

LEARNing Landscapes

Journal

Arts-Based Performances,
Perspectives, and Approaches
in Research and Pedagogy



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Statement of Purpose

LEARNing Landscapes™ Journal is an open access, peer-reviewed, online education journal supported by LEARN (Leading English Education and Resource Network). Published in the spring of each year, it attempts to make links between theory and practice and is built upon the principles of partnership, collaboration, inclusion, and attention to multiple perspectives and voices. The material in each publication attempts to share and showcase leading educational ideas, research, and practices in Quebec, and beyond. We welcome articles, interviews, visual representations, arts-informed work, and multimedia texts to inspire teachers, administrators, and other educators to reflect upon and develop innovative possibilities within their own practices.

Review Board (Vol. 15)

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Editorial

I am pleased to introduce to you our Guest Coeditor, Abigail Shabtay (PhD). Dr. Shabtay is an Assistant Professor at York University in the Children, Childhood, and Youth Studies Program, and a former PhD student of mine. Since beginning her work at York, she has led five SSHRC-funded projects focusing on Children, Youth, and the Performing Arts with a range of community organizations. One of these projects was the 2021 *Children, Youth and Performance Conference*, an international conference of over 350 attendees. *LEARNing Landscapes* collaborated with the conference in our call for the 26th issue of *LEARNing Landscapes* on “Arts-based performances, perspectives, and approaches in research and pedagogy.” While articles in this issue are not solely from the 2021 CYP Conference, we are very pleased with the number of excellent submissions that emerged from it and hope that the 2022 CYP Conference, which Dr. Shabtay is again directing, will yield some equally interesting articles for the 2023 issue of *LEARNing Landscapes* on “Education in a pivotal time: The moment for inspiration, innovation, and change.” www.learninglandscapes.ca

Arts-based research and pedagogy are not new. Extensive literature has shown how arts-based work extends understanding in embodied and meaningful ways, reveals dimensions of research and learning that otherwise remain elusive, renders work accessible to others, builds on propensities that could be stifled otherwise, and engages and gives voice to marginalized populations. Elliot Eisner (1933-2014), painter and Professor of Art and Education at Stanford University, did a great deal in his lifetime to encourage the arts in both education (Eisner, 1998) and research (Barone & Eisner, 2012). He wrote extensively on curriculum reform that emphasized the arts and opened doors to the acceptability of arts-based research through his writing and work as President of the American Educational Research Association (1991-1992) and the AERA arts-based institutes that he ran for over a decade for scholars worldwide. Those institutes, when held in Palo Alto, California, incorporated wonderful evenings which were hosted by the Eisners at their lovely home, and are still remembered and revered by attendees. Dr. Eisner always spoke about living poetically. He was the epitome of that in all that he did. He also was a strong supporter of the work published in *LEARNing Landscapes*, and we were honoured when he contributed a commentary for the 2008 issue on “Education and the arts: Blurring boundaries and creating spaces.” The work in the current issue builds upon what he advocated for in education and research, and we hope adds in some small way to his tremendous legacy.

The articles in this issue represent inspiring work in multiple levels of education and a myriad of contexts. They all include a wide variety of arts-based research and practices that illustrate the positive role that the arts can play in research and learning contexts. It should be noted that while articles are arranged alphabetically in all our issues of *LEARNing Landscapes*, for the purposes of the editorial they are arranged and discussed thematically.

Invited Commentaries

We are pleased to have engaging commentaries on arts-based research and practices on performance, comedy, and poetry. They “set the stage” nicely for the articles that follow. The opening commentary is by Associate Professor **Naila Keleta-Mae** (PhD), who holds a Canada Research Chair in Race, Gender, and Performance at the University of Waterloo. She is also an accomplished practicing artist. This piece, titled “Only staging whiteness: What we lose,” is an abridged version of the passionate keynote speech she delivered at the opening session of the 2021 Children and Youth Performance Conference mentioned earlier. Keleta-Mae attributes her work to the negative experiences she had as a Black child and student. She begins by acknowledging the suffering of all marginalized groups and recounts recent examples of atrocities caused by White supremacy and experienced by marginalized and racialized communities in Canada. She argues that artistic performances provide excellent spaces for sharing and interpreting issues of social justice. She emphasizes how much is lost in intellectual and artistic work when “whiteness” predominates, and how much can be gained when the voices and practices of Black educators, writers, and performers can reach Black and racialized audiences accessibly and easily with material that provides resonance with their histories and experiences. An interview with **Mary Walsh**, a well-known Canadian comedian, actress, and writer, titled “An odd way of looking at things,” shares how growing up in Newfoundland where “comedy is at the heart of things” gave Walsh a rich start for her career. She began working at CBC on a summer show in her early 20s and never looked back as her work morphed into working in amateur theatre, studying theatre at Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University), and coupling these skills with journalism to write for “This Hour Has 22 Minutes.” She suggests that to become a comedian requires a very unique perspective, admitting that studying comedy is definitely helpful. She emphasizes, however, that some comedians become actors, but the reverse is seldom true, suggesting that there is something “basically innate” about comedy. She affirms that women still face challenges in the comedy world, for example, whether or not women can ever be funny, and suggests these challenges become more extreme with age. Walsh shares with personal experience how comedy featured large in the success of “Canada, It’s Complicated.” In it she performed and toured across Canada with Indigenous and Settler youth to help unpack for audiences the tragedies in Canada’s history, which require acknowledgement, discussion, and greater understanding for healing to occur. She believes, advocates for, and concludes that comedy and music really do help to make learning engaging in classrooms. Our third commentary, “Composing and translating poetry: Learning from scholarly and daily activities,” is by **Botao Wu** (PhD), senior lecturer at the Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics, in China. He received his doctorate from the University of British Columbia in 2019. A prolific writer and poet, Wu discusses how he uses his scholarly and daily life to write poems in both Chinese and English. Even with his seamless ability to shift from one language to another, he shares how difficult it is to do the translations, and often turns to literature and famous poets to help him in this work. He provides an interesting glimpse into the historical and cultural context of Chinese poetry, which no doubt will provide fruitful thought for poets for juxtaposing with and thinking about the historical and cultural context of poetry written in English. The beautiful tone of his written and poetic text provides the reader with a sense of the ease he brings to the task and the satisfaction he garners from his writing passion and production.

Creative Approaches Inclusivity, Access, and Social Justice

Ruth Churchill Dower, from Manchester Metropolitan University in the United Kingdom, discusses the theoretical underpinnings of contact improvisation, a process of creating unscripted dance movements carried out with others. The author shares how she used it in sessions with six children, four of whom had received a diagnosis of selective mutism by age three. Through her piece, she shares that more attention should be paid to reducing anxiety among children by honouring different ways of communicating using the arts. **Laura Yvonne Bulk**, at the University of British Columbia, describes a workshop meant to deepen cognitive and affective understanding of disability, ultimately to affect change in university settings and beyond. This workshop involved research-based theatre using data from conversations with 35 people with varying degrees of visual challenges, and the development of an audio-based performance piece reflecting on the data and how the campus might become a more welcoming space. **Lisa A. Mitchell**, from St. Thomas University in Fredericton, and **Kerri Kennedy**, a teacher and interdisciplinary artist in Ontario, Canada, discuss a project in which 90 Bachelor of Education students used portraiture (literary and painted) and appreciative inquiry to better understand student needs, the complexities of classroom management, and unpack systemic social inequities that play a role in students' learning environments. **Christine Liao** and **James DeVita**, at University of North Carolina Wilmington, share a collaborative performance-making project that they developed to help students advocate for social justice in education. Through sketches, poetry, video, and dance, they identify five interconnected experiences that emerged in their research and discuss precarity in the field.

Identity, Belonging, and Community Through the Arts

Jason D. DeHart, from Appalachian State University, discusses his work with undergraduate and graduate students, using the visual and poetic arts to help students reflect on literature, and their own emotional responses, as well as the processing of complicated experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. He shares how these multimodal visual portrayals helped students to illustrate elements of the readings that resonated with them and explore their own identities and experience. **Shirley Clifton** and **Kathryn Grushka**, at the University of Manchester in Australia, report on a case study aiming to better understand if and how visual art classrooms can promote empathic understandings. The study took place across three visual arts classrooms that included 13 youth participants, three teachers, and two preservice teachers. This piece demonstrates how visual arts methods offer opportunities for students to engage with the worldviews and experiences of others. **Shyam Patel**, a graduate student at the University of Ottawa, examines his in-between identity and sense of belonging through a written text interwoven with poetry. He grounds much of his poetic inquiry in the often-asked question: "Where are you from?", which, in some contexts, can be interpreted as unwelcoming and accusatory. He discusses his own experiences, and those of others in the South Asian diasporic community in Canada and relates these to identity and belonging. **Terry G. Sefton**, from the University of Windsor, and **Kathryn Ricketts**, from the University of Regina, share an article that is adapted from a catalogue essay published for the 2017 Windsor-Essex Triennial. These authors describe a collaborative research initiative which involved mapping sites of memories and personal histories and transforming the stories through improvised movement and sound. This process, which they call "Carto-Elicitation," builds on the belief that stories of our past matter, and

that they can contribute to our sense of belonging, identity, and community. **Ramona Elke**, who self-identifies as Anishinaabe, Métis, and European, is a high school teacher, and doctoral student at Simon Fraser University. Through the weaving together of life writing, poetry, photography, and theoretical discussion, this article describes her approach to Indigenous pedagogy and suggests that her research practices are transformative by inviting ways of building and being in community. This piece highlights the importance of attending to dreams, honouring ceremony, drumming, and making in creating communities that are inclusive for Indigenous students and inviting for all learners. **Michelle Lavoie**, from MacEwan University, writes about a three-year narrative study exploring the diverse experiences of three transgender young adults in Alberta as a way to broadly explore asset-building processes within relational learning. The author describes how artmaking and reflective conversation helped the youth participants make sense of their experiences, formed and changed community networks, and reduced social isolation. **Kathleen Gallagher**, **Nancy Cardwell**, and **Munia Debleena Tripathi**, from the University of Toronto, share how even in virtual spaces, the arts can help to sustain a sense of community. As part of a larger, five-year international research project, this article focuses on how the Toronto High School Drama Club, their teacher, and researchers made adjustments when COVID-19 required that they move online. Their work together helped strengthen feelings of community during times of crisis and isolation.

Performing Arts Approaches in Learning Contexts

Kendra N. Kahl, at Arizona State University, reflects on the differences she experienced when teaching dramatic arts to children and university students in in-person and synchronous online settings. These included how presence and contact were affected in the virtual environments, and how individual and collective embodiment play an important role in learning. **Keely D. Cline**, from Northwest Missouri State University, **Meghan Sheil**, from Tree Top Academy in Jupiter, Florida, and **Cindy Rouner**, from Northwest Missouri State University, demonstrate the strength of emergent curriculum planning, process drama, and the idea of “pushing limits” in preschool classroom planning and teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. **Jeffrey M. Schouela**, a professional comedian and educator in Quebec, shares his experiences of using comedy in the classroom and discusses how comedy is an important tool that can be creatively woven through the primary and secondary curriculum. **Joana Calçada**, an elementary French immersion teacher in Ontario, and **Chris Gilham**, from St Francis Xavier University, discuss research focusing on social-emotional learning, and Biodanza (a facilitator-led dance form that integrates music, dance, play, and interactive exercises) to understand how it may be implemented in classrooms across age groups.

Artistic Innovation and Reflective Practice

Inci Yılmazlı Trout, from the University of the Incarnate Word, **Shaniek Tose**, from the Desmond Doss Health Clinic, as well as **Caitlin Caswell** and **M. Candace Christensen**, from the University of Texas San Antonio, write about using personal written reflections and arts-informed inquiry (including poetry, drawing, photography, and digital collage), to explore their professional collaboration over three years. Through this experience, they found that the doing of art itself strengthened their connection and allowed them to engage with their research more deeply. **Tetsuro Shigematsu**, a playwright, performer and radio

host, **Graham W. Lea**, from the University of Manitoba, as well as **Christina Cook** and **George Belliveau**, from the University of British Columbia, reflect on the use of Research Based Theatre, an innovative, arts-based methodology that shows, rather than tells, using theatrical methods, and in so doing, brings research data to life. **Sheila O’Keefe-McCarthy**, from Brock University, **Michael M. Metz** and **Bernadette Kahnert**, artist-educators, share how they engaged in Mirror Theatre to deepen understanding in an embodied way about symptoms of heart disease resulting in an educational play titled: “He-ART-istic Journeys-Heart DIS-ease.” **Jonathan P. Jones**, from NYU’s Steinhardt Department of Music and Performing Arts, discusses the use of ethnodrama and devised theatre in three separate projects, including creating scripts and activities with students in ways that invited them to reflect on their own experiences in a safe context. **Janet L. Kuhnke** and **Sandra Jack-Malik**, at Cape Breton University, discuss how the creation of aggregate narratives, poetry, sketches, and paintings can be used as reflexive practice and lead to deepened understandings of qualitative articles in medical contexts. **Peter Shaner** and **Robert Donmoyer**, at the University of San Diego, reflect on the use of visual anthropology and video research as tools for disseminating research. They discuss four rich examples through video links and supporting written text to reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of using video as an approach to research dissemination. Last, but not least, **Elizabeth MacDonald** and **Kristin M. Murphy**, from the University of Massachusetts Boston, discuss the use of photovoice, semi-structured interviews, and poetry to reflect on and discuss undergraduate student experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. They emphasize the need to attend to the voices of college students when university policies that affect them are made, arguing that photovoice is one arts-based way to do this.

AS & LBK

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Abigail Shabtay (B.A., York University; M.A., King's College London; PhD, McGill University) is an Assistant Professor in the Children, Childhood, and Youth program in the Department of Humanities at York University. She is currently the Principal Investigator for several SSHRC-funded projects related to children, youth, and the performing arts, focusing on drama-based research approaches, social justice issues, and digital theatre programming. Dr. Shabtay has also received awards for excellence in teaching and research in her field, including the Humanities Award for Excellence in Teaching (2020-2021), the York University Faculty Award for Student Accessibility (2020-2021), the Ada Slight Drama-in-Education Award (2018-2019), and the Jackie Kirk Fieldwork Award (2018-2019). Dr. Shabtay's research and publications focus on drama-based participatory action research, child-centred research methodologies, youth activism, children's rights, and arts-based pedagogy. Some recent publications in 2021-2022 include an article titled "Dramatic Scene Creation as a Participatory Research Methodology with Youth" in *Youth Theatre Journal*, and a chapter titled "Ethical Considerations in Drama-based Research with Children and Young People" in the book *Ethics and Integrity in Research with Children and Young People* (Emerald, 2021). She is an executive member of the Association for Research in the Cultures of Young People (ARCYP) as well as the chair and primary organizer of the annual *Children, Youth and Performance Conference*, an international conference exploring performing arts work by, with, for, and about children and young people.



Lynn Butler-Kisber (B.Ed., M.Ed., McGill; Ed.D. Harvard) is a Professor of Education in the Department of Integrated Studies, Faculty of Education and an Associate Member of the Institute for Health and Social Policy, Faculty of Medicine, McGill University. She was recipient of the 2022 Faculty of Education, Distinguished Teaching award at McGill and recently elected Chair of the Elliot Eisner Special Interest Group at the American Educational Research Association.

Her teaching and research include qualitative research methodologies; leadership; multiliteracies; and professional development. She is particularly interested in arts-based methodologies, more specifically in visual inquiry (collage, photo/film, and visual narratives) and poetic inquiry on which she has written and presented extensively. She focuses on issues of marginalization, equity, and social justice. Some recent publications include a chapter titled “Getting Out of the Armchair in Qualitative Research: A Constructive Approach,” with coauthor Nicola Bourassa (Richards, Skukauskaite, & Chenail, 2022, Brill), the second edition of her book, *Qualitative Inquiry: Thematic, Narrative and Arts-Based Perspectives* (Sage, April 2018) and *Collage-making*, in the 2019 *Sage Research Methods Foundations* (edited by Atkinson, Delacourt, et al.). She is founding (2007) and continuing Editor of *LEARNing Landscapes*, an online, open access, peer-reviewed journal that integrates theory and practice, encourages multimodal submissions and the inclusion of a variety of voices. Current projects include: The NEXTschool Initiative; the Human Displacement and Narrative Inquiry Project (Routledge 2022) and online Sage Nvivo Webinars on arts-based research. She has done a range of international research and development projects in Dominican Republic, China, Indonesia, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos Islands, and in the UK and USA.

Only Staging Whiteness: What We Lose¹

Naila Keleta-Mae

Abstract

This commentary has been revised from a guest talk, with the same title, that the author delivered at the opening session of the Children and Youth Performance Conference III, presented by Young People's Theatre and York University, online on June 25, 2021. The attendees were theatre practitioners, performers, community organizers, educators, and researchers working in the area of children and youth performance. This commentary attempts to demonstrate in practice “what we lose” when we only stage whiteness by focusing on the insights gained from centering the intellectual and artistic contributions of Black educators and Black theatre practitioners.

Black And Free²
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Good morning. I am writing today from the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples. It is land that is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples and that is covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit.

On May 27, 2021, the Tk'emlups te Secwépemc First Nation released a press statement saying that the remains of 215 children were found at the Kamloops Residential School run by the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate from 1890-1969 and the Federal government until 1978. In the days that followed the discovery of the children's remains, Bonnie Devine, an Anishinaabe/Ojibwa artist and Associate Professor at Ontario College of Arts and Design, posted the following on Facebook (O'Kaadenigan Wiingashk, 2021):

I want that place treated like what it is – a crime scene. I want the police and the courts and the international human rights tribunal involved. I want criminal charges laid and the institutions and individuals responsible to face legal consequences. I don't want pity. I want justice.

On June 6, 2021, a white man intentionally rammed a truck into five members of the Afzaal family as they were out for an evening walk in London, Ontario. Four members of this Muslim family were killed. The following day, the National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM, 2021) posted a statement on Twitter that included a quote from Mustafa Farooq, CEO of the Council:

Muslims in Canada have become all too familiar with the violence of Islamophobia. . .[b]ut this loss of a family, the loss of a child in our community because of Islamophobia – this is a sorrow that will run deep for a long time. But let that sorrow be the ground where we stand for justice, and stand for change.

I invite you to join me now in a moment of silence to bear witness to the many people who have been killed on these lands from the violence of white supremacist beliefs.

