide people in groups in different ways. … [A]lso talk about these things, have the books in the classroom. … [S]omebody may feel safe talking to you if you make a safe environment. (Baer et al., 2019, p. 426)

One challenge with these approaches to performative inquiry is in communication and the transfer of meanings. Pelias notes that sometimes there may be "slippage between what the body knows and what it can say and between what the body says and what an audience can interpret" (2008, p. 190). In addition to this, there can be issues in communicating the message of a performance to a reader who has not seen the piece performed. Pelias (2008) explains that "because performance is ephemeral (once given, then lost), performance scholars have tried to document in print what the body knows. Such attempts, more often than not, have been frustrating. Seldom does a printed account capture the feel for a performance" (p. 191).

Other issues involve those of representation. As Hall (1998) notes: “how people are represented is how they are treated” (p. 27). Madison explains that representation “often carries with it, political ramifications far beyond the reach of performance” and should be seen as a great responsibility (2005, p. 178). As a result, importance should be placed on constant ethical testing, critical reflection and reflexive processes. This includes carefully negotiating data, so participants retain ownership and authenticity, which can be done by including participants in multiple aspects of the research, and checking in with them to ensure that data is used properly in context (Madison, 2005; Mienczakowski & Moore, 2008; Pelias, 2008).

Something not frequently discussed is how, and whether, ethnographers should script themselves into the pieces they create. In any given script, an ethnographer can be implied rather than embodied, situated as the narrator of the piece, a central character in the piece, or placed as a participant on stage. Another consideration is the purpose of the piece. For some performance ethnographers, the task is to report findings objectively, while others find it a space for advocacy or intervention on behalf of cultural others. Because of this, performance ethnographers undergo different procedures, such as those discussed in an earlier section on ‘the literary’, changing the nature of the performance.

Researchers often view this performative inquiry approach as an opportunity to work for productive change and social justice, but in so doing, they also run several methodological risks. In undertaking a project that examines culture through performance, researchers may unintentionally reify what they hope to question; propose so many possibilities that there is no clear course of action; or, call for action without adequately posing possibilities, not recognizing the complexity of the circumstances (Pelias, 2008). The following section considers more of the specific benefits and challenges of using this method.

Ethnodrama and Ethnotheatre

Ethnodrama and ethnotheatre (also referred to as 'performance ethnography'), are specific methods of performative inquiry. An ethnodrama is a written script dramatizing qualitative data (interviews, observations, artifacts etc.), while ethnotheatre uses theatre production techniques to mount a production based on participants' experiences, or a researcher's understanding of the data collected. These two methods interact, as ethnotheatre is the performance display of an ethnodrama for an audience (Saldaña, 2008, p. 195-196).

One example of how these methods are used in research is Belliveau's (2006) project in which he created an ethnodrama about the process of preservice teachers creating a play. To do this, he used pre-service teachers' reflective journals during a playbuilding process, his own field notes, scenes from the final draft of their play script, as well as comments from viewers during their opening performance, and examined these through his own ethnodramatic piece about these processes. He found that this process brought forward new knowledge about meaning-making within collective creations, allowing "a convergence of lived and performative worlds to be played out simultaneously" (Belliveau, 2006, p. 11). Other examples of ethnodramatic works include *Chalkboard Concerto* (Saldaña, 2005), a piece based on a teacher's experiences in Chicago in the early 1990's, which merges different teachers' stories into a one-act monologue; and *Finding My Place*, a play based on Harry Wolcott's series of articles about the life history of a 'schizophrenic high school drop-out' with whom he developed a romantic relationship, and who subsequently tried to kill Wolcott and led to a heated debate in the academic research ethics community about power-dynamics, and intimate relationships with research participants (Saldaña & Wolcott, 2001).

Ethnodrama and ethnotheatre are said to have potential to achieve powerful results in disseminating research, assuming the script and production values are of high calibre, and the audience is receptive (Saldaña, 2008, p. 196). In fact, Denzin calls the use of ethnodramatic methods "the single most powerful way for ethnography to recover yet interrogate the meanings of lived experience" (1997, p. 94). Moreover, the process of *creating* an ethnodrama is a useful reflexive process for researchers in order to a gain deeper understanding of interview data, and the motives and needs expressed (Cannon, 2012). However, there are also some practical challenges facing researchers who use these methods.

One issue Saldaña elucidates is the idea of 'legitimacy'. Because ethnodrama and ethnotheatre are unfamiliar qualitative research approaches to many researchers, credibility of these methods can be suspect to some scholars. As with many other arts-based researchers, performance ethnographers are often faced with questions of credibility and whether their work is truly 'empirical'. Norris (2009) recognizes this issue, but maintains that everything researchers do shapes data slightly, stating, "if we recognize the subjectivity of perception, nothing would be empirical" (p. 28). Saldaña suggests the way to build credibility in these types of performances is to create the best performative work possible. He notes that researchers must be aware of the differences between writing for a staged production and constructing a narrative for qualitative reports, since ethnodramatic writing must take into account theatrical conventions. He explains:

> This may be difficult for some to accept, but theatre's primary goal is neither to 'educate' nor to 'enlighten.' Theatre's primary goal is to entertain — to entertain ideas and to entertain for pleasure. With ethnographic performance, then, comes the responsibility to

> create an entertainingly informative experience for an audience, one that is aesthetically sound, intellectually rich, and emotionally evocative. (2003, p. 220)

Saldaña believes that if the field is saturated with high-quality, rigorous performances, people will come to respect the work (2008, pp. 203-204).

Another related challenge is that many scholars who want to engage in ethnodramatic work may be experienced researchers but may not have a background in theatre arts or formal training in performance. In response, Saldaña (2008) cautions researchers that the merit and success of performance pieces are dictated by the audiences. To maintain the reputation and integrity of the methods and the performances, researchers must become well-acquainted with the methods and be open to honest and constructive feedback from peers, audiences and those with performance experience as "they are the final arbiters and should be treated as such" (Saldaña, 2008, p. 204).

Saldaña's (2008) discussion leads to an important ethical consideration. In taking on an ethnodrama project and attempting to create a 'high-quality' performance piece that audience members are receptive to, researchers are aware that the data will be performed, and need to ensure that the work is both informative and *entertaining*. So, how can researchers ensure that certain data is not privileged simply for its entertainment value, or that important elements of data are not left out if they don't 'work' on stage? Belliveau discusses this concern:

> While writing my drama, which could be considered an ethnodrama, I became increasingly aware of the interpretive and subjective nature of this approach to research. For instance, as I analyzed the data for recurring themes I was also continually thinking

> about the performance of the research - how particular findings would work dramatically. And, even though I tried to honor and represent the most significant research findings into my script, I was cognizant that during the creative process I may have privileged elements that 'worked' dramatically. (2006, p. 7)

Belliveau notes two ways to address this concern: to consistently re-visit the data after each draft of a script, and to have another person who is familiar with the data (such as a research assistant) assess the script for accurate data representation (2006, p. 7). Addressing similar concerns, Goldstein (2008) highlights the importance of follow-up conversations after the performances with research participants, other readers, or audience members (also used by Meyer, 1998) so that they may have input about the conclusions of the research. She asserts:

> This allows for ongoing analysis of the research findings. The incorporation of audience input into on-going revisions of the play provides an opportunity for mutual analysis, and in doing so, can help create more ethical relationships between researchers, their research participants, and the communities to which the research participants belong. (p. 2)

In addition to these suggestions, it is also important to check in with research participants *during* the creation of an ethnodrama (whenever possible) to ensure that the representation of voices is accurate, as well as to formally acknowledge that the data presented is the researcher's (or playwright's) interpretation of the data.

Another challenge for researchers is that since ethnodrama and ethnotheatre (as well as several other types of performative inquiry) are relatively new forms of inquiry, conference and

journal reviewers are often unfamiliar with them and make uninformed decisions to showcase or reject works based on their own lack of experience. To address this, Saldaña suggests that, until these approaches to research become widely known and used, those who do have experience with these forms of inquiry should volunteer as reviewers, so that credible work using performance are seen and read about and the field can progress (2008, p. 204). Similarly, Kerry-Moran's (2008) discussion of assessment of arts-based research notes that it is not enough for evaluators to appreciate arts-based inquiry; people must be open to learning about the tools and skills of the craft, including the pursuit of training and experiences outside of social science as well as working with and consulting artists (pp. 496-497). To assess the work, she notes that it is important to focus on the goals of the piece, and whether the goals are met, the researchers' approach and methodological knowledge, and the appropriateness of the piece for its intended audience. She also stresses that it is important for researchers to engage in ongoing assessment of the piece throughout the process, rather than simply after the piece is complete. She notes that "evaluation and assessment are more effective, offering greater opportunity for improvement, when they are done with us rather than to us" (p. 497).

Dissemination may also be a challenge when using these approaches, as performances are limited to a live audience (often under 100 people). Because of this, Saldaña stresses the importance of publishing papers and books about the work, touring the work for different audiences, and documenting the pieces in additional formats such as film (2008, p. 204). While this is a valid concern, audiences for these pieces are often not intended to be *solely* academic audiences, and in some cases, these pieces can be seen as more accessible than academic publications, with greater potential to mobilize research in communities beyond academia (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Jones, 2012; Madison, 2005).

Reader's Theatre

Originally used by playwrights, and later in educational circles (Flynn, 2004), reader's theatre (also sometimes written as 'readers theatre', without an apostrophe) is building momentum as a tool of inquiry and dissemination in education and the social science research. Donmoyer and Donmoyer (2008) refer to reader's theatre as a 'conservative' form of performative inquiry, in which an individual or ensemble gives a staged presentation of qualitative data read directly from a script (pp. 210-213). Unlike several other types of performative inquiry, these pieces often have simplistic staging, limited technical aspects (such as lighting and sound), and make sparing use of props and tools (Donmoyer & Donmoyer, 2008, p. 213).

The minimalistic set-up and script are considered distancing techniques so that the performance is more about content than empathy for characters. Because of this, Donmoyer and Donmoyer argue that reader's theatre is more closely related to more 'traditional' forms of research than other areas of performative inquiry (2008, p. 210). While it may be true that 'distancing techniques' reduce empathy for characters, this is not necessarily a sought-after response for many researchers using performative inquiry, who are often using these approaches to help audiences better relate with and identify social issues, empathize with participants, and impact change (Butler-Kisber, 2010; 2018; Madison, 2005; Pelias, 2008). While some use reader's theatre as a 'conversation starter', as described by Donmoyer and Donmoyer (p. 217), many may actually seek out this approach as they do with other forms of performative inquiry, for its ability to connect with audiences on a more personal level than other types of data presentation. Konzal et al. (2002), demonstrate this by using *reader's theatre* to discuss *reader's*

theatre. Through their piece, titled *Transforming Experience*, Konzal et al. discuss the use of reader's theatre for research and pedagogy, using a variety of methods including scripted conversation, poetry, and minor acting directions such as "(sing at regular pace at first and then slow down on the last 5 lines)" (p. 247). They also explore their own experiences of reader's theatre as a creative way of connecting with readers and viewers and helping knowledge "stick in your mind" (p. 253).

Donmoyer and Donmoyer explain that another benefit of using reader's theatre is that it allows for a montage-like format, more akin to a review than a play (without a linear plot), which allows the performance to be built around analysis rather than a narrative (2008, p. 213). Nevertheless, it is not accurate to imply that a montage, or review-like format differentiates reader's theatre from other forms of performative inquiry, as non-linear formats can be and are often used in other approaches to performance inquiry, such as playbuilding (Norris, 2009; Tarlington & Michaels, 1995).

Playbuilding, Devised Theatre, and Collective Creation

Playbuilding, devised theatre, and collective creation are terms used for a process that involves a group of actors taking part in a collaborative process that culminates in the creation of an original theatrical piece. While the terms are often used interchangeably, most experts agree that there is not one process that is used to 'playbuild', 'devise', or 'collectively create', but rather each group engages in their own unique process based on the participants' desires, experiences, and needs (Barton, 2008; Norris 2009; Oddey, 2013; Robinson, 2015; Tarlington & Michaels, 1995).

Playbuilding, devised theatre, and collective creation processes are highly participatory, most often drawing on participants' ideas and experiences focusing on a specific topic or theme, improvising scenes based on ideas that emerge, and creating a theatrical piece that embodies and examines the thoughts and experiences of the participants. When discussed as a research methodology in education, the term 'playbuilding' is used (Norris, 2009), or the process is discussed more broadly as 'drama-based research'. In performance contexts, the process is often discussed using the terms 'devised theatre' and 'collective creation'. Since these terms are often used interchangeably with similar definitions, I draw on literatures using all of these terms but refer to this inquiry approach as 'playbuilding', as it is the term used for this form in research applications (Norris, 2009).

Scholars describe playbuilding as a method of working with groups of actors to create a theatrical piece. In contrast with other forms of theatre where performers rehearse a play previously written, playbuilding involves the entire group of performers in the creative process. The performers' involvement stretches from development of the play to the performance of the final product, placing the responsibility for the play on the entire collective (Filewod 1982, published in Barton 2008; Tarlington & Michaels, 1995; Norris, 2009; Robinson, 2015).

Playbuilding often takes on a 'vignette' structure, employing multiple theatrical devices, which can include "puppetry, narrated-mime, song, shadow screen [and], body sculpting" (Norris, 2009, p. 10). A vignette expresses multiple perspectives and visions within the same theatrical piece. Shabtay et al. (2019) describe this vignette structure as a 'dramatic collage' of stories based on a common theme. Because of the variety of perspectives showcased, some of which may be contradictory (Oddey, 2013), this type of performance is an 'evocative' way to engage performers and live audiences in discussions for 'mutual learning' (Norris, 2009, p. 21).

Comparing this process to other forms of performance, Filewod describes it as "the best equipped to embody and reflect actively the objectivity of social life" (1982, published in Barton, 2008, p. 47) because of its unique approach for presenting multiple perspectives and experiences.

Playbuilding as research.

Playbuilding is a form of participatory research, because there are no distinct lines between researcher and participants: all are involved in supplying the data and in how it is treated and disseminated through performance (Norris, 2009, p. 24). Participants are involved from data generation through to data presentation, examining "their own cultural and social context, investigating, integrating, and transforming their personal experiences, dreams, research, improvisation and experimentation" (Oddey, 2013, p. 1), and acting as researchers, playwrights, and performers (Norris, 2009, p. 10). Improvisation plays a major role in the development of these pieces. An example is Carter et al.'s (2011) study where teacher candidates co-created a non-linear play about their thoughts about teaching, as part of a drama education class. They explain:

> It is important to note that none of the scenes were written down (with the exception of two songs and two monologues that were integrated into the nine scenes). Therefore, all scenes were improvised, based on repeated rehearsals and refinements; thus, each time the scenes were performed they were slightly different as it was influenced by the creation of other scenes and ongoing discussions and reflectivity. With each class, the teacher candidates became more aware and reflective of the art-making practice, and the play became more refined. (p. 24)

Because it employs a collective and participatory process, playbuilding can be seen as giving participants more ownership for the material than some other forms of performative inquiry (Norris, 2009; Robinson, 2015; Tarlington & Michaels, 1995). The participants are the play-builders and are the performers.

Norris notes that there is a reduced hierarchy in playbuilding because the process often involves storytelling in which the researcher is involved in the sharing and telling. He asserts that "[t]he avoidance of a researcher's disclosure, in fear of contamination, is a canon that needs to be reconsidered" (Norris, 2009, p. 24). Norris explains that a researcher's involvement in sharing personal experiences yields more data than interview-style methods because stories can elicit stronger responses. Stories can provoke reactions, lead to more stories, and allow for greater discussion.

Playbuilding research attempts an 'organic' approach to data retrieval, as the pieces are created through a cycle of informal conversations and improvisations. This creation process is different from more traditional approaches to research because the three research 'acts' (data collection, analysis, and dissemination), are simultaneous (Norris, 2009).

Playbuilding as qualitative research is used as a form of inquiry in Shabtay et al.'s (2019) article which explores the experiences of a group of preservice teachers who took part in a playbuilding process as part of a drama education course at a Canadian university. The preservice teachers used drama methods they had learned earlier in the term to mount one-hour theatrical productions and perform them for their classmates. The article focuses on one of these original productions, created by ten preservice teachers and titled: *The Teacher Diaries*. The production was a collage of stories based on the preservice teachers' lived experiences as teacher

candidates. The preservice teachers shared negative teaching experiences they had with the group, discussed and analyzed them, and identified common themes in their stories. Next, they developed scenes based on their experiences and created a theatrical piece to perform for their peers. Following the performance, the group engaged in a discussion with their audience, and together they shared resources and stories to address some of the issues they were facing. The key finding of this research was that playbuilding provides a 'holistic' participatory research approach in which participants conduct, collect and analyse the data thematically and later implement and share their findings through performance. The next sections explore connections between Participatory Action Research and playbuilding, and how these approaches contributed to the present study.

Participatory Action Research

Participatory Action Research (PAR) can be defined as "collaborative research designed to promote social change through equal partnerships between researchers and participants in various phases of the research" (Kim, 2016, p. 40). It is an overarching term that includes: 'participatory research' which focuses on increasing participants' power in the research process; 'action research' which facilitates social action to solve issues participants face; and, 'community-based participatory research' which focuses on a specific group of participants that share common needs or interests, as well as other collaborative methods (Kim, 2016). PAR often involves visual inquiry including photovoice, video, mapping and drawing, as they "enable people to choose particular symbols that represent their lives and share them with others to identify common themes in an easy and accessible manner" (Kim, 2016, p. 42). Past PAR research has benefitted numerous youth participants, organizations and communities (for

examples, see: Berg et al., 2009; Ford et al., 2012; Gosin et al., 2003; Nygreen et al., 2006); however, Kim (2016) has found that "in comparison to adults, young people have not been frequently involved in such collaborative research as co-researchers or partners" (Kim, 2016, p. 39).

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR).

Youth-led Participatory Action Research (YPAR) draws on the new social studies of childhood discussed earlier in the chapter and is grounded in children and youth's own life experiences and concerns. It is meant to not only gather data about these experiences, but to improve the lives of these young people (Rodriguez & Brown, 2009). YPAR involves young people discussing issues that concern them and their communities and spreading awareness of, and/or advocating for solutions to these issues (Anyon et al., 2018; Burke et al., 2017; Kirshner et al., 2005; Ozer, 2016; Ozer et al., 2010). YPAR projects often have strong equity emphases, covering a wide range of topics such as food security (Breckwich Va´squez et al., 2007), school violence (McIntyre, 2000) and youth homelessness (Garcia et al., 2014). The YPAR approach is meant to reduce power dynamics between youth and adults within the research process, as young people make decisions about the project and how to move forward with the issues they uncover (Anyon et al, 2018; Kirshner, 2008; Rodriguez & Brown, 2009; Ozer et al., 2013). Ozer (2016) explains that in YPAR projects, "[p]ower-sharing is particularly important for key decisions regarding the definition of the problem, research design, interpretation of data, and strategies for action" (p. 191). Through their active participation in these research processes, youth are included as experts and co-creators of knowledge (Ozer, 2016). Foster-Fishman et al. (2010) found that traditionally there have been limits on how 'participatory' YPAR projects have been when implemented in practice. They explain that while it is common for YPAR projects to involve youth in identifying

community needs and providing feedback to encourage dialogue in their communities, “it has been less common for YPAR projects to engage youth in all stages of this research continuum, particularly in data analysis processes” (Foster-Fishman et al., 2010, p. 67).

There are also practical and ethical challenges in participatory action research with youth. One issue raised by Suleiman et al. (2006) was that due to the time constraints of their project, several participants were unable to attend meetings and participate actively. This short timeline meant that youth were unable to accomplish the ‘social action’ portion of their research. Another concern, raised by Kim (2016), is that in some cases, these projects can potentially result in “social exclusion, political violence, or emotional distress, because [they] often consist of social action that challenges existing power structures” (p. 47). For example, in a study by Ross (2011) youth involved in a participatory research project to reduce tobacco use in their community expressed that they felt intimidated by adult storeowners when discussing ideas about reducing advertisements for tobacco in stores.

Kim (2016) discusses the importance of mutual trust between the researcher(s) and youth participants in ensuring success of a project, noting that trust is often built over time and difficulties with scheduling or limitations on the time spent together can become a barrier in building trust with youth participants. He also found that when identities and interests are shared by youth and researcher(s), trust develops more quickly, and that incorporating young people’s interests into the project can help make the project more enjoyable and productive for participants and researchers (2016, p. 46).

Burke et al. (2017) raise another key issue of false promises, in discussion of a recent participatory project with youth which moved from a small photovoice project into a larger rejuvenation of a community park. The youth participants in their project took part in a variety of

activities including photography, guided walks, poetry, map-making, collage and collective coding of data. Based on the data they collected, the youth chose to embark on a larger rejuvenation of a local park, which the researchers agreed to help facilitate and support. The researchers later realized that the project came with numerous roadblocks that were out of their control, realm of expertise, and financial means. These roadblocks stalled the project significantly, and they lost participants, partnerships and trust of the participants and community. They explain,

> Six years later, the youth remain puzzled and at times disillusioned at our stalled park. While they can see that some progress has been made to install the equipment that was purchased, in their minds they didn't plan half a park, they planned holistically for the community. Ultimately, this is a story of how we as community-based researchers have, in our failure to ensure that the park is finished, even amidst ongoing efforts, betrayed their vision and by extension the youth, to some degree. (Burke et al., 2017, p. 11)

Burke et al. (2017) found that while "much of youth participatory work presumes that the value of our work is in engagement with the process … one that encourages youth to take on democratic responsibility and social participation" (p. 10), this work also comes with the danger of false promises made by researchers (whether implicit or explicit), and that to the youth they work with "the product also matters" (Burke et al., 2017, p. 10). In my own research, discussed later, this was a key consideration.

Playbuilding as Participatory Action Research.