It is a tremendous honour to be in the presence of so many practitioners, performers, community organizers, educators, and researchers working in the area of children and youth performance. I began with Divine and Farooq's calls for justice because artistic and academic work can amplify, echo, and distill urgent public calls and this premise informs my talk today entitled "Only Staging Whiteness: What We Lose." Throughout it I will demonstrate "what we lose" when we only stage whiteness by focusing on the insights we gain from the intellectual and artistic contributions of historically marginalized peoples. For the rest of the talk, I will focus on the perspectives of Black educators, Black theatre practitioners, and Black performers. I will, at times, quote people at length in place of adding my own authorial voice in order to bring their perspectives onto this stage space and into deeper conversation with each other. I invite you, throughout my talk, to think through and experience if and how the centering of Black people's perspectives affects you and, as I centre Black people's perspectives, I invite you to consider if and how whiteness figures in your own artistic and academic work.

In her essay on Black teaching in the South from 1940-1960, Siddle Walker (2001) synthesized a variety of perspectives on Black teachers and identified five principles that capture the beliefs they held about their roles: teachers should develop a relationship with the community, teachers should be committed to professional ideals, teachers should care about their students, teachers should relate the curriculum to students' needs, and teachers [should] receive community and school forms of support" (Tillman, 2004, p. 283).

As a Black educator and performer, I call my teaching practice a "pedagogy of justice" and it uses divergent source material to challenge students to interrogate the historical, political, and cultural components of their frameworks of analysis and those at play in the material at hand (Keleta-Mae, 2011). I pay attention to these things because my formal educators were rarely attentive to that for me as a Black student in public elementary and high schools in Ontario and universities in Ontario and Quebec. One of the things I learned in all of the courses where whiteness was constantly staged and centred is that there is a deficit of learning when artists, teachers, and students foreclose areas of inquiry, tout intellectual blind spots, and suspend complex material realities of everyday life. Those creative processes and pedagogical modes of teaching left me out as a Black, female, bisexual student. And so, my artistic and teaching philosophies stem from what I did not experience and what I hope the classroom and stage can be.

An ongoing frustration for some Black artists and educators, however, is the constant refusal by white-led institutions and institutions with majority white audiences to engage meaningfully with Black artists and Black audiences. In the article "Non-Traditional Casting (an Open Letter)," Clinton Turner Davis (1997) writes,

Why do artistic and managing directors, educators, producers, and other decision makers love to talk about the changes they are making in their theaters and institutions? Isn't it action that we have come to accept as the driving force of good theatre—action, not talk? Why has it taken so long for these so-called artistic leaders to identify and implement the actions they should take? Stubbornness? Lack of creativity? Unconscious racism? Lack of dedication to their public expressions of commitment to change? Fear? (p. 591)

Why is it certain theater companies can only identify one or two ethnic directors and designers to work in their theaters? Usually one per season! Why does the hiring of this ethnic director preclude the hiring of others? Why is s/he hired to direct or design only the ethnically specific work? Is it a question of willful ignorance of the talent pool or finding one's level of comfort with an ethnic artist? Is it a belief that ethnic artists are not capable of creating beyond their own ethnicity? Is the black artist, the ethnic artist still being perceived monolithically—under the assumption that the one that is hired knows, and can express, the desires and urges of and for the entire race? Or are we being blacklisted because we continue to ask difficult, uncomfortable questions, to name names? (p. 591)

Davis' questions, in 1997, about the state of theatre in the United States, are relevant questions to ask, in 2021, about the state of theatre in Canada where I reside as evidenced by the document "The Black Pledge." The Black Pledge was initially conceived by a collective of Black women artists led by Sedina Fiati in 2020 that developed into The Black Pledge Collective made up of the following members: Alicia Richardson, Chiamaka Glory, Diane Roberts, Jajube Mandiela, Janelle Cooper, Joella Crichton, Rita Shelton-Deverell, Samantha Walkes, and Sedina Fiati. So when I speak the following quote, I invite you to imagine it performed by a nine-person chorus.

The Black Pledge was drafted in response to the long-standing systemic injustices against Black people, of which we witnessed an insurgence and global response to in 2020. . . The goal of the Black Pledge is to address and dismantle anti-Black racism within the structure of live-performance organizations in order to support, affirm and advance Black artists and arts workers across Canada. By focusing on equity and inclusion at the structural level, we can create spaces where Black people feel safe, supported, and empowered to self-advocate within the more nuanced interpersonal experiences of anti-Blackness. (The Black Pledge, 2020, p. 2)

The Pledge asks theatre (p. 8), dance and opera organizations to make a three-year commitment to the following:

1. Creating and/or updating policy & Addressing Past Harms
2. Increasing Black representation beyond tokenization
3. Prioritizing historically marginalized groups within Black communities
4. Make an annual monetary commitment to the Collective which will cover operating costs, as well as the establishment of an arts-service organization and mutual aid funds that will support mental health services, professional development, and entrepreneurial aid for Black artists and arts workers.
5. Work at building and repairing community relationships with Black people. (p. 1)

In my own work, centring blackness has extended to thinking about centering the experiences of Black audiences. I wrote the play *stuck* in 2001 as a meeting place between performance poetry and theatre. I revised it in 2020 as part of my Black And Free project influenced by the work of Ntozake Shange and Christina Sharpe. *stuck's* new three-act structure reflects Shange's novel *Sassafrass, Cypress and Indigo*,

which is divided into three sections each told from a different character's perspective. The play's new focus on imagining its primary audience as Black reflects the influence of the social media post by Sharpe some years ago that I read (and can no longer find) where she called on Black writers to write as though our audience is Black.

stuck's 2020 revisions were informed by Sharpe's tweet insofar as I reread the original script while asking questions including: Is this scene meant for a Black audience? If not, what purpose does it serve? Does it need to stay in? How else can I tell this story? In practical terms, it meant understanding that I originally wrote *stuck*, in part, for white audiences as evidenced by all the text I found—then deleted or revised—that conjured and dramatized some of the horrors of chattel slavery, white supremacy, and anti-Black racism. My interest and experimentations with centering Black audiences is part of my research project Black And Free that researches and creates art and scholarship about how Black artists and scholars envision and express freedom through various modes of Black expressive culture (such as theatre, performance, literature, music, visual art, and film). As a result of this research, my plays are no longer solely about Black life, but they now also intentionally centre Black audiences and Black characters that are free.

I know that each of us has a story, a reason, an explanation for why we are drawn to performance focused on and by children and youth. What brings each of us to this work also informs the materials we select, the tasks we assign,³ and the ways we use our skills as theatre practitioners and researchers to organize in our communities beyond work. And so, in conclusion, I offer this reminder that the stakes are high for the perspectives we choose to teach in rehearsal halls, classrooms, and community centres precisely because performance can address our urgent social needs by facilitating participants' and audiences' ability to better understand the world, forge their place in it, and imagine their dreams for it. Thank you.

Notes

1. Edited from a paper with the same title, delivered at the Children and Youth Performance Conference III, presented by Young People's Theatre and York University, online, June 25, 2021.

2. Italics are sung, a capella.

3. In "Staging Race," Sharrell D. Lockett (2017) offers a series of practical tips for teachers leading drama classes for K-12 students. Lockett writes, "If the play involves students playing animals or inanimate objects, one should ask, "Does this animal or object have negative historical racial significance that should preclude me from casting a minority actor in this role?" "Is my student of color the only actor portraying a non-human?" I recommend not casting an actor of color to play an animal or inanimate object at all. However, if all the actors are playing non-human characters, cast minority actors in roles that are heroic, positive, and smart, while excluding them from roles that are antagonistic, intellectually inferior, or mute" (p. 157). Furthermore, Lockett advises that students should not be consulted about casting choices and instead that it is the instructor who should be tasked with being aware of the potential tropes, stereotypes and other incumbrances that could accompany casting choices (p. 157).

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Photo credit: Glenn Stillar

An Odd Way of Looking at Things

Mary Walsh

Abstract

In this interview, actor, writer, and comedian Mary Walsh discusses how comedy is part and parcel of Newfoundland's social fabric. She recounts her early days in theatre, which soon led to her forming comedy troupes with performers who would become lifelong collaborators. She outlines the basic skills for becoming a comedian as well as the challenges of being an older woman in comedy. In conclusion, she poignantly connects comedy to the importance of knowing one's history: "A bit of comedy helps the truth go down . . . they always say the truth will set you free. It'll make you mad first, but it'll make you free . . . We found right across the country that people were very open to the *message* because they got it with a laugh . . ."

When did you first know you had a penchant for comedy, and how did that translate into a career?

There is something about the Newfoundland character that is very funny, and some people are very witty and dry here. My family—my parents and my older brothers and sisters—really valued comedy being funny, and coming back with a witty and fast remark. Basically, you could get away with anything as long as you were funny. And if you weren't funny, you might as well go and hang yourself because there was every possibility you wouldn't even get fed. Comedy is a very important part of the whole structure of our culture and people who have a fast wit generally, which I didn't really have. I grew up with my two maiden aunts and an uncle who also were not the same as my parents, but when I would visit my parents, I would say something that I thought was funny and the entire family would kind of dismiss it and then carry on.

I knew the value of comedy for sure, but what we dealt with mostly in my large family was sarcasm and that kind of thing—the fast and witty put-down. I just wasn't very good at that. Not very fast in all that. Anyway, I wanted to be a journalist. That's what I really wanted to be. After a certain point, after a certain age, I started to fail very badly. I really didn't have the marks to get into school. And I decided I would marry this American guy from Colorado. So I went down there with him—that was a complete and utter disaster—but then I wouldn't go home. Everybody wanted me to go home, but I wouldn't go home because I thought, "Well, what else am I going to do? Dear God, this is my plan and now I'm screwed!"

Anyway, I came home, got very depressed, I guess, which seems to be fairly common in the 18 to 20-year-olds. And I fell into a job. I was watching *Coronation Street*, quite depressed on the couch at Aunt May's, and they said they were looking for a summer replacement for a morning show at CBC, which just happened to be across the street from us. I went down and I was so sure that I wouldn't get it—I don't even know why I went. Anyway, I got the job and was a complete failure at it, too.

Meanwhile, on the radio, Dudley Cox was starting a theater company, an amateur theater company in the basement of the arts and culture center. And he heard me on the radio and he called me up and asked me to do it. And then I got in with a crowd, you know, the way you do, and Tommy Sexton was in it. Then we started to do semi-professional theater. We all went off to Toronto and I went to theater school at Ryerson. Everybody else was working. And then Tommy and Diane got some money from Theatre Passe Muraille—Paul Thompson, God love him. Theatre Passe Muraille in Toronto seems to be at the basis of so much that is good in theater in this country. He gave them \$300 to do their own auditioning for him.

And so I didn't really want to do it because you weren't allowed to do theater when you were taking theater—for fear you'd get the wrong idea. So, we did a show called, "Cod on a Stick." Greg Malone, Diane Olson, Kathy Jones, Tommy Sexton, and Paul Sametz were with us at the time, and Andy Jones and Bob Joy were in England. But we used a couple of Andy's pieces that he'd done, just funny things that he'd been doing. And so he was in the show, though he wasn't really in the show—his material was in the show. And I was terrible and I just was so ashamed. Having gone to the nuns and all the other things, I had a very high level of shame.

I don't even know why anybody would ever want me in the thing, but I would act towards the back of the stage. That's how bad I was. Anyway, we did a big tour of Newfoundland, and Andy and Bob came. Bob joined us to be part of that tour, but he was at Oxford at the time. And then the tour was longer, so he wrote back to them and asked if he could have an extension on his holidays. And they wrote back to him while he was at Christ church college—I guess he was a Rhodes scholar—and said, no, he couldn't. And so he quit Oxford and his Rhodes scholarship, something his mother really never ever got over and really blamed us for . . . She was very bitter about that for a long time.

But anyway, I went on, and Andy came home, took me aside, and really helped me by working with me on things. We stayed together as a company, and I found myself getting better at it. When I was around 27, I kind of realized that my dream of being a journalist was passing me by. And then, of course, I came up with the idea for *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*, where I got to pretend to be a journalist on TV every week. So it was perfect for me.

What kinds of things were you coached on that really helped?

I've had an awful lot of insecurity and shame. Andy would just say, "Stand there, don't move around, and say the line like you believe in the line." I think that was basically it. It's a long time ago now—it was 1973 or 1974. And then we did very well as *Codco*, and Kathy and I joined the "Wonderful Grand Band." And then I had a TV show called "Up at Ours," where I had a boarding house with Ray Guy.

I just kept going, and then the idea to do *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* came to me. When I was a youngster I loved that British show, "That Was the Week That Was," and they had a folk singer on there who would perform a weekly song. I asked Ron Hynes at the time—it was 1992—if he would do it, and he couldn't. His album was just taking off, and stuff like that. But I had always wanted there to be a music component.

And now years after, there is, because Mike, the executive producer, and Mark Critch are both so musical that there always ends up being musical numbers.

What are basic skills needed for an aspiring comedian?

I heard someone on Seinfeld's *Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee* say, "Comedians can be actors, but actors can't be comedians. Because comedians have a thing. They see things in a funny way." And I think because I came from the family that I came from, and because I'm a Newfoundlander, I do have that weird way of seeing things, or that comedic way of seeing things, which you have to have to be a comedian. You have to have an odd way of looking at things. I know that there are a lot of really great comedians who are also great actors, but I'm not sure that any great actors can really be comedians. There's just a certain way of looking at the world, right?

Can one acquire that or is it just kind of natural?

I don't know if one can acquire it. There are courses in Humber College to teach comedy. But I think that if you're attracted to comedy, no doubt, you already have that on the go. You know what I mean? It's not like it's an easy life . . . people are so angry with comedians now. And now there's the new comedy, which is not funny at all, where people cry all the time. I'm for the old comedy really, because there's lots of things to make us cry. Years ago we came up with two things, comedy and drama. We can still have comedy, but the new comedy seems to be all about pouring your heart out.

And it's not that it is bad. I mean, it's good. There are so many good new comedians, but they don't make you laugh. And I like the old comedians, like Richard Pryor, who make you laugh until tears run down your face. And then people are mad at comedians for saying the wrong thing. This is a time where people take offense very easily. I'm doing stand-up at the Halifax Stand-Up Comedy Festival in April, and I'm very nervous about it. I was watching Richard Pryor last night. Those early things that Andy said, "Just stand there and say it like you believe it." That's all Richard Pryor was doing as these terrible people were heckling him. They weren't heckling him about his material. They were going, "Tell us about your mom, Richard," but he was so comfortable. He would just go, "Don't you talk about my mom. You shut up. I'm dealing with this guy." I don't know if I ever could get to that level, but I do find that, over the years, once you do stuff enough, if you are devoted to being a comedian and you do it enough over and over again, I guess just like the craft of acting, you just get better.

What challenges have you faced in your career as a comedian?

It isn't easy to be a woman in comedy because people are still asking that question, "Are women really funny?" Meanwhile, I grew up with Lucy who sort of invented sitcoms, and Mary Tyler Moore, Carol Burnett, and so on. And my mother was funnier than everybody else in our family, though apparently my father was supposed to be funny too. My mother said that, but I just never saw him. He never really got the chance. Women being funny seemed perfectly reasonable to me, but there's still a general kind of sense that we're not, for some reason. And that's difficult to fathom.

And then, of course, it's like Ursula K. Le Guin said in her work: "I have failed. I have failed completely. I'm not a man, number one. And I never could become a man, though. I've tried as hard as I can. And now I'm old. I'm an old woman. What could be more failed in the world?" It's called "Introducing Myself" and it's just the funniest piece. I don't know where it came from, or what publication it was, but it is so perfect.

Is it fair to say that women still face a challenge in comedy, particularly older women?

Absolutely. I think older women face a challenge in the world generally, but I've been playing older women for a long time. So, the great thing about being an older woman, or even playing an older woman, is you don't care as much. That is what helped me get through that terrible stage paralysis: when I stopped trying to be the object of somebody's desire, and became the subject of my own life by playing an older woman or a granny or something. And then I could speak freely. It's probably not going to work for others, but it opened me up and freed me up to be able to be myself as I was playing. I still find it hard to be myself. I find it easier to be someone else, but, of course, they're all me anyway. But I'm still hiding behind that little facade.

What can we learn from comedy and how might this be translated into the elementary and high school classrooms?

First of all, we have to start telling the truth about who we are and what we've done. Canadian history in no way reflects that we didn't discover Canada, but we, in fact, invaded Canada. A Cree Chief said, not long ago, "It's hard to discover a country that's already fully populated." And then he said, "It'd be like if I went over and discovered England now." We have to stop that nonsense and tell the truth because when we accept that this is what happened, then we can start to change. But while we're in denial, while we're saying, "What is *wrong* with them?", change is that much more difficult.

I wrote a show with a lot of people, some of them Indigenous People, and we took young Indigenous and Settler People on the road. And we did a show called, *Canada, It's Complicated*. We talked a lot about the broken treaties and about how we just came over. My favourite is when the Americans landed during 9/11 in Gander, and the Gander crowd took care of them. There's even a Broadway play about it called, *Come From Away*. But imagine if they stayed 500 years, do you think the Gander crowd would still be feeding and taking care of them or . . . Came from away and never went back. That's what we did. We depended totally on this country's Indigenous People to help us through those first 200 years.

What good was the wheel? The European wheel was no good for us. We had to learn how to use it new—all the things that made people who lived here know how to live here. We found that people were very open. We did song, dance, and comedy, and the message, it's like Mary Poppins said, "a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down." So a bit of comedy helps the truth go down. They always say the truth will set you free. It'll make you mad first, but it'll make you free. And as we go around constantly using all our energy to deny what the truth is, then we never get a chance to move forward. We found right across the country that people were very open to the *message* because they got it with a laugh. Laughing opens your heart and sometimes things get in that wouldn't be there. They wouldn't be allowed in if you weren't laughing.



Mary Walsh is a Newfoundland actor, writer, comedian, activist and mother. Among her many awards and doctorates, Mary is the recipient of *The Order of Canada* and the Governor General's *Lifetime Achievement Award* in the Performing Arts. Her work in television and film is extensive; she may be best known for *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*, a show she created and starred in as many of its various colourful characters. In 2017 Mary wrote her first novel *Crying For The Moon*, a coming-of-age story set mostly in

Newfoundland in the 1960s.

Composing and Translating Poetry: Learning From Scholarly and Daily Activities

Botao Wu

Abstract

Poetic Inquiry invites people to return to the thousand-year-long scholarly activity, namely writing original poetry. It encourages multiple possibilities of combining lexical thinking, poetry composition, and translation. In an attempt to revive the glory of writing, Poetic Inquiry appeals to a broader readership of scholarly works. This article explores my scholarly and daily life and seeks to learn by writing original poems. It also analyzes how I translate my Chinese poetry into English. With poetic works, I travel across languages, time, and space toward a better understanding of myself and the world.

Education is a process of learning how to become the architect of your own experience and therefore learning how to create yourself. — Elliot W. Eisner (2002, p. 24)

Background

As a way of learning and knowing the world, I would look around the environment and search for some interesting, yet, unobtrusive, things that are ignored in my daily busyness. I tidy up my thoughts, combing through all the memories and events that happened to me, and finding reasonable explanations and excuses for me to feel at ease. In such a process of exploring the outer world and examining my inner self, I come up with poetic lines. Writing regularly about my life is an effective way to dig into the deepest part of myself.

Spring: Traveling Back to Ancient China

I try to write as many poems as possible about spring as a tribute to ancient Chinese poets. They used to engage in similar activities as a pastime. With borrowed images from classical Chinese poems, I travel back to the age when poetry was an inseparable part of scholarly life. Poetry and nature are a peaceful and transient haven for me.

In ancient times, Chinese poets introduced the image of a lonely person lingering at the window. Staying at the window can be an alleviation of the person's loneliness and unfulfilled expectations. However, other poets depicted a lonely person's lamentation over the scene outside the window, and thought this could aggravate one's bad feelings. Both explanations make sense, and I prefer the latter, so I don't approach the window when I'm not in high spirits. Instead, I write poems.

寻幽

月夜乌啼风瑟瑟

山花初放隐蒿蓬

桑榆萝径寻幽处

蕙草禅宫若一梦

Seeking Seclusion

In moonlight, the crow caws and the wind sighs,

Mountain flowers just appear in the wild grass.

On a trail flanked with vine-decorated mulberries and elms, I search for a secluded place,

Fragrant plants at a monastery fill my senses like a dream.

The above Chinese poem is rhymed and rhythmed, and the word choices are generally literary Chinese. We don't say 蒿蓬 (wild grass) and 禅宫 (monastery) in modern Chinese. I used these classical Chinese words, as well as the classical Chinese poetry form, to create an imaginary scene. In such an imagined world, I indulge in the sheer beauty of nature, and comfort myself simultaneously.

When I translated the Chinese poem into English, I bore Benjamin's words in mind: "no translation would be possible if, in accord with its ultimate essence, it was to strive for similarity to the original" (Benjamin, 1997, p. 155). I appreciate the understanding of translation "task" not as "duty" and "responsibility," but as searching for "a solution within the domain of language" (Berman et al., 2018, p. 43). At the same time, I thought over my intention of writing and translating. I'm not trying to bind myself with doctrines. In writing, a globally recognized human right, I'm not interested in curbing my free will, although I definitely confine my writing to my own life instead of the vertiginous world.

In my pursuit of freedom in language, I also noticed the importance of "fidelity in translating" (Benjamin, 1997, p. 160), and I agree with Benjamin that my translation "can almost never fully render the meaning it has in the original" (p. 160). Benjamin developed a concept that "words carry emotional connotations" to describe the situation that the original meaning is "fully realized in accord with its poetic significance for the original work not in the intended object, but rather precisely in the way the intended object is bound up with the mode of intention in a particular word" (pp. 160–161). Also, a language has its long-established cultural, societal, ideological, psychological, and literary tradition. This tradition cannot be translated to its full potential, or even may not be accepted by readers from another culture. In this situation, I don't cheat my English readers by offering a wrong interpretation of Chinese culture. I try to avoid the controversial cultural backgrounds.

春

春深波淼雾迷蒙
野树低垂岗上风
浩浩千年今又见
山狐田鼠笑孤鸿

Spring

Deep spring, rough water, and opaque fog,
Wild trees hang low in the wind on the hill
A thousand-year history sees again
Mountain foxes and field mice laughing at a lonely swan goose

A lonely swan goose appeared in classical Chinese poetry as a representation of noble, outstanding, and ambitious people. The image of a swan goose in this poem is to express my respect for great poets of the past. I admire their mighty expressions composed from their life experiences. After reading them, I enjoy ordinary life more than anything else.

Summer: Savoring the Moment

倦怠

阳光懒懒地在草坪上溜达
风把枯叶聚拢在一起
广告牌静静地站着
你，
坐在窗前

----倦怠 (Wu, 2016a, p. 150)

Ennui

The sunlight languidly strolls on the lawn
Wind rakes together dead leaves
Billboard stands silently by the pile
You,
Sit listless at the window--
Ennui

My poetic inquiry is a spiral and upward endeavour to become maturer in character and more versatile and proficient in abilities. The aim is glamorous and glorious, but the road toward it is slippery. I slither, drop, give in, rest, and regain courage and momentum. Sometimes, I'm distracted from my main duty, namely reading and writing (Clarke, 2012, p. 53). I indulge in distraction and retrospection, and learn lessons from them. Similar to the nature of my poetic inquiry, I recall a story of eating meat.

My father liked meat and provided his employees with all kinds of meat when they drove my father's combine harvester to harvest wheat for farmers. These people were very satisfied for the first few days, as meat was not in daily supply at that time. Then they would be turned away by the smell of meat and begged for fruits and vegetables. Finally, they were able to eat meat in large quantities. I like meat and I like reading and writing. But reading poems and novels every day was really challenging, and sometimes nauseating. Later, I was able to persuade myself to keep reading and writing after I recalled my father's advice on how to hoe a whole acre of land by hand. He said: "just keep doing it, and when it is done, it is done."

电视机

作为电视技工，父亲说：

“不用大号元件

无法组装大电视机，而

大电视和小电视播放同样的内容”

作为诗人，我想说：

“没有足够长的经历

我无法写出长诗，而

长诗与短诗同样让人愉悦”

(Wu, 2016b, p. 152)

TV Set

Father, as a TV technician, said

“You cannot make a TV set big

Without parts big enough, and a big

TV shows the same as a small one.”

I, as a novice poet, would say

“I cannot compose a poem long
Without contents long enough, and a long
Poem evokes the same pleasure as a short one.”

Autumn: Returning to Reality

Autumn has a binary connotation in Chinese worldview. It represents mellow fruitfulness and augurs the past of the best time. The lamentation on the sad side of autumn is plentiful in Chinese literary works. Chinese scholars, especially the pessimistic, tend to link autumn with the elapse of the best years of their lives. For instance, Du Fu, the poetic genius of the Tang dynasty, wrote eight poems inspired by autumn, each of which was enshrouded in a sad tone and atmosphere and his worry about his country. Ascribing a scholar’s emotional vulnerability to changing weather is not uncommon.

I thought I was already immune to emotional stimuli, but an ordinary scene on a grey afternoon could engender my thoughtful forlornness. I remembered mother again. My mother looks nothing like the description in the following poem, but her virtue is much more laudable. She is not the kind of person who knows her rights and still pushes for more. Instead, she concedes any of her belongings for the benefit of the family.

In terms of diction, I intentionally used some allusions like 青州从事 and literary words like 寒英 in the poem. 青州 is a location, and 从事 the name of an official position. They were used together in classical Chinese literature to refer to good wine. The two characters 寒 and 英 literally mean “cold” and “flower,” respectively. In poetic language, the phrase is figuratively used to refer to plum blossoms, which bloom in cold winter. It is a literary tradition that a poet uses classical Chinese to write traditional Chinese poems. This kind of word choice also helps me create a poetic world that is aloof from the physical world. In this imagined world, I can stay away from the struggles and the impurity in the real world. I meditate, change my memory of the past, and (re)write my stories.

I first translated the literary Chinese lines into modern Chinese, and then rewrote them into English-free verse. I focused on conveying the meanings of my Chinese poems, and the cultural background embedded in the poems. A Chinese child raised in the traditional way is supposed to fulfill filial duty and gain fame and honor for the family. The Chinese tradition may be “new concepts” (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1995, p. vii) for English readers, but Berman called for respect for “the differences of foreign texts and cultures” (1999, p. 76 as translated and cited in Venuti, 2013, p. 186), Recognizing and respecting cultural differences, I write to better myself. I try to overcome the confines and limitations of languages and communicate “the universal spirit,” or “the human spirit” (Venuti, 2013, p. 118).

美

明月寒英惹蕙心
 青州从事相与饮
 柔荑拨开流苏密
 琴瑟丹青赋弹棋

A Beauty

Bright moon and plum blossoms grace her chaste heart
 I drink fine wine with her
 Her white and tender fingers push away the dense tassels
 As she plays zither, draws pictures, and writes poems about our chess game

Winter: Enduring the Coldness

I take writing as a way to alleviate my overwhelming feelings and emotions, and as a compass guiding me toward a more meaningful existence. I'm a poet trying to find my way in the complex world.

I enjoy poetry by feeling it. I would taste the texture of lined-up words, immersing myself in all the wild imaginations with musical and picturesque backdrops produced in my mind. I would form vivid scenes in my head when I try to write each sentence. I align words the way I like and delineate the scenes I saw. I just play with words in the most unadorned way. I call them my primitive poems in a simple and naive style.

"Poetry is the most intense, most highly charged, most artful and complex form of language we have" (Grossman, 2010, p. 93). Grossman tried to produce similar rhymes and meters when she translated Spanish poetry into English. Translating poems, Pound also made attempts at "recontextualization" (Venuti, 2013, p. 81). But, even Pound himself realized that recontextualization didn't fit exactly and was not accepted by every reader. When I read Pound's English poems translated from classical Chinese poems, I could barely recognize which Chinese poems he had translated. When I read other translated Chinese poems, I couldn't find their Chinese counterparts either. My peer Chinese scholars have the same feeling. In translation, something always gets lost. Pound produced rhyme schemes that are acceptable in English, but the poetic effect is not an equivalent to Chinese poems at all, especially for Chinese readers. This is an inevitable consequence of the fundamental differences of the two languages. For example, Chinese characters have tones for themselves, while English words don't; Chinese characters don't have stress, while English words have. Trying to create some poetic effects in English, a translator always has to add extra words, and to use different meters and diction from those of the original text (p. 87).

An alternative and common practice in Chinese and English poetry translation is to focus on meaning. Translating my own traditional Chinese poems, I don't try to produce similar poetic effects in English. I focus on translating meaning. The Chinese characters themselves are foreign enough for English readers. If my translated poetry can pique their curiosity, then they might begin to learn Chinese characters and then Chinese culture. On the other hand, I write original English poems without translating them into Chinese, and invite my Chinese students to write English poetry as well. Traversing the two languages, I anchor my emotions and memory.

冬韭

后院的韭菜

抵挡不住

冬的

盛情

脱去

碧绿碧绿

的

衣裙

蜷缩在

冰冻的

地上

和着风的摇篮曲

沉沉睡去

Leeks in My Backyard

Couldn't resist
The hospitality
Of Winter

They took off
Their dark green
Dresses

They huddled up
On the frozen
Ground

With the lullaby sung by wind
They fell asleep deeply

Ending Remarks

I write and translate to console myself and set an example for other people to take writing as a way of living and learning. I write poems to reconstitute my world as poetry accommodates blurriness. I write poems to avoid political and cultural conflicts. I write poetry for me to face the past.

When there is something wrong in our lives, it is easy to criticize others or the circumstances. The outside world affects us, to some degree, but cannot define and confine our lives. We control our own thoughts and reactions to things that happened to us. It is more rewarding and valuable if I focus on my (re)interpretation of the outside world, and on correcting the things that went wrong in my life. Traveling through time, space, and emotions, I write to discover aspects of me that need further improvement. I'm an "imperfect" human being, learning to live well "in the world" (MacKenzie-Dawson, 2018, para. 5).

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Cocreating Spaces of Belonging: A Campus Workshop Using Research-Based Theatre for Affective Learning

Laura Yvonne Bulk

Abstract

Creating climates that embrace justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion, must involve learning by everyone in the community. Although active learning techniques for promoting cognitive learning have received much attention in recent decades, techniques for affective learning are less developed. Affective learning is, however, essential to this particular area of change. Using the example of an innovative workshop about creating more welcoming environments for Disabled people, this article demonstrates how Research-Based Theatre, in combination with other active learning techniques, can promote affective learning and encourages readers to reflect on how they might incorporate creative, arts-based, research-informed approaches.

Background

Having a sense of belonging is important for human well-being and flourishing, and is particularly important for success in higher education settings. Creating JEDI communities—climates that are conducive to belonging and which embrace justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI)—must involve all actors in the community. While cognitive learning and awareness are important, affective learning must occur before effective JEDI communities can be achieved. Affective learning can be supported through Research-Based Theatre (RBT) integrated with other active learning techniques. Cocreating spaces of belonging (CSB) is a workshop that does just that with the aim of influencing attitudes and actions toward Disabled people within higher education settings. This article describes:

- 1) educational theories and positionality informing CSB;
- 2) how an RBT was created and incorporated into the workshop; and
- 3) evidence regarding RBT's effectiveness in affective learning from both literature and workshop participant feedback (collected via anonymous surveys).

Readers are invited to listen to the RBT used in the workshop by following this [link](#) and read the script and more detailed workshop outline in the dissertation [here](#).

Cocreating Spaces of Belonging: Workshop Design

CSB is shaped by different kinds of knowledge from various sources: personal and professional values; research evidence; literature and theory; lived experience; and feedback from workshop participants.

Collaboration, equity, inclusion, and integrity, are some of my personal and professional values as a teacher that influence this workshop's design. Collaboration involves learners and teachers working together toward learning. By valuing equity I profess that all humans are of equal value and deserve access to equitable opportunities. That is, humans have the same value but should not necessarily be treated the same way. To have *equitable* opportunities, individuals might need to go about learning in different ways or with different resources. Inclusion in my teaching means embracing diverse ways of being in and perceiving the world. I invite diversity of perspectives and use various teaching approaches to meet diverse ways of understanding and knowing. Finally, I value the integrity of learners and my own integrity. In valuing learners as whole beings and acknowledging that they are more than just learners, I support their integrity as individuals and members of communities. For example, by inviting participants' input and expertise throughout the workshop, and by inviting their feedback to shape future workshops, I am valuing them not just as learners, but also as teachers. By invoking the word integrity in reference to myself, I indicate that it is important for me to maintain honesty and humility—especially when I do not know something—congruence between my values and the ways I respectfully interact, and adherence to ethics (Bulk et al., 2019; O'Sullivan et al., 1994).

Educational theories and concepts underlying CSB include transformational learning, constructivism, active learning, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL). As a teacher, I hope to both engage in and facilitate transformational learning, which involves perspective transformation. Transformation involves “structural change in the way we see ourselves and our relationships” with other actors, and with the wider world and its structures (Mezirow, 1978, p. 100; Tokiwa-Fuse, 2000). This leads to transformed and wider perspectives, which, in turn, contributes to more informed choices for behaviours and occupational engagement (Tokiwa-Fuse, 2000). By presenting challenging ideas and alternate perspectives in novel ways, I encourage learners to examine their assumptions. I also invite learners into an interdependent learning community where all can be challenged to engage in critical reflection (Hartley, 2007). Drawing on Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy, I hope learners will experience personal transformation as they examine previously held assumptions, and that they will act on their learning.

An initial step in my teaching is cocreating a welcoming learning space. In doing so, I recognize learner autonomy to advocate for their learning needs. For example, at the beginning of CSB, I invite learners to cocreate a space that is conducive to their learning and do what they need to in order to learn well. I invite learners to stand, sit, or move around as needed and model this by standing, sitting, and moving around as I need. I also bring stories of my experience as a Disabled healthcare professional and academic into the classroom as a way of challenging common assumptions and demonstrating vulnerability and effective use of personal story as a pedagogical tool. Cocreation of an effective learning space is important from constructivist, transformational, and trauma-informed learning perspectives (Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Davidson, 2017). In this workshop, as in all teaching and learning spaces, belonging is an important factor for learning. We need to feel valued and to share in one another's transformation. Acknowledging contributions from all learners, opening space for authenticity, and endorsing collaborative learning, are some approaches to enhance belonging (Bulk, in press). Using paired and small group exercises builds connections among learners, opens space for many voices, and accelerates learning through sharing of ideas. Of note, although I can employ facilitatory strategies to

engender a learning environment like this, I recognize that inviting shared control of space does not change structural power hierarchies that exist among participants, and between myself and participants.

Constructivist learning theory postulates that learners build knowledge actively in the context of previous knowledge and social experiences (Cummings et al., 2014). In CSB I facilitate active learning through a variety of evidence-based activities, such as paired and group discussion, interactive lecturing, and scenario-based learning (Barkley & Major, 2020; Cummings et al., 2014; Hackathorn et al., 2011). Although being told “the answer” may seem easier in some instances, the creation of a constructive and challenging environment is ultimately better for learning. For example, rather than providing a list of problems and solutions, in CSB I use scenarios and discussion to encourage critical thinking, collaboration, resource seeking, knowledge application in both solving and reframing “problems.” Throughout the workshop, learners are not passive recipients of, but, rather, are co-constructors of knowledge. In keeping with a constructivist approach, my role as a teacher reflects being a facilitator of knowledge co-construction, rather than an expert transmitting information into the minds of learners (Brooks & Brooks, 1993).

Flexibility allows more space for learners to collaborate in building knowledge. Flexibility aligns with both constructivism and UDL. CSB is designed to allow the greatest possible degree of flexibility in the means of representation, expression, and engagement (Center for Applied Special Technology, 2020; Rose & Meyer, 2002). Flexibility is incorporated as I plan multiple options for learning activities in order to adapt to participant needs, while meeting the meta-objectives of the activity. I also use multiple means of representation of information, such as giving information verbally and visually. For example, the goals of an activity may be to provide space for participants to begin reflecting on their existing knowledge, and to start thinking about some important topics related to the experience of disability. This activity may be a virtual quiz. The facilitator shows questions on screen, participants can read the question on their own device, and the facilitator reads the question aloud—providing multiple means of accessing the information. The activity’s meta-objectives could also be met using a paper-based quiz, or self-reflection guided by questions, or something else. CSB is designed using various active learning techniques, including RBT, to facilitate learners achieving five objectives.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this workshop participants will be able to:

- 1) Apply knowledge from this workshop and previous experiences to discuss what disability is, including appropriate and inappropriate terms to use.
- 2) Describe some barriers Disabled people experience to belonging in academia.
- 3) Discuss respectful ways to interact with Disabled people.
- 4) Identify at least three strategies for making your own spaces more welcoming to Disabled people.
- 5) Reflect greater appreciation for some of the nuances of the realities of Disabled people in academia, and how some of these concepts may extend to other equity-seeking groups.

Research-Based Theatre as an Affective Learning Tool

What Is RBT?