Performative inquiry, and particularly highly participatory approaches such as 'playbuilding,' have potential for use as participatory action research. Cahill found in her (2006) study involving Australian students and preservice teachers workshopping practices through drama to improve school life, that "[t]here is considerable synchrony between the methodology of participatory action research and approaches commonly used in process drama. Both traditions are centrally concerned with dialogue, praxis, participatory exploration and transformation" (p. 62). There are different forms of participatory research with young people, with the young people's participation ranging from consultation, to collaboration, to ownership, in a variety of different aspects including research design, data generation, analysis, and dissemination (Aldridge, 2016; Groundwater-Smith et al., 2014). Drama-based approaches can include youth participation in any/all of these aspects.

Participatory drama methods are also referred to as 'popular theatre', a term Prentki and Selman (2000) describe as "a process of theatre which deeply involves specific communities in identifying issues of concern, analyzing current conditions and causes of a situation, identifying points of change, and analyzing how change could happen and/or contributing to the actions implied" (p. 8) and involving "a process of enquiry, action, and reflection, collecting 'data' from each other as a means to understand their circumstances and plan for change" (Cahill, 2006, p. 62). The concept of Popular Theatre comes from Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, a series of theatrical approaches that engage people in challenging their oppression and changing their social realities through "a rehearsal of revolution" (1979/1993, p. 155). While called different names, this type of research has been found useful in a number of studies, such as Conrad's (2004) project with a group of Canadian secondary school students in a rural Alberta community.

They used various theatre approaches to explore and perform issues they faced that they felt were determined by their rural environment (2004, p. 17). The youth involved in Conrad's project created a performance piece in which they explored their understandings of what it meant to be youth 'at risk'. Through their piece, *Life in the Sticks*, the youth presented a counter narrative to taken-for-granted notions and assumptions about what 'at risk' means – namely, that 'at risk' youth are necessarily victimized or defiant. As outlined in these recent studies, drama has great potential for use in Participatory Action Research.

Reflecting on Current Trends in Performative Inquiry

Given my background as both a theatre artist and a childhood studies scholar with a deep-rooted interest in children's rights and participatory research with children, it is important to me that my work takes a youth-centred, participatory, arts-based approach. Examining the current trends in performative inquiry and how these intersect with the new social studies of childhood, and Participatory Action Research, providing a conceptual context for my own study and a rationale for this work.

While the popularity of performative inquiry is growing in the education research community, I have found that most of the highly participatory work has been done with pre-service teachers rather than children and youth (see: Belliveau, 2006; Carter et al., 2011; Shabtay et al. 2019, for examples). Also, there have been studies conducted with children and youth, but they often appear to be more structured and researcher-led than the work conducted with adults (see Cahill, 2006; Conrad, 2004, for examples). These studies also appear to be conducted in educational settings including classrooms and in-school programs which may have influenced how participatory the projects could be. School settings often have their own hierarchies,

structures and schedules which can limit participation in a project. These limitations can include things like the amount of time spent on a project, or the researcher-participant relationship, since students are often required to learn from adults in school settings, while in participatory research, the idea would be for the adult (researcher) to learn from the students (participants).

Engaging children and youth in arts-based research is not equivalent to taking a participatory approach. Gillies and Robinson (2012) explain that "even the most concertedly child-centred approach is necessarily governed by an adult-imposed research agenda" (p. 162), adding that often young people's creative involvement in research is automatically associated with 'empowerment' and 'democracy', and that these assumptions are not necessarily true. They caution that this type of thinking can sometimes lead to "tokenistic rhetoric about the importance of hearing children's voices, alongside overblown claims about the authenticity of the findings" (p. 162).

Awareness of the key issues involved in conducting drama-based research with young people helped me assume a critical and realistic approach in designing my own research project. Some of the challenges with many types of performative inquiry, particularly concerns about the privileging of certain voices or data, as well as issues of legitimacy and authenticity (raised by Belliveau, 2006; Pelias, 2008; and Saldaña, 2008, among others) reconfirmed my commitment to doing work in which participants themselves are deeply involved in most stages of the research and performance process. As a result, I found that the playbuilding method was best suited for this project rather than other performative approaches, such as ethnodrama or reader's theatre, since in the other approaches the participants supply the data but are often not involved in the creation process or dramatic presentation of the findings. My project explores the use of drama as a form of inquiry for research *with*, rather than *on*, youth.

Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed literature about performative inquiry, the 'new' social studies of childhood, and participatory action research. In exploring some of the key theories, methods and examples of empirical research conducted on these topics in the Global North over the past fifteen years, the section examines the purposes, focuses, methods, challenges and implications of conducting participatory, drama-based research with youth.

The chapter began by introducing the new social studies of childhood and discussed drama-based research methods, as they are situated within the broader field of qualitative research methods. It discussed specifically how drama-based methods fit into performative inquiry, which Butler-Kisber defines as the "use of performance/dramatization as a mode of inquiry that addresses social issues with goals of change" (p. 136).

Following this, I examined some of the benefits of these methods for representing data, mobilizing research to reach audiences within and outside of academia, and instigating social change. I explored the use of 'embodiment' (Pelias, 2008) and 'performance of possibilities' (Madison, 2005) as theories on how performativity inquiry can impact social change.

Next, I considered specific drama-based methods including ethnodrama (Saldaña, 2008, p. 195-196; Belliveau, 2006), reader's theatre (Donmoyer & Donmoyer 2008; Flynn, 2004; Konzal et al., 2002), playbuilding, devised theatre and collective creation (Barton, 2008; Norris 2009; Oddey, 2013; Robinson, 2015; Tarlington and Michaels, 1995).

Finally, I discussed the playbuilding approach, which I used in my doctoral research, in greater detail and drew connections between these methods and recent literature focusing on the 'new' social studies of childhood, and youth-led participatory action research (YPAR). I

followed this with a reflection on these literatures and how they have had an impact on this project. Chapter Three discusses the methodology for my study.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

In this section, I describe the objectives of my research, the research sites, the participant sample, the types of data collected, and the specific research methods used. I elaborate on the rationale for the use of these methods, the key ethical considerations of the study, and the credibility of this work.

Research Objectives

Building on my relationships with secondary schools, children's theatre companies, and youth-centred arts organizations, along with my own published work on arts-based research and youth-led initiatives, the objective of this research was to understand how drama-based methods can be employed in an education-focused participatory research project with youth. As discussed in Chapter Two, performative inquiry is becoming more widespread in social science and education research; however, most of the highly participatory work has been done with pre-service teachers and other adult populations, rather than children and youth (see: Belliveau, 2006; Carter et al., 2011; Shabtay et al., 2019). Drama-based research with children and youth has been more structured and researcher-led (see: Cahill, 2006; Conrad, 2004). Through this study, I set out to examine the following overarching research question: How can youth in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) take part in the process of participatory, drama-based research? More specifically the sub-questions are:

1. How do the youth participate during this process?
2. How do the youth describe their experiences during this process?

Research Setting

I launched this project under the umbrella of my registered not-for-profit organization, Artucate Canada, an organization dedicated to empowering youth through participatory, arts-based initiatives. Through Artucate Canada, I obtained a municipal grant for the performance aspects of the project, which contributed to the cost of room rentals at a local library and a secondary school (as well as other costs, such as props and costume pieces). In addition to this funding, I received two monetary awards, the Jackie Kirk Fieldwork Award from McGill University and the national Ada Slaight Drama-in-Education Research Award from the Toronto Young People's Theatre. These, too, contributed to covering the rental costs of the space. These rooms were used as rehearsal spaces, meeting rooms for focus groups and interviews, and the venue for the final performance. While most fieldwork was conducted in these spaces, one focus group was conducted over Skype which is discussed below.

Participant Sample

This study had 29 participants. Of these 29 participants, 26 were youth participants (between the ages of 13 and 17 years of age) and three were adult audience members. All participants resided in the GTA. Of the 26 youth participants, 15 youth participated solely in the 'initial conversations' (semi-structured discussions and focus groups, discussed in detail in sections that follow), while 11 participated in both the 'initial conversations' and the participatory drama-based aspects of the research (henceforth, these 11 participants will be referred to as the 'play-builders', to distinguish them from the youth participants who did not take part in the drama-based aspects). Of the 26 youth participants, 17 identified as female, one identified as non-binary, and eight identified as male.

The nature and time commitments involved in the drama-based research elements and the need for video documentation of the rehearsals and performance as part of data collection process placed limitations on participation. Participation in drama-based aspects (as 'play-builders') was limited to those who were available for rehearsals and for those who assented and obtained guardian consent to be photographed and video-recorded. Of the 11youth play-builders, nine identified as female while two identified as male.

Three adult audience members (over the age of 18) were participants of a follow-up focus group which took place after the performance. These participants were members of the audience that watched the final performance of *Motivation and Justice*. Two of the adult audience members who participated had familial relationships with youth play-builders, and one was a student-teacher at a school which was attended by some of the play-builders. All three adult participants identified as female.

Recruitment of youth participants.

I recruited youth participants through a recruitment flyer (Appendix B) posted on Artucate Canada's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/artucatecanada). The flyer was publicly accessible through Facebook, with the ability for Facebook users to 'share' the digital flyer with other users. This recruitment method acted as a snowball recruitment approach (Robinson, 2014), as the flyer was shared by young people, teachers, the social media page of the Council for Ontario Drama and Dance Educators, and in private Facebook groups such as a group called 'Connecting Canadian Teachers'.

In addition to this, I was invited to several drama, history, and philosophy classes at two local high schools, where I did not directly recruit participants, but gave guest talks on 'Drama-

Based Research' and 'Research Ethics' and discussed my research project. After these talks, several students approached me, asking for ways they could become involved in my project, and I shared the flyer with them so that they could obtain more information about the project. All young people and parents who contacted me after seeing the flyer were invited to an information session about my project, held at a local library, where they could learn more about the purpose, methods, and ethical considerations of the project. During this session, I read through the consent form with the group, and answered questions about the project. I asked interested participants to bring their signed consent forms to our preliminary interview or focus group session.

Recruitment of audience members.

On the day of the final performance of *Motivation and Justice*, the research-based play created through this process, each audience member received a performance programme. Each programme included an invitation for audience members to take part in a follow-up focus group about their experiences watching the performance (also used by Myers, 1997). On the invitation, audience members were provided with my contact information, and were asked to contact me for more information if they were interested in participating in a focus group. The audience focus group was to provide feedback on the performance, but the data collected was not analyzed in answering my research question (which is focused specifically on the youth's own experiences). The only requirement for participation in this aspect of the project was that the audience members had watched the whole production. Three audience members emailed me stating their interest, and after obtaining consent, I set up a Skype focus group session with the three of them.

Data Collection

My data collection was divided into three different parts: I began with initial conversations (focus groups and interviews) with 26 youth in the GTA; next, I worked with the 11 youth play-builders through a devised theatre process to create an original theatrical piece based on the initial conversation data; and, following the performance of the piece, I held two follow-up focus groups, one with three adult audience members, and one with five youth play-builders. I conducted this research over a three-month period in Fall 2017. All research took place on weekdays after 4:00 pm, and on weekends so that participation would not interfere with the youth participants' attendance at school. In the initial stages of the research process, I took on a 'facilitator' role, organizing and leading meetings, and explaining the research project to the participants. While I continued to act as a facilitator throughout the process, I moved into a 'participant observer' role for most of the play building and scene development, which was primarily youth driven. In my 'participant observer' role, I participated in warm-ups, acted as a stand-in (reading lines for young people who were unable to attend some rehearsals), assisted with the direction of some scenes, and assisted the play-builders with other production-related tasks. I discuss the methods I used for data collection in greater detail in the sections below.

Initial conversation data.

This study began with 'initial conversations' with 26 youth in the GTA. In early September 2017, I met with these youth, either in semi-structured, conversational interviews or focus groups, held at the research sites (either the rented classroom or library space). Based on my previous experience conducting interviews and focus groups in my MA research, I chose to allow participants to decide whether they preferred to participate in one-on-one interviews or

focus groups, as some of my former participants expressed that they preferred speaking in groups than they did one-on-one and vice versa, based on how comfortable they felt speaking in front of their peers, or alone with an adult researcher. Participants had the choice of participating individually in one-on-one interviews, or as part of focus groups, depending on their availability and comfort levels. The main topic of the interviews and focus groups was 'school experiences', defined as "events, classes, relationships, homework, or anything you find relevant to your feelings towards school" (Appendix C). This topic was deliberately vague to encourage youth to take leadership for the direction of the conversations. Also, I selected this topic as it would be one with which participants had an 'everyday relationship', and therefore could lead to more detailed responses (Acocella, 2012, p. 1127).

These initial conversations served two purposes: [1] to gather information from a larger group of youth, which would give the smaller group of youth play-builders ideas for their dramatic scene development [2] to build rapport with the youth play-builders before beginning the playbuilding process itself. In total, I conducted six, one-on-one interviews, and five focus groups (discussed in greater detail below). I used an audio-recorder to record these conversations, as recommended by several researchers (Hennink, 2013; Carey & Asbury, 2016), and later transcribed the interview and focus group data to aid in the playbuilding process. Since these transcripts would later be used by groups of youth to develop scene ideas (discussed in detail in Chapter Four), I kept participant identities in the data confidential, replacing participant names with pseudonyms and removing all identifiable information present in the transcripts (school locations; street names; siblings', peers', or teachers' names etc.). Also, I excluded my introductory explanations, any breaks from the conversation (for example, when a participant

received a phone call), and comments not related to the research from the transcripts to provide additional confidentiality and to allow for ease of use during the playbuilding process.

One-on-one interviews.

Six youth participants selected one-on-one interviews as their preferred conversation format. I held interviews at the rented library or classroom spaces, depending on availability of the spaces. Interviews lasted between 15-35 minutes depending on the availability of each participant. Interviews were semi-structured in that I used several open-ended prompts and questions to guide the interviews but used these prompts and questions solely as a starting point, following up on their responses with more specific questions. My interview questions/prompts were phrased in plain language. One example was: "What is something you really [like/don't like] about school?" (see Appendix C for list of prompts/questions). These open-ended questions often allowed for follow up questions. In instances where participants strayed significantly from the focus of the discussion, I used several gentle prompts to guide the conversation, such as "back to what you were saying about [insert comment here], what exactly did you mean by that?" I found the flexibility of the semi-structured interview method useful as it was more conversational and enabled me to gain a better understanding of what the youth found important to explore while at the same time maintaining direction in our discussion. Christensen (2004), Greig et al. (2007), and Mayall (2000), and Flewitt (2014) encourage the use of this approach in conducting social research with child and youth participants. Flewitt explains:

> [This method] resembles the ebb and flow of everyday exchanges, and thus, despite the interviewer having a pre-set list of questions to which they refer, it can help both interviewee and interviewer to relax and result in more personalised responses, opening

> up areas of enquiry that emerge from participants' rather than from researcher's preconceptions. (p. 140)

Mayall (2000) adds that this method can help researchers gain a better understanding of what matters to participants as it enables researchers "to hand over the agenda to children, so that they can control the pace and direction of the conversation, raising and exploring topics with relatively little researcher input" (p. 133).

I attempted to make this research project as youth-led and participatory as possible within the constraints of McGill's dissertation and research ethics board requirements, which require certain aspects (such as project design, ethics approval, and dissertation writing) to be completed by the doctoral researcher. The participatory nature of this project often involved adjusting the direction of the discussion to accommodate the participants' thoughts, experiences, and ideas. I found that the flexibility of semi-structured interviews and focus groups allowed for participants to bring up aspects of their school experiences that were important to them, but that had not been a major focus in my planned interview prompts and questions. For example, during the first few discussions, participants expressed a strong interest in discussing social justice issues and their relevance to youth school experiences. While this had not been the focus of my interview prompts, the youth-directed nature of the conversations meant that this became a key focus of the playbuilding project and, ultimately, in the resulting theatrical production.

Focus groups.

Twenty participants selected to participate in focus groups. Mayall (2008) found that using focus groups helps child and youth participants feel more confident with adult researchers,

adding that in groups they are able to "follow on each other's leads, pick up points and confirm, comment or move on" (p. 112). I selected four separate days for focus groups and participants had the option of choosing a time when they were available to attend. Initially, I planned on holding four focus groups, with four to six participants in each group, as small focus groups can lead to more in-depth responses (Krueger & Casey, 2015, p. 506). Four participants were available for each of the first three meeting dates, and eight were available for the fourth meeting date. To keep the groups small, I scheduled two separate focus groups on the fourth date (at different times), each with four participants. In total, I conducted five focus groups with four participants in each group. Focus groups lasted between 25-60 minutes, depending on the availability of participants. I conducted focus groups in a manner that was similar to the individual interviews, using a semi-structured format and the same initial prompts (see Appendix C for prompts).

Focus groups seemed to lessen the researcher/participant (and adult/youth) power dynamic, giving the youth participants strength in numbers and enabling participants to follow up with things others had said. However, there were also challenges with this method of data collection. One of my concerns was that group dynamics and social pressure might prevent participants from bringing forward more controversial and/or very different perspectives. Acocella (2012) suggests that speaking in group settings can sometimes "lead participants to conform (at least publicly) to the most popular opinion in the group, as it is considered socially accepted" (p. 1134). This occurrence, which Sawyer (2017) refers to as 'groupthink', can mean that in conforming, a group's ideas can become counter-productive and less meaningful. While this challenge could not be eliminated entirely, I sought to minimize these effects by encouraging participants to bring forward their opinions 'even if they weren't the popular opinion' (see

Appendix C), encouraging participants to share the speaking time (see Appendix C for opening statement), and asking focus group members to follow up on what their peers had discussed, to encourage participants who were less outspoken to add to the conversation. Similar to the one-on-one interviews, another challenge of this method was giving participants control over the direction of the discussion, while still working to ensure participants stayed on topic. I addressed this by using gentle prompts, as discussed earlier in the 'one-on-one interviews' section.

I transcribed the initial conversation data in as much verbatim as possible, including paralinguistic dimensions such as moments where participants sighed or laughed, to create rich and detailed transcripts. Since the initial conversations were audio-recorded, and not video-recorded, I did not include non-verbal cues. In the transcripts, I also excluded my introductory explanations, any breaks from the conversation (for example, when a participant received a phone call), and comments not related to the research since the youth play-builders would later use the transcripts as starting points for scene creation. I believed removing the extraneous information would aid the playbuilding process. I replaced participant names with pseudonyms and removed all identifiable information present in the transcripts (school locations; street names; siblings', peers', or teachers' names, etcetera). These transcripts were used as scene development during the playbuilding process, and not for my own analysis; however, I also reference sections of the initial conversation data in Chapter Four, as I explain how the youth used certain sections of the transcripts. The excerpts from transcripts I have selected as examples of their processes in Chapter Four are those that the play-builders used when developing scenes for the play.

Video-recordings.

Drama-based methods are embodied, active, and visual, and because of this, the primary method of data collection I used was video-recordings of the playbuilding process. As a participant observer, I participated in much of the drama-based work, and therefore it was difficult to take notes on all of the occurrences during our meetings, and capture visual data – video-recordings of the sessions made it easy to re-visit the data to aid in my analysis. The youth play-builders were aware that all rehearsals and meetings would be filmed, as this was discussed during the information session and was repeated and clearly stated on the consent forms.

One of the concerns in using video-recording as a method of data collection is the 'camera effect', where the presence of a video camera affects the behaviour of the participants and the resulting interaction is 'unnatural'. Blikstad-Balas (2017) points out that this issue has been "somewhat exaggerated when it comes to video research [since] most, if not all, research methods will have some effect on the situations they are attempting to portray" (p. 513). She discusses examples of projects in which participants became used to the camera after a short time and thereafter paid little attention to its presence (Blikstad-Balas, 2017). I took certain measures to limit the influence of the camera on the participants' behaviour: [1] the camera was not a major focus – it was typically stationary on a tripod in the corner of the room (rather than being held and/or moved around); [2] youth participants spent a lot of time in the space – I met with participants for six to eight hours each week (usually for three to four hours per meeting) over a three-month period, which increased comfort and 'natural' behaviour in the space; and, [3] youth participants were busy – they spent the majority of their time actively engaged in warm-ups, activities and scene creation, meaning the camera was likely not a key focus.

During the playbuilding process, I brought a video camera and tripod to our group meetings and rehearsals and positioned it so that it recorded most of the room. Video-recordings were taken during our full meetings, including plenary discussions, drama warm-ups, scene creation, and rehearsals. When participants worked in several groups simultaneously, I often left the camera and tripod in one area of the room which recorded one group's progress, while I worked directly with another group. I recorded a total of 51 hours and 48 minutes of video footage. Because it is difficult to take notes while facilitating/participating in the discussions and playbuilding activities, video-recordings were an easier way to document these meetings.

I used these video-recordings in what Haw and Hadfield (2011) call 'extractive mode', meaning that 'raw' video footage was used as data, and that the video camera was the tool used for data collection (p. 23). The use of video-recordings in this way provided a very 'rich' and 'multi-layered' type of data when compared with other forms of data in the social sciences, such as interview data or fieldnotes (Haw & Hadfield, 2011). Since the playbuilding process is an observable phenomenon, video-recordings provided a very detailed representation of the process.

I also used video recordings in 'reflective mode' (Haw & Hadfield, 2011). Reflective mode is present when video-recordings are used to prompt reflection among those who were recorded. Since I was an active participant in the playbuilding process, and my actions were recorded, the videos helped prompt my memory and reflection of the events. As Haw and Hadfield state, this helped me, in my role of researcher, to become "focally and peripherally aware of [my] own image and what surrounds it" enabling me to shift my focus during these moments to what was happening in other areas of the room (2011, p. 51).

The use of video-recordings opened up the potential for more detailed analysis, since I was able to re-watch the process repeatedly and pay attention to details that I might otherwise

have missed. An issue with only using video data is that "the camera can only provide a limited field of vision" and sometimes leaves out the complexity of social interaction (Haw & Hadfield, 2011, p. 26). Because of this, I chose to supplement my video data with reflective memos (discussed in a section that follows). In this way, the video recordings created what Haw and Hadfield (2011) suggest is "a reference point for the observer's existing judgements about themselves and their situations, because an apparently 'objective' image can be juxtaposed with their 'subjective' memory of themselves" (p. 51). I analyzed these videos using a logging system and thematic analysis described later in this chapter in the section on 'thematic analysis.'

Video stills.

Haw and Hadfield (2011) discuss video 'pauses' as a time for reflection. While watching the video recordings, I took moments to pause, think about, and reflect on certain aspects of the process that were relevant to my analysis. I took screen shots of these moments, collecting a series of video stills to help remind me of aspects of the process and provide a visual context for my descriptions. Later, I revisited the video stills and selected those which would help incorporate a visual element to my analysis, depicting specific activities and moments in the playbuilding process that I described and reflected upon.

In instances where I had multiple stills of the same activity or moment, I selected those that included more detail and/or were higher in resolution. Images used in this way are for 'illustrative' purposes, meaning they "are used as an explanatory adjunct to an argument or discussion presented in written form" (Newbury, 2011, p. 654). As will be seen, the stills provide richer depictions of moments I discuss, which I believed would help readers better visualize and appreciate contextual aspects of the research site and the youths' participation. While the

inclusion of images for illustrative purposes is necessarily subjective, it is also deemed transparent as it gives readers "access to what the researcher wants to show them" (Newbury, 2011, p. 654).

Reflective memos.

Reflective memos, or personal notes and reflections, were another form of data I collected based on my observations as a participant observer. In my memos, I kept track of questions and insights that arose during the process, through reflective memo-writing (Birks et al., 2008; Charmaz, 2006; Daley, 2010). Charmaz (2006) discusses memo-writing as a way to "catch your thoughts, capture the comparisons and connections you make, and crystallize questions and directions for you to pursue" (p. 72).

I worked as a facilitator for several aspects of the project but spent most of my time in the role of a 'participant observer'. My memos are based on my experiences in this role. As Montgomery (2014) describes it, participant observation "involves engagement and 'deep hanging out' with children, understanding their lives, their experiences and how they make sense of the world" (p. 124). As a participant observer, I participated in warm-ups, acted as a stand-in (reading lines for young people who were unable to attend some rehearsals), assisted with the direction of some scenes, and assisted the play-builders with other production-related tasks. In my role as a participant observer, I was able to better understand common practices, social hierarchies, and rules for behaviour of the young people with whom I worked. In addition to helping better understand the atmosphere of these rehearsal settings, this role enabled me to build rapport with the participants.

My participant observer role allowed me to take part during the times that observers would typically take fieldnotes. Since I could not take fieldnotes during rehearsals, I supplemented my video recordings with reflective memos I wrote after rehearsals. I used these memos to contextualize the video recordings in my analysis.

I used the reflective memoing approach to keep track of and interrogate my own biases and assumptions during the research process. For example, in an early meeting with the play-builders I learned that many of them had never performed for an audience before, which was contrary to what I had expected:

> It turns out that most of the youth I'm working with have never been in a play or taken drama classes before. I wrongly anticipated that the youth who would choose to participate in the drama aspects of this project would be those who liked drama and actively pursued it in other aspects of their lives. I was totally wrong about this and will have to re-think some of my other assumptions about how this process would go. I thought we could begin some of the scene creation today, but instead we played some simple tableaux games to ease them into drama work, which many of them were nervous about. The games went well, but I'm going to need to take things slow so that they can become comfortable with performance work before moving into anything more complicated. (Reflective memo, September 18, 2017)

In the excerpt above, I reflected on some of my assumptions, including how the meeting did not go as I initially had planned. My interpretation is necessarily subjective as a participant observer, so I placed a lot of emphasis on self-reflection during the process. This process helped me keep

my biases in check while still collecting the richness of /closeness to data that comes with participant observation. I discuss the use of reflective memos in more detail in the data analysis section.

Follow-up focus groups.

Following the performance, play-builders and audience members had the opportunity to take part in conversations to follow-up on and discuss the process and performance. These conversations were also audio-recorded and transcribed as described above. I held one follow-up focus group with five play-builders, and one follow-up focus group with three audience members.

Follow-up focus group with youth play-builders.

The focus group with youth play-builders took place in-person, in late November 2017, following the final performance. I invited play-builders who were interested and available to participate in a follow-up focus group conversation to reflect on their experiences during the playbuilding process. Five play-builders were available for this focus group. I provided the questions to participants a few days in advance, so that they had some time to reflect on their experiences before our discussion (see Appendix D for follow-up questions).

My follow-up conversation with the play-builders allowed me to ask questions I had for them, and determine the effectiveness of the process (Morgan, 1996). It also allowed them to share any feedback they had for me based on their experiences during the process, including any ideas they had about the future directions of participatory drama-based work. Initially this focus group was meant as a means of member-checking, as well as a follow-up on the project with participants, to provide closure for the study; however, their responses became an important

source of data for Chapter Five where I explore my second sub-question: How do the youth describe their experiences during this process?

Follow-up focus group with adult audience members.

This focus group took place over a Skype video-conferencing call several days after the final performance. Like my follow-up discussion with the youth play-builders, I provided the questions to the participants in advance, so that they had some time to reflect on their experiences before our discussion (see Appendix D for follow-up questions).

In-person conversations are typically viewed as the 'gold-standard' by qualitative researchers (McCoyd & Kerson, 2006, p. 390), and in conducting this study, I gave preference to this method of data collection. However, since the adult audience members could not meet in the same place at the same time, the flexibility of a conference call offered a significant advantage in terms of scheduling. A disadvantage in using Skype was that it was more difficult to read visual cues such as body language, as only the participants faces were visible. Other disadvantages were the potential for distractions within each participant's environment (Opdenakker, 2006), as well as a risk of video or audio glitches that could distort, or delay response time. Thankfully, these did not affect our session.

The focus group with audience members provided me with their perspectives on the performance and helped me glean the effectiveness of the performance as a method of dissemination. As Saldaña (2008) explains, "[audiences] are the final arbiters [of the work] and should be treated as such" (p. 204). I used data from these two types of focus group interviews primarily to receive feedback from both participants and audience members that would contribute to my future research and help to make the work more engaging for audiences. While

I touch on some of the responses briefly in my concluding chapter, particularly when discussing future directions for my research, these data were not analyzed in relation to my research question.

Data Management

I used an audio-recorder to record initial conversation data and follow-up focus group data. I transcribed the audio-recorded data within a few days of the conversations. I played the recordings on my computer and typed out the conversations word-for-word, including relevant paralinguistic features (pauses, sighs, laughter, etc.) as recommended by Butler-Kisber (2018, p. 25). Since the initial conversation transcripts would later be used by groups of youth to develop scene ideas (discussed in detail in Chapter Four), as mentioned earlier, I kept participant identities in the data confidential, replacing participant names with pseudonyms and removing all identifiable information present in the transcripts (school locations; street names; siblings', peers', or teachers' names etc.). Also, I excluded my introductory explanations, any breaks from the conversation (for example, when a participant received a phone call), and comments not related to the research from the transcripts to provide additional confidentiality. I continued my use of pseudonyms in my personal memos and in my dissertation.

I used a video camera to record the video data. To manage the video data, I created a log of each video that sectioned the data into key moments with video times (the video logging process and a rationale for this process are discussed in detail in the next section). These logs were completed within a week of each meeting, to ensure the meetings remained fresh in my mind when I logged them (see below). To protect confidentiality, all data (including audio-recordings, video-recordings, transcriptions, video logs, and memos) were stored on password

protected files, which could only be accessed by me, and were stored on a password protected computer.

Data Analysis

The analytic procedure I used for this study was thematic analysis, specifically drawing on constant comparison inquiry. Vaismoradi et al. (2013) define thematic analysis as "the search for and identification of common threads" across a data set (p. 400). This type of analysis is encouraged by Braun and Clarke (2006) as it is flexible and provides in-depth and elaborate accounts of data, which works very well in qualitative research. It is also encouraged by Holliday, who adds that thematic analysis "represents the necessary dialogue between data and researcher" (2007, p. 94).

I found constant comparison inquiry useful because of the qualitative nature and variety of the data collected. I approached my analysis with the background knowledge of the literature on performative inquiry (see Chapter Two), providing a conceptual context for my research. As Butler-Kisber (2018) notes, in constant comparison inquiry, creating a conceptual context helps researchers remain aware of and sensitized to what has already been studied, but "not specifically guided by it" (p. 41). This type of inquiry involves comparing "all data to all other data in the data set … rather than [disregarding some data] on thematic grounds" (O'Connor et al., 2008, p. 41). I explain this approach to inquiry for each of my sub-questions in my study.

Analysis for the first sub-question.

My first sub-question was: How do the youth participate in this (drama research) process? My analysis for this question began whilst data was still being collected, through

reflective memo-writing and video-logging. As described earlier, after each meeting with the group of play-builders, I wrote memos to reflect on the meetings, listing the date of each memo for easy retrieval. Charmaz (2006) explains that memo writing is a crucial approach as it "prompts you to analyze your data and codes early in the process" (p. 72). After each week, I also conducted a 'close reading/viewing' of the video data collected during that week. This involved watching the video-recordings of the playbuilding process. During this 'close reading / viewing', I sectioned off my video data in a logging sheet so that I could easily find parts of my data in the future. Haw and Hadfield (2011) recommend logging data as soon as possible after data has been collected, so that videos are easier to navigate. Logging the data in this way "provides the researcher with an overview of the data … which helps the researcher pick up on patterns and contradictions they find interesting" and "help[s] with data management and reduction" since researchers can examine logging sheets to find sections previously watched so they can conduct a closer analysis of them (Haw & Hadfield, 2011, p. 41-42). I have included a section of a logging sheet in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Section of a video logging sheet

File name	In	Out	Brief description	Additional Note(s)
X18784	00.00	07.30	Plenary discussion	
	7.30	11.45	Researcher leads warm-up activity	Warm-up activity: Red Ball
	11.45	16.13	Participants discuss their plan for scene work	Large group discussion, 11 youth participants & researcher.

In Table 1, the data are broken down by time, to make the data easier to navigate. Each section of time has a start ('in') and end ('out') time in the video recording, with a brief description of the events that took place during that time. I used these sections to unitize the data visually, breaking the videos up into relatively 'natural' sections, so that I could later review the sections using an emergent analytical framework (Haw & Hadfield, 2011). In the above logging sheet, one unit of data is the 'plenary discussion' that took place between the video time of 00.00-07:30.

After I logged the video recordings, I examined my reflective memos that coincided with the days of the recordings and watched sections of the video data that were relevant to what was written in my memos. I took notes on those sections, asking questions such as "what do I see happening on video?", "what are people doing?", and "what are people saying?" Then I moved on to more specific questions, such as "how do my memos influence my viewing of these videos?" Next, I looked for patterns in these units and put them in categories and assigned code names for each category. I used these categories to identify features of the data that I found particularly relevant to my research sub-question. I named these categories, and created a rule of inclusion for each, which consisted of "a propositional statement, coupled with sample data" (Saldana, 2009, p. 9). These rules of inclusion helped me determine in which category to place a unit of data. Some of these category names included "overcoming stage fright" and "developing performance skills". I juxtaposed my reflective memos with the video-recordings to confirm or disconfirm what emerged, and to interrogate any biases and/or assumptions that I brought with me to this work. One memo excerpt reads as follows:

> When participants shared their working improvisation of the press conference scene this week, I was torn between questions of participant agency and aesthetics. I think the concept participants have for this scene is brilliant, but the way it is currently being portrayed on stage doesn't necessarily convey its brilliance to an audience. When we develop scenes, how much should we be thinking about how the scene looks? Aesthetics aren't that important to the research, or are they? What do we do when the purposes of research and performance conflict? Do they? Just like any paper I write this performance is conveying their meanings and arguments to a wider audience. So probably this should be re-worked and edited like a paper would be. (Reflective memo, October 16, 2017)

Through the close readings and juxtaposition of memos (like the one above), I expanded and contracted these categories as the analysis progressed, moving from descriptive categories to more conceptual themes. In thematic analysis, these themes delineate important elements of the data that are relevant to the research question and represent "some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). To develop these themes, I interrogated my categories by asking questions of them (Charmaz, 2006). Some of the questions I asked included "what does this activity *do*?" and "What role does this activity play in the drama-research process?" My questioning led me to merge descriptive categories such as 'overcoming stage fright' and 'developing performance skills' into more conceptual themes; in the case of these two categories, the theme developed was *Becoming Performers* (see visual breakdown of themes in Figure 1, below). These themes are discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

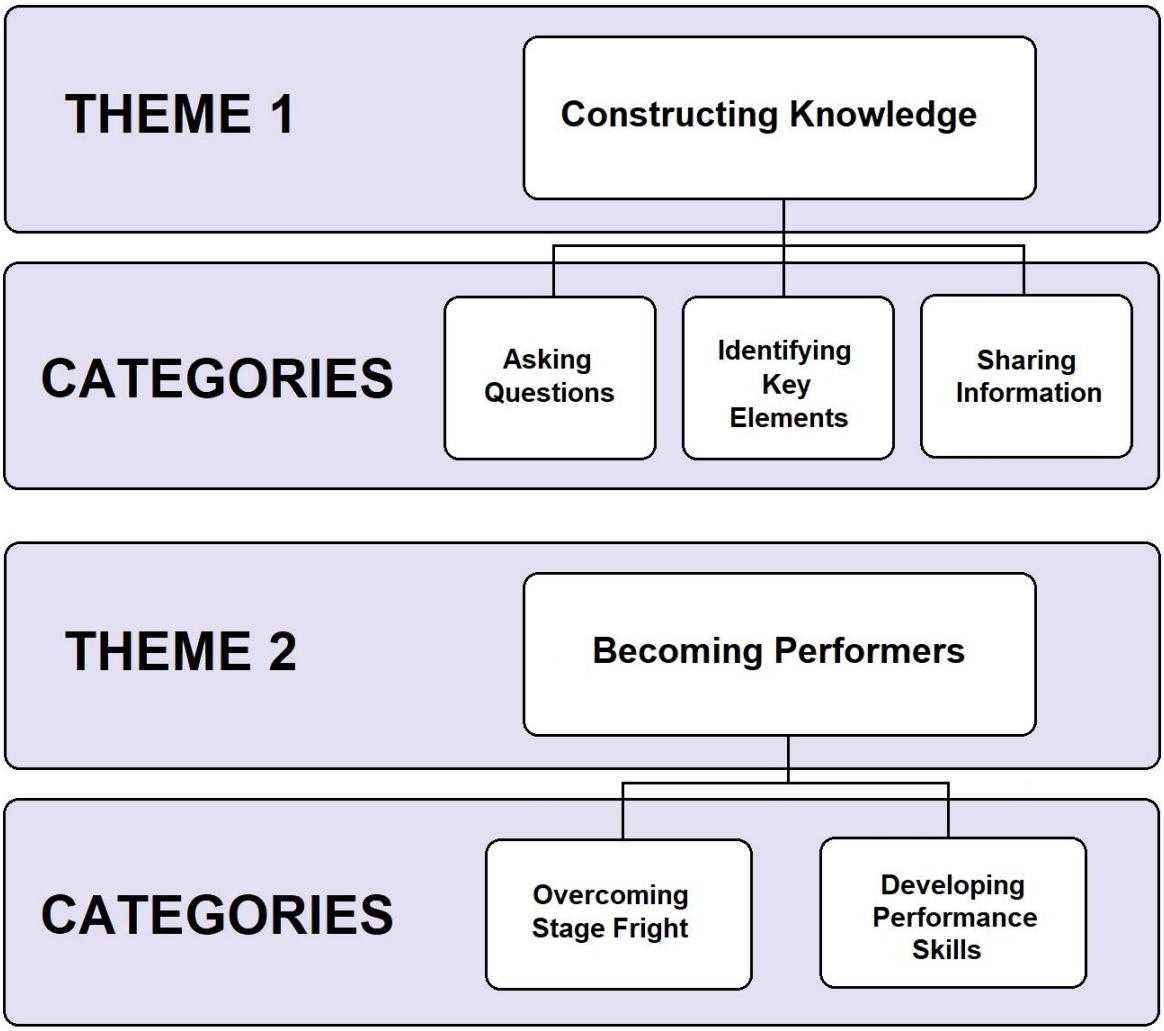

Figure 1: Visual breakdown of themes in Chapter Four

Analysis for the second sub-question.

My second sub-question was: How do the youth describe their experiences during this process? In answering this question, I focused solely on analyzing the transcribed data from the follow-up focus groups with youth play-builders. As with my analysis for Chapter Four, I thematically analyzed these data, deriving conceptual themes from the categories of data I identified (see Figure 2 for visual breakdown of themes). These themes are discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

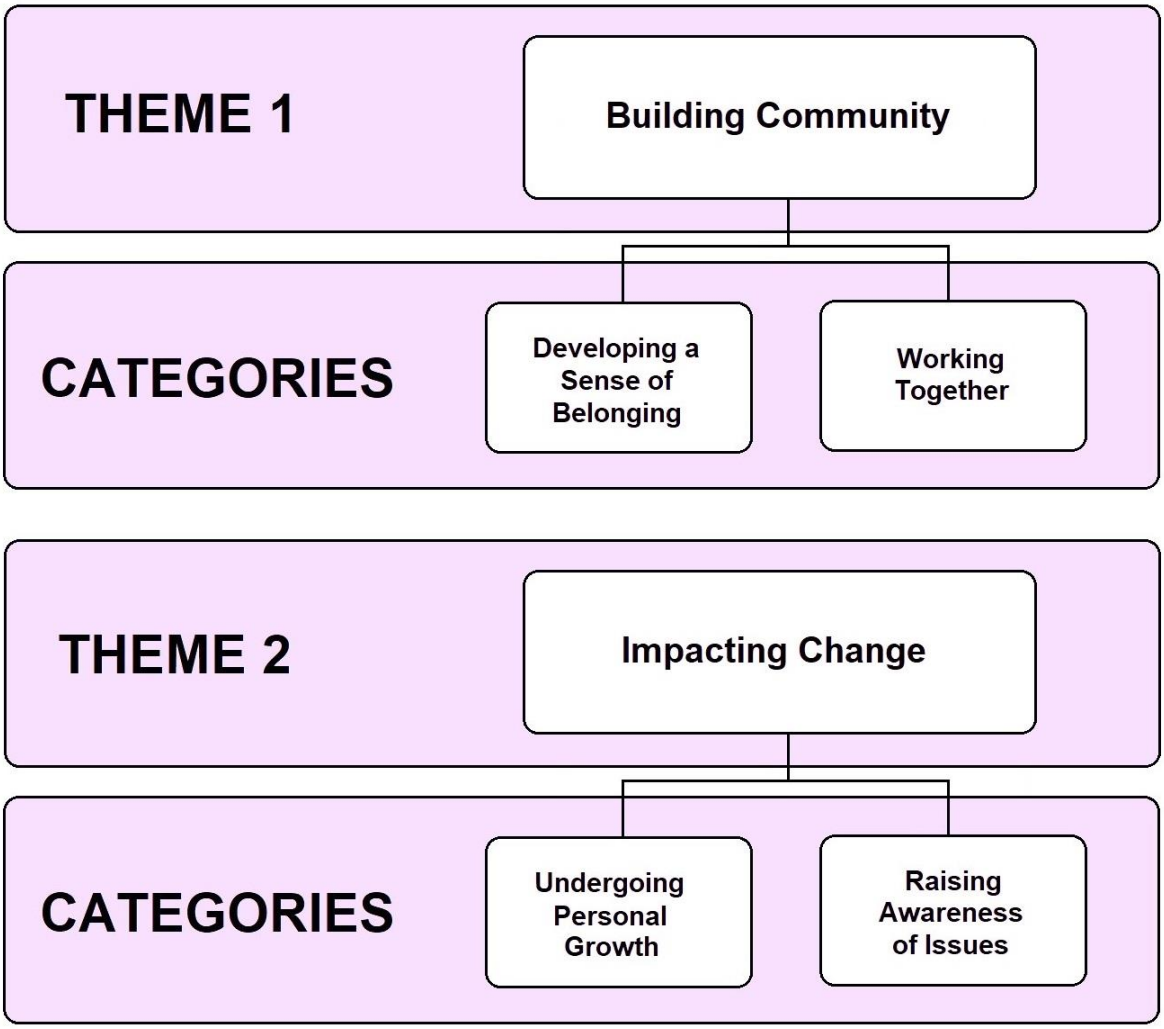

Figure 2: Visual breakdown of themes in Chapter Five

Ethical Considerations

In designing my research project with youth participants, there were several key ethical concerns I considered. First and foremost, it was important to ensure that the research being conducted had a clear purpose, and that the benefits of the research significantly outweighed the risks. Before conducting my research project, I obtained approval from the McGill Research Ethics Board. In addition to this, I recognized the importance not only of procedural ethics protocols, but ethics in practice, and that an ethical stance requires ongoing attention to any ethical issues that were to arise throughout the project (Feldman et al., 2003).

One ongoing consideration was my power and position as an adult researcher working with youth participants. I took measures to ensure that the participants did not feel pressure to participate or pressure to provide certain responses, recognizing that in their current societal position as secondary school students, they are socially conditioned to listen to and attempt to please adults (teachers, parents, etcetera.). One of these measures was to ensure participants knew their rights in the research process, including their right to withdraw at any time, as well as to only participate in aspects of the research with which they were comfortable and for which they had time. I was transparent about how my data would be used and my role as a researcher/facilitator in the process.

While participants were under the legal age of consent, it was important to me that they received the same information that their legal guardians had about the study, and I drafted an assent form for them to sign, which mirrored the consent form their guardians signed. Dialogue about participation and assent was ongoing throughout the research project, from start to finish. I kept this awareness of my positionality while working with the participants, but also when

viewing video data, writing memos, and writing up the findings of this research. I will discuss this in more detail in the next section.