Although research-based theatre (RBT) can at first-read be understood as theatre that is based on research, it is far more complex. RBT has become understood as a method and methodology for sharing and creating knowledge (Belliveau & Lea, 2011). As a research tool, RBT is said to open spaces of empathetic power (Mieniczakowski & Moore, 2008) that “[enhance] understanding of lived experience in different groups and communities” (Mitchell et al., 2006, p. 198). It humanizes data by maintaining the voices, stories, and unique humanities, of those involved (Belliveau & Nichols, 2017; Donmoyer & Donmoyer, 2008; Mieniczakowski & Moore, 2008; Saldaña, 2008). RBT is more than using theatre at the end of a project to share findings. RBT can also include incorporating theatre at various phases in the process and inviting continued engagement in research processes throughout research phases (Belliveau & Lea, 2011).

Why RBT and Affective Learning?

In this section I discuss the connection between RBT and affective learning, using examples and evidence from CSB participants and from the literature. Bloom’s taxonomy describes learning in three domains: affective, cognitive, and psychomotor (Bloom et al., 1956). All three domains are addressed by the learning objectives in this workshop. The affective domain involves learner attitudes, beliefs, and values (Krathwohl et al., 1964; Pierre & Oughton, 2007; Savinckiene, 2010). Addressing *affective* learning objectives is often cited as a key challenge for both novice and experienced teachers (Pierre & Oughton, 2007; Savinckiene, 2010). Affective learning can be addressed through witnessing others’ perspectives and being open to challenging one’s previously held beliefs, values, and attitudes (Krathwohl et al., 1964). Noting RBT’s empathetic power and strong foundation of evidence, I pursued RBT as an evidence-informed affective teaching tool. I am not alone in this endeavour. For example, when Segedin (2017) employed RBT in professional development with educators, their participants said RBT is more effective than traditional professional development for promoting long-lasting learning that provokes emotion and is oriented toward action. One participant said that CSB:

[. . .] is clearly backed by extensive research done on the topic . . . she presented various perspectives/aspects of disability as diversity and encouraged self-reflective and dynamic dialogues to happen. The theatre and story-sharing component adds an affective touch to the workshop that makes this workshop not only informative but also memorable.

Bird and Donelan (2020) found that the form of RBT they used—an interactive ethnographic performance—in a professional learning context fostered critical reflection and effective collective learning. One CSB participant noted the RBT “helped me reflect more on everything I [had] learnt to that point . . . on what it meant in my practice and how I can better adjust those practices” and another that “it caused me to consider how I perpetuate ableism.”

Where RBT opens space of cocreation between audience and actor (Lea, 2012; Mienczakowski & Moore, 2008), RBT in the workshop context may enhance co-construction of knowledge between learners and facilitators. A CSB participant said of the RBT: “it was a great way to engage the audience and to create a form of shared experience . . . it was encouraging to see authentic uses of facilitation/pedagogy to engage the participants.” And yet another: “it was surprising, engaging, and added an emotional element to the ideas that was especially powerful.” By prompting emotional and cognitive recall, RBT opens a shared space for learners to co-construct new affective knowledge. Through theatre, learners are encouraged to consider and enter into perspectives of people who are different from themselves (Iverson, 2013). As poignantly said by Wesley (2007), “art, and its celebration of what is different, opens us to the possibility of imagining difference as something to be embraced rather than pushed away” (p. 15). A CSB participant noted:

At the beginning, I was kind of lost because I am used to the formal/traditional way to conduct workshops in which someone speaks and shows slides or videos. However, this technique allowed me to put myself in someone's shoes, projecting their thoughts, frustrations, and expectations.

In this workshop, I intentionally incorporated a variety of learning activities to address the learning objectives. Importantly, RBT alone does not necessarily have an impact on transformational learning in the affective domain—it is important for the learner to also engage in self-reflection and dialogue (Muzyk et al., 2017). One participant noted that a highlight of CSB was “the space that was provided for reflection and connection.” Pairing RBT and other active learning techniques invites participants to reflect on their own experiences of belonging, to consider how Disabled peoples’ experiences are unique, and to ponder how these experiences intersect and how they might make shifts in their own practice. For example, a participant said, “I really enjoyed the reading of the play. It was interesting to hear many different perspectives and I definitely learned about some of the challenges that disabled people face.” Some active learning strategies engage the cognitive domain through dialogue and discussion, whereas RBT communicates through embodied, felt experience, and enhances understanding and empathy (Weems, 2003). A CSB participant learned “there is no one definition or identity of disability. I knew that intellectually, but the session (it) hit home.”

RBT also serves as a catalyst for further dialogue and “deeper learning” (Iverson, 2013; Wesley, 2007, p. 17). One participant said, “I greatly appreciated the Theatre that was performed as this helps me to digest information and lessons in a different and more profound way than some other forms of learning.” Another commented that she became more aware of the nuances of Disabled peoples’ experiences and was able to discuss this during the scenario activity. This combination of active learning strategies and RBT addresses the cognitive and affective components of stereotyping and prejudice (Chan et al., 2009). Addressing these components may disrupt the stigmatization process whereby prejudice and stereotyping based on a negative stigma become enacted through discrimination against Disabled people (Chan et al., 2009; Fiske & Tablante, 2015).

How Was This RBT Developed?

The RBT used in CSB—“I Know I Belong When . . . Stories of Authenticity, Performance, and Burdens”—is based on conversations with 35 blind and partially blind people from across Turtle Island: 28 focus-group participants, six storytellers, six cocreators, and the first author. Refer to Bulk (2020) for detail regarding how the data forming the RBT were collected.

RBT Cocreation Sessions

I invited members of the blind community to cocreate an RBT centered on ideas and stories from the research data and our experiences. We had two sessions, with a total of six cocreators besides me. Prior to the sessions, cocreators received a summary of the research. During the sessions, we participated in activities and conversation to develop ideas for a theatrical re-presentation of the stories shared in the research. In the first session we generated ideas, shared stories, and engaged as a community. Ironically, while creating a play about belonging, we developed a sense of belonging with one another.

After the first session, I worked with theatre artist Tetsuro Shigematsu to develop an initial draft. I invited feedback on the draft from the six cocreators and all 34 research participants. At the second session, I read aloud part of the script and we engaged in activities to share stories to build upon and diverge from the script. We generated ideas and discussed possible theatrical elements to enhance sharing our stories.

Following the second session, I used the ideas generated to write a second draft. I invited feedback on this second version from the six cocreators and, after integrating their feedback, from all 34 research participants. At this stage, six responded with messages of enthusiasm for the creative way of sharing stories. One participant made a suggestion to improve the interactive portion of the RBT. A first reading took place at an RBT symposium; one part read by me, and the other by a cocreator. We made small adjustments to the script and theatrical components based on this reading.

Ethics

Vulnerability

Participating in focus groups, storytelling, and RBT sessions, involves vulnerability as we reveal aspects of our identities and experiences that may open us up to ridicule or other negative outcomes. Vulnerability is, however, an essential *part* of cocreating the outcomes of research, and, in the end, enriches the experience for those involved (Defrancisco et al., 2007; Young & McKibban, 2017). Defrancisco et al. (2007) state, “based on our experiences, we believe other qualitative researchers would benefit from acknowledging their own stories more fully before asking others to be vulnerable and share the stories of their lives, whatever the topic of study” (p. 241). By sharing some of my story and identity with participants, I made myself vulnerable before asking them to do the same.

Accessibility

A vital ethical consideration for this project is that of accessibility. I tried throughout the process to be attuned to access needs. For example, consent forms are traditionally provided in print format. I provided consent forms electronically to participants (all of whom have access to technology that allows them to read electronically). At the time of the focus group, conversation, or workshop, I offered to read the consent form aloud and recorded participants' consent to participate based upon the electronically received consent form. Another example of accessibility comes in the way we interacted. We engaged together using simple "gestures of belonging" that, although unusual in non-blind contexts, are expected in the context of the blind community. For example, we announced ourselves when we entered or left a space, or came up alongside someone, and I provided snacks at the workshops, and ensured that all participants knew what was available and where it was. Additionally, I provided funding for cabs to/from the workshop.

Trustworthiness

Some of the techniques we used to promote trustworthiness in the work include member reflections, crystallization, reflexivity, praxis, and voice (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Ellingson, 2009; Lincoln et al., 2011; Richardson, 2000). I invited community members to participate in all stages of the research process. This was important, as the knowledge was built together. Participants ultimately chose the level of involvement that worked for them. I acknowledge that these "choices" were shaped by the personal constraints in their lives. I used member reflections to promote representation of all our voices in the construction of knowledge. Member reflections were an opportunity for us to collaborate and elaborate on findings, as opposed to ensuring that we *got it right* (Tracy, 2010). Praxis involves connecting knowledge with action. According to Lincoln et al. (2011), research can be judged, in part, on its ability to stimulate change and decrease ignorance by elucidating previously stifled stories. Thus, I examine the research regarding its ability to expose experiences of reality previously misunderstood or under-represented.

Crystallization, gathering data from various sources, enhanced the outcomes of this research (Ellingson, 2009; Richardson, 2000). Crystallization contrasts with triangulation in that the aim is not to improve accuracy or get a true picture of a particular reality, but rather, to increase the amount of data and gain multiple perspectives such that it is possible to construct a thicker description of the phenomenon being explored. This is based on the idea that realities are not more or less true, rather they are more or less *informed* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Finally, throughout the process I had reflexive conversations and kept reflexive notes containing observations, critical reflections, and feelings, regarding the process and data (Yang, 2015). Because readers/audiences are also co-constructors of knowledge, integrating insights from the aforementioned notes in my writing and the RBT may allow readers to have a greater understanding of the values that may have shaped how I re-present stories (Vandenberg & Hall, 2011).

“I Know I Belong When . . . Stories of Authenticity, Performance, and Burdens”

This section describes, “I Know I Belong When . . . Stories of Authenticity, Performance, and Burdens,” the RBT used in the CSB workshop. The play unfolds through five scenes: 1) I know I belong when; 2) feeling like a burden vs. contributor; 3) performance vs. authenticity; 4) questioning belonging; and allies, attitudes, and 5) actions, attitudes, and allies. The opening scene introduces the topic of belonging, from perspectives of both Disabled and nondisabled people, and invites participants to engage in considering their own sense of belonging. The second and third scenes share major themes from the research and invite participants to consider how the experiences of Disabled people regarding belonging might differ from or reflect their own. The fourth scene highlights a question discussed by participants: do we want to belong to an ableist system anyway? The final scene invites participants into actions that might contribute to more welcoming spaces.

The play employs various flexible theatrical elements, which may be used in different combinations, and alternatives were developed to adapt the play for in-person and virtual workshops, and an audio version was created and can be accessed at this [link](#). Whatever variations are used, the RBT incorporates participant involvement and critical thinking. The overall aim of the play is to promote empathy, shift negative attitudes, and encourage action toward creating spaces that foster belonging.

Acknowledgments

Some 35 individuals contributed their stories to the research that forms a foundation for play. Additionally, audiences/participants who engaged with early iterations of the script contributed their feedback, leading to the further growth of the piece. The script was developed by Laura Yvonne Bulk, with support from Tetsuro Shigematsu and the [Research-Based Theatre Cluster](#) at the University of British Columbia. The audio version was created in collaboration with Amy Amantea (who reads Ava) and Edward Norman (who gave great assistance with editing the audio files), as well as numerous volunteers who read short lines for the introduction.

Cast, Setting, Props

There are three roles in this play: Kendra, Ava, and workshop participants. Wherever possible, performers are people from the Disability community and are compensated. Props for the virtual performances include a hat, a jar, and coins. The in-person performance is set in a neutral space with two chairs, a blazer, a dumbbell, a bag, and a table. The participants are in a circle with a large gap as the stage.

Theatrical Elements

Various theatrical elements are incorporated in the RBT to complement the rest of CSB and promote active engagement in learning throughout the performance. For example, CSB participants are invited to think about their own experiences of belonging. Prior to or at the beginning of the workshop, participants are asked to write a statement that completes the sentence, *I know I belong when*. The play begins with

actors or participants reading aloud statements to complete that sentence, followed by examples of *I know I belong when* statements from the research. A unique theatrical element in the virtual performance is the use of a blurred camera view of one of the actors, simulating the way the actor sees the world. This element has been described by participants as unique, surprising, and engendering empathy. Sound is another element used to engage multiple senses in learning. For example, when discussing the *minority tax* paid by Disabled people in higher education, the actor adds more coins to a can and loudly shakes it after each line. Breaking the third wall—speaking directly with the audience during a play—is used to keep participants engaged and ask them to consider their own role in creating spaces of belonging. Humour is not only useful for entertainment, but when used with intention to increase understanding and clarity humour can also be an effective teaching device, particularly for affective learning. “Humour enables us to view ourselves with great objectivity and to think about things from other people’s perspectives” (Morain, 2001, p. 118). Finally, repetition is another effective device used for both storytelling and teaching (Norman, 2003; Saville, 2011). For example, the phrase, “I know I belong when . . .” is used repeatedly in the play with various conclusions. The conclusion “. . . my belonging was never in question to begin with” is repeated at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the play to emphasize the point and invite learners into the conversation regarding whose belonging is questioned and to reflect on whose belonging they may have questioned.

The Insider Performance

These RBT stories are our stories, and they are my story. While I tried to ensure the stories were grounded within the diverse perspectives of participants and cocreators, as the main author of the RBT my perspective certainly influences the stories told. I identify with all the themes expounded upon in the RBT, but perhaps not all the perspectives or dimensions of the experience of being blind and belonging in academia. I performed versions or portions of the RBT in various settings and for/with various people throughout the development process, in workshops, an RBT symposium, and in defense of my dissertation. As an *insider*, a blind scholar and teacher, there was some blurring, to use a pun, of the lines between who I am as the CSB facilitator and a character I played. I do not explicitly differentiate for audiences which of the stories I identify with, and which I perhaps do not. Another interesting avenue for exploration is how engaging in this kind of insider performance and education might affect the performer/teacher, and how having an insider perform the RBT/facilitate discussion might affect the engagement of learners. For example, although I employ strategies to mitigate this impact, such as opportunities to submit anonymous questions and small group discussions, participants might feel less free to ask honest questions that might offend me, a Disabled person.

Concluding Thoughts

This article demonstrates and invites readers to reflect on the value of RBT, in combination with other interactive and intentional teaching tools, for supporting affective learning and creating change. Although *change* happens at different levels and, as several Disabled participants said, “awareness education” has been going on for decades and still there remain barriers. While it is not claimed that RBT or this workshop will solve all the barriers, some change has occurred as a result of this particular innovative arts-based approach to teaching. For example, based on the impact of CSB, one individual advocated for change within their organization’s 15,000 student event registrations to add to the registration a place for people to share their access needs. Several participants reported that they incorporated a practice of requesting a round of names to ensure everyone knows who is in the room at a meeting. Based on feedback received, it appears participants took what they learned and applied it to other settings as well—spreading those small gestures of belonging and perhaps some larger changes too.

To build on this work, future studies could examine the longer-term impact of RBT-enhanced learning on actions, attitudes, and knowledge. It would also be beneficial to explore the potential impact of the workshop and RBT on shifts in workplace cultures. It should be noted that while this workshop and strategies therein were effective for many, not all learners will connect with these in the same way. Future work could also explore how the approach might be modified to meet a variety of needs.

This article demonstrates how innovative, evidence-informed, RBT-enhanced teaching promotes affective learning. The article describes evidence for RBT’s effectiveness based on literature and the impact of the described RBT-enhanced workshop. The hope is that this growing evidence will inspire more educators and scholars to employ creative approaches, such as RBT, to engage their learners in simultaneous cognitive and affective learning processes.

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Biodanza and Other Dance Forms as a Vehicle for Social-Emotional-Learning in Schools: A Scoping Review

Joana Calçada and Chris Gilham

Abstract

In this scoping review, the literature on the relationship between dance and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) was consolidated. Research of various forms of dance on psychosocial outcomes among K-6 populations included: increased sense of belonging, violence prevention, and increased creative thinking and problem-solving responses. The dance form, Biodanza, in particular, may be useful in engaging students in the active practice of social skills, appropriate use of body language, self-regulation, self-awareness, and boundaries. We suggest that using dance as a tool for SEL in the classrooms may contribute to improved student mental health and to more inclusive schools.

Introduction

In striving towards inclusive education in public schools, addressing students' Social Emotional Learning (SEL) needs, such as student capacity for understanding and managing their emotions in healthy and appropriate ways, is important (CASEL, n.d.). For this paper, we define SEL according to the international Collaboration for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL):

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is an integral part of education and human development. SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. (n.d.)

For students with persistent and chronic SEL needs, waiting lists for school-based psychological services have traditionally been long (Ontario Psychological Association, 2016; Njie et al., 2018), though there have been recent provincial efforts to reduce wait times (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2017; People for Education, 2018). Educators are increasingly called upon to expand their roles in order to address unmet student mental health needs.

Recently, provincial departments of education have officially embraced student wellness. School boards are now required to provide system and school improvement plans with wellness goals (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2020; Alberta Teachers Association, 2019). While SEL has been taught in schools for many years now, the formalization of student mental health in school plans legitimizes SEL as necessary school-based content, parallel in importance to numeracy and literacy. In some jurisdictions, SEL is embedded directly into traditional subjects like Math, for example (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2020), and a strong case is made for the natural affinity between SEL and English Language Arts curriculum (Storey, 2019).

We think these are important, worthwhile changes given that students' increased understanding of their emotions—and their causes—and how to respond to them in healthy ways, can result in increased school success (CASEL, n.d.). Early intervention and proactive SEL can promote more restorative approaches to interpersonal conflict in schools and could also have other positive sequelae, such as reduced likelihood of childhood onset mental illness, increased numbers of high school graduates, and reduced burden on mental health resources.

As educators seek out SEL content, some have seen the connection with dance (Pereira & Marques-Pinto, 2018; Toppen, 2019). Dance is kinesthetic, social, interactive, creative, musical, and engaging. Given that one of the “five to thrive” (UBC Wellbeing, n.d.; Kutcher, 2021) is regular exercise, and dance may also be connected to SEL, we were keen to understand what evidence exists in support of dance and SEL outcomes. Joana has direct experience with Biodanza, a dance intervention she has experienced as useful in engaging students in the active practice of social skills, appropriate use of body language, respect for self and others, self-awareness, boundaries, critical thinking, and creative problem-solving. Our scoping review is an attempt to consolidate the current research on Biodanza and other dance interventions as they relate to SEL outcomes in public schools.

Biodanza—An Introduction



Fig. 1: Biodanza #1(Photo used with permission from Josanne Broersen – Facilitator/Didact Amsterdam School of Biodanza, 2013).

Biodanza is a facilitator-led practice that follows a series of dance, play, and/or interactive exercises, designed to activate the sympathetic nervous system, followed by the activation of the parasympathetic nervous system, which restores physiological balance as it improves mood and releases anxiety

(Stueck et al., 2009). Biodanza does not involve choreography and it is suitable for all ages and fitness levels. It was developed in the 1960s by Rolando Toro Araneda, a clinical psychologist and anthropologist from Chile. In an effort to humanize psychiatric practice, he began investigating the effects of music and dance on psychiatric patients at the Psychiatric Hospital of Santiago, and found that certain movements and exercises accompanied by music seemed to improve depressive symptoms, among others. Biodanza means “dance of life.” It is a system that integrates music, movement, and interactions, with others to provide experiences of being acutely aware of oneself and others in the present moments of Biodanza practice. Biodanza promotes human development through “vivencias,” a Spanish word used to describe basic experiences of being human. These experiences can be those of vitality, creativity, affection, and equanimity. Through the use of certain movement exercises, participants work towards greater understanding of themselves, others, and the wider community. Biodanza is practiced worldwide, with two Biodanza schools in Canada: one in Montreal, the other in Quebec City.

Protocol

We used and adapted the Arksey and O’Malley (2005) scoping framework, as well as the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses - Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) checklist (Tricco et al., 2018). We searched four electronic databases: Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), ProQuest Research Library (ProQuest), Taylor and Francis, and Wiley Online Library. The databases were chosen because of their multidisciplinary content that includes education, dance interventions, and psychotherapeutic literature. Studies were screened, relevant data was extracted, and a narrative synthesis of an analysis of the current research was written. The population, intervention, comparison, and outcome (PICO) (Greenhalgh, 2019) criteria, was utilized for the identification of search terms as outlined below.

Eligibility Criteria

The search was limited to English-only peer-reviewed full-text research literature that investigated dance interventions primarily for children and adolescents, but also other age groups, published between 2000 and 2020. Publication country of origin was not limited in order to include studies from Europe, where the bulk of Biodanza research originates.

Search

As Biodanza research in general is still nascent, searches were expanded to include “dance intervention,” “dance program,” “dance movement therapy,” and “children.” This resulted in finding 319 articles. Duplicates were removed. Through title and abstract review, studies were reduced to seven articles. An additional 19 articles were obtained via citation chaining, particularly scanning reference lists of studies that investigated Biodanza specifically and those that most closely resembled SEL-like dance interventions in K-12 education.

Researchers used a wide variety of key words in their titles such as “empathy,” “sense of belonging,” “problem-solving,” and “resilience.” Other terms such as “interpersonal competence,” “social competence,” and “psychosocial functioning,” were accepted. Lobo and Winsler (2006) define social competence as: “the capacity for children to attain social goals, engage effectively in complex interpersonal interaction, make and maintain friendships, gain entry to social groups and achieve peer acceptance” (p. 501). Other studies use terms such as “emotional intelligence” (San-Juan-Ferrer & Hípola, 2020) and “social reciprocity” (DeJesus, 2020), both of which are analogous to social competence. It is important to note that “SEL” and “dance intervention” alone did not yield any results.

All studies that were specific to dance and the key words identified above were included. Twenty-six articles were included in this scoping review (see Appendix A, Table 1).

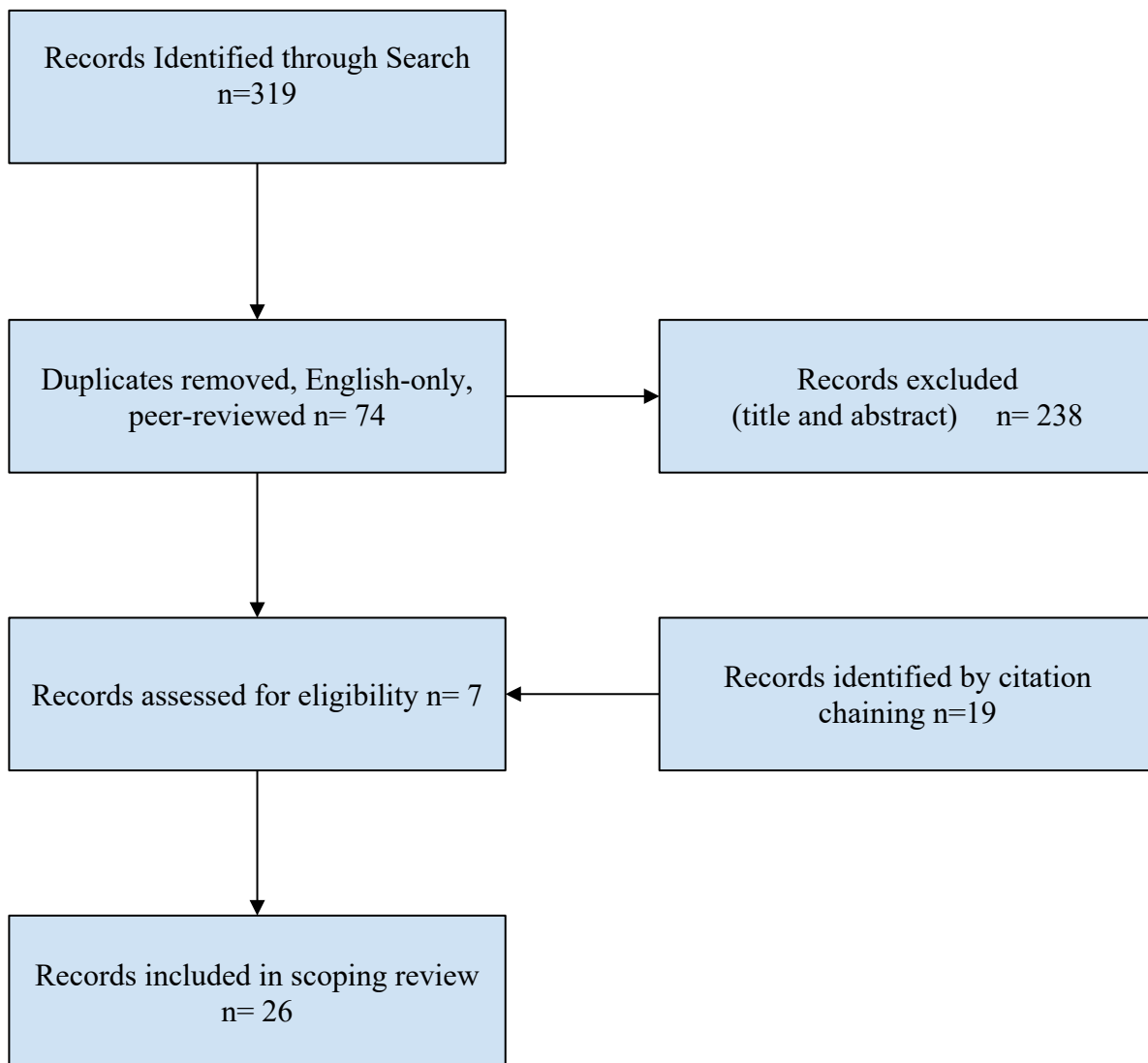


Fig. 2: PRISMA Flow Diagram of the Database Search.

Selection of Sources of Evidence

Of the 26 articles selected, one was a meta-analysis and seven were systematic reviews (see Table 2). The meta-analysis investigated the psychological effects of dance movement therapy and dance in the general population. One systematic review was on the effects of dance interventions on the psychological well-being of children and young people. Another systematic review on emotional intelligence and dance in various age groups and in diverse populations was found to be in congruence with SEL. Finally, two additional systematic reviews on the effects of dance therapy on various age groups and in culturally diverse populations were found. These systematic reviews were selected in order to determine whether or not a foundation has been established that demonstrates dance in general can have psychosocial benefits in line with SEL, and that the topic is worthy of continued research and implementation, particularly in school settings.

Results

Meta-Analysis and Systematic Reviews

Of these eight higher order studies (see Appendix B, Table 2) there were no restrictions on age, gender, ethnicity, clinical or non-clinical samples, length of treatment, or language, and the studies in each review are all unique, in that no study is found in more than one review. This is perhaps due to the fact that SEL captures a number of outcomes, depending on whether the research is clinical, pedagogical, or other (to be explained further below). These studies contrasted using a number of variables and outcomes. These included: target outcome(s) (self-regulation and psychosocial competence/SEL, or both); target population(s) (preschool children, K-6 students, adolescents, adults, general population); and intervention program types, [Dance Interventions (DI), Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) and Biodanza (BD).]

Although the meta-analysis included in this scoping review reported evidence that DMT and dance are effective interventions in many clinical outcomes, such as quality of life and mood, the effects that most align with SEL, namely, social and interpersonal competence, remained inconclusive. Koch et al. (2014) hypothesized that this may have been due to “the many different operationalizations of interpersonal competence” (p. 61). It is certainly difficult to measure social skills, as these tend to be in constant flux depending on many other variables, such as context, perceived interpersonal competence versus objective interpersonal competence, and so on.

It is also possible that length of intervention may be an important variable, as most interventions in the studies presented here lasted less than three months. Continued, diligent participation in the intervention might yield more positive results as new social and interpersonal skills are practiced concurrently within the intervention, as well as, hopefully, in participants’ daily lives. Continued exposure to the intervention might prolong the effect on self-regulation, or perhaps participants learn to self-regulate long enough to be able to develop more higher-level social skills. The SEL gains may be longer lasting, though, beyond the intervention period. It might also be easier for participants to see improvements in the protected

sphere of a controlled intervention, but then more difficult to implement and sustain new skills with family and friends, as context greatly influences self-regulation and behaviour (Stokes & Baer, 1977, in Evans et al., 2017).

In the systematic review on the effects of DMT on Autism Spectrum Disorder, DeJesus et al. (2020) found “substantial effects on negative symptoms, as well as on communication, body awareness, behaviour and social reciprocity when compared to other interventions such as physiotherapy, occupational therapy, equine-assisted therapy, social skills training and psychotherapy” (p. 5). Autism, being one of the diagnoses that most affects psychosocial functioning, thereby requiring SEL intervention, was found to be positively influenced by DMT. In the systematic review by Strassel et al. (2011), the authors stated that dance’s “social component could be therapeutically valuable because human interaction is important for all aspects of psychological functioning” (p. 58) and “dance therapy also has the advantage of nonverbal communication, which enables participants to express their feelings without words” (p. 58). All other systematic reviews presented here found that similar forms of dance and movement education can be used as a tool in increasing the capacity for self-regulation, improving psychological well-being, and developing the social skills necessary for resolving interpersonal conflicts (Burkhardt et al., 2012; Millman et al., 2020; San-Juan-Ferrer & Hípola, 2020; Sheppard & Broughton, 2020).

Other Studies Reviewed

In the 18 studies included in this scoping review (not including systematic reviews or the meta-analysis), all the dance interventions were claimed to be effectively used as a vehicle for SEL in the classroom (see Appendix A, Table 1). Outcomes included: increased sense of belonging (Kreutzman et al., 2018); increased social skills (Masadis et al., 2019); psychological engagement and socioemotional functioning (Archbell et al., 2019); violence prevention (Koshland et al., 2004); improved emotional responses and neurohormone modulation (Jeong et al., 2005); increased creative thinking and problem-solving responses (Lai Keun & Hunt, 2006); increased self-esteem and well-being (Connolly et al., 2011); reduced internalizing problems, and increased self-trust (Duberg et al., 2016); social engagement (Nelson et al., 2017); social competence (Lobo & Winsler, 2006); dance as a teaching tool (Sharma et al., 2020); social-emotional development (Rajan & Aker, 2020); and accelerated learning of skills via dance (Golding et al., 2016).

While the terminology of outcomes may vary greatly, the evidence suggests that dance in all its forms may be effective for implementing SEL programs in schools, though more evidence is needed specifically related to SEL programming. The classroom is the space for practising and developing psychosocial skills that might be generalizable to student life throughout the school and community, including student life at home, with parents and siblings. Kreutzman et al. (2016) states, “with inclusiveness of classrooms as a major educational policy, feelings of belonging to a class - notwithstanding its inherent significance for positive academic achievement - can be a central indicator for a genuinely inclusive learning environment” (p. 11). Given these findings, dance as a form of SEL may make a lasting contribution towards creating inclusive schools and classrooms, we cautiously suggest.

Importance of Target Populations

The evidence of effectiveness of SEL-based dance interventions on psychosocial functioning is most robust in younger children, as 14 of the studies focused on children in K-6, both males and females (Archbell et al., 2019; Burkhardt et al., 2012; Golding et al., 2016, Greaves et al., 2016; Koshland et al., 2004; Kreutzmann et al., 2018; Lai Keun & Hunt, 2006; Lobo & Winsler, 2006; Masadis et al., 2019; Nelson et al., 2017; Rajan & Ake, 2020; Sharma et al., 2020; Stueck et al., 2013, 2016). This may be due to the fact that younger children are learning the limits of acceptable behaviour as they develop more complex relationships with peers and adults over the course of their K-6 education. Older students, particularly males, may be less engaged in a SEL-based dance program due to preconceived notions about dance, and self-consciousness about “performing” in front of others. Also, by middle school, adaptive social strategies may have already been acquired and maladaptive coping strategies may have become ingrained and less resistant to intervention (Kutcher, 2017). Hence, the reason why earlier intervention is best.

For example, in the preschool age bracket, a study by Rajan and Aker (2020) found that, “31% of preschoolers who participated in in-school dance developed a stronger sense of self and 18% of preschoolers who participated in dance established stronger friendships with their peers” (p. 6), as measured by the four sub-scales for social-emotional development, under the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP). For Kindergarten, the work of Stueck and colleagues (2013, 2016) has shown significant changes in self-regulation as measured by cortisol saliva post Biodanza intervention, though sample sizes were small, affecting the ability to generalize these results. In the first through third grade age bracket, Koshland et al. (2004) found a “significant decrease in students instigating fights, failing to calm down, frustration intolerance, and throwing articles” (p. 69). In the fourth to sixth grade age bracket, post-intervention, Masadis et al. (2019) found a “significant decrease in inappropriate and aggressive social behaviour and a dramatic rise in socially acceptable manners” (p. 517).

Gender Differences in Dance Research

All age groups were included in order to also include studies specific to Biodanza. All other studies in this scoping review focused mainly on adolescent or adult females, which suggests that the practice may be less appealing to males after adolescence. Furthermore, Stueck et al. (2009) state that, “further research should address the issue of gender-specific differences in the effects of Biodanza on immunological parameters” (p.111). This suggests that there may be physiological differences between male and female responses to an intervention like Biodanza, in addition to, generally speaking, female interest in dance versus male disinterest in dance. There was no research found that attempted to account for different gender identities.

Dance as a Pedagogical Tool

While people who engage in dancing activities might do so simply because they all find it enjoyable, dance also serves as a pedagogical tool. Dance has been used with efficacy “as a kinesthetic tool for accelerating learning whilst assisting educators to recognize movement methods as potent delivery strategies” (Golding et al., 2016, p. 239). Furthermore, according to Sharma et al. (2020), “dance-based teaching can potentially ignite cognitive learning in children, since physical movement deepens neural connections” (p. 30). Thus, more educators are becoming increasingly aware of using dance in a cross-curricular fashion, not just teach dance as a subject on its own.



Fig. 3: Biodanza #1 (Photo used with permission from Cristiano Martins, Facilitator/Didact Biodanza School SRT of Porto and Portugal, 2019).

Dance as a Clinical Tool—DMT and Biodanza

Various therapeutic dance forms like DMT, as well as recreational dance forms, like Ballroom dance for example, were included in this scoping review in order to establish the connection between dance and SEL. Even when SEL is not explicitly embedded in the intervention, SEL can still be seen as being present as dance practised in groups is inherently social and interactive. At present, Biodanza may be found somewhere in between the two poles, even though clinical interest in the practice is increasing (as it is a prescribed intervention in hospitals in Europe and in community health centres in Brazil). In the six studies specific to Biodanza, even subclinical forms of dance were used to achieve results, such as improved mood and increased self-regulation in children and adults (Greaves et al., 2016, Stueck et al., 2009, 2013, 2016, 2019). Biodanza goes beyond this to include an experiential psychoeducational

component. According to Stueck and colleagues (2009), in Biodanza the goals are: "...a well-regulated internal state" and "...the establishment of a state of human integration in the context of the struggles to express one's individual, genetically-determined potential" (p. 100). Dance and movement exercises in Biodanza are designed to achieve affective psychomotor integration of the individual, by establishing synchrony between thoughts, feelings, and actions, as well as social integration between participants (Stueck et al., 2009). The kinesthetic, psychomotor, self-regulating skills learned in Biodanza, like other dance and movement approaches, with regular practice, have the potential to become transferable, pro-social skills to be used in and outside the classroom, as well as, in the greater social sphere.

Research Gaps

Presently, there is limited research available on Biodanza specifically. The current research shows that the effects on self-regulation are statistically significant, however the sample sizes are very small—a serious limitation in these studies—and some of the literature is poorly translated. There are currently no randomized controlled studies for Biodanza. The school community would be the ideal place to propose controlled studies, as cohorts could be easily divided into Biodanza intervention and control groups, such as exercise, for example. However, there may be other barriers that may limit sample sizes, such as parental authorization for participation in research, and student opt-out options.

Future studies are needed that attempt to address the gender and age differences seen in the current results for the K-6 school-aged population. The relationship between SEL as integrated in traditional subjects like ELA and achievement scores is also important, and needed. Overall, because of the results of the systematic reviews on dance, an increased focus on high-quality studies, with increased replication, would bolster the current research on this topic.

Limitations

There are some limitations associated with this scoping review. Because target outcomes varied greatly across the various databases, depending on whether their focus was more clinical, as in "psychosocial functioning" or more educational, as in "social emotional learning," "social competence," or "emotional intelligence," most of the studies included were found via citation chaining, which makes the replication of the initial search more difficult. As more educational research adopts the term "Social Emotional Learning" as a catch-all for the process and the target outcomes in the design of any SEL-inspired intervention, initial database searches may become more transparent and more easily replicated. As previously stated, "SEL" and "dance" did not yield any results, but a connection has been established here, even if in a circumvented fashion.