Another major consideration was confidentiality. Because this project involved youth performing in a theatrical production, which was performed live and filmed, and because focus groups and group discussions were methods in this process, there were limits on confidentiality. This was something I was upfront about with participants, and I required additional permissions for the photography and video recording that took place throughout the process. I was, however, able to take certain precautions to protect confidentiality. I used participant pseudonyms in my memos and dissertation and removed identifiable information to the extent possible (including school names, teacher names, and specific cities/towns they reside, in etc.). While a play programme was distributed to the audience, it included a group photo of the cast in lieu of a list of participant names. As mentioned previously, anonymity is not possible in this type of research – in fact – consent to be video-recorded and photographed, and for this documentation to be used in my research, was necessary for participation in the study. However, I took precautions to ensure confidential information (including participant names) was not compromised, including storing it on a password protected document on a password protected computer in a secure location.

While there was low potential for physical harm in this process, it was still a consideration. As a researcher, and an adult who works with children and youth, it was important to me that the young people I worked with felt safe and protected. An important step in ensuring my participants' safety was choosing my research sites with care, and ensuring I was equipped to deal with potential physical harm to the best of my ability (holding an up-to-date standard first-aid and CPR certificate and ensuring there was always an on-site first aid kit). I also provided

participants with the phone number of Kids Help Phone, a free professional counselling service available to youth, in case they were under psychological stress, or wanted to speak with a counsellor.

Compensation was another ethical consideration which I took into account. While I did not provide monetary incentives for participation in this project, I wanted participants to leave the project with something of concrete benefit to them. This was a key reason I conducted this research through my organization, Artucate Canada, which was eligible to provide the young people who participated with community service hours for their participation in a non-profit project. High school students in Ontario are required to complete 40 hours of community service before they can graduate. Their participation was counted as community service and was a way to compensate them (non-monetarily) for their time and provided a concrete benefit for them.

I received funding from a municipal grant and was able to hire theatre professionals to work as acting coaches for the participants. This training was provided to the youth participants free of charge, which contributed to their education as emerging theatre artists. This training was something they could add to their resumes, and for some, it would be useful for their applications to theatre schools. In addition to this, I brought snacks for the participants (such as crackers and cheese, granola bars, banana bread, etcetera) to all group meetings and rehearsals, as the young people spent significant time rehearsing and I wanted to ensure they had food available if they were hungry. In addressing the numerous considerations involved in this work, including but not limited to relationships and power dynamics, informed and ongoing consent, confidentiality and compensation, I worked to make this project ethically sound.

Rigour and Credibility

As opposed to quantitative research, for which rigour is typically determined based on validity, generalizability, reliability, and objectivity (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015), rigour in qualitative research is assessed for its *credibility* and *plausibility* (Butler-Kisber, 2018). Butler-Kisber (2018) explains that some of the key contributing elements to credibility in the qualitative research process are transparency, prolonged participation in the field, use of multiple sources of data, and inclusion of participant voice in the process. I have worked to enhance rigour and credibility in a number of ways: [1] I have developed a clear account of my research process, including detailed examples and visuals; [2] I spent approximately three months in the field, meeting multiple times each week and developing relationships with my research participants, participating actively in a drama process with them; [3] I used multiple sources of data in my research, including focus groups and interviews, video recordings, and reflective memos and carefully grounded my findings in these data; and, [4] I undertook a participatory research process, giving participants control over the direction of many elements of the research project. James (2007) raises the point that since it is adult researchers who typically control how youth voices are presented in their studies, this can make the research less 'authentic'. To address this, I remained in contact participants, contacting them during my analysis process to clarify their meanings and provide context where it was needed, and checked in with them when using their verbatim excerpts from transcripts in my writing.

Another important consideration is 'closeness to the data'. Norris (2009) explains that in the playbuilding process, researchers are co-creators, contributing to the data generation themselves, sharing stories about their own experiences and being part of the creative collective. This process required me to be a co-participant in the data, which can be viewed as a drawback,

because of the potential for me to 'contaminate' data through personal biases and other factors such as relationships with the participants and emotional investment in the success of the piece. As discussed earlier, I addressed this through reflective memo writing and revisited the memos throughout the process to keep track of these issues and address them. In this study, I feel that closeness to the data was a positive attribute as it was a way to gain a deep understanding of the process and to collect rich data.

When taking on the role of a co-participant, reflexivity was especially important. I was challenged to ensure constant reflexivity throughout the process, through reflective memo-writing to interrogate my biases and assumptions and account for them throughout the process (Birks et al., 2008; Daley, 2010), as well as asking for constant feedback from the participants with whom I was working. This feedback took the form of plenary discussions, held before and after each meeting/rehearsal, follow-up focus groups after the performance, and checking in with participants to ensure that I used their excerpts from the data in proper context in my writing.

Striking a balance between research and art.

My literature review in Chapter Two touched on some work that focused on the importance of performance quality as an indication of research rigor. This posed multiple challenges for me, as I was working with participants who had limited performance experience, and in most cases had never worked on a theatrical piece before this project. Saldaña's insistence on high-quality production values as a means for progress in the field, and Belliveau's questions around the privileging of data based on audience reception are very real practical and ethical considerations researchers face in the field (see Chapter Two for a more in-depth discussion of these issues).

Concerns I had when developing this project included the fear that the work would be judged for its entertainment value, or that in attempting to showcase all relevant data, the piece could have less of an impact on audiences. I am not certain these concerns are reserved for drama-based researchers, but they are certainly important considerations. Striking a balance between rigorous research and quality art was not an easy task – especially in my role as a doctoral student with limited time and financial resources and the fact that I was working with participants who had very little prior performance experience.

Saldaña and Belliveau's discussions are important ones, and helped me examine my priorities, as well as the resources and partnerships I had available to me. While I recognize the importance of high calibre performances, I decided that this discussion might be most relevant to those whose research stops after the final performance. In my work, I was most interested in the process (research) than the final piece (art), as my research extended beyond the production, including the responses of audience members and follow-up discussions with the participants/performers. That being said, having been both a performer and an audience member, I agreed that importance should be placed on ensuring the performance is watchable, and that things 'work' dramatically. I especially agree with Saldaña (2008) that researchers need to be well-acquainted with the methods before using them, as well as open to constructive feedback from peers, audiences, and those with performance experience throughout the process. Because of this, as mentioned above, I used some of the funds from my grant to hire theatre professionals to work with the group to help create a piece to which the audience would be receptive (discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four). This was as much about valuing participants' time and efforts as it was about audience reception – since the youth spent a significant amount of time co-conducting research with me and creating an artistic work, it was important to me that

they came away from the process feeling that the work was high-quality, thorough, rigorous, and something of which they were proud. I am pleased to report that the audience reception was overwhelmingly positive (the audience engaged audibly through laughter, awe, shock, and clapping at appropriate moments), which in turn gave the performers an understanding that their work had an impact on their audience.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I discussed my research methodology in detail. I began by discussing the objectives of my research, including my overarching research question: How can youth in the Greater Toronto Area take part in the process of participatory, drama-based research?

Following this, I provided a discussion of my research sites (two rented rooms where meetings and drama-based work to place), and my participant sample (26 youth in the GTA and three adult audience members) and how these participants were recruited. I explained the different ways participants were involved in this project:15 youth participated solely in the 'initial conversations', while 11 youth participated in the 'initial conversations' and the drama-based process.

Next, I detailed my data collection processes and the types of data sources: interview and focus group data from initial conversations, video recordings of the dramatic process, video stills (images), reflective memos, and follow-up focus group data. I also discussed how these data were analyzed through thematic analysis using constant comparison inquiry.

Finally, I moved on to a discussion of the ethical considerations involved in this work, such as rights-informed practices, informed consent, confidentiality, and compensation. In concluding this chapter, I discussed rigour and credibility in this work as well as the process of

striking a balance between research and art. In Chapter Four, I will discuss the themes that arose in response to my first research sub-question.

Chapter Four: How do the Youth Participate During this Process?

The purpose of this research was to understand how drama-based methods can be used in an education-focused participatory research project with youth. In Chapter Two I explained that although performative inquiry is becoming more widespread in social science and education research, most of the highly participatory work has been done with pre-service teachers and other adult populations, rather than children and youth (see: Belliveau, 2006; Carter et al., 2011; Shabtay et al., in press, for examples). I also noted that drama-based research with children and youth has often separated the youth as "subjects" and adults as researchers (see: Cahill, 2006; Conrad, 2004, for examples). My project focused on how highly participatory drama research can be used with youth. Here, I address my first sub-question: How do the youth participate during this process?

In this chapter, I present key themes that emerged in the video data as described in Chapter Three. The two themes that emerged from the data analysis are: [1] *Constructing Knowledge*, and [2] *Becoming Performers*. These themes emerged through a constant comparison inquiry and were developed from relevant categories of data (see Chapter Three for more discussion of my analysis). In the sections that follow, I present each theme and the categories within it, and provide specific examples from the data, including excerpts from youth participants and video stills, which I have obtained permission to use. When quoting participants, I refer to them using pseudonyms, and include dates of our activities and conversations.

Theme One: Constructing Knowledge

One way in which the youth participated in this drama-based process was by *Constructing Knowledge*. When facilitating this participatory drama-based research project, I

was aware that my participants would be conducting their own analyses and working to disseminate their thoughts, ideas, and views through drama. In this process, they worked as co-researchers in the creation of a research-based performance. They took part in a number of activities to build and hone their research skills. The theme constructing knowledge was derived from three categories of participation that I observed: 'asking questions', 'identifying key elements', and 'sharing information' (see Figure 3 below). I continue my discussion of these categories throughout this section.

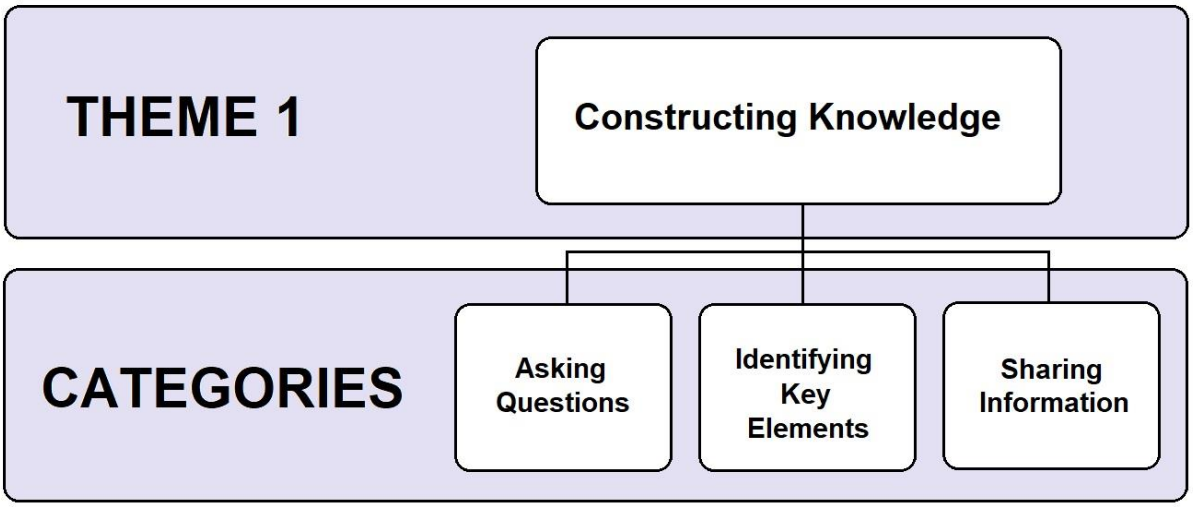

Figure 3: Visual theme breakdown for *Constructing Knowledge*

In Chapter Three, I explained my use of 'initial conversations' (interviews and focus groups) with 26 youth in the GTA to collect preliminary data about school-related issues youth face, which would aid in the creation of scenes during the playbuilding process.

Following the interviews and focus groups, I led a group of eleven of the youth 'play-builders' through a participatory playbuilding process, meeting six to eight hours each week to design, workshop, and rehearse scenes, and polish a theatrical production. The data collected

during the initial conversations were transcribed and used during the playbuilding process. I discuss several parts of the research elements involved in the playbuilding process in the following subsections. It is important to note that participatory drama research is not a linear process, but a flexible and iterative one, and although activities are presented in a linear order in this dissertation for ease of reading, some were in fact simultaneous.

Within the theme *Constructing Knowledge* comprises the categories of [1] asking questions, [2] identifying key elements, and [3] sharing information. When describing these categories I use transcribed excerpts from participants, and descriptions of our processes based on video recordings. While the final performance was made up of multiple scenes, I draw on the creation of one of the scenes, 'The Living To-Do List', as an example that is built on throughout the following sections.

Asking questions.

Before engaging in the drama-based work, participants took part in 'initial conversations' (interviews and focus groups) where they were encouraged to take leadership over the direction of the conversations. During this process, participants who were involved in the focus groups asked their own questions of their peers and built on what others had said. Throughout these conversations, participants were engaged in what Sawyer and Norris (2013) refer to as duo-ethnography, a process where "two or more researchers work in tandem to dialogically critique and question the meanings they give to social issues and epistemological constructs" (p. 2). In this way, participants were involved in collecting data that would later be used in the playbuilding process. An example of this process is in an excerpt below, where participants are discussing an experience they have all encountered which leads to academic stress. They discuss

a problematic cycle where they avoid beginning to complete tasks because they are too daunting, and the longer they wait to start the tasks, the more tasks build up, the more daunting they become, and the more difficult it becomes to begin working on them.

Jen: It becomes sort of like a cycle of badness, where I don't actually do anything, just freak out.

Suki: Cycle of badness! What do you mean?

Jen: Pretty much I don't do one thing, and the longer I wait I can't do it because it becomes this scary thing and I can't start doing it.

Carmen: And then you get even more things and you can't do them because you didn't do the other things?

Suki: Yeah. Oh, I know what you're talking about. And when I do that, honestly, sometimes I do want to do the other things just to avoid doing the scary thing.

Carmen: It depends. For me, sometimes I just don't do any of them because I don't know where to start, and I can't make myself decide what to do. You know what I mean?

Jen: Like you don't do one thing and then there's another, but the other thing is always, like, sitting there in your head and it makes it hard to do anything.

Suki: I know exactly what you mean. And that's when I just binge on *Death Note* [television series].

(participants laugh)

Carmen: And does that help reduce stress? I try to avoid Netflix because it stresses me out to do that instead.

> **Suki:** [watching Netflix] always helps me in the moment, but I know that it's not for the long run because it doesn't make the tasks go away, just delays and they get scarier. I know that technically, but I still do it. It's like what [Jen] said, 'the cycle of badness'.
>
> (Focus Group, Carmen, Jen, & Suki, September 12, 2017)

In this focus group, participants were involved in duoethnographic knowledge construction. They asked each other questions and built on what other participants have said. Suki's question "What do you mean?" led to a more in-depth discussion of Jen's idea of a 'cycle of badness'. Carmen's question "does that help reduce stress?" led to greater discussion of Suki's decision to watch Netflix instead of beginning her schoolwork. The focus group participants' probing helped them gain more details about the phenomena their peers were discussing. The excerpt above exemplifies how the youth participants were engaged in aspects of knowledge construction as they collected data that the play-builders would later analyze and share.

Identifying key elements.

When beginning the drama-based work, I shared the transcribed data from the 'initial conversations' with the group of eleven play-builders. In working groups, I provided sections of the data (excluding identifiable information) to the participants and they worked to identify excerpts of the data that they found particularly relevant and meaningful, including areas in the data where they found similarities in things participants had said.

To begin this process, I guided the play-builders through a simplified constant comparison analysis process based on critical grounded theory (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2019). I separated the transcribed data into several small booklets, each including the data from one of the initial conversations (interviews or focus groups). I divided the group of play-builders into

smaller groups (two groups of four, and one group of three) and provided copies of the booklets to each group. Group members then worked together to conduct a 'close reading' of the transcribed data. The purpose of this reading was to get a general sense of the information and the overall meaning at a surface level, asking basic questions such as "What is the tone of the ideas?" and, "What general ideas are the participants saying?" (Creswell, 2013). During this step, play-builders used pens to record any personal notes and ideas they had onto the transcripts.

After the close reading, we reconvened as a larger group, and discussed some of the participants' initial ideas, including anything that stood out to them, or resonated with them within the data. As a group, we looked for patterns in data, discussing similarities and differences in each smaller group's notes (see Figure 4, below).

Figure 4: The group reconvening to share and discuss notes

Next, we grouped the sections of data that represented key elements together and selected a coloured marker to represent each element. The play-builders marked sections of the transcripts that they found relevant to each element in the associated colour. One of our initial elements, for example, was named ‘tackling one task at a time’ and the colour selected for that element was green. This element came out of excerpts from the transcripts where youth spoke about dividing their schoolwork into manageable sections and/or focusing on one academic task at a time. For example, one of the groups underlined a section in the transcript that read “I break my homework into smaller parts so I can get it done” (Interview, Jay, September 15, 2017) in the colour green to indicate it was part of the ‘tackling one task at a time’ element.

Some challenges we faced with this approach included the sheer quantity of data, and significant subjectivity of the play-builders, since they had been participants in some of the focus groups and interviews. While we undertook a systematic process, this process was also not entirely linear, since new ‘elements’ arose and/or changed throughout the process as participants became more familiar with the data. This reality is present in any type of qualitative analysis based on critical grounded theory as categories are collapsed and/or expanded, but it is especially evident when conducting this type of analysis in a participatory manner with a group of youth who were new to this process. I reflect on these realities in Chapter Six.

An example of identifying key elements.

As in the example in the previous section, where Jen, Carmen, and Suki were discussing the ‘cycle of badness’, the play-builders found that nearly all participants who described experiences of extreme stress linked these feelings to a lack of organization.

In contrast to this, the play-builders found excerpts from several participants who identified themselves as 'organized' who appeared to have lower levels of stress and a stronger drive to complete academic tasks. They found several passages in the transcripts where youth described strategies they used to help reduce stress. Each of these strategies became a key element on which they focused. The elements that emerged were: 'just starting', 'keeping track of tasks' and 'tackling one task at a time'. I discuss these below, providing examples of excerpts relevant to each key element.

Just starting.

The play-builders found data from several interviewees who deemed themselves highly focused and motivated in academic contexts who describe a concept of 'just starting' as being the most effective way to reduce stress. Much like Jen's earlier description of a 'cycle of badness', where avoiding a task makes tasks more and more daunting, 'just starting' is a category of data including implications that beginning a task can make the task feel less daunting. The following interview excerpt that the play-builders identified in the transcripts describes this strategy.

Wanda: I know how people feel when they say things are stressful, and it's like literally the hardest thing ever, but the only way I can motivate myself when the task is hard is to do it. I know it maybe sounds obvious, or like, stupid, but I'm serious. Starting is the hardest part for me, and maybe I don't always get A's but at least I get it done and then I can do the next thing, y'know?

Abigail: It doesn't sound stupid to me at all, it sounds like a good system. How do you get yourself started? How do you get past the stress?

Wanda: Well I'm not always able to do it, but when I do, it's like, I just need to tell myself "you're doing this now", and I make myself sit down and work.

Like I decide I don't care if it's bad. I just need something done. Like, no more procrastinating, I'm not allowed, it's time to just start.

Abigail: And when you start, what happens?

Wanda: I start it and sometimes it's hard but sometimes it just starts flowing and I can see the end, and then I can keep working, like, it helps push me. Sometimes I can't make myself do it, but eventually, I think everyone has to make themselves start or else it won't get done.

(Interview, Wanda, September 11, 2017)

The play-builders found that Wanda's description of 'just starting' was similar to things other interviewees had said. In other excerpts, interviewees describe a variety of scenarios in which starting a task – whether it involves writing down a few sentences or reading a few pages of a book without focusing on the final product – helped them reduce stress, move forward, and complete a task. Another example that they felt was relevant to this category is illustrated in an excerpt by Tim, an interviewee who considers himself a 'good student.' In this excerpt, he explained how this strategy helped him stay motivated despite achieving low grades in the past:

I don't know what happened, maybe being in grade eleven and realizing that my grades actually matter to my future now, I got that I needed to change that way I was doing things. It was not only my parents and teachers that were mad at my grades, because I also handed stuff in late, but I also realized that I needed my homework to go away, and the way to make it go away was to actually just do it … So now I go home and try to work on an assignment right when I get it. My goal is get it done as soon as possible because there will be more work soon. It's hard but it feels better than before, and it does

> feel good when I'm done and people are all stressed with like four assignments and they're like "how are you done History already?" (Interview, Tim, September 15, 2017)

Tim's strategy of completing tasks as soon as possible after he receives them helped reduce the feelings of being 'overwhelmed' that many of his peers experienced. While other data the play-builders found pointed to a number of reasons why finishing assignments as soon as possible is not always feasible, in several other excerpts youth indicated that if they made a conscious effort to start assignments earlier, it reduced the increasing stress they experienced closer to assignment deadlines. In examining these portions of the data, the play-builders identified 'just starting' as an element of key importance to the project.

Keeping track of tasks.

Another element the play-builders identified was 'keeping track of tasks.' Play-builders found patterns of data where interviewees discussed using a calendar, to-do list, agenda, or cellphone app, as a strategy to stay organized. One such excerpt, selected by play-builders, comes from an interviewee named Anna who explained that having awareness of her tasks helped her in planning steps to accomplish the work:

> When I can see all of the deadlines visually in my agenda I can count how many days I have for each and see which ones I need to make sure to finish first, like if my Math ISU is due next Thursday, and my English ISU is due next Friday, I know I can't do the whole English ISU in one day, so I need to try to plan out my time. (Focus Group, Anna, September 12, 2017)

In this passage Anna explained how visualizing time through the sections in her agenda helped her keep track of the tasks she needed to accomplish and make tangible plans. In addition to Anna's awareness of tasks, the play-builders underlined segments of data where youth discussed how being able to check things off of their to-do lists, or cross them off their calendars, helped them feel organized and motivated them to continue crossing/checking tasks off. They underlined all these excerpts in pink to demonstrate that they were part of the element 'keeping track of tasks.'

Tackling one task at a time.