Recommendations

More research specific to Biodanza with children is required to be able to establish an understanding of the benefits of the practice, before considering training of educators, and fuller implementation in classrooms. In the meantime, other forms of dance that have been more rigorously studied like DMT, and certainly non-clinical or recreational dance forms, may be used to teach SEL in the classroom, though with attentiveness, given the results of the meta-analysis. Certainly, more research on the direct connections between dance and SEL is needed; however, we note the following:

Dance participation appears to contribute positively to individuals' wellbeing and health across cultures and age groups. It seems to provide a safe context for social engagement and building communities, which crucially enables participants to construct and maintain their own wellbeing and health in a range of ways: cognitive function, physical health, stress reduction, self-perception and mental health. (Sheppard & Broughton, 2020, pp. 13–14)

As teachers' mental health literacy has increased over the years, so too has the implied expectation that teachers do more for students' psychosocial development. The reality is that, as educators, we seem more often engaged in reactive, rather than proactive, interventions. Perhaps, this is where connections between clinical and educational research may be found in order to assist us in maximizing the time window for early intervention. As SEL is being embedded across the curriculum, and since dance is also part of that curriculum, the hope is that this scoping review will spark interest in SEL-based dance interventions. More research on the subject is warranted—a recommendation echoed similarly in the systematic review by Sheppard and Broughton (2020)—in order to validate the current research available and to legitimize the practice of Biodanza and other forms of dance as psychosocial development tools in K-12 classrooms.



Fig. 4: Biodanza #3 (Photo used with permission from Michelle Dubreuil Macek - Didact Biodanza IBF Facilitator/Trainer, Johannesburg, South Africa/Italy/Brazi, 2017)

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Appendix A

Table 1. Research related to Biodanza (BD), Dance Movement Therapy (DMT), or other Dance Intervention (DI) and related variables, Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Authors, Year and Country	Publication	Target population (TP); Participants (P) and Data Sources (DS); Experimental Group (EG); Control Group (CG)	Intervention	Aim (A) and Research Design (RD)	Conclusion(s)
Archbell et al. (2019) Canada	Merrill-Palmer Quarterly	Children 6-8 years of age P: N = 166 children (75 boys and 91 girls ages 6 to 8)	DI (Performing arts activities (dance and music))	A: to investigate the effects of Structured Performing Arts Activities in Early to Middle Childhood on psychological well-being, engagement, stress, and SEL. RD: Quasi-experimental	Girls are more likely than boys to engage in dance programs. Stress in performing arts was positively associated with emotional problems and negatively associated with prosocial behaviors. Results were significant (p=.001)
Burkhardt and Brennan (2012) UK	Arts & Health	TP: 5-21 year olds	DI (Cultural dances; Modern dance; Dance aerobics; Hip Hop; African dance; Ballet; Jazz dance; folk dance.)	A: A systematic review of 14 studies on the effects of recreational dance interventions on the health and well-being of children and young people. RD: 4 RCTs, 7 Non-RCTs, 2 cross-sectional studies; 1 prospective cohort study.	Significant evidence of efficacy on physical outcomes. Limited evidence of efficacy on psychosocial outcomes. Low-quality studies.
Connolly et al. (2011) UK	Research in Dance Education	TP: Female adolescents (age 14) P: N=55 DS: Rosenberg Self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965); Intrinsic Motivation Inventory; 20-meter shuttle run test to measure aerobic capacity	DI (Dance 4 your Life - 5 to 12 hours of dance classes over 6-week period)	A: to explore the health and well-being implications of a contemporary dance intervention for female adolescents. RD: Quasi-experimental	Self-esteem statistically increased (p=.01), as well as aerobic capacity(p=.001), but not significant in other areas.
DeJesus et al. (2020) Brazil	Complementary Therapies in Medicine	TP: Adults with normal to high-functioning ASD N=+266	DMT	A: A systematic review of 5 studies investigating how dance promotes positive benefits for negative symptoms in autism spectrum disorder (ASD) RD: 2 RCTs, 3 CTs	All studies showed the influence of dance on empathy, emotional expression, body awareness, and behaviour. Significant evidence that dance can be effective in improving reciprocity and the communication process between participants.
Duberg et al. (2016) Sweden	International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being	TP: Adolescent females (ages 13 to 18) 83% Swedish born P: N=112 EG N=59 CG N=53 DS: semi-structured interviews; NVivo 10 software program (QSR international)	DI EG: Twice weekly sessions for 8 months CG: no intervention	"I feel free": Experiences of a dance intervention for adolescent girls with internalizing problems. RD: Randomized Controlled Trial	DI led to increased bodied self-trust, more acceptance, less comparison with peers, increased empowerment, appropriate emotional expression, and an increased ability to approach life with a sense of freedom and openness.

Golding et al. (2016) UK	Research in Dance Education	TP: Children (early years) P: N=55 DS: semi-structured interviews; Goodenough-Harris draw-a-person test	DI EG: Developmental Dance Movement (DDM) 8, 35-minute sessions CG: no intervention	A: to Investigate learning through developmental dance movement as a kinesthetic tool in the early years foundation stage. RD: Quasi-experimental	Pre-post scored drawings showed significant differences in visual-motor integration and developmental maturity in children (p=.005).
Greaves et al. (2016) Latvia	Society Integration Education Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference	TP: First grade school children (ages 6-7) P: EG N = 10 CG N = 9 DS - cortisol saliva testing; Prosocial scale, Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ, Goodman, 1997)	BD EG: TANZPRO - Biodanza CG: no intervention	A: to investigate changes of emotional and social competence of 1st grade school children in TANZPRO - Biodanza intervention group. RD: Quasi-experimental	EG showed statistically significant improvement in emotion regulation outcomes, prosocial and internalizing behaviour (p=.02). *very small sample size
Jeong et al. (2005) Korea	International Journal of Neuroscience	TP: Adolescent girls (mean age 16) P: N= 40 EG N=20 CG N=20 DS: plasma serotonin and dopamine concentration; Symptom Check List-90-Revision (SCL-90-R) (Derogatis, 1977)	DMT EG: (45 minute sessions 3 times per week for 12 weeks) CG: no intervention	A: to evaluate the effects of DMT on adolescents with mild depression RD: Randomized Controlled Trial	Dance movement therapy significantly improves emotional responses and modulates neurohormones in adolescents with mild depression, including interpersonal sensitivity and hostility (p<.001).
Koch et al. (2014) Germany/USA	The Arts in Psychotherapy	TP: Various age groups, various diagnoses N=1078	DI and DMT, but also other types of dance (creative dance, authentic movement, rumba, folklore, classic, etc.) in various durations and frequencies of sessions	A: a meta-analysis of the effects of dance movement therapy and dance on health-related psychological outcomes. RD: 23 studies	DMT and dance are effective interventions in many clinical contexts, as there were increases in quality of life, mood, etc., although effects for interpersonal competence remained inconclusive.
Koshland et al. (2004) USA	American Journal of Dance Therapy	TP: Children in grades 1 to 3 53% Hispanic; 21% Native; 22% Caucasian Low SES - living at or below poverty line P: N= 54 DS: Student Response Form; Behaviour Incident Report Form	DI EG: Dance/movement therapy-based violence prevention program (50-minute sessions for 12 consecutive weeks) CG: no intervention	A: to evaluate the effects of a violence-prevention program on school children RD: Quasi-experimental	EG showed a significant decrease in the number of aggressive incidents and reduction of problem behaviours, as well as an increase in prosocial behaviours (p<.001).
Kreutzmann et al. (2018) Germany	European Journal of Social Psychology	TP: Children in grades 5 to 9 Mean age: 11 years P: N=606 N=311 girls N=295 boys CG N= 292 DS: The Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) scale; Social Networks indicators; measured outdegree and indegree centrality	DI EG: Dance project (students collaboratively developed and publicly performed a choreographed dance designed to foster social integration.) CG: no intervention	A: to investigate how social networks mediate the effect of a dance intervention on students' sense of belonging to their classroom. RD: Quasi-experimental	Social belonging at post-test was positive and significant (p<.001), (d=0.14). The dance intervention increased students' sense of belonging and social acceptance.

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Lai Keun and Hunt (2006) Singapore/USA	Research in Dance Education	TP: Chinese Primary school children with no previous dance experience (age 7) P: N=39, 19 girls, 20 boys DS: Observations; video recordings	DI 5 sessions	A: to observe the effects of dance and movement on Singapore children's creative thinking and problem-solving responses. RD: Quasi-experimental	Children acquired new skills and movement responses, such as increased evidence of personal and general space knowledge, as well as increased risk-taking as part of the creative problem-solving process.
Lobo and Winsler (2006) USA	Social Development	TP: Preschool children (ages 39 months to 62 months) Mean age =50 months 67% Hispanic; 16% Black; 5% Asian; 7% Arabic; 5% Caucasian Low SES - income below poverty line N=40 P: EG N=21 CG N=19 DS: Social Competence Behaviour Evaluation: PreSchool Edition (SCBE) (LaFreniere & Dumas, 1995)	DI EG: biweekly 35-minute sessions for 8 weeks) CG: Free play, with no music or dancing	A: to investigate the effects of a creative dance and movement program on the social competence of head-start preschoolers. RD: Randomized controlled trial	EG children made significantly greater gains in social competence, and significant reductions in internalizing behaviour (depression, withdrawal, anxiety) and externalizing behaviour (anger, aggression, impulsivity, hyperactivity) ($p<.001$).
Masadis et al. (2019) Greece	International Journal of Instruction	TP: Elementary school children (Grades 4-6, ages 9 to 12) P: N = 206 EG: N=132 (66 male, 66 female) CG: N=74 (43 male, 31 female) DS: Matson Evaluation of Social Skills with Youngsters (MESSY-II)	DI 16 lessons (2/week) concerning the development of social skills through Greek traditional dance.	A: to explore traditional dances as a means of teaching social skills to elementary school students. RD: Quasi-experimental	Significant decrease in inappropriate and aggressive social behaviour and increase in socially acceptable behaviours.
Millman et al. (2021) UK	Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy	TP: Clinical population; all ages	DMT	A: A systematic review of 15 studies towards a neurocognitive approach to dance movement therapy for mental health RD: RCTs	Evidence of clinical efficacy of DMT in that its mechanisms include improvements of embodied cognition and interoception. DMT has the possibility of being effective in neurorehabilitation and trauma treatment due to how it involves both the body and the mind.
Nelson et al. (2017) USA	Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities	TP: Preschool-aged children with Autism Spectrum Disorder P: N=3 DS: Educator observations; recordings of percent of engaged time in activity.	DI One half-day session including 10 minutes of Dance and Movement, unknown duration.	A: To observe the use of a Creative Dance Intervention Package to increase social engagement and play complexity of young children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. RD: Quasi-experimental	Creative Dance activities appeared to result in more complex and interactive play. Over the course of the intervention, participants moved closer to their peers and joined with them in the variety of dance activities explored.
Rajan and Aker (2020) USA	Journal of Dance Education	TP: Children ages 3-5 92% Hispanic 80% identified as high-risk 18% IEPs P: N=69 DS: Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) - 4 scales for social emotional development	DI EG: 30 minutes weekly over entire academic year CG: no intervention	The impact of an in-school dance program on at-risk preschoolers' social-emotional development. RD: Quasi-experimental, longitudinal	In-school dance program had a positive effect on social-emotional development, particularly in children's ability to identify themselves in relation to others and in the improvement of their relationships with peers.

San-Juan-Ferrer and Hípola (2020) Spain	Research in Dance Education	TP: Ages 0-94	DI (Dance; Sports Dance; Korean dance; Belly dancing; Classical, Unspecified.)	A: A systematic review on 49 studies on emotional intelligence and dance	Significant effect of dance on self-efficacy, emotional self-control, and expression of negative and positive emotions.
Sharma et al. (2020) New Zealand	New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies	TP: Primary school students P: EG: N=101 CG: N=86 DS: Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning (AsTTle) questionnaire, Assessing Well-being in Education (AWE) questionnaire, Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDG); Actigraph accelerometer; focus group interview	DI EG:18 dance sessions across 6 weeks of Dance and movement intervention CG: No intervention	A: to investigate the integration of a dance and creative movement program in 4 New Zealand primary schools. RD: Quasi-experimental	Evaluation procedures of the project to be disseminated in future publications.
Sheppard and Broughton (2020) Australia	International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being	TP: all ages	DI (Salsa; Contemporary; ballroom; Scottish country dancing; modern; line; Bollywood; tango.)	A: A systematic review on the effects of dance and music on promoting well-being and health. RD: 28 studies, RTCs, comparative studies	Dance participation appears to contribute positively to individuals' well-being and health across cultures and age groups.
Strassel et al. (2011) Netherlands/ USA	Alternative Therapies in Health & Medicine	TP: Clinical and sub-clinical populations; all age groups, predominantly adults	Dance Therapy; DMT; dance-based aerobic exercise; Ballroom dance; culturally based dance.	A: systematic review of the evidence for the effectiveness of dance therapy. RD: 8 reviews and 18 RCTs	Most studies focused on the effects of dance on mental disorders. All reported benefits or neutral findings. Significant improvements in Quality of Life. Low-quality studies.
Stueck et al. (2009) Germany	Signum Temporis	TP: Adults - School teachers P: N=13 DS: saliva testing pre and post intervention; subjective relaxation reported in 17-point scale (developed by Binz & Wendt, 1986)	BD EG: Biodanza (10 weekly sessions) CG: STRAIMY (Stress-reduction with elements of Yoga)	A: to measure the effects of Biodanza on secretion of Immunoglobulin A (IgA) and subjective feeling of relaxation RD: Quasi-experimental	Significant increase ($p \leq .05$) in IgA in 6 out of 10 sessions.
Stueck et al. (2013) Germany	Problems of Education in the 21st Century	TP: Children (4 to 6) P: N= 20 girls DS: saliva testing pre and post intervention	BD TANZPRO - Biodanza (10, weekly, 45-60 minute sessions)	A: to measure the effects of TANZPRO - Biodanza on participants' Immunoglobulin A, Testosterone and heart rate. RD: Quasi-experimental	Intervention had a short-term positive effect on immunity of tested children.
Stueck et al. (2016) Germany	Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy	TP: Children (4-6 years of age) P: N=10 girls DS: saliva testing pre and post intervention	BD TANZPRO -Biodanza	A: to measure the effects of Biodanza on changes of cortisol levels and self-regulation RD: Quasi-experimental	Biodanza has a short-term positive effect on self-regulation in 4-6 year olds (as measured by improved cortisol modulation).

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<p>Stueck et al. (2016)</p> <p>Germany/UK</p>	<p>Signum Temporis</p>	<p>TP: Adults N=13 DS: saliva testing pre and post intervention</p>	<p>BD Biodanza for adults</p>	<p>A: to evaluate the effects of weekly Biodanza on stress reduction and well-being in adults. RD: Systematic review of 7 quasi-experimental studies of weekly Biodanza classes in Germany (5), Italy (1) and Argentina (1) (since 1998)</p>	<p>Decrease in impatience (irritability), increased motivation, improved mood, increased capacity for appropriate emotional expression, and increased immunity (as measured by IgA) with ongoing sessions (long-term effects) p=0.09, d'=0.72. *very small sample size</p>
<p>Stueck et al. (2019)</p> <p>Indonesia</p>	<p>Health Psychology Report</p>	<p>TP: Adults N=34 EG N=17 CG N=17</p>	<p>BD EG: (90-minute sessions, duration unknown) CG: School of Empathy (verbal) (explicit teaching of skills)</p>	<p>A: to explore the implementation of Biodanza (nonverbal part) and School of Empathy (verbal part) in expressing emotions and needs among adults</p>	<p>Biodanza participants were significantly more able to express their emotions (p<.05), although the ability to express needs was not significant.</p>

Appendix B

Table 2. History of Meta-Analysis and Systematic Reviews on DMT/Dance/Biodanza effects on participants' psychosocial functioning from 2011 to 2021.

Authors	Publication Year	Topic	Type	Journal	Country
Strassel et al.	2011	Dance Therapy	Systematic review	<i>Alternative Therapies in Health & Medicine</i>	Netherlands/USA
Burkhardt and Brennan	2012	Recreational dance interventions	Systematic review	<i>Arts & Health</i>	UK
Koch et al.	2014	DMT	Meta-analysis	<i>The Arts in Psychotherapy</i>	Germany/US
Stueck et al.	2016	Biodanza	Review	<i>Signum Temporis</i>	Germany/US
DeJesus et al.	2020	Dance	Systematic review	<i>Complementary Therapies in Medicine</i>	Brazil
San-Juan-Ferrer and Hípola	2020	Dance	Systematic review	<i>Research in Dance Education</i>	Spain
Sheppard and Broughton	2020	Dance and Music	Systematic review	<i>International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being</i>	Australia
Millman et al.	2021	DMT	Systematic review	<i>Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy</i>	UK



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Chris Gilham, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at St Francis Xavier University. Chris has been working in education for over 25 years. He taught grades 3 to 9 and was a school board consultant. He enjoys working with others to create, implement, and evaluate practical, school-based mental health programming for educators and students. Chris teaches courses on inclusion, mental health literacy, critical research literacy, and the philosophy of education. He is now researching mental health literacy of educators (SSHRC), and boys-specific groups for developing healthy relationships (supported by Nova Scotia Status of Women).

Contact Improvisation as a Force for Expressive Reciprocity With Young Children Who Don't Speak

Ruth Churchill Dower

Abstract

Movement can be a powerful force for sensory connection and expression in young children who sometimes don't speak. Their kinaesthetic curiosity naturally experiments with—and forms spontaneous relationships through—touching, sensing, and moving-with the world around them. This article wonders what might happen if children's connective movements are invited through the speculative method of contact improvisation, not as an alternative to speech or way of interpreting meaning, but simply as a space for the transmission of forces, sensations, intimacy, and reciprocity. I consider what these shared forces or sensations of expression are that generate intimacy, joy, and reciprocity beyond words.

Background

Contact improvisation (CI) is a touch-based, relational form of dance; a dialogue of sensations and sensorial inquiry where bodies listen to each other's proposals, acquiesce, or counter-propose. CI movements are both spontaneous and intentional, inviting and responding to the other and, as such, help to amplify the connectivity and differences of bodies moving together in the world. Such movements can intensify sensation by playing with each other's forces of momentum, inertia, friction, and gravity, or a process of "exploring new and other possibilities of what a body might be and become productive of" (Taguchi et al., 2016, p. 710).

Although CI is an arts-based method, it is also an effective pedagogical practice that can explore, over a longer term, theories of sensory/movement-based learning and the implications this might have for reconceptualizing "not talking" as a positive, relational force in schools and early years settings. I do not use the term "non-verbal" since all bodies are constantly making sounds and movements of expression at different frequencies as they interact with the world, whether we can hear/see them or not. Also, several of the young children in this research verbalized fluently when relaxed and immersed in their aesthetically open movement play, which I will discuss later.