Another element they identified was 'tackling one task at a time'. The play-builders found passages that indicated students were less overwhelmed when they were able to put aside other tasks and focus all their energy on one task. One such example was from a focus group transcript:

> It's too much. Like I only want one thing on my list, I can't do my essay when my mom is also bugging me to clean and I know I have like three other assignments due. The only thing that works is just pushing everything away, and only focusing on one thing, well, like, if I get that done then I do the next one, but first I just need to only focus on one. When I do one, I feel like I actually finally did it, and I accomplished something, and it helps feel like the rest won't be so hard anymore like I thought. (Focus Group, Karin, September 14, 2017)

This sentiment was echoed in a few other portions of the initial conversation data. These data all focused on the element 'tackling one task at a time'. Using the three above-mentioned elements 'just starting', 'keeping track of tasks' and 'tackling one task at a time', the play-builders developed the scene "The Living To-Do List" on the topic of 'staying organized', described in the next section. Through the collaborative process of identifying key elements within the initial conversation data, the youth were engaged in constructing knowledge. The play-builders grouped the three elements together and later created a scene about them. While I have decided to focus on this scene in the next section to keep a consistent narrative of examples throughout this chapter, it is important to note that there were numerous other elements identified and five scenes developed through this process (see Appendix A for full play script). I describe how these elements were used to create a scene in the following section.

Sharing information.

Another category that emerged was 'sharing information'. In the playbuilding process, the youth presented information through the performance of their original theatrical play *Motivation and Justice*. The piece was a 'dramatic collage' (Shabtay et al., 2019) of stories or series of dramatic sketches created by the youth play-builders and presented in a non-linear fashion. All touched on the patterns which emerged from their data analysis. The final play included five scenes: 'The Living To-Do List' (a scene about the importance of keeping organized), 'The Comparison' (a scene focusing on a student's experience of being labelled), 'The High School Reunion' (a scene about the impact of teachers on students' long-term achievements), 'The Cafeteria Press Conference' (a metaphoric scene that examines how political climates can impact students' experiences); and 'The Sexist Teacher' (a scene about

students' experiences of sexism in schools) (See Appendix A for full play script). As an example, I will draw on the process the play-builders took to create the 'The Living To-Do List' scene, which was created to present key elements discussed in the previous section.

Creating 'The Living To-Do List' scene.

After identifying key elements in the data, the play-builders grouped elements together thematically and created scenes based on them. They grouped the three elements described earlier ('just starting', 'keeping track of tasks' and 'tackling one task at a time') because they felt that all these elements related to an overarching theme of *keeping organized*. I worked with a subgroup of six youth play-builders to develop ideas for this scene based on these elements. In this work, I acted as a facilitator, posing questions to help the group brainstorm ideas (I reflect on my role in the process in Chapter Six). When examining the excerpts of data that they found relevant to the theme of *keeping organized*, one of the things that stood out to the play-builders was the stark contrast between the responses of the participants who felt disorganized (and were often overwhelmed by academic tasks), and those who felt organized. In our discussions, I worked with the play-builders to develop some initial questions to address in the piece, based on their reactions to the data:

1. How can we represent the contrast between students that are organized and disorganized?
2. How can we visually demonstrate (through performance) how annoying and overwhelming it is to have so many tasks at the same time?

The answer to the first question came easily. There was a consensus among the six play-builders developing this scene. They felt that there should be two characters, one who is organized and one who is not. They decided that the actors playing each character should be able to visually and verbally demonstrate the differences in the way students handle stressful tasks through embodiment of the characters.

Next, we discussed how we could represent tasks on stage. One idea was to have two students working on an assignment at the same time, on opposite ends of the stage, and show how stressful it was for the disorganized student, and how easy it was for the organized student. Talking through the idea, some group members felt that this did not accurately represent the stress that a build-up of many tasks could create. They discussed several ideas, including having tasks represented by large paper lists on stage, or having actors hold large "thought bubbles" to represent the different tasks in the characters' minds. Some play-builders complained that these ideas were simply not 'annoying' enough. Dani described this:

> I don't know. It just doesn't seem annoying enough. Like it's not just thought bubbles, it's like, like people are screaming in your head or something. Like people should be bugging them, like swirling around. Like constantly tapping you on the shoulder and they won't go away until you get them away. (Dani, September 25, 2017)

Play-builders began discussing how we could incorporate this idea of tasks 'bugging' a person, of them 'screaming' or 'swirling around' in someone's mind. One play-builder, Lara, pointed out that within the interview and focus group data, many of the participants had discussed non-

academic tasks as adding to their stress and lists of tasks. Speaking about this, we developed another question to address in this scene:

> 3. How can we show audience members that tasks are not limited to homework, but that they encompass other things including household responsibilities, sleep, and exercise?

Eventually, the play-builders agreed that instead of inanimate objects, the tasks would be characters. Each task would have a distinct personality and would interact differently depending on how organized and in-control each student was. When we got up and worked the scene out in one of the groups, the play-builders each took on a character and worked through their interactions through improvisation. The character of organized student, eventually named 'Alicia', moved the living tasks around the stage with ease, telling them where to stand, lining them up like a to-do list, and speaking to the audience like a narrator of her own life. The disorganized character, eventually named 'Keith', was swarmed by tasks, unable to accomplish any of them (see Figure 5 below).

Figure 5: Play-builders improvising the tasks 'swarming' Keith in Living To-Do List scene

Once they worked through this part of the scene, we discussed the end of the scene. How would it conclude? Would Keith be doomed? What message did we want to communicate, and how would we communicate it? Speaking with the group, many believed that there should be hope for Keith. Some of the data the play-builders were drawing on suggested that some youth had been able to get out of negative cycles, and that sometimes breaking the cycle involved help from a sibling, tutor, parent, teacher, or therapist. This led to other questions:

4. What does hope look like for an overwhelmed student?

5. How can we represent this hope on stage?

The ending came about through improvisation. Reeya, one of the play-builders, said that Keith was probably a student that needed support, and that the character Alicia would be his support. While Keith was on the ground, being swarmed and clobbered by the living tasks, Alicia entered and helped him gain control again. They worked through a system, organizing the tasks into a list and accomplishing each of them: one at a time. At the beginning, Alicia took charge, demonstrating how to properly create a list, and worked with Keith to check off a few items. After this, Keith took charge, and checked them off with Alicia's moral support (see Figure 6 below).

Figure 6: Play-builders rehearsing 'The Living To-Do List' scene, the characters 'Alicia' and 'Keith' (left) are checking items off of Keith's To-Do List.

While not all of the scenes had 'happy' endings, it was important to the play-builders that this one did. When they discussed the transcribed data, as well as their own experiences, they felt

that it could be realistic to depict Keith getting out of the negative cycle, but that his character would need help to do so. In creating this scene, the play-builders shared their interpretation of the data on stage for an audience. They addressed the categories of data they uncovered: 'just starting' was represented by Alicia initiating task completion, 'keeping track of tasks' was represented through Alicia and Keith's creation of a to-do list, and 'tackling one task at a time' was represented through Keith's completion and checking off tasks one by one.

This scene, among others, was shared in the play-builder's final production *Motivation and Justice*. The piece was presented in a rented-out high school drama classroom space, which included a stage and seating for 45 invited audience members, including family members, friends, educators, community members, and anyone else the youth chose to invite. As mentioned in Chapter Two, drama-based research is touted for its ability to mobilize research in communities beyond academia (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Jones, 2012; Madison, 2005). The youth actively shared this information with an audience in a succinct performance. They acted out the scenes live for an audience with whom they chose to share their newly constructed knowledge. While in a different format, this portrayal is similar to the way academic research is presented at conferences and in scholarly publications. Rather than presenting information in writing, their findings were embodied on stage. Through the process of asking questions, identifying key elements, and sharing information, the youth took part in constructing knowledge.

Theme Two: Becoming Performers

Another way the youth participated in this drama-based process was *Becoming Performers.* The theme includes the grouping of two categories of data, which I derived from my constant comparison inquiry (see Chapter Three for the details of my analysis). The categories

that made up the theme *Becoming Performers* are: [1] 'overcoming stage fright', and [2] 'developing performance skills' (see Figure 7, below).

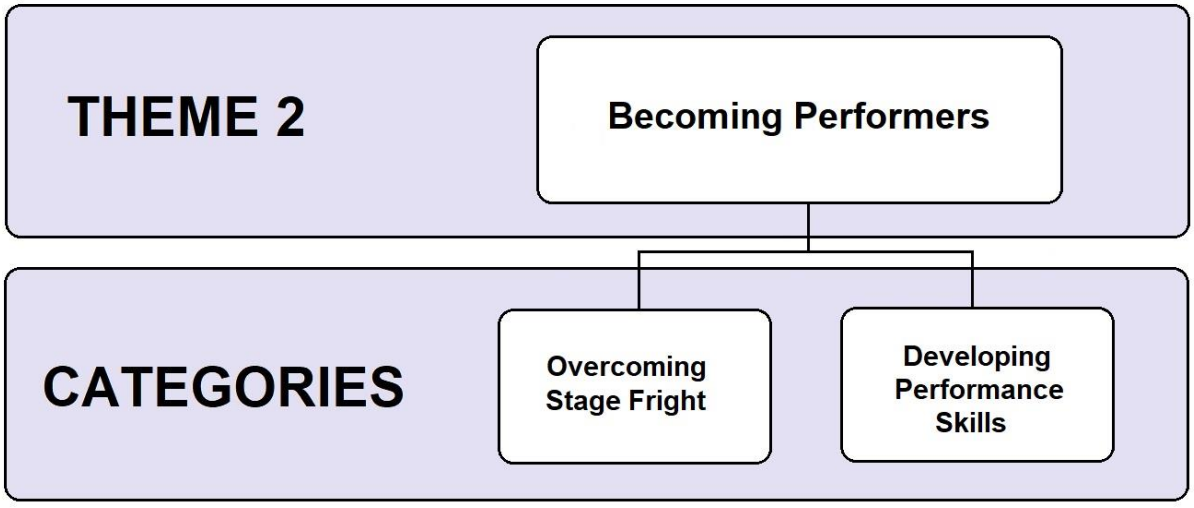

Figure 7: Visual theme breakdown for *Becoming Performers*

As I have discussed in Chapter Two, in playbuilding, participants are involved throughout the entire play creation process, from conceptualization to performance of the piece. Becoming a performer in this context is more than simply performing, it involves significant work and growth. I met with the eleven youth 'play-builder' participants for six to eight hours each week, over a three-month period. Each time we met for rehearsal, the group of youth took part in a plenary discussion, one or more drama 'warm-ups' and then engaged in the scheduled activities for each particular rehearsal session (brainstorming and/or workshopping scenes in small groups, rehearsing scenes, polishing scenes, full dress rehearsals, etcetera). Most of our drama activities did not involve physical touch; however, it is important to note that we practiced consent-based drama, meaning that participants were asked to respect the physical space of their peers and receive permission before engaging in any elements of physical touch (such as giving 'high fives' or holding hands to take a bow).

Overcoming stage fright.

The majority of youth 'play-builder' participants had little or no performance experience when we began our playbuilding process. Two out of eleven participants stated that they had taken a drama class before, and two had begun their first high school drama class in the same weeks as our playbuilding session (in Ontario, the school year begins in September, which coincided with the beginning of our project meetings). Seven youth stated that they had little or no experience with performance and had not elected to take a drama class or participate in a play prior to this project. In fact, while all eleven play-builders had volunteered to participate in the drama-based activities and performance, the majority of participants discussed feelings of anxiousness over performing for an audience.

This fear of performing or public speaking, colloquially referred to as 'stage fright', often involves worries about being embarrassed in front of peers or of being judged by an audience (McCammon & Østerlind, 2011). During our first playbuilding meeting, several participants discussed this:

Lara: I'm not sure I'll be good on stage. I mean for an audience. I never took drama at school because even though I can be loud, I'm actually pretty shy when it comes to being in front people, in, like, a play or anything.

Reeya: Same. I mean, I want to do it, I'm just nervous. I've never done it before. Like what if I'm really bad or like I laugh on stage or don't remember what to say?

Abigail: Well, to start out, I want to remind everyone that you only need to participate in parts of the project that make you feel comfortable. Just because you volunteered doesn't mean you have to participate in every single activity. But, also, I want you to know that drama is about learning,

and that people get better with practice. And, since we're meeting so many hours each week you'll get a lot of practice. You can try it out and decide how you feel about it, you don't need to make your decision right now.

Reeya: No, I definitely want to. I want to. I'm just nervous but also really excited.

Lara: Yeah, same.

(Reeya & Lara, September 18, 2017)

In this passage, Lara and Reeya both expressed hesitation towards performing in front of an audience. Both participants discussed a fear that they won't perform well; Lara states that she's not sure she will 'be good on stage' and Reeya worries she'll be 'really bad'. During that first meeting, other participants expressed similar concerns. I have included a couple of examples:

> I'm actually surprised I'm doing this. I mean the drama stuff. Like I'm not an actor or anything. I hate class presentations and stuff in front of other people. Like I actually fear it. I keep thinking, like, what if I freeze up? Like, maybe I should just help behind the scenes or something. I never acted before in front of people [*pause*] but then, it could also be really fun. (Jen, September 18, 2017)

> I'm just letting you know I never did a play before, except maybe in grade two, but that doesn't count. So, I'm kind of nervous about it, and I'm not funny like the drama kids at my school. So basically, I'm going to try it out, but I'm a bit worried I'll mess up on stage, so maybe I could have a small part where I don't need to talk much. (Grace, September 18, 2017)

Lara, Reeya, Jen, and Grace all expressed feelings of stage fright in our initial playbuilding meeting. Later that week in our second playbuilding meeting we played a series of community-building drama games. They all participated actively, and when asked how the second meeting went, Lara responded "so much fun! I can't wait until next week" (Lara, September 19, 2017). The following week, Jen and Reeya volunteered to be the first performers in a game called 'Freeze', where participants perform improvised scenes in front of their peers. Despite their initial hesitations, all four of them attended and participated actively in the playbuilding meetings, engaged in drama activities, worked on scenes with peers, and performed in the final play. Following the final performance, I held a follow-up focus group where I asked them to reflect on their experiences during the playbuilding process. Grace and Lara discussed their experiences of overcoming stage fright:

> I honestly can't believe I used to be scared of acting. I literally just changed my schedule for next semester to take drama instead of art because I love it so much now. I think basically it was mostly fear, because there wasn't really a reason behind it. I just needed to try the first drama game to realize it wasn't actually scary. Because it was stuff we came up with, too, which meant it wasn't as nerve-wracking. I just needed to overcome it, and now I will definitely keep doing it. I feel like you guys are my drama family now. (Focus Group, Grace, November 28, 2017)

> So, before you guys reminded me, I actually forgot about how worried I used to be about acting on stage. It seems like we just need to take that step, you know? We needed to overcome the fear of messing up, and really, just by trying it you realize it's a lot of fun.

> And Abby, and you guys made it actually so much fun and not scary at all like I thought. One thing at a time gives you confidence, and all of a sudden you're one of the 'drammies' and you're in a play. (Focus Group, Lara, November 28, 2017)

Grace and Lara both discuss overcoming their fears of performing as a necessary step in the playbuilding process. For Grace and Lara, the catalyst for overcoming stage fright was trying something new. Grace notes that she "just needed to try the first drama game", while Lara states that she "just needed to take that step" and that trying "one thing at a time" gave her confidence. Other participants agreed that overcoming stage fright was a major stepping-stone in the playbuilding process, but noted that their confidence came from gaining knowledge and experience:

> I think I was scared of acting because I was afraid I'd suck, or like people wouldn't laugh at my jokes. And I was kind of worried my face would get all red. So what made me feel like I actually transformed is that I actually feel good at acting now. Like I think I'm actually not a bad actress and that kind of comes from experience. Like we learned a lot of things in this process, and like I didn't really know how to project my voice before and I also learned that acting isn't actually that scary if you know what you're doing. (Focus Group, Reeya, November 28, 2017)

> Mostly I think the biggest thing that I learned about performing is that it doesn't have to be scary. For me, I felt like I needed to be good at it in order to be confident. Once you do a few improv games you realize improv isn't actually hard and not everything has to be

perfect. You get better as you practice and also as you learn from what other people do. It's mostly about getting experience. (Roy, October 17, 2017)

Reeya and Roy both felt that gaining experience helped them improve their acting skills and confidence, which in turn helped them overcome their fears of performing. Both participants indicated that while they initially found acting 'scary', they gained performance knowledge and practice that put them at ease. This experience and skill-building ties into the next category of data, 'developing performance skills.'

Developing performance skills.

Developing performance skills was of key importance in the youths' journey to become performers. Saldaña (2008) suggests the way to build credibility in drama-based research is to create the best performative work possible. He states that with drama-based research "comes the responsibility to create an entertainingly informative experience for an audience, one that is aesthetically sound, intellectually rich, and emotionally evocative" (Saldaña, 2003, p. 220). In order to do this, the youth participated in this process by learning from theatre specialists, participating in drama warm-ups, and engaging in self-reflection.

Learning from theatre specialists.

Saldaña (2008) cautions researchers that the merit and success of performance pieces are dictated by the audiences, and that researchers engaging in performance-based work should be familiar with performance methods and seek guidance from those with performance experience. In addressing the cautions raised in Saldaña's work, as mentioned earlier, I hired two theatre

specialists to help with the production. These specialists were actors who had completed degrees in theatre, and had experience performing, mounting theatre productions, and working with youth. They worked as acting coaches for the youth, providing feedback on the scenes the youth created.

Through their interactions with the theatre specialists, the youth learned more about acting, particularly about aspects of character work, and communicating messages to an audience. When the theatre specialists attended our rehearsals, they stayed from beginning to end, participating in the plenary discussions and splitting off into working groups, focusing on specific scenes the youth were working on. The theatre specialists watched the scenes-in-progress and provided concrete feedback to improve the scenes for better audience reception (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: Youth receiving feedback from a theatre specialist on a scene-in-progress

Often, their feedback was about basic aspects of performance, such as speaking volume or stage directions to help the audience better see what was happening on stage. Several youth participants discussed how they used this feedback to make the pieces more effective:

> Even though I took drama in grade nine, I pretty much learned the basic stuff from you guys. Like about breathing and how to project my voice and stuff. Like in drama class we used to just talk at regular volume, but we didn't know on stage you actually need to be like ten times louder and over-exaggerate your speaking because people need to understand you from far away. (Alice, October 10, 2017)

> I just want to thank you so much for your help because I feel like it's a lot more professional now, and just better because of your help. We are a lot better actors now and feel more confident on stage because of your tips. I was pretty stuck, and I felt like the scene wasn't really good but now I'm a lot more confident in myself. (Reeya, October 23, 2017)

> I think before, we didn't really know the right way to stand on stage. Like I didn't realize you have to cheat out towards the audience, but after [the theatre specialist] showed me, it feels a little unnatural at first but really I see a big difference in how the scene plays out. And also, it just makes you louder for the audience. (Focus Group Jen, November 28, 2017)

In the excerpts above Alice, Reeya, and Jen discuss things they learned from the theatre specialists. Alice discusses how their guidance helped her learn about breath control and voice projection; Reeya describes that the tips she was given helped her become a more confident performer; and Jen notes a performance technique she learned called 'cheating out', where actors readjust their bodies and stance with the audience in mind (so that their backs are rarely towards the audience). Another way the youth developed performance skills was through participating in drama warm-ups.

Participating in drama warm-ups.

The drama 'warm-ups' used in this process were short games, icebreakers, exercises and activities. They focused on important elements of performance such as voice, movements, diction, and concentration. These skill-building activities, particularly focusing on voice and movement can be considered the "engine room" of performance training (Moseley, 2006, p. 125). Moseley (2006) notes that "it is through these sessions [a new performer] will discover the expressive and communicative potential of [their] body in all its aspects, which [they] can then bring into the more specific and defined contexts of the playtext and the performance" (p. 125). These drama warm-ups were led by me or the theatre professionals, based on warm-ups we had learned in theatre classes and in our work as performers.

Many of the warm-ups focused on voice work, with which the youth told us that they were least familiar. These warm-ups usually began with jaw massages, where participants would massage their own jaws to 'warm-up' the area of their face (see Figure 9, below).

Figure 9: Youth (and researcher) massaging their jaws in beginning vocal warm-ups

After ‘warming up’ their jaws through massage, I often led the group through a series of singing and breathing exercises. Through these exercises, participants learned to breathe in a way that was open and relaxed, and to project their voices ‘on support’ rather than push or force their voices in damaging ways. Moseley (2006) defines projecting ‘on support’, as having “an easy intake of breath, combined with excellent muscular control in the chest, stomach, and abdomen, which controls the release of air to produce an unconstructed and steady sound” (p. 117). Other vocal warm-ups included tongue twisters that the group would recite to work on diction. These warm-ups included phrases like ‘unique New York’, ‘Irish wrist-watch’ and ‘toy boats’ which become tongue twisters when repeated multiple times, quickly.

Another example of a drama warm-up that the youth participated in is a game called “Red Ball”. This game involves voice, movement and concentration. Like most drama warm-ups, there are many versions of this game played by different groups and in different settings, and instructions are often changed to fit the culture and needs of a particular group (see Improv

Resource Centre, 2013; People and Chairs, 2018, for examples). In our version of this activity, the group stands in a circle and the leader of the activity holds an imaginary "Red Ball". She demonstrates the ball's size and weight. She then makes eye contact with another person in the circle and asks, "Red Ball?", to which he responds "Red Ball", and the leader passes the imaginary ball to him. He mimes catching the ball, mimicking its size and weight. He then makes eye contact with another member of the circle and asks the same question: "Red Ball?", she responds: "Red Ball.", and the pattern continues, with the ball being passed to different participants across and around the circle. While the "Red Ball" is travelling between participants, the leader adds a new imaginary object to the circle. She looks at a participant and asks, "Red Bowl?" to which he responds, "Red Bowl.", and an imaginary "Red Bowl" now moves across and around the circle as well. Slowly, other imaginary objects are added, such as a "Red Bill", a "Bread Bowl" and a "Red Bull" (energy drink). After all of the imaginary objects have been distributed, the leader becomes one of the participants, passing the objects around. After a couple of minutes in which objects are being passed back and forth, the leader asks, "Who has the Red Ball?" and collects the imaginary Red Ball from that person, removing it from the game. She then asks, "Who has the Red Bowl?", and again removes it from the game. Once she has collected all of the imaginary objects, and removed them from the game, the game is over. If all of the participants holding imaginary objects know which object they are holding, the group knows they have been successful, if not, they know that they still have work to do when it comes to concentration, listening, and vocal diction. Since the objects are imaginary, if a participant thinks she is receiving a Red Ball, but is in fact receiving a Red Bowl, the group may end up with two Red Balls and no Red Bowls at the end of the game.

Following the game, I asked the youth participants to share their thoughts on the activity. One participant shared: “I think this really shows the importance of projecting voices and enunciating lines on stage, because if performers don’t speak clearly the audience members can mishear what they are saying” (Alice, October 9, 2017).

One of the other performance skills the youth developed through warm-ups was improvisation. We played a variety of improvisation-focused games, including ‘Jump In’ (see Figure 10), ‘Strange Neighbour’, ‘Emotional Taxi’, and ‘Freeze’ (see Figure 11).

Figure 10: Youth participants, researcher and theatre specialists participating in 'Jump in', an improv-focused warm-up game

Figure 11: Youth and theatre specialists participating in 'Freeze', an improv-focused warm-up game

In the improvisation-focused warm-ups, pictured above, the youth gained experience coming up with scenes ‘on the spot’. One participant explained the importance these activities played in developing performance skills, stating: “I think one of the main things we needed was learning how to improvise, because that’s one of the things we used the most as performers. We did things like ‘Freeze’ and stuff that got me the ability to act on the spot” (Jen, October 16, 2017). Developing these performance skills, along with overcoming stage fright were the key categories that made up the theme of *Becoming Performers*. The themes from this chapter, *Constructing Knowledge* and *Becoming Performers* will come together with the themes in the next chapter as part of a ‘working model’ described in Chapter Six.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented the key themes answering the research sub-question: 'How do the youth participate during the drama-based process?'. I included examples throughout the chapter, including excerpts from transcribed video data and video stills to portray the processes.

The first theme, *Constructing Knowledge*, demonstrates the ways in which youth participated in research processes, through asking questions, identifying key elements, and presenting information. The first category within this theme was 'asking questions' – the youth asked peers questions and built on what peers had said to generate preliminary data. The second category within this theme was 'identifying key elements' – the youth categorized the preliminary data to decide the themes for the dramatic scenes they would create. The third category within this theme was 'sharing information' – the youth created dramatic scenes based on their findings and shared these findings through the performance of an original theatrical production titled *Motivation and Justice*. Through these activities, the youth constructed new knowledge.

The second theme, *Becoming Performers*, encompasses the ways the youth participated in the process in order to effectively perform for a live audience. The categories within this theme were 'overcoming stage fright' and 'developing performance skills'. The first category within this theme, 'overcoming stage fright', emerged from discussions with the youth in which many discussed that overcoming their fear of performance was an important step in the process. The second category, 'developing performance skills', came out of a variety of data highlighting the ways in which the youth developed skills, including learning from theatre specialists and participating in drama warm-ups. These experiences helped the youth become performers in this

process. In Chapter Five, I address my second sub-question: How do the youth describe their experiences during this process?

Chapter Five: How Do the Youth Describe their Experiences During this Process?

This chapter focuses on participant responses during a follow-up focus group after the final performance of *Motivation and Justice*. I invited all play-builders who were interested and available to participate in a follow-up focus group conversation to reflect on their experiences during the playbuilding process. I held this focus group in late November of 2017, after the youth had finished their performance, and five play-builders (Dani, Grace, Jen, Lara, and Reeya) participated.

Based on the transcribed conversation data, I address my second sub-question: How do the youth describe their experiences during this process? I include examples throughout the chapter, such as excerpts from transcribed audio data, as well as video stills from particular scenes that the youth discuss which are used to provide visual representations of the scenes for the readers. Two themes of key importance emerged from our follow-up discussion: [1] *Building Community*, and [2] *Impacting Change*. These themes emerged through constant comparison inquiry and were developed from relevant categories of data (see Chapter Three for more discussion of my analysis).

Theme One: Building Community

In analyzing participants' responses during our follow-up focus group, two categories of data emerged in the process: 'developing a sense of belonging' and 'working together' that formed a larger theme: *Building Community* (see Figure 12 below). I describe each of these categories in the following sections, including specific examples from the focus group data.

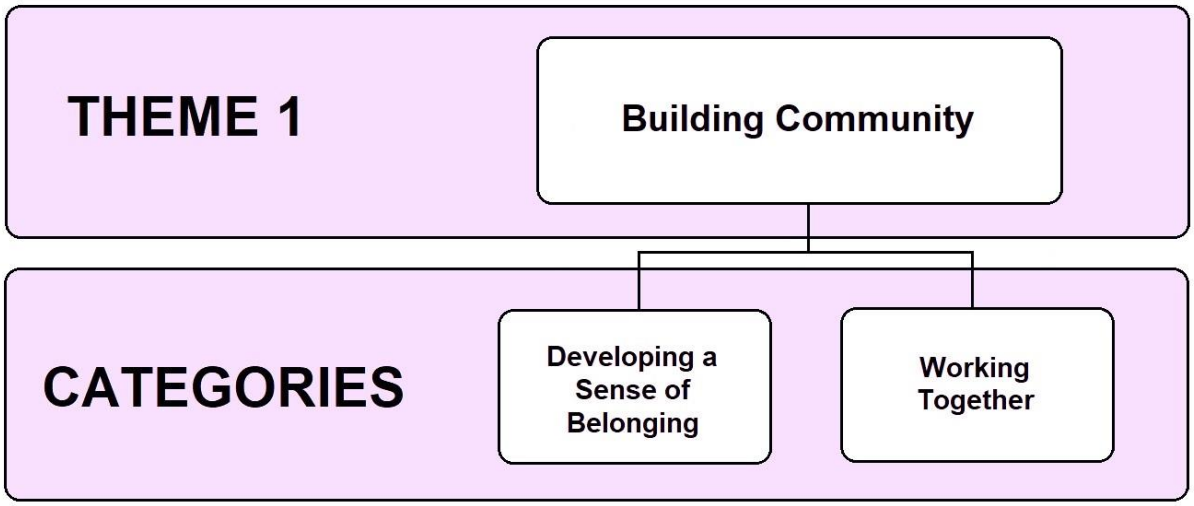

Figure 12: Visual theme breakdown for *Building Community*

Developing a sense of belonging.

One of the aspects of community building that participants raised was that the process provided them with a sense of belonging. For three participants, Reeya, Grace, and Lara, these feelings developed early in our process. Reeya explained, “Ever since we started, I really felt, and maybe you guys did too, I really felt like I fit in” (Focus Group, Reeya, November 28, 2017). Grace added, “What’s cool about this process is that you start off almost like strangers with each other but after only a few times you become close, and you really feel like you’re a part of the group” (Focus Group, Grace, November 28, 2017). Lara described her feelings of belonging through the term ‘drammies’ which is used at her school in describing people who enjoy and are proficient in drama – she felt that by participating in this process “All of a sudden” she herself was “one of the drammies” (Focus Group, Lara, November 28, 2017).

Dani, another participant, also expressed how this process helped her develop a sense of belonging:

> I used to go straight home after school, but now I feel, I guess, like I've been part of something important and also I have a drama group that I belong to. Like we're all dedicated to something and I think it's amazing, because I think that's rare for most teens who are just trying to get through this part of our lives. I started out thinking 'whatever, I guess I'll try it', and now it really made a difference in my semester because I had something to look forward to every week. I think it doesn't usually happen that you really feel like you're a part of something. (Focus Group, Dani, November 28, 2017)

For Dani, this process helped her feel like she was 'a part of something important'. In the excerpt above, she notes that being a part of the group also gave her somewhere to be after school, and something to look forward to every week. This sentiment was echoed throughout the process by many participants, who commented each week that they had been looking forward to our meetings 'all week long'. While I focus on specific examples from the follow-up focus group here, it is important to note that these sentiments were echoed throughout the playbuilding process across all participants, in the ways they interacted with each other and what they expressed during our debriefing sessions at the end of each meeting. Participants would also frequently arrive at rehearsals early, simply to spend time together, and sit clustered together as a group during all of their breaks, despite the room being quite large, with plenty of space to spread out (see Figure 13).

Figure 13: Participants sitting clustered together during 'breaktime'

Working together.

‘Working together’ was another way the participants discussed community building. For example, Lara discussed connections between feelings of community and ‘working together’, stating:

> In school I hate group work, but this is different because you really are working together, not just everyone just doing their own part and sticking it all together. I feel like we really connected here. Everyone is involved in the whole thing which means you actually get to know everyone and it can be so much better (Focus Group, Lara, November 28, 2017)

In the above excerpt, Lara noted that ‘working together’ is different in the context of playbuilding than in other situations, such as group projects in school. She explained that in the

playbuilding context, all participants were involved in all aspects of the project allowing for more opportunities to 'get to know' other participants. Similarly, Jen, another participant, stated: "I feel really close with you guys, and I think definitely one thing that I think helped me feel like that with you guys is that we spent so much time working together. I know I've worked with everyone here and we all helped each other with different stuff" (Focus Group, Jen, November 28, 2017).

Another example of this is from Dani who felt that the feelings of closeness amongst group members were because of a trust they developed through their collaboration. She explained:

> I think we feel close because we created trust between us, and that's because we did so many activities together like with the warm-ups but also with acting out the scenes and it made us get to know each other and just pretty much to trust each other (Focus Group, Dani, November 28, 2017).

It was evident that the participants attributed much of their closeness and community building to the time spent 'working together'. Participants also discussed specific instances of working together. They described several instances where working as a team helped them feel a sense of community. Lara explained: "I remember there was a day when we were improvising ideas based on the research information for a few scenes and it was really a team thing. It felt good to try everyone's suggestions and like we were all part of the team" (Focus Group, Lara, November 28, 2017). Jen added:

> For the press conference scene, and the to-do list [scene], I think that was really a group effort because we all did them so many times and it just got better and better every time. At the beginning [in the 'Cafeteria Press Conference' scene] when the group was supposed to murmur it wasn't really good the first time we did it, but we kept working on it and it ended up being fun. Like we were murmuring so much that we just said funny stuff to each-other as a group and it ended up sounding realistic on stage like murmuring. When we work together like that we end up feeling more, whatever the word is, I guess I mean we become united more as a cast (Focus Group, Jen, November 28, 2017)

The play-builders spent between six and eight hours each week together. In this time, the focus group participants felt that they had opportunities to work together and that the experience gave them a sense of belonging. This collaboration and their feelings of belonging all contributed to a larger sense of community. As Grace, a participant, noted "I feel like you guys are my drama family now" (Focus Group, Grace, November 28, 2017).

Theme Two: Impacting Change

In examining the follow-up focus group data, two other categories emerged in which the youth described their experiences during the playbuilding process. These categories, 'undergoing personal growth' and 'raising awareness of issues'. Initially, I felt these categories were outliers (not part of a theme) or even potentially themes in their own right, as they seemed to focus on two distinctly different experiences; however, after examining the data more closely, specifically looking at the phrases the participants used to describe their experiences, I realized that both of these categories, 'undergoing personal growth' and 'raising awareness of issues', involved the

facilitation of change. These two categories came together as part of the same overarching theme, *Impacting Change* (see Figure 14 below).

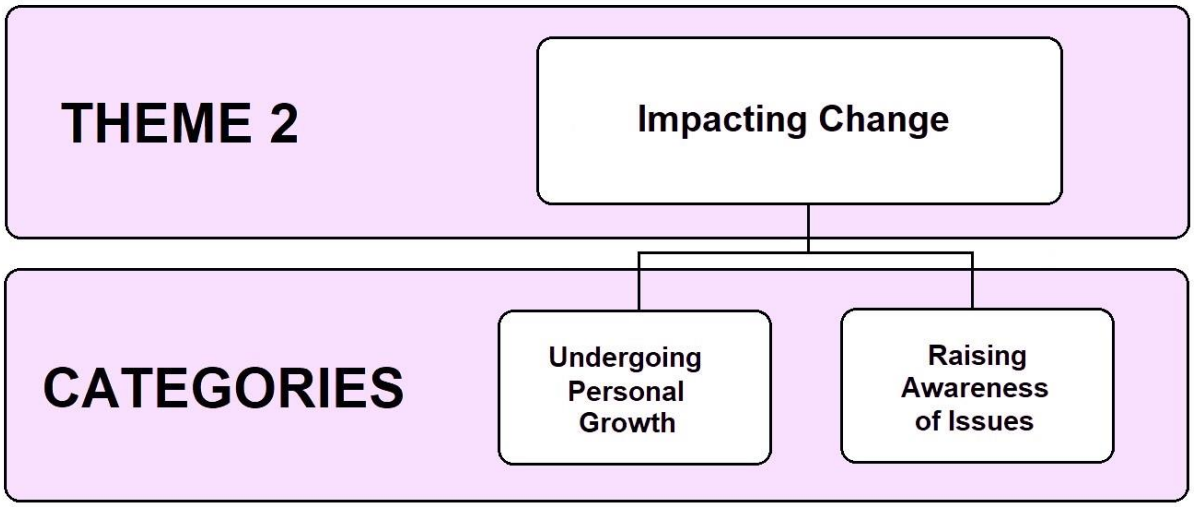

Figure 14: Visual theme breakdown for *Impacting Change*

Undergoing personal growth.

One category within the theme of *Impacting Change* is 'undergoing personal growth'. The participants discussed a variety of ways that they felt their participation in this process helped them grow as individuals. When discussing 'personal growth' participants referred to ways they felt the process had changed them personally, including the development of social skills, self-awareness, and empathy. All five focus group participants touched on instances where they felt they underwent personal growth.

Dani, for example, discussed the impact she felt the process had on developing social skills and confidence:

> I think I was pretty closed off earlier in the year. I didn't really know you all, and after, I opened up a bit. If I think about last year, I didn't really have a lot of friends, but I think it's because I didn't open up. It's weird but I think that also had to do with our work on this project. Like, it puts you in a different position than usual, and you're doing all of these weird drama stuff where you look stupid, but it ends up feeling like you're, I dunno, like more confident to do new things and also maybe not to worry about what people think. (Focus Group, Dani, November 28, 2017)

Another participant, Lara,touched on these ideas as well, adding "I hope this makes sense but I feel like after this [project] I became more social, in a good way, like not on my phone and more mature, like about my friendships and talking to new people" (Focus Group, Lara, November 28, 2017). Another example of 'undergoing personal growth' was raised by Reeya, who explained that in addition to building confidence, this process helped her develop more self-awareness, and empowered her to change her habits, which in turn reduced some feelings of stress:

> On top of getting more confidence, one big takeaway for me is that I think that I think in a different way now. It's really interesting actually. At first I thought this was only about learning how teens feel to make a play about it, but I realized that I can actually look at these issues and change the way I do things to be more better and less stressed out. We're focusing on research and what other people your age talk about, but then you realize it actually relates to you. I think I'm a little more self-aware about that now. (Focus Group, Reeya, November 28, 2017)

Another way the participants discussed 'undergoing personal growth' was that they felt the process made them more empathetic. During our discussion, Jen mentioned "I feel like doing this play helped me put myself in other people's hearts and understand what they're feeling", which was followed by sounds and nods of agreement from her peers. Grace elaborated on this idea, adding that participating in this process gave her better understanding what her peers are going through, and a stronger ability to empathize with their struggles:

> So, I think it's important to say empathy is a thing. We were talking about all of these experiences and it's important to know that you're not alone with these experiences, but also you got to realize that some people legit have it harder than others. Creating these scenes was based on people's experiences and like it actually is hard. And I think it made me more empathetic to some of my classmates when I see them struggling at school. I think learning about other people makes you a better person. (Focus Group, Grace, November 28, 2017)

These participants indicated that their participation in the playbuilding process helped them undergo personal growth, including social skills, self-awareness, and empathy, which were aspects of personal growth. However, these youth also felt that this playbuilding process helped them impact change beyond personal growth, through 'raising awareness of issues', the second category of data within the theme of *Impacting Change*.

Raising awareness of issues.

The second category within the theme of *Impacting Change* is 'raising awareness of issues.' When discussing their experiences during the playbuilding process, participants discussed how they felt the process helped them raise awareness of issues that youth face in schools.

One participant, Jen, focused on 'The Sexist Teacher' scene in her discussion. This scene was based on several instances of sexism at school that youth described in the initial conversation data. The youth compiled all of the instances of sexism described in the initial conversation data into one scene, demonstrating that although 'casual' instances of teachers' sexism often go unnoticed, these instances can accumulate into an uncomfortable climate for students of all genders. Jen explained,

> Lots of people think [sexism] doesn't happen anymore but so many teens say it does. The ['Sexist Teacher'] scene kind of demonstrates how totally crazy it is if one teacher were to do all of the little kind of sexist things teens talk about their teachers do, like make girls in the class change what they wear or giving preference to boys in sports or tell girls to clean up a mess made by boys because they think girls are 'tidier'. They might not realize these things are sexist when done once in awhile, but it builds up to a bigger deal when we show it all happening in one scene. It's kind of impossible not to think these things are sexist when you watch it all happen in one scene (Focus Group, Jen, November 28, 2017)

When asked why she found this scene important to showcase, Jen added "because it drew attention to it. I feel like that's the point of this all. We made scenes and then our parents and

teachers and other people know more about the issues we face and they kind of ‘get it’ more” (Focus Group, Jen, November 28, 2017).

Figure 15: A rehearsal of 'The Sexist Teacher' scene

Similarly, Reeya discussed two scenes that focused on teacher’s actions, and how they affected their students: ‘The Comparison’ scene, and the ‘High School Reunion’ scene. The comparison takes place in a classroom, where one student is humiliated by his teacher when his grades are compared to other students in his class. In this scene, the teacher thinks she is helping him by calling him out in front of the class and asking if another student will be his ‘buddy’, but instead, the student feels embarrassed and comes up with an excuse to leave the room.

Figure 16: A rehearsal of the ‘Comparison’ scene

The ‘High School Reunion’ scene takes place after a group of students have graduated, and there is a clear divide between students who had been supported by their teachers and one who had not – those that had been supported had been inspired to continue their passions and excelled in their chosen careers (one student, who had a supportive English teacher became a best-selling novelist, another had become a technology guru based on the support he received from his technology teacher). Meanwhile, one student, who initially loved acting and hoped to become a theatre performer, had an unsupportive drama teacher who had no interest in the subject she was teaching, and this disinterest influenced the student’s decision not to pursue her dream.

Figure 17: A rehearsal of the 'High School Reunion' scene

When discussing why these scenes were important, Reeya explained “I think it’s important that teachers know what they do can impact us” (Focus Group, Reeya, November 28, 2017). She added:

> It’s like a big deal when teachers are bad or like just uninspiring. The scene pretty much shows that a class can be totally ruined for a student if the teacher embarrasses you or like in the reunion scene, like completely ruins your dreams. Often you take classes that you think will interest you but then if a teacher doesn’t have the interest themselves it can be destroyed. It also doesn’t have to be teachers. My mom even asked after the play if there was stuff she could do to help support my passions. She said that the scene stood out to her because she agrees that sometimes people give up on things because they don’t

> have the support, and that the same thing happened to her when she was young. (Focus Group, Reeya, November 28, 2017)

Reeya raised the example of her interaction with her mother following the performance, demonstrating her ability to 'raise awareness of issues' through the playbuilding process. While they did not focus on specific scenes, Dani and Lara also discussed how their participation helped them draw attention to issues young people face at school. Lara explained,

> A big thing for me was that we were talking about issues students face and that by seeing it on stage people will get a taste of what issues teens face. Even if we just get through to some and open their minds it makes a difference. (Focus Group, Lara, November 28, 2017)

Dani added, "I think people are unaware of all the things we have to do, and the stress we're under. Maybe watching the scenes helped give them an understanding of what we're going through and that maybe we need support" (Focus Group, Dani, November 28, 2017).

Through this follow-up focus group discussion, the youth participants described their experiences during the playbuilding process. Whether it was through personal growth or through raising awareness, it was evident that to these participants, a key aspect of their participation involved *Impacting Change*. The themes from this chapter, *Building Community* and *Impacting Change* work together with the themes from the previous chapter as part of a 'working model' described in Chapter Six.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented the key themes answering the second research sub-question: 'How do the youth describe their experiences during the playbuilding process?' This sub-question is answered using transcribed participant responses during a follow-up focus group in November of 2017, after the final performance of the play *Motivation and Justice*. Five play-builders volunteered their time to participate in this follow-up focus group (Dani, Grace, Jen, Lara, and Reeya). I included examples throughout the chapter, including excerpts from transcribed audio data, as well as several video stills from scenes the youth discuss, to provide visual representations of the scenes for the reader.

The first theme, *Building Community*, illustrated the ways in which youth felt they created community during the playbuilding process. The first category within this theme was 'developing a sense of belonging' – the youth discussed how they built trust with other play-builders and came to feel included. The second category within this theme was 'working together' – the youth discussed aspects of collaboration that helped them feel united as group, working towards a common goal.

The second theme, *Impacting Change*, focuses on the ways the youth felt their participation contributed to larger social changes. The categories within this theme were 'undergoing personal growth' and 'raising awareness of issues'. The first category within this theme, 'undergoing personal growth', emerged from discussions with the youth in which they shared instances where they felt they had developed skills and self-awareness which they attributed to their participation in the playbuilding project. The second category, 'raising awareness of issues', came out of discussions in which the participants felt the play that they created helped them advocate for issues young people face, and discuss these issues with a larger

audience of family members and educational stakeholders. In Chapter Six, I conclude my discussion of the project, including some of the future applications and implications of participatory drama-based research with youth.