Across the globe there are up to 2.2%¹ of families whose children are often silenced or frozen by a new environment generating anxiety, such as the transition to their first school or a visit to the hospital or extended family. This research focused on six of these children, of whom four had received a diagnosis of selective mutism (SM) by the age of three, which describes the inability to speak in an unfamiliar environment. Despite a dearth of research in this field, the pathologization of SM positions it as a child-oriented problem which needs "fixing" and "normalizing" by increasing their exposure to talk-based environments. Following several years of experiencing non-speaking children speak freely when

immersed in arts-based environments, my research takes the view that *not* talking is not the/a problem for very young children and so exposure to talk is not the solution. Rather, opportunities to reduce the sensations of anxiety in the body through movements that build trust, confidence, connection, and risk-taking, all play an important role in a child's expressive being.

The strength of young children's multimodal (specifically kinetic and sensory) languages as a means of being in, and making sense of, the world prior to using words, is well documented (Hackett & Rautio, 2019; Olsson, 2009; Sheets-Johnstone, 2011). For this reason, they may be more critically attuned to the sensations of anxiety which often emanate from the environment and manifest in somatic and sensorial ways. Current interventions for SM generally focus on speech goals and minimizing negative environmental impacts where possible. However, this research does not aspire to therapeutic modes of communication nor does it seek to develop talking skills in children. Rather, it has been designed to nurture generative experiences between parents and children through contact-based movement that may or *may not be understood*, and which invited moments of sensory intimacy and reciprocity that were perhaps beyond rational articulation.

This approach also aims to reconceptualize some perceptions of embodied cognition, initially coined to describe experiences that are known and made sense of by the corporeal body (Batson & Wilson, 2014). Whilst there exists an important rationale for the existence of bodily knowledge through muscle memory, genetic codes, or the intelligence of the nervous system (Maturana & Varela, 1992; Sheets-Johnstone, 2011), I fear the phenomenological defence of this concept can unwittingly serve to prolong the Cartesian separation of body and mind. Thinking with posthuman practitioners, I propose instead to consider these ways of knowing as part of a whole system of relationships where biological, sensory, cognitive, incorporeal, and imaginative faculties cannot form knowledge without being in relation with each other and the molecular, life-giving forces of their environment.

Leaning on Spinoza, Hickey-Moody (2009) considers the connections between corporeality and imagination, thought, sensation, and memory as "bodily affects." Affects are "brought about through corporeal relations and the material residues of experiences that live on in human imagination. These material residues are traces of experiences past that provide points of departure, and points of reference, for future experiences" (p. 2). This reflects Deleuze and Guattari's suggestion that, "the mind is the 'idea' of the body; human consciousness is a product of corporeality" (as cited in Hickey-Moody, 2009, p. 8). Since these residues, traces, and ideas are in a continual state of being and becoming, it seems unlikely that we can talk with any certainty about complete bodies of knowledge.

Indeed, the concepts of *embodied knowledge* and *understanding* can be misleading, as if the body were in a privileged position to form concrete facts about the world through its movements within and amongst it. Rather, this research demonstrates that the more a human body moves, explores, and partners with its surrounding material and virtual worlds, the more its sensory perceptors (as much limiters as enablers) become attuned to the fine details or differences, and the less it seems to *know* in relation to these contexts because it is *not in the centre* of those interactions: a human body is often subject to, not the object of, the world's interactions. That is not to reduce sensory or experiential ways of knowing the world, but to question whether *what* we might know is perhaps not as interesting or important as *how*

we might know it. Therefore, I will refer instead to “bodies of experience” where the body-mind has ways of knowing what is taking place but cannot necessarily rationalize or generalize this because, “experience remains elusive, tangential, transient and evanescent, subject to fluctuations in attention and memory” (Batson & Wilson, 2014, p. 79).

We will see how the practice of CI can unfurl these bodies of experience by inviting non-speaking young children and their parents into different ways of communing, affecting, and tuning in with each other and the material world which might make a difference to how they, and we, think about communication. I will examine this not in terms of measuring the intensities and forces of reciprocity in biological terms, that is to say, when made visible in the human body (which is the Oxford English Dictionary definition of “embodiment”), but by attending to what happens when bodies, sensations, ideas, and tiny gestures emerge through collaboration—often beneath and beyond worldly visibility. I also challenge the sense of embodiment that suggests an intelligent capacity or agency is attributable to individual bodies in the event, and instead explore a posthuman perspective where expressive bodies/matter are multiple, interdependent, and have distributed and shared agential qualities. Finally, I explore different notions of expression and attunement through contact improvisation, and ask what the implications of such might be for children who communicate differently when in the nursery or classroom setting.

Ways of Knowing Through Being-With Bodies and Materials

Over several months, six families with their three-to-five-year-old children met with me as researcher on a weekly basis, at first individually over Zoom and then face-to-face as a group, in a large art gallery space, as Covid-19 restrictions allowed. We played with different notions of reciprocal movement through contact improvisation, gradually reducing my own talk within the environment as children became familiar with me, and parents’ inhibitions about dance or concerns about their children’s responses diminished. Before and during each session, I made it clear that, even when I might ask questions, the children (and parents) were free to respond (or not) in whatever ways they wanted to, with no expectation of speech.

Unusual objects were wrapped up and sent in small suitcases to the families in advance, one to be opened in each session as a stimulus for the collaborative movement play. Objects were chosen to have the least predefined “roles” or actions attached to them (including silk scarves, feathers, bubbles, socks, sticks, ribbons, and drawing maquettes) to ensure as much openness to the somatic imagination as possible. In some cases, it still took a while to move beyond predefined expectations of how some toys, games, or play routines should move or be moved, but this became easier as trust was built in the improvisational method and ideas flowed more freely. Recorded background music was used to begin with, but, due to this causing anxiety for one of the children, improvised singing and humming became a more useful tool to ease into the movements taking place. This approach seemed less intrusive and prompted curiosity as to whether parents’ humming and singing, for instance of lullabies before any talk began, might have developed children’s familiarity and ease with that mode of music.

The fieldwork sessions encouraged movements as starting points for helping us to *listen differently* with bodies and open possibilities for attunement, intimacy, and intra-action between young children and their adults. This more speculative, in-the-moment approach, framed by an ethics of care in relation to touch-based methodologies, afforded an active resistance to some of the goal-oriented systems which can limit the blossoming of non-word-based modalities. In removing the expectations for speech and foregrounding *ways of knowing through being-with*, rather than searching for blocks of unsituated knowledge, surprising things happened. Parents discovered a deep reciprocity in this group of unrelated kin, bodies became immersed in movements never before imagined and carried on moving together outside of the sessions, families unfolded new perspectives on the tremendous capabilities of their children, and five of the six children began speaking to me after only a few sessions, even continuing after the transition from Zoom to face-to-face sessions.

In the next section, I will put the notion of reciprocity to work and consider what happens when connecting bodies become immersed together in an environment that does not resist them but holds the space for whatever might emerge.

Movement as Emergent Entanglements

In movement, bodies/matter are in a constant dance of resistance or submission to gravitational and other forces, intensities, and sensations. There is an intricate and ceaseless repositioning and corresponding of muscles, tendons, nerves, blood cells, oxygen, electrical impulses, pressure and pain receptors, chemical concoctions, enzymes, vibrating molecules, and organic matter, dancing with the spaces, gases, energies, and materials around each one.

More than building a set of muscular, locomotion, proprioception, and sensory-motor skills, contact improvisation takes dance beyond a performative thinking-in-action (Batson & Wilson, 2014, p. 37) towards a less predefined, more emergent way of being entangled together as “collective assemblages of desire” (Olsson, 2009, p. xxiii). Sheets-Johnstone (2011) proposes that, “thinking in movement is not an assemblage of discrete actions happening one after the next, but an enfolding of all movement into a perpetually moving present” (p. 425). But this still revolves around the nexus of the human body as if, by tuning in to our somatic senses in constant motion, we have a “perceptual system by which [we] are literally in touch with the environment” (Paterson, 2009, p. 768). This carries an inuendo of independent control or agency, with a clear separation between the human body and the world around them. However, CI is a method that attempts to go beyond the “skin as container” in the search for more-than-human connections, or assemblages, where we “describe and analyse sensory experience in ways that do not begin and end with experience as organized by an autonomous human subject” (Ash & Gallacher, 2015, p. 1).

Manning (2016) extends this space for assemblage beyond the corporeal in her intra-agential concept of *thinking-with movement*—opening up to other possibilities by noticing the differences and potentiality of bodies (as in, matter). This is movement as a more complex, distributed encounter where “experience is in the tense of life-living, not human life per se, but the more-than human life: life at the interstices of

experience in the ecology of practices" (p. 3). Manning refers to this ecology of practices as "not straining toward homogeneity but toward a bringing-into-relation of difference" (p. 234), which more closely expresses the aims of this project.

By its ecology of practice as a *living body of experience*, contact improvisation, as employed in this project, therefore becomes effectively situated prior to meaning, based as it is in sensorial ways of knowing that can be experienced but not articulated. Furthermore, this living body of experience, by its very nature of existing momentarily, may even be enough in itself, not needing to be interpreted, understood, or valued by a cultural signifier. As MacLure (2013a) explains (with reference to Barthes), "the West moistens everything with meaning" so that, "difference chance and alterity struggle to free themselves from the clammy coating of causes and effects, reasons and hierarchy applied by Western rationality" (p. 169). Unfortunately, and especially in the world of early childhood, humans are so drenched in, and driven towards, the golden chalice of meaning, that it is hard to let go of the need to stabilize an experience, of wondering how to do it "right" or why it does or doesn't "work." This is a fundamental tension in much embodiment research—attempting to analyze the sensational in order for something to be understood, validated, and perhaps repeatable (ironically, just as I am doing in this paper), rather than allowing the experience to emerge and disappear without remark. It creates even greater urgency for a speculative praxis, to open up possibilities through the suspension of certainty, albeit for a small window of space and time whilst we hold back the imposing, oppressive, imperialist search for meaning.

Holding this tension in view, my participants bring their bodies as a starting point in order to play without words. We begin playing with small movements, materials, and spaces that, at first, allow a deeper attunement to the body. Not in terms of mastering a certain skillset or discipline for performative action, but in terms of *tuning out* from the verbal, language-based modes that dominate western ways of being and thinking. Movement alongside each other also introduces many levels of playing-with that are highly productive of communication, "offering a counter to the dominant advice in early years pedagogy that adults should work to engage young children in direct eye contact in order to encourage them to speak" (Hackett et al., 2020, p. 12). It takes a long time to get used to not talking and describing movement kinaesthetically with young children but, as this becomes more familiar, parents begin to play-with, observe, and experience interactions between all the bodies/matter involved in touching/not touching each other. For adults who have not danced playfully since they were young children, this can feel quite unfamiliar territory. It requires time to build trust in the method, the space, the researcher, the research purpose, and our own bodies, and to let go of performative expectations on ourselves or others. I will now turn to thinking about how such sensory connection leads to reciprocity through an affective charge which can be triggered or switched off with each touch, and which seems to be more accessible through in-the-moment improvisation.

Contact Improvisation Creating Possibilities for Reciprocity, Care and Intimacy

CI is a particularly interesting speculative method since the touch cocreated between participating bodies not only evokes a “specifically powerful sensorial experience,” but also an “affective charge that makes it a good notion to think about the ambivalences of caring” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 98). By “ambivalences,” Puig de la Bellacasa indicates that physical touch does not necessarily mean being *in touch* with one another. This implicates a level of responsibility and care when including touch-based movements with children (or anyone) who may not enjoy tactility or find that it triggers sensations (or memories of sensations) that cause discomfort. From an ethical perspective it requires us to be in touch with the possibilities and tensions of touch before they are touched upon. So, from that point of view, this speculative research is never entirely unanticipated, nor is access to the research field made entirely equitable. But this is an important consideration since, whilst other senses that are also an important part of the process of being *in touch* can be dialed down or switched off (such as vision, proprioception, or thermoception), physical touch exists all the time and not just on a physical level.

CI offers a unique mechanism for touch to go beyond the skin-sack and correspond with feelings. To touch in motion requires at least some of our intermittently animated senses to be triggered, perhaps more intensely than in static situations, in order for bodies to remain open, for imaginations to become animated and curiosities reciprocated. An affective charge is a trigger that sparks a body closer towards its potential or *what a body can do* (Massumi, 2005) and feelings are “the registration of intensive affect; they are the effects of affect” (Olsson, 2009, p. 77). Cocreated movement awakens this affective charge and leads to a deeper immersion in the presence of the other, to care about what matters or to be more *in touch*. Also, touch is always relational—to touch is to be touched (referred to as the *reversibility* of touch)—which is a kind of autonomic reciprocity. To this end, Castenada (as cited in Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017) argues that the experience of touch “cannot be detached from its embodiment,” but neither is it “reducible to the body itself” (p. 113). The skin, as an active living surface, “becomes a site of possibility” (p. 113), perhaps because of how touch awakens the reciprocity of bodies.

Whilst dance can remain quite a formulaic technique, the use of improvisation in connecting bodies can create imaginative and aesthetic qualities in the moment, which generate a kind of affective reciprocity because one cannot anticipate the movements of the other or their impact on one’s own body. These are forceful sensations which Shotter (2012) suggests are

[. . .] events that we cannot deliberately set out to cause to happen but that happen spontaneously to us and amongst us as a result of our inextricable immersion in a particular flow of energy occurring around us and in our surroundings. (p. 2)

To create possibility for these encounters to happen, Shotter describes how we might relinquish the “whatness” of an event whose objective is “‘formulated’—in an already shared language—as a ‘problem’ within an existing system of conceptual terms” (p. 2). In doing so, space is opened for a new, less certain experience of “witness,” where bodies’ first language of the senses can be attended to. But not in a way that requires *interpretation* into words because experiential knowledge comes from moving with, and

being moved by, sensations moment by moment, all the while resisting the fear of not knowing *what* they represent. Contemporary dance as an art form can open such a space but is not always accessible as a performative event where observers see/feel/sense the experiences of the dancer(s) from a passive distance, whereas the collaborative intimacy of small, relational dances in CI honours the present, situated, and contextual experiences of all the bodies involved.

Indeed, Deleuze et al. (1994) argue that, “art is the language of sensations” (p. 176), and that immersive art experiences contain *percepts*—“a tiny fragment of the world imagined through an artwork” (Hickey-Moody, 2009, p. 2) and *affects*—“the sense or feeling that is enmeshed within the materiality of the artwork” (p. 2). Through this, an artwork can offer “blocs of sensations,” or unique ways of feeling that reflect the worldviews and sensory landscape of the bodies involved and enables these bodies to relate to the artwork as it calls to their perspectives, histories, feelings, lived experiences, and perceptions. The subjective qualities of this affective charge are perhaps augmented by contact dance in ways that are not so apparent in other forms of interaction, partly because of the shared intimacy that can be created between touching bodies, and partly because of the ways in which dance opens bodies up to experiences that are as yet intangible and unknown (Hickey-Moody, 2009; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017).

By resisting a traditionally defined method and language (Manning, 2016) and refusing adherence to predetermined rules and expectations, it is this speculative nature of contact improvisation which attunes to potential (or the “more-than”) in the other. In this act of tuning in, a space opens up for being *in touch* with, affected by, and open to spontaneous, unanticipated possibilities that deviate from the rules and lead to being cocreative in the moment.

In order to tune into more unique, sensorial ways of knowing and augment the unfolding of witness-thinking, Shotton (2012) offers three considerations:

- *Overcoming the cartesian anxiety* [of knowing completely] – we must learn to think *partially* while still in the midst of *uncertainty* as a way of feeling one’s way forward in the present moment.
- *Repositioning ourselves as ‘inside’ rather than ‘outside’ thinkers*: we need to position ourselves not as subjects regarding an objective, external world, but as participants *within* or *inside* the boundary zone between the subject/object split...
- *The agency of our surroundings*: the flow of activity within which we are currently at work, is also at work on and in us; we are not just *in* the world, we are *of* it. (p. 5)

These considerations strike me as being at the heart of contact improvisation where every moment is unique and made more so by the immersion of the mindful body into the sensations of each moment, countering the “psychologist’s fallacy,” that humans can stand outside of, and objectively know/describe, their experiences as a singular reality. Improvisation in the fieldwork sessions offered possibilities for rehearsing this immersive participation and collaboration in increasingly attuned ways. We became accustomed to how our sensory inquiries and responses, our ways of knowing without words, came to feel in the body—the ways in which muscles, nerves, skin, heartbeats, and subconscious desires were positioned ready to interact and be interacted with. It was a space for building sensory anchors with which to remain inside the experience, each time for a little longer or deeper as relationships grew.

In what follows, I will explore how the unknowns of improvisation become the strongest anchor points for affective reciprocity by introducing different ways of listening.

Improvisation as an Act of Protest by Listening Differently

Attuning to sensational interactions like this is a form of political activism because, by listening to the multiple identities of bodies—human and nonhuman—without words, we resist the partial definition, reduction, and representation that can dominate early childhood environments (Hackett & Rautio, 2019; Olsson, 2009; Taguchi et al., 2016). Through such moments of sensory intimacy, flow, and mutuality, contact dance reaches beyond the pathological lexicon, unfastening the binary assumptions, fixed expectations, and represented judgments, that are tightly held in word-based languages.

As a practice rather than a performance, this improvisational approach offers *pedagogies of attunement*—ways of *listening differently* to the tiny moments of connection and intimacy. It opens spaces for perspectives that are irreducible to faulty biological parts—an antidote to the oppressions of colonized practices. These are spaces to notice what Manning (2016) terms, the precarious, “nuanced rhythms of the minor” (p. 1); gestures which emerge from deep in the gut to just under the skin (Ellingson, 2017; MacLure, 2013b). Minor gestures are almost unnoticeable to the human eye, evident in goosebumps, a tiny trace of sweat on the forehead, the mouth going dry, the gut sickening, the increased heart rate, the unsolicited flickering of an eyelid, the dilation of pupils, the raising of body temperature, or the twitch of a finger. Yet, these are the small dances of correspondence shared between bodies which are otherwise frozen or invisible in unfamiliar settings. In my view, the dominant mode of spoken language can never represent the full measure of bodies, always living as it does *behind* the veil of sensation—an interpretation of what is taking place in one particular time and space; a *representation of life*.

To illustrate the power of listening differently, I introduce a four-year-old child from this study who hides her head and face in her hands whenever the conversation turns towards her but whose body cannot stop itself from jumping over the furniture and running in and out of the camera shot during our Zoom-based sessions. In our first face-to-face session in an art gallery, this little girl watched the other children exploring movements with their parents. Being there with new people in this unfamiliar space, seemed to generate discomfort and an irresistible desire to run around the parameters of the art gallery, accompanied by high-pitched screeching sounds that were released with little jumps. More than a proprioceptive mapping of the space, this was a protest against passive body methods or spaces for talk and, as she ran, her face began to open wide with joy, looking at me full on to share the sensations buzzing all over her body.