Chapter Six: Curtain Call

Figure 18 : Youth participants taking their final bow at the end of the performance

The purpose of this study was to examine the use of drama-based inquiry with a group of youth in the GTA, drawing on their experiences throughout the process. The study aimed to answer the overarching research question: How can youth in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) take part in the process of participatory, drama-based research? More specifically, the study examined the following research sub-questions: (1) How do the youth participate during this process? and (2) How do the youth describe their experiences during this process?

In this chapter, I offer a summary of my findings in answering these questions. Next, I highlight the unique contributions of this research, as well as the future implications and applications of this work. Like all studies, there were limitations to this project. I discuss these limitations, as well as suggestions for future research in this field.

Summary of Findings: A Working Model

My overarching research question for this study was: 'How can youth in the Greater Toronto Area take part in the process of participatory, drama-based research?' To answer this question, I derived two research sub-questions: one focusing on the ways I witnessed the youth participate during the process, and one focusing on how the youth described their experiences during the process. What ultimately became apparent to me was that the themes derived from these two research sub-questions when considered together answer my overarching research question and signal four important dimensions of participation in the playbuilding process. Interestingly, this holistic conceptualization of participation would not have emerged without analyzing both the participation process, and the youth's perception of it. These four themes, *Constructing Knowledge*, *Becoming Performers*, *Building Community* and *Impacting Change* form the basis of a working model of participation that I hope to build on in my future work. Since models often over simplify and do not account for complexity in the data (Bazeley, 2009, p. 17), I want to emphasize that my use of this model is not meant to replace the detailed accounts of my participants, or to infer linearity in the playbuilding process. Instead it is a 'working' understanding of key components of these youth's participation in this project. I refer to this model as the 'four modes of participation in youth-centred playbuilding research' (see Figure 19, below).

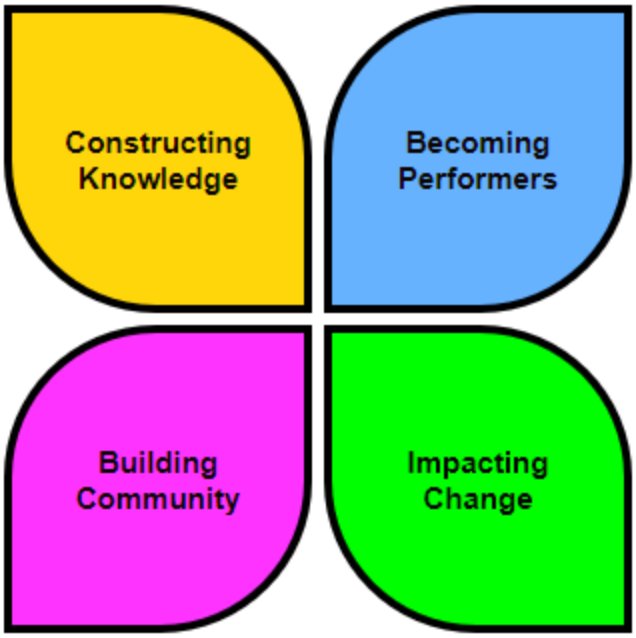

Figure 19: Four modes of participation in youth-centred playbuilding research

The first research sub-question, 'how do the youth participate during the drama-based process?', led to the identification of two 'modes of participation': *Constructing Knowledge* and *Becoming Performers*, based primarily on my analysis of video data and participant observation of the process. These modes of participation involve observable actions and expressions and provide insight into some of the ways these youth took part in the process of participatory, drama-based research. The first mode of participation, *Constructing Knowledge* (top left corner of Figure 19), involves the ways in which participants asked questions of their peers, identified key elements within data, and shared the information through the live performance (see Chapter Four for a thematic breakdown). Another mode of participation, *Becoming Performers* (top right corner of Figure 19), focuses specifically on the ways the youth participated in the process in order to effectively perform for a live audience, including overcoming stage fright and developing

performance skills (see Chapter Four for a thematic breakdown). These two modes, based primarily on observational data, are supplemented by two additional modes of participation based on the youth playbuilders' perspectives.

The second research sub-question: 'How do the youth describe their experiences during the drama-based process?' was answered based on the participants' personal experiences. This data led me to two additional modes of participation: *Building Community* and *Impacting Change*. These two modes of participation are based on the participants' own understandings of their experiences. Participants described the third mode of participation, *Building Community* (bottom left of Figure 19), in their descriptions of developing a sense of belonging within the larger group of youth participants, and working with their peers towards a common goal (see Chapter Five for a thematic breakdown). The fourth mode of participation, *Impacting Change* (bottom right of Figure 19), involved both personal and public participation. Participants felt they underwent personal growth: developing social skills, self-awareness, and empathy. Participants also felt that through the process, they were able to raise awareness of issues that youth face, in their theatrical performance which was presented to an audience of family members and educational stakeholders (see Chapter Five for a thematic breakdown).

The modes of participation that emerged are corroborated by the work of other authors. For example, in the context of theatre, Diamond (2007) found that acting can shape identity (related to *Becoming Performers*), which in turn can encourage group building (related to *Building Community*). Connections have also been found between the self-exploration and search for 'authenticity' required in acting, and that this authenticity can be used for provoking social change (related to *Impacting Change*) (Diamond, 2007). In the context of teaching and learning, Noddings (2005) has found that the development of caring relationships and cooperative work

(related to *Building Community*) provide a foundation for pedagogy and learning (related to *Constructing Knowledge*). These four modes of participation that emerged from the data are more than discrete themes. Together they provide an explanation for my overarching research question and create a working model that brings together my observations as a researcher (in answering the first sub-question), as well as the participants' own perspectives on the process (in answering the second sub-question) to provide a more complete understanding of how these particular youth took part in the process. These four modes of participation may resonate with other researchers and/or signal aspects of participation that should be attended to when conducting youth-centred playbuilding research in their own research contexts.

Contributions of the Study

While the use of drama-based inquiry is becoming increasingly popular in social research, I have found that the work conducted with adult participants has been more 'participatory' than the work conducted with youth participants (see Chapter Two). The settings of this previous work with youth (often educational settings, including classrooms and in-school programs) have likely influenced how participatory the projects could be. School settings often have their own hierarchies, structures and schedules. These factors can limit the amount of time spent on a project, and heighten the researcher-participant power dynamic, as youth are often required to learn from adults in school settings. This can complicate participatory research, where the aim is power sharing between the adult (researcher) and youth (participants). This research provides an example of highly participatory drama-based research conducted with youth outside of school hours.

This study also offers methodological contributions, because it combines a variety of data collection approaches and forms of analysis to answer the research questions. While there has been much discussion of the use of playbuilding approaches (see Chapter Two), as well as the use of video-recordings as a method of data collection (see Chapter Three), there has been little discussion on the combination of performative inquiry and video-recording research methods. As drama-based inquiry is embodied and performative, video-recordings are an invaluable asset in documenting these processes. While there are limitations to this method (discussed in Chapter Three), this study should open up discussion about the combination of these methods and how one can be used to document and complement the other. A recent (2020) study by Katz-Buonincontro et al., also examined the use of video to document drama processes; however, their approach was quite different from mine, as they focused on drama as a pedagogical tool, and I focused on drama as a research tool. Katz-Buonincontro et al.'s study investigated how drama can be used to *teach* youth, whereas my study examined how drama can be used to *learn from* youth about their lived experiences. These researchers also included some positivistic approaches in the video data analysis, including pairing the method with the use of Likert scales. The study by Katz-Buonincontro et al. discussed the video data from more of an outsider stance, different from my approach as a participant observer with intimate knowledge of the videos I was analyzing. While this study by Katz-Buonincontro et al. demonstrates that there is recent academic interest in the process of analyzing drama through digital video methods, I believe my study showcases how these methods can be used in more constructivist and participatory research approaches.

This study provides discussion of a data analysis process (discussed in Chapters Three and Four) in which the youth participants took part. Foster-Fishman et al. (2010) have explained

that although it is common for participatory projects to involve youth identifying some community needs and providing feedback to encourage dialogue in their communities, it is less common for youth to be engaged in data analysis. This study, and particularly the discussion of the theme *Constructing Knowledge*, provides a detailed account of youth as active participants, engaged in data analysis.

I believe that another contribution which is much needed is the discussion of young people's own experiences as participants in a participatory, drama-based research process. I incorporated this element in my project using a follow-up focus group with participants. As researchers, it is imperative that we consistently interrogate our research methods and recognize the experiences of our research participants in the process. This is particularly important for those claiming to develop and use 'child and youth-centred' methods. Discussions of the effectiveness of drama-based work often come from the perspective of the adult researchers. I would argue that this study offers new knowledge on how youth participated within these processes as well as how *they described their experiences during the process*. By conducting my research in this way, I gained better insight into the participants experiences which will help me in my future work. During research projects, researchers are often focused on conducting research and since it is often the research findings that are of most interest to them, they may not always be attuned to understanding which parts of these projects, other than the research findings, participants find particularly valuable. One thing that I was struck by in our follow-up focus group was how important community-building was to the participants. While community-building was something I had witnessed in my observations during the playbuilding process, it was only during the follow-up focus group that I grasped how deeply important the feelings of belonging and the experiences working as a group had been to them.

There has been very little research conducted into youth's experiences doing drama-based participatory action research; however, there has been a recent study that touches briefly on this. Wright's (2020) study, using theatre of the oppressed to examine young people's experiences of oppression, includes a line from a youth participant about her experience in the project:

> There was an activity that I remember for sure with oppression. And we were discussing how we have interpersonal, internalized, and institutional oppression. It's just describing oppression and how many things could influence you and what people influence you and how you change yourself. And if your environment is one way, it might impact you in the same way. (Wright, 2020, p. 38)

While it was not the primary focus of Wright's study, the inclusion of excerpts like the one above provides some indication of movement towards considering young people's own experiences and perspectives on drama-based research processes.

In summary, the present study makes a range of contributions. It provides an example of highly participatory drama-based research conducted with youth outside of school hours. The study also combines a variety of data collection approaches and forms of analysis to answer the research questions, opening up discussion about the combination of these methods and how this combination can be deployed as part of a constructivist approach. Additionally, this study provides a discussion of how research can be made more participatory and youth-centred through engagement with youth in data analysis processes and solicitation of feedback from young

people on their experiences as research participants. I expand on some of these methodological implications in the section that follows.

Implications for Methodology

The study outlines transparently, a research project using drama processes with youth. It has the potential of informing qualitative and arts-based researchers on the ways in which drama-based inquiry can be adjusted for use with young people, as well as the challenges of this work (see Chapters Two and Three). While drama-based research is used in a variety of projects, these studies often focus on the outcomes of the research, rather than the method themselves. As the field of drama-based research grows and becomes more defined, it is important to outline the ways in which youth participants take part in these processes, and to highlight their experiences. I believe this study provides a comprehensive understanding of how these processes can be used with youth participants and should contribute to the ongoing development of more participatory drama-based research projects. It also provides a foundation for adapting these approaches for use with younger research participants (under 13 years old).

With the rise of the 'new' social studies of childhood (discussed in Chapter Two), strides are being made in the field of childhood studies to include youth as active participants and knowledge-holders in social research. This study further contributes to the body of knowledge on participatory, youth-centred methods focusing on drama-based approaches. While these methods are being used in education-focused research with youth, findings from this study may be of value to researchers studying childhood and youth in numerous contexts and communities, including those outside of the field of education, and to those who are interested in using drama to highlight young people's perspectives in research.

A recent publication by Hamera poses five sets of 'key questions' focusing on "aesthetic, ethical and intellectual responsibilities" that she suggests researchers address when embarking on performative inquiry (2018, p. 366). While these questions are intended to be rhetorical, my study provides an in-depth discussion of many of the elements she has highlighted, particularly in my discussion of how performance emerged in my research site (see Chapter Four), discussion of my research setting (see Chapter Three), how the work fits into scholarly conversations in the field (see Chapter Two), how participants engage with and present performance research (see Chapters Four and Five) and the ways this research can make meaningful interventions or influence change (see Chapters Five and Six) (Hamera, 2018, p. 367).

This study should also be useful to those interested in using performative methods to disseminate research findings to an audience outside of academe. As discussed in earlier chapters, this project resulted in the creation of an original theatrical production, *Motivation and Justice* (see Appendix A), which was based on the participants' experiences. The piece was performed for an invited audience of parents, peers, educational stakeholders, and community members. While research is traditionally disseminated through academic publications and presentations, performance pieces can be seen as more accessible, with greater potential to mobilize research in communities beyond academia (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Jones, 2012; Madison, 2005).

Limitations

As with all research, this project is not without its limitations. This study, which aimed to examine the use of drama-based research methods with a group of youth in the GTA, was situated in two specific sites in the region, with a limited sample size. I began with initial

conversations (focus groups and interviews) with 26 youth in the GTA; next, I worked with the 11 youth play-builders through a devised theatre process to create an original theatrical piece based on the initial conversation data; and, following the performance of the piece, I held two follow-up focus groups, one with three adult audience members, and one with five youth play-builders. Because of this limited sample, the findings of this study are not, nor were they intended to be, representative of the experiences and perspectives of other young people within the GTA. While the study was open to participation from any young person who resided in the GTA, and participants included youth from different communities and schools, the GTA has a vast and diverse population, and individuals within this area enter the research with unique knowledges, experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives.

While this research focused on methodology, it is important to note that the play-builders who volunteered to participate in this study were all able-bodied, and had, at minimum, completed and met the basic provincial standards for eighth grade literacy prior to this study (this was not a requirement of the study, but should be noted). All participants attended publicly funded secondary schools.

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this research was to understand how this specific group of youth participated in and experienced a drama-based research process and enable researchers to find areas of resonance with this work, rather than to produce generalizable results. This study provides a contextualized discussion of the participation and experiences of a particular group of youths with sufficient detail to contribute to a larger body of literature and from which I anticipate researchers will be able to determine aspects of relevance and applicability in their own research contexts.

I conducted this research over a three-month period in Fall 2017. All research took place on weekdays after 4:00 pm, and on weekends so that participation would not interfere with the youth participants' attendance at school. While I met with the youth for approximately six to eight hours each week, over the course of the three-month period, it was a relatively short-term study. The study does not provide a sense of the participants reflections and experiences beyond the study period. This study was, however, focused on a particular project which took place over these three months. The time spent together, in combination with the methods used, generated rich accounts of these participants' experiences in this particular context, which will inform my future research planning in longer term studies of drama-based work with youth.

My use of video-recordings of the playbuilding process might be considered a limitation as the youth play-builders were aware that all rehearsals and meetings would be filmed, as this was discussed during the information session and was repeated and clearly stated on the consent forms. A concern some researchers raise about the use of video in data collection is the 'camera effect', where participants' behaviour is affected by the presence of a video camera, and therefore they do not act 'naturally'. I acknowledge that video recording can influence the data collected; however, as Blikstad-Balas (2017) points out, "most, if not all, research methods will have some effect on the situations they are attempting to portray" (p. 513). I did recognize this potential limitation, and took certain measures to limit the influence of the camera on the participants' behaviour, including ensuring the camera was not a major focus (it was typically stationary on a tripod in the corner of the room) and ensuring the youth participants spent a lot of time in the space (six to eight hours each week for three months), which increased their comfort and 'natural' behaviour. It is also important to note that during our meetings, the youth participants were busy – we spent the majority of the time actively engaged in warm-ups,

activities and scene creation, which meant that the camera was likely not a key focus for them in our meetings (see Chapter Three for more discussion of the video-recording method).

Another limitation, present in most studies, is the presence of a power imbalance between researcher and participants. My power and position as an adult researcher working with youth participants was an ongoing consideration for me throughout this project. I took measures to ensure that the participants did not feel pressure to participate or pressure to provide certain responses, recognizing that in their current societal position as secondary school students, they are socially conditioned to listen to and attempt to please adults (teachers, parents, etcetera). One of the measures I took was to ensure participants knew their rights in the research process, including their right to withdraw at any time, and to participate only in aspects of the research with which they were comfortable and for which they had time. This is a reason only 11 youth out of the 26 volunteered to participate in the playbuilding process.

Another consideration I had was the power that comes with authorship. James (2007) raises the point that since it is adult researchers who typically control how youth voices are presented in their studies, this can make the research less 'authentic'. To address this, I remained in contact with participants, contacting them during my analysis process to clarify their meanings and ask for additional context where it was needed, including several instances of incorporating their verbatim excerpts taken from the data in my writing.

Finally, as a qualitative researcher, I worked to account for and check my biases. In collaboration with the youth in this participatory process I became close to the data, which, like all qualitative researchers, influenced my interpretations and understandings throughout the research process. In the initial stages of the research process, I took on a 'facilitator' role, organizing and leading meetings, and explaining the research project to the participants. While I

continued to act as a facilitator throughout the process, I moved into a 'participant observer' role for most of the playbuilding and scene development, which was primarily youth driven. In my 'participant observer' role, I participated in warm-ups, acted as a stand-in (reading lines for youth who were unable to attend some rehearsals), assisted with the direction of some scenes, and assisted the play-builders with other production-related tasks. As an active participant-observer in this process, it can be argued that I have developed somewhat of an 'insider' status, particularly because rather than much of participant observer work, where a researcher joins an already existing group, the participants and I developed the group and project together, coming to know each other throughout the process. My emic position meant that my interpretation of data was necessarily subjective, and I acknowledge this and placed a lot of emphasis on self-reflection during the process. I used reflective memo writing to keep track of and interrogate my own biases and assumptions during the research process (see Chapter Three). This process helped me keep my biases in check while still collecting the richness of data that comes with participant observation. While not free from bias, I grounded my discussion in the wide variety of data I collected. I feel that my emic position was a strength in this research as it helped me develop rapport with participants and, I would argue, to make connections that an outsider could not.

Future directions of this work.

In my future work, I hope to conduct more research into audience perceptions and experiences of research-based performances. While I had only one small follow-up focus group with three audience members, I found it very useful for receiving feedback on the production. The feedback was encouraging but was limited in depth due to the small number of audience

participants and the short time that they were available. If I conduct similar work in the future, I hope to expand my reach to collect more audience feedback, potentially through a talk-back session following the performance. As the chair of the past two conferences on *Children, Youth and Performance Conference*, I have witnessed the power of talk-back sessions following research-based performances. At these conferences, researchers have been given the opportunity to perform excerpts of performative works that are derived from their research and receive questions and comments from an audience of researchers, performers, educators, youth, and practitioners. I have seen and received feedback that these talk-back sessions provide a space for meaningful dialogue between audiences and researchers. A recent piece by Nessler (2018) corroborates this idea, discussing how talk-back sessions following research-based performances can contribute to interpersonal learning. This is an area I will continue to explore.

Another important direction for future research is examining practices for participatory data analysis with youth. Conducting thematic data analysis as a group, which the youth participants of this study did in their scene development, is not a linear process. New categories arise and/or change throughout the process as participants become more and more familiar with the data. This reality is present in any type of qualitative analysis based on critical grounded theory as categories are collapsed and/or expanded, but is especially evident when conducting this type of analysis in a participatory manner with a group of youth who are new to this process. Foster-Fishman et al. (2010) explain that while it is common for participatory projects to involve youth in identifying community needs and providing feedback to encourage dialogue in their communities, it is less common for youth to be involved in data analysis processes. My review of literature on participatory research with youth, indicated there has been very limited discussion

about how youth have participated in data analysis. In the future work, I intend to expand on the ways that youth are engaged in data analysis in drama-based research.

I took on the role of facilitator during the initial stages of the playbuilding process (particularly in the initial conversations, data analysis and brainstorming sessions). In this role, I posed questions to help the group brainstorm ideas (see Chapter Four for more discussion of this). My role as a facilitator for those aspects meant that like most other YPAR projects, the process was not entirely youth led. I took on this role as I felt it would be unfair and unrealistic to expect a group of youth who had little/no experience analyzing transcription data, and very limited experience developing original theatre to lead these aspects of the project. I feel that my role provided some guidance and structure to the project's early stages, which enabled the participants to conduct their analyses and create and develop theatrical scenes. The participants demonstrated strong analytical abilities, and I hope to work with youth on future projects where they can take more leadership in the initial stages. Research into participatory data analysis with child and youth participants has been largely ignored (Foster-Fishman et al. 2010), and more research on this topic is needed.

Another important direction for future research is in-depth examination into the project facilitator's role in participatory drama-based research. This project focused specifically on the youths' participation in the project; however, in future research I hope to look further into my role as a research facilitator, and how this role is negotiated. There has been much discussion of researcher's adopting a 'less adult role' in conducting research with children and youth (Albon & Rosen, 2013; Christensen, 2004; Horgan, 2017; Lundy & McEvoy, 2012; Mayall, 2008; Punch 2002), but what does this mean in the context of drama based research?

As a relatively young academic doing drama-based work with youth, my role seemed paradoxical at times. Youth participants in the study were aware of my role as an adult and a researcher, and I did not attempt to deceive them in any way about my role during the project; however, there was closeness and community that developed within the group of play-builders in which I felt included. I feel that there are a variety of things that contributed to a perception that I was 'less adult' than teachers and other adults they spend time with. I was smaller in stature than nearly all of the youth participants; they were aware that I was a 'student'; I participated in warm-ups with them, acted 'silly' during drama games (see Figure 20); and, filled in for youth participants in scenes when they were absent from rehearsals.

Figure 20: Play-builders participating in a drama game, researcher (Abigail) is located downstage left, wearing a red shirt

While I initially introduced myself as Abigail, participants quickly began referring to me as 'Abby', shortening my name as they did with their peers in the group. When I met with a few

play-builders for the follow-up focus group after the performance, I was greeted with hugs from the participants, which was the same way they greeted each other. All this said, it was still evident that I was not 'one of them'. Aside from generational issues, there was also a researcher/ participant power dynamic in that they relied on me to set the schedule and help them meet their requirements for the scenes. I often led and/or facilitated discussions, activities, and warm-ups. Participants contacted me when they were going to be late to rehearsal or if they had questions about the projects. I was the designated permit holder for the room bookings, meaning that they could not enter the rooms unless I was there. I also was the grant holder for the financial aspects of the project, meaning I purchased props, hired theatre specialists to help with the production, and purchased snacks for them to eat at rehearsals.

My role and participation were not the focus of this research project; however, they are things I hope to engage with further in my future research. Norris (2009) notes in playbuilding, facilitators/researchers are often involved as co-participants in sharing their own sharing of stories and providing input in the play, asserting that "[t]he avoidance of a researcher's disclosure, in fear of contamination, is a canon that needs to be reconsidered" (p. 24). Building on this assertion, I am particularly interested in better understanding the roles that adult facilitators take in drama-based research with youth participants, and how to facilitate a more shared, collaborative dynamic. In order to satisfy the ethical protocols set out by McGill for this project, I was required to design my study prior to meeting with youth participants; however, in the future, I hope to find ways to involve youth in more aspects of project design, so that the projects focus on topics that they find important and worthy of study.

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APPENDIX A: Full Play Script

MOTIVATION AND JUSTICE

Scene 1: The Living To-Do List

Lights go up on an empty stage. ALICIA enters confidently, walking directly to centre stage and addressing the audience – infomercial style.

ALICIA

Hi there! I'm Alicia. Alicia Googalaball Smith, the third, and I'm here to tell you a bit about how I keep organized and motivated! I make a detailed to-do list to keep me moving forward and help me get things done. Every evening I call my grandma!

ALICIA walks to stage right, pulling GRANDMA on stage with her. ALICIA moves GRANDMA into her position as they speak.

ALICIA

Hi Grandma!

GRANDMA

Whaaat?

ALICIA

(*speaking louder*) Hi Grandma!

GRANDMA

Hi Sweetie! Do you have a boyfriend yet?

ALICIA

No.

GRANDMA

Whaaat?

ALICIA

(*speaking louder*) No, no boyfriend! (*to audience*) After that, I make sure to do all of my homework.

ALICIA walks to stage right pulling HOMEWORK on stage with her, HOMEWORK is holding an open binder. ALICIA moves HOMEWORK into his position next to GRANDMA as they speak.

HOMEWORK

And, did you finish your science project?

ALICIA

Of course!

HOMEWORK

Nice.

ALICIA

(*to audience*) Next, I do my chores.

ALICIA walks to stage right pulling CHORES on stage with her, CHORES is holding a broom and sweeping. ALICIA moves CHORES into her position next to HOMEWORK as they speak.

CHORES

Did you do the dishes?

ALICIA

Yup. And the Laundry. Oh, missed a spot!

ALICIA points to the floor and CHORES sweeps it.

ALICIA

(*to audience*) Following that, I do my exercises. Got to keep healthy!

ALICIA jogs to stage right pulling EXERCISE on stage with her.

EXERCISE

Let's go!

EXERCISE and ALICIA run a lap around the stage ending as ALICIA moves EXERCISE into her position next to CHORES.

ALICIA

(to audience) And finally, I make sure to get a good night's rest. No less than eight hours!

ALICIA walks to stage right pulling SLEEP on stage with her, SLEEP moves sleepily holding a fluffy S-shaped pillow. ALICIA moves SLEEP into her position next to EXERCISE as they speak.

SLEEP

(*yawns*) Did you get enough rest?

ALICIA

More than eight hours!

ALICIA displays her to-do list for the audience, drawing a large invisible check mark with her finger for each task completed.

ALICIA

Grandma Check!

GRANDMA

Bye-bye!

GRANDMA exits.

ALICIA

Homework Check!

HOMEWORK

Finished!

HOMEWORK exits.

ALICIA

Chores Check!

CHORES

All clean!

CHORES exits.

ALICIA

Exercise Check!

EXERCISE

Good job!

EXERCISE exits.

ALICIA

Sleep Check!

SLEEP

Good night!

SLEEP exits.

ALICIA

My list keeps me on track and ready to succeed! I'm all done and ready for a brand new day!

ALICIA exits. KEITH enters, lost, stressed out, and stumbling around the stage. Eventually, KEITH stops at centre stage.

KEITH

Aw, man. I forgot to call grandma!

GRANDMA enters angrily, walking in circles around KEITH and yelling and repeating phrases including "Why don't you ever call me anymore?", "You don't love your grandma", "You don't care about me", "You're too busy for grandma" etc.

KEITH

Ahh, I think my English assignment is due.

HOMEWORK enters angrily, joining GRANDMA as they walk in circles around KEITH. HOMEWORK is repeating phrases including "What about your science project?", "You're going to fail", "Don't forget geography", "What about your math homework?" etc.

KEITH

But I need to exercise! And I still have my chores. I'm exhausted.

CHORES, EXERCISE and SLEEP enter slowly, joining GRANDMA and HOMEWORK in a loud and aggressive swarm around KEITH. They repeat phrases including "Do your chores!", "Exercise, you're out of shape", "Sleep is important", etc., The swarm gets louder and more aggressive as KEITH falls to the floor, stressed and overwhelmed. The lights flash inconsistently as the tasks swarm around.

ALICIA enters.

ALICIA

Keith! Are you okay?

ALICIA walk towards KEITH and helps him up. Seeing ALICIA, the tasks stop swarming KEITH and move upstage in a cluster.

ALICIA

Here, let me help you. It's impossible to get all of your work done without staying organized. Things get stressful and overwhelming, and it's hard to stay motivated with so many incomplete tasks at the same time. Try this. First, call your Grandma.

ALICIA walks with KEITH up to GRANDMA, and together they move GRANDMA into her position on stage.

KEITH

Hi Grandma!

GRANDMA

Whaaat?

ALICIA

Next, do your homework.

ALICIA walks with KEITH up to HOMEWORK, and together they move HOMEWORK into his position on stage next to GRANDMA.

HOMEWORK

Did you do your math homework?

KEITH

Yes, actually, I did.

ALICIA

Now, it's time for your chores.

ALICIA follows KEITH as he walks up to CHORES, and KEITH and CHORES sweep the floor together as KEITH positions CHORES next to HOMEWORK.

ALICIA

And don't forget your exercises! Got to stay healthy!

ALICIA follows KEITH as he walks up to EXERCISE. KEITH and EXERCISE mime weightlifting reps as KEITH walks EXERCISE into her position next to CHORES.

KEITH & EXERCISE

(doing jumping jacks and counting them) Ninety-eight, Ninety-nine, One hundred!

ALICIA

Now it's time for sleep. It will give you energy for tomorrow.

ALICIA follows KEITH as he walks up to SLEEP and positions her next to EXERCISE.

Together, KEITH and ALICIA display the to-do list for the audience, drawing a large invisible check mark with their fingers for each task completed.

ALICIA

Grandma…

KEITH & ALICIA

Check!

GRANDMA

Bye-bye!

GRANDMA exits.

ALICIA

Homework…

KEITH & ALICIA

Check!

HOMEWORK

Complete!

HOMEWORK exits.

KEITH & ALICIA

Chores… Check!

CHORES

Clean!

CHORES exits. KEITH is proud of himself as he looks at how small his to-do list has become.

KEITH & ALICIA

Exercise, Check!

EXERCISE

See ya!

EXERCISE exits.

KEITH & ALICIA

Sleep, Check!

SLEEP

Good night!

SLEEP exits.

KEITH

Wow, that felt good!

ALICIA

And that's why I stay organized!

Keith gives a thumbs-up to the audience. Blackout.

Scene 2: The Comparison

Lights go up on a traditional classroom set-up. Students sit in their chairs, as MS. WINTER hands back tests to a class.

MS. WINTER

Jenny, you did really well. Congratulations!

MS. WINTER hands JENNY her test.

MS. WINTER

Sam, good work as well.

MS. WINTER hands SAM her test. MS. WINTER walks over to JAKE.

MS. WINTER

And, Jake... not so good.

The rest of the class listens attentively, snickering.

MS. WINTER

I have to say I am quite disappointed.

JAKE looks around at peers.

JAKE

Okay. Well… I'll stay behind after class to talk?

MS. WINTER hands back JAKE's test.

MS. WINTER

Only 31%. It's like you didn't even try, Jake.

JAKE grows increasingly aware of his snickering classmates and is embarrassed.

JAKE

I'd really love to talk after –

MS. WINTER

While we're all together, class – would anyone be willing to tutor Jake moving forward? Jenny perhaps?

JENNY and JAKE look at each other awkwardly while the classroom gawks.

JENNY

Uh… sure…?

MS. WINTER

Fabulous. There we are Jake – now you have a buddy!

The room freezes – except for JAKE who walks downstage addresses the audience.

JAKE

Well, that's about the worst thing I've ever experienced.

JAKE sits back in his seat. The room unfreezes, the class thinks this has been hysterical.

MS. WINTER

Can we say 'thank you, Jenny'?

JAKE

I need to go to the washroom.

Blackout.

Scene 3: High School Reunion

Light come up on stage left, quiet jazz music plays in the background. ALISON, BARRY, JANE, and KARA are at their high school reunion, sipping wine and sharing stories.

ALISON

And that's how I saved Flipper's life and she went on to film Dolphin Tale 2: Electric Boogaloo.

BARRY

Can I get Flippers autograph?

ALISON

Ummm, no… She's a dolphin.

JANE

Ha! Wow, it's so awesome being back here! Where it all started: Riverdale High!

ALISON

Honestly, I couldn't have become a celebrity marine biologist if it wasn't for all the science lessons from Mr. Beaker. He always made them so interesting for us.

KARA

I mean, I feel like we were all lucky. My artwork couldn't have had a grand opening at the A.G.O. without Mrs. Pallete and her enthusiasm for the arts!

JANE

Yeah, and this New York Times Best selling author *(points to herself)* wouldn't have even started writing about wizards if it weren't for Mrs. Quill having an open-door policy whenever I was having trouble.

BARRY

Well, I don't know what you guys are talking about, I'm a self-made millionaire who invented FaceTube for the Pineapple MyPhone, all by myself.

KARA

What about all those times you were raving about Mrs. Net's fun class where she let you design your own programs!

JANE

Yeah. You were so surprised that a teacher would allow you actually create something, instead of just read about it!

BARRY

Yeah, you're right. Shout out to Mrs. Net!

ALL

To Riverdale High!

ALL clink glasses together. BEVERLY enters.

ALISON

Beverly! Is that you?

BARRY

Hollywood!

JANE

How's Chris Hemsworth? I mean Chris Pine? I mean Chris Pratt?

BEVERLY

I don't know actually.

KARA

Yeah, she's obviously friends with the best Chris, Chris Evans.

BEVERLY

Actually guys, I didn't pursue acting after high school.

BARRY

Say what?

KARA

But you loved drama!

BEVERLY

Yeah, after Ms. Bohr's class, I kind of stopped acting.

ALISON

Want to tell me about it?

Lights up on stage right – a memory from the past. YOUNG BARRY and YOUNG BEVERLY are seated together in MS. BOHR's classroom. ALISON and BEVERLY are watching on from stage left.

MS. BOHR

(*taking attendance*) Barry.

YOUNG BARRY

Here!

MS. BOHR

(squinting and misreading Beverly's name) Beverage-Tree.

YOUNG BEVERLY

It's Beverly. And I'm present.

Classroom freezes. Shift focus to present day BEVERLY and ALISON.

ALISON

Look there you are.

BEVERLY

Wait until you hear what we're reading!

BEVERLY and ALISON freeze. Shift focus to Classroom.

MS. BOHR

Now class, today we are going to continue reading Act 1 of Shakespeare's unproduced play entitled "Ye Olde Paint Doth Dry". This is the Act where the paint is fresh but begins to dry, and the drying progresses throughout the scenes.

YOUNG BEVERLY raises her hand.

MS. BOHR

Yes, Belindastree?

YOUNG BEVERLY

It’s Beverly. I think we read this yesterday.

MS. BOHR

Well, I don’t remember that, so we will read it again today. From the beginning.

YOUNG BARRY

Oh man, I can’t wait to get to tech class.

Classroom freezes. Shift focus to BEVERLY and ALISON.

BEVERLY

Do you see how uninspired she is?

ALISON

Not to mention that "Ye Olde Paint Doth Dry" sounds like the most boring play of all time. She could have tried to connect with you guys!

BEVERLY

Right? Just wait ‘til she talks about it.

BEVERLY and ALISON freeze. Shift focus to Classroom.

MS. BOHR

Now, I have got to admit I’d rather be with my cat, Mr. Mittens, than here reading this boring, dusty play, but someone’s got to pay for Mr. Mittens’ ear medicine. Anyway, this is a play about paint or something so just sit and read.

Classroom freezes. Shift focus to BEVERLY and ALISON.

ALISON

Sit and read? It’s drama class. You’re supposed to get up and act.

BEVERLY

That’s what I thought.

BEVERLY and ALISON freeze. Shift focus to Classroom. YOUNG BEVERLY raises her hand.

MS. BOHR

Yes, Ms. Bicyclewee?

YOUNG BEVERLY

It’s Beverly! I was wondering if today we could get up, work together, and act out "Ye Olde Paint Doth Dry"?

YOUNG BARRY

Or anything other than *this*!

MS. BOHR

I’m sorry, but school isn’t about fun. It is about sitting quietly in a corner, listening to your teachers, and never asking questions.

YOUNG BEVERLY

So, I guess you don’t have an open-door policy like Ms. Quill?

MS. BOHR

Ha! Open door? How ridiculous. Anyways, I have a date tonight with Mr. Mittens, a cup of hot water and lemon, and a bottle of cat ear medicine.

Classroom freezes. Shift focus to BEVERLY and ALICIA.

ALISON

Wow, that sounds like a terrible class.

BEVERLY

And that was just one day. It went on like that all year, until I gave up even raising my hand.

ALISON

That's awful. One teacher totally crushed your motivation to pursue a career in acting. Hey, if you're not an actor what do you do?

BEVERLY

I work at Home Depot… The paint department.

Blackout.

Scene 4: Cafeteria Press Conference

A lunchtime assembly is beginning in a school cafeteria– a crowd of students and teachers are murmuring loudly in their seats. Suddenly, a door swings open and VICE PRINCIPAL (former supermodel) enters and knocks loudly on the podium until she has the attention of the room.

VICE PRINCIPAL

Attention, please! Students and teachers, I'd like to introduce our new principal.

VICE PRINCIPAL gestures for the students and teachers to applaud. The students and teachers do so hesitantly. PRINCIPAL enters, walking confidently to the podium.

PRINCIPAL

Alright folks, don't have a lot of time, let's get this show on the road!

VICE PRINCIPAL sits silently next to the podium, bored and looking at her nails (she continues to do this throughout the scene). Hands from the crowd shoot up. PRINCIPAL picks one.

PRINCIPAL

Yeah, you.

JENNY

Ms. Principal, we look forward to having a new voice at this school, but can you please outline your new agenda? It has been very unclear to –

PRINCIPAL

What was unclear? It was great. I have the best and most clear agenda. I made it all very clear. There will be four new rules being implemented. Number one: students in the science department will have no more equipment. Everything can be done with paper clips. Number two: anyone taking English, French, or Math this semester will no longer have a locker. Students taking Business need more space for their binders, and they show more promise than the rest of you! Number three: No more recycling bins. Everything will go in the garbage cans. I'm not a fan of recycling. Number four: No more student council. You all have too many complaints, and I'm the one in charge.

Students and teachers are freaking out. They are saying things like "paper clips? How will we learn about chemical reactions?", "No lockers!? Where will I put my things?", "This principal is awful", "I knew she hated recycling" etc.

MS. CELLS

Ms. Principal, we need more than paperclips to teach Biology!

PRINCIPAL

Too bad. Next question.

JANE

Sorry. So just to be clear: no recycling at all?

PRINCIPAL

None.

JAKE

I take music, without a locker, where will I put my instrument while I'm in other classes?

KARA

What about the environment?

TESS

Without student council, who will plan the dance?

MS. CELLS

And what will the robotics team use?

PRINCIPAL

Silence! Stop asking questions. I've fired two teachers and suspended six students today, and I'll raise those numbers if I have to. I make the best decisions. This is the best plan, and the best school, and I'm the best principal. We are beginning my plan starting now! Now, move your things out of your lockers and get to class before you get suspended.

The crowd stands up in shock, scrambling to get their things and exit running. MS. JERKY approaches PRINCIPAL.

MS. JERKY

I think that went very well. You're just what this school needs. *(exits)*

PRINCIPAL

I know. *(To VICE PRINCIPAL, gesturing in the direction MS. JERKY exited)* We should promote her.

Blackout.

Scene 5: The Sexist Teacher

Lights come up on a classroom. Students are seated. MS. JERKY stands at the front of the room, holding a whiteboard marker.

MS. JERKY

(*writing on the board*) Okay class, today we're learning about Pythagorean theorem. Ladies, if you need any help, just ask Jeremy. He's good at math.

JENNY

We don't need help.

MS. JERKY

Just in case.

Jeremy reaches into his pencil case and knocks it over, contents falling all over the floor.

MINA

Uggh. Jeremy!

MS. JERKY turns around and notices the mess.

MS. JERKY

Can one of you ladies clean that up?

LANA

But it was Jeremy's fault, why doesn't he clean it up?

MS. JERKY

Oh, Jeremy. Girls, you know boys are pigs. They don't know how to clean. Can one of you ladies volunteer?

MINA

Fine, I'll do it. *(bends over to clean it up)*

MS. JERKY

(*looks at Mina's outfit*) Mina, you're also showing a lot of skin. You know that's against the dress code.

LANA

Well, Jeremy is wearing a hat.

MINA

That's also against dress code.

MS. JERKY

Hmm… Are any of you ladies distracted by Jeremy's hat?

GIRLS

No…

MS. JERKY

Well, there you go. Students shouldn't need to be distracted in class. Oh, that reminds me! We're playing soccer next week against Danforth High, I need a team captain. Any volunteers?

Some girls raise their hands.

MS. JERKY

Anyone else? Does anyone else want to volunteer?

JENNY raises her hand.

MS. JERKY

Jeremy, don't you want to volunteer?

JEREMY

(*reluctantly*) Okay.

MS. JERKY

Great! Jeremy's our new team captain.

Girls are outraged and upset, complain it's 'not fair' etc.

MS. JERKY

Calm down, and quit complaining. Jeremy's just taller than you, so I figured he'd be good at soccer. I just want to make sure we win.

MINA

But I've played soccer since I was 8!

MS. JERKY

Yeah, but who'd win in an arm wrestle?

ALL GIRLS

Freeze!

Room freezes. One at a time girls stand up and speak.

MINA

That's not fair, soccer has nothing to do with arms! I wanted to be Captain.

JENNY

And she cleaned up your mess!

LANA

And you don't follow the dress code either!

All freeze except Jeremy.

JEREMY

I don't get it. Why does she put me in this position? I could've cleaned up the mess myself. I guess I'm lucky about the hat thing, but seriously, the soccer captain? She expects me to be good at soccer, but I have no coordination! The girls are going find out and be even more upset. She keeps putting me in these awkward positions.

ALL GIRLS

Why don't you say something?

JEREMY

She's the teacher.

ALL GIRLS

She'll listen to *you*.

JEREMY

I can't.

Blackout.

APPENDIX B: Recruitment Flyer

McGill

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR DRAMA-BASED RESEARCH

We are looking for volunteers between the ages of 13-18 residing in the GTA to take part in a research project that examines academic experiences through participatory play-building.

Your participation would involve meeting two to three times per week for up to three months to put together a theatrical production. Each meeting will be about two to four hours long.
You will also have the option of participating in follow-up focus groups.

No drama experience necessary!

In appreciation for your time participating in this project, you are eligible to receive community involvement hours

For more information about this project, or to volunteer for this project, please contact:

Abigail Shabtay

Email: abigail.shabtay@mail.mcgill.ca

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance by the McGill Research Ethics Board.

APPENDIX C: List of Prompts and Questions

Interview/Focus Group Prompts

Prior to these meetings, participants have completed and submitted consent forms. We have gone over the project goals and read over the consent forms once more, and I have asked if participants if they require any additional clarification before we begin.

Opening statement:

I want to thank you again for joining me today. This [focus group / interview] is about your school experiences, which can include events, classes, relationships, homework, or anything you find relevant to your feelings towards school. I am interested in learning from you about your experiences.

As I mentioned earlier, I am excited to learn what you have to say, and want to encourage you to share your thoughts and ideas, even if they aren't the popular opinion in the room. There are no right or wrong answers; I am trying to learn more about your own opinions. I have a few questions to get us started, but feel free to ask your own questions of the group, and to discuss things I don't ask about. Try your best to share the speaking time with other members of the focus group, so that everyone has a chance to share their ideas.

As I mentioned earlier, I am excited to learn what you have to say, and want to encourage you to share your thoughts and ideas, even if you think others might disagree. There are no right or wrong answers; I am trying to learn more about your own opinions. I have a few questions to get us started, but feel free to discuss things I don't ask about.

Prompts to build on / provoke discussion:

What grade are you in?

Which classes are you taking this semester?

What has been your favourite class in high school so far? Why?

What has been your least favourite class in high school so far? Why?

Which other classes did you take last year?

What is something you really like about school?

What is something you really don't like about school?

Is there anything that you wish you could tell your teachers about your experiences at school?

Is there anything that you wish you could tell your peers about your experiences at school?

Is there anything that you wish you could tell your parents/guardians about your experiences at school?

Is there anything else you'd like to share about your school experiences?

APPENDIX D: Follow-Up Prompts and Questions

Follow-up Focus Group with Youth Play-builders

Prompts to build on / provoke discussion:

Is there anything you specifically wanted to discuss today about your experience in this project?

How are you feeling now that the production is complete?

Are there any aspects of this project that you found particularly meaningful?

Are there any aspects you found irrelevant or that left a negative impression on you?

Were there any scenes that stood out to you in the play?

(Re: Question above) What are they, and why did they stand out?

If you were to participate in this type of project again, is there anything you would change (or something that I should change) about the process?

Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience in this project?

Follow-up Focus Group with Adult Audience Members

Prompts to build on / provoke discussion:

Is there anything you specifically wanted to discuss today about your experience in this project?

Do you have any constructive feedback on the production?

Are there any aspects of the play or scenes that you found particularly memorable or meaningful? (If yes, what were they and what made them memorable/meaningful?)

Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience as an audience member?