Whilst other bodies found ways of hopping, spinning, rolling, crawling, flying, snaking, pushing, or pulling each other along the floor, this little girl remained focused on jumping. She invited her mum to lift her up by the hands, so she could jump even higher, often climbing up on her mum’s knees and thighs to jump off. The sense of movement through the air was so important to this girl whose body felt compelled to expression beyond the bounds of her small stature and the words she could not say, and above the spaces occupied by other bodies. In that busy silence, I listened to her body and began to

unwind balls of wool, wrapping them around the various structures in the room to create a giant 3D web. Without hesitation, our little girl jumped in and out of the lines of wool, enjoying the feeling of entangling and disentangling herself and jumping free.

Rather than try to counter this with a request for calm amongst the webby mess, her mum joined in with the winding and unwinding, understanding that the sensation of liberation was important for her daughter and, therefore, for her. Their bodies were tuned into the sensations brought about by this spontaneous movement, and a reciprocity of limbs, looks, and intentions followed that kept them deeply connected to each other. By the end of this session, the girl quietly but confidently walked around the space, touching my arm to show me things and helping me clear up all the materials we had used. These body-listening sessions became an important space for the efficacy of expressive forces, ideas, correspondences, and sensations to emerge and for identities to become repositioned and recognized.

Expression not of *Who We Are as Individuals* but *How We Are Collectively*

According to Massumi (cited in Hackett et al., 2020), “Expression does not come from ‘inside’ us. Rather, to speak is always to be part of an event that exceeds, and precedes, our own consciousness and intentionality, in which forces strike the body and spark sensations” (p. 4). For the little girl above, finding the right spaces for such forces to move, even explode, seemed to “restore some of the ‘sense of life’ that animates language, in which language moves through and across bodies as a collectively-felt force” (p. 8) even when it cannot be articulated in speech.

In our case, these body languages and this “sense of life” are akin to what Massumi (2005) calls “the force of expression” (p.xvii), which is not so much a tangible, outward demonstration of what is felt inside but more of an event marking the changes happening inside the body as forces are transported through it. Perhaps this is a series of electrical, nerve, chemical, and sensorial exchanges that feed from (and to) the forces in and around the body in proportion to the changes in the molecular structure of sonic, visual, olfactory, and haptic registers in the air around us. If this is the case, then this radically alters any perception that a child is in control of, or responsible for, their talk (or lack thereof), which has important implications for how early educators consider their curricular goals. Hackett et al.’s (2020) research concludes that, in none of these situations

[. . .] is the unfolding action under the control or agency of any individual (adult or child), but rather, the ways in which adults and children are moved by a more-than-human milieu, caught up in something bigger than themselves, and how this affects how bodies feel and relate to each other, is what is at stake here. (p. 14)

This happens again during a session with another of my research children, also four years old, getting caught up in the playfulness of climbing over and rolling under her mum who is on her hands and knees. After discovering her arms and legs are not long enough to reach the floor, the child wriggles harder in order to propel herself forward, over her mum’s back. In an assemblage of flailing arms and legs, twisting of clothing, thrashing of hair, and bumping and jiggling from mum’s back to try to help move the little

body round, there is an eruption of giggles and shakes as the two bodies become entangled in a fight against gravity. Tentatively balancing on a single hand, mum puts out the other arm to help the child cling to her upside-down podium as she crawls round and under mum's tummy. Within a moment, the child's weight pulls towards the floor and mum catches and cradles her in both arms, sitting back on her heels to balance as she does so. Child is rolled up in mum's arms, brought close to mum's face, kisses exchanged amidst the laughter, and hair stroked back into place again. The child's limbs unroll themselves, eager to climb up and over mum's back once again, ignoring attempts to adjust clothing, and expressing sensations of joy and enjoyment in the intimacy and challenge of the game. In this short, 30-second episode, so many sensory possibilities are triggered through improvised contact that might never have been experienced through words.

Sensorial correspondence happens at a deep level, through tactile tremors traveling through parts of bodies that only close kin may have access to, sensations of weight, balance and coordination with resistant forces, a trust in the strength and movement of the other, and a sense of possibility and desire to risk the unknown. Feelings, visuals, and sounds are reciprocated and contagious (such as wide eyes and giggles), extended by connection and vibration through the skeletal structure, through chemical reaction, and through shared "sensory tropes" (Hickey-Moody, 2009, p. 2) that emerge through the entanglements, which seem to hold a deeply shared correspondence, or knowing, without words. These are examples of what Spinoza referred to as "affectus," the capacity to simultaneously affect and be affected which, when activated, "gives rise to collective experimenting, intensity and unpredictability" (Olsson, 2009, p. xxiii) and seems to increase in intensity in proportion to attunement.

According to Ash and Gallacher (2015), attunement, defined as "the capacity to sense, amplify and attend to difference" (p. 73), is an ideal methodology for embodiment research, inextricably linked as it is with affect. Tuning-in isn't about simply reading bodies, feelings, or atmospheres, but about inviting and reciprocating them—a way of sensitising oneself to the other. As such, "attunements are not just individual or psychological states of mind, but are also shared and collective" (p. 71). Manning (2013) describes this affective attunement as "an open field of differentiation out of which a singularity of feeling emerges and merges. A tuning not of content but of expression-with" (p. 11), namely, a collective relationship between matter, whether material, human, nonhuman, virtual, or imaginary. The closer the kin, it seems, the deeper the possibilities for attunement and affective transmission.

The cocreated, attuned presence that emerged during our fieldwork sessions challenged the notion of agency being attributable to a single being or action, and strengthened the intention to move away from taxonomies of singular embodied cognition towards manifold embodied experience. As Manning (2016) articulates, "Artful practices honor complex forms of knowing and are collective not because they are operated upon by several people, but because they make apparent, in the way they come to a problem, that knowledge at its core is collective" (p. 13).

Conclusion

Opportunities for attuned attention afford a richer perspective on the connections between the material, sensory, physical, and imaginary capacities of matter and the generative disturbances caused by collaborative bodies which go beyond cognitive or rational thinking. It opens bodies up to the experiences of being multiple, rather than singular beings, that can share expression and ways of knowing in communion. It is essentially a practice of tuning into the life-giving expressions, intensities, and contagions of this animate world and playing speculatively with that animacy (in our case through CI), in the knowledge that, "All that you touch you change. All that you change changes you" (Butler & Jemisin, 2019). The aesthetic openness of the new imaginaries afforded through CI encounters are essentially the condition for this reciprocity, and for change, to happen, since "blocs of sensations are the language with which art speaks" [. . .] they are "vectors of the forces that these bodies produce. They establish new economies of relation through which bodies... can be known" (Hickey-Moody, 2009, p. 2).

As an antidote to the pathologized spaces of reduction with which many of these families are familiar, speculative movement allows us to occupy the in-between spaces that are still full of collective possibility and capability. Contact improvisation is a powerful pedagogical strategy for early educators in building connections, confidence, and a raft of body-listening and sensory skills, providing a much-needed counter to resist the reductive tropes around communication, language, and disability. This strikes me as being important for all children since,

[. . .] in a politics attuned to emergent difference, we must begin instead in the midst, where force has not yet turned to form. In this middle, where the event is still welling, there is potential for new diagrams of life-living to be drawn. (Manning, 2016, p. 15)

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Note

1. See Appendix of <http://www.selectivemutism.org.uk/info-multi-lingualism-and-sm/>

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Rendering Artful and Empathic Arts-Based Performance as Action

Shirley Clifton and Kathryn Grushka

Abstract

There is a critical need to consider ways to enrich the educational experiences and well-being of adolescents when the lack of empathy in the world is high. This paper presents the concepts of *Artful Empathy* and *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology*. The concepts are exemplified from a multi-site case study within Australian secondary visual art studio classrooms. The article demonstrates how learning and making art in an artfully empathic ecology can support the legitimacy of diverse and marginalized voices. Arts-based performative approaches may facilitate empathic knowing across disciplines with global traction.

Background

Visual art (VA) learning environments have the capacity to embed artful empathic approaches to learning. The article reports on research in the VA classroom, employing performative approaches and demonstrating the qualities of an artful empathic learning ecology. Artful and empathic learning ecologies contain the performative elements identified in arts-based research. It is a learning ecology that accepts and welcomes diversity and has the capacity to support empathic knowing and empathic journeying. Artful performative acts embed the identities of both the art students and their teachers learning together. Artful empathy can be seen as operating in a shifting assemblage of meanings and possibilities. This article presents the idea of an *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology* containing learning that sees an intersection between Lifeworld, Artworld, and Making meaning. An ecology with interrelational elements and authentic forums provides opportunities for young people to discuss aspects of their individual and shared lives inside and outside school. The *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology*, a finding of a multi-site case study across three Stage-5 Visual Arts studio classes in regional Australia, will be unpacked through both its theoretical lens and research outputs.

Rendering Artful and Empathic Learning Ecologies

The inquiry is positioned in a qualitative, ethnologically oriented, interpretive multi-site case study. Situated within the VA classroom, it was able to render, or depict, the performative and empathic capacities of arts-based VA studio learning as they emerged in student actions, words, and artmaking. The research sought to inquire as to whether the VA studio learning ecology could facilitate empathy.

As visual art educators, we had examined school environments and VA classrooms seeking evidence of empathic acts that might contribute to making school a safe space and lead to deeper relationships and improved academic outcomes (Fullchange, 2016). As researchers, we sought to explore this possibility

building from understandings that VA classrooms have an historical legacy of transformative practice embedded in the visual artmaking experience (Dewey, 1934). Past research has seen a clear articulation of VA learning and artmaking as sociocultural inquiry (Eisner, 1981, 2002) that fosters citizenship and democratic classroom relationships (Dewey, 1921, 1934). The learning has been described as fostering the conditions that incorporate an empathic understanding of self and world. There has been an assumption that empathy is another dimension of the Visual Arts curricula as it embeds identity or subjectivity work within its educational goals. Thus, it was assumed within the wider debate about student well-being in education that VA learning did indeed build empathic understandings through curriculum without a clear understanding of how. It was seen to provide the context for understanding difference via connections to students' Lifeworld and learning when making art. This inquiry has been built on the research antecedents of Eisner (1981, 2001) and Dewey (1921, 1934), who conceptualized the role of artmaking as socioculturally and sociopolitically situated. These conclusions have more recently been hypothesized as present when a student-centred and choice-based postmodern modern curriculum grounds artists' practice in engagement with materiality. To date, very few research projects (Jeffers, 2008, 2009) have been carried out from the perspective of the naturally occurring conversations within the classroom during and about art making, as student artists explore the liminality of becoming empathic. This research grounded in VA performative and co-constructed learning spaces has sought to extend previous notions of empathic learning in the VA classroom and go where very few studies have ventured. The inquiry moved beyond the aims and rationales of curriculum and the purposeful teacher-directed pedagogical imparting of ideas about what it is to be empathic (Bullough, 2019; Franzese, 2017; Gair, 2011; Warren & Lessner, 2014), to an investigation of how empathy dwells and has resonance within a VA studio learning ecology.

In the context of this inquiry, artful empathy is presented as dwelling within VA making processes and its material knowing. It is presented as emergent from within the performative complex self-assemblage praxis of student artists when they talk about and make art. "Performative" is defined in this study as the receptive/aesthetic, and expressive/embodied, artmaking responses of learners that can be seen as representing events artfully. The artful event is connected to a sense or experience of becoming self (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013). It emerges in the intra and inter affective production of Art (Semetsky, 2010, 2011). Artful knowing can therefore be seen as learning, as a journeying, co-constructed between teacher and student, student to student, emergent within VA studio pedagogies and individual lifeworld learning. An artful learning ecology goes beyond the idea of a biological ecology to embrace the notion of a classroom as an aspect of a wider sociocultural world where living and thriving depends on our abilities to be adaptive (Valera et al., 2017). The concept of ecology is applied to describe the VA studio teaching and learning landscape where interrelated elements within multiple relationships occur in its complex sociocultural and educational terrain.

Articulating the differentiation between the well-known VA classroom and an *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology*, emerged at the core of the inquiry. Therefore, it is important to unpack the interrelated assemblages that transcend the boundaries of the classroom as a teaching space. This lies at the heart of the overarching research project and the focus guiding the inquiry. The inquiry considered data collected as relational elements of VA learning across three different VA classroom contexts.

The Inquiry

The VA studio classrooms used in this research were ethics approved inquiry sites and were purposely selected as examples of good practice (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983). Learning sites had similar characteristics, such as having a high profile in the school and a robust Creative and Performing Arts Department. The participants were three consenting VA teachers who allowed the researcher to observe their classrooms and share the Visual Arts studies programs; two VA preservice teachers on placement; and 13 students from Stage 5 (ages 15-16 years). In order to capture the complexity of intersecting conversations within the VA classroom, the consenting student and teacher participants wore small MP4 recorders and lapel microphones during the artmaking classes. This enabled conversations to be gathered across the duration of the learning and between students and teachers who inevitably moved around the VA classroom. In addition, the researcher dwelt in the classroom for one lesson a week for 14, 12, and 10 weeks in the first, second, and third sites respectively, and situated themselves as a legitimate classroom member. When appropriate to do so, the researcher spoke to the students during the learning about their artmaking and joined in conversations. In addition, taking photographs of the learning throughout the lessons was permitted. This allowed candid moments of interactions and movement in the classroom to be captured. Images from Visual Art Diaries (VADs) in progress, student artworks, and classroom environments, were also captured. The rapport built with students guided the photographs taken as well as an understanding of the subtleties of student conversation. When assembled, the multiple ways the students and teachers engaged with the learning, such as being observers; active contributors to conversations; and co-constructors of the learning, were viewed as storied lenses. Teacher reflective voices were also significant for their capacity to relate to, and resonate with, the student voices and actions. This additional teacher voice provided authenticity to the insights into curriculum praxis and relationships between teachers and students in the VA studio classroom. Combined, the weaving together of these data sources informed the assemblages operating within the visual art *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology* that emerged and were seen to facilitate empathic knowing.

In a final analysis phase of authentic truthfulness, photographs were selected by students and teachers, as stimulus and elicitation material for recorded reflective conversation interviews. During the interviews, teacher and student responses to selected photographs and reflections on VA learning were probed through an empathic, participatory researcher lens. The interrelational and aesthetic conversations in the classroom that occurred between students during artmaking were viewed as performative and co-constructed acts and as spaces where empathy may be found. In relation to claims of authenticity and truthfulness (Leavy, 2020), this study draws on crystallization as a postmodernist approach, presupposing that no ultimate truth exists “out there.” Instead, it posits that there are only multiple, or partial, truths authentically constructed by researchers (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018).

Relationships between and within the data emerged as an *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology* construct, which can be seen as assemblages bound by a concentration of affective expression and revealed through conversations and narrative voice. Within the construct, you can observe the interrelational play of the assemblage and the ecology’s key affordances. Thus, student artmaking can be seen as a learning self-assemblage. It is the core of becoming and is artfully and affectively experienced

(Deleuze & Guattari, 2013). These affordances facilitated through curriculum and pedagogy, relationships with peers, self, and world, are seen to value difference and inform the learning assemblages within an artful and empathic learning ecology.

The Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology Unpacked

The key finding of the inquiry was the concept of an *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology* (Figure 1, below). It emerged as the researcher sought ways to render the interrelational elements of VA studio learning and how its performative affordances dwell in classrooms. The following section will unpack the concept of the *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology* through both its theoretical lens and performative perspectives via student learning examples. This conceptual model is one aspect of a wider study that sought evidence of empathy in Visual Arts artmaking classes.

Figure 1 depicts the *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology* and its interrelational affordances as the key elements of a VA studio learning environment. The *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology* emerged from the spaces where student artists' Lifeworld, Artworld, and Making, coalesce in a learning environment that nurtures Artful Empathy. It must be viewed as a dynamic system, one of openness and tolerance, hence its representation as concentric circles with no start or finish within which the components all work together to varying intensities over time.

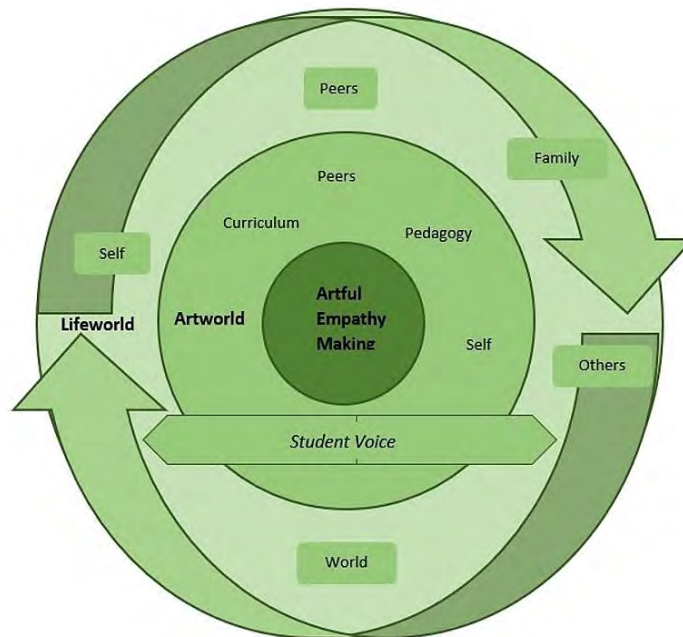


Fig. 1: Artful and empathic learning ecology.

Its key elements are:

Lifeworld (Outer circle). The broader aspects of students' lived experience occurring in their lives inside and outside school. They include: self, peers, family, others, and the world of all experiences, and embed complex diversity.

Artworld (next circle). The function of artists, artworks, the world, and audiences, as agencies within the Artworld which are considered and are connected to students' own artmaking. These agencies contribute to how they can interpret, explain, and perform self through art.

Artful Empathy Making (Inner heart). At its core is Artful Empathy. It reveals itself in the teaching and learning self-assemblage praxis of student artists, in conversation with and between peers and visual art teachers, as a journeying within co-constructed studio pedagogies. The images they make provide alternative modes for interpreting the world (Walton, 2012; Yunkaporta, 2009). They work with symbols and images to convey their own realities through means other than words (Barone & Eisner, 2011). Making performs Artful Empathy.

Empathy. Empathy is not static but is a complex process of becoming. Empathic knowing emerges, grows, and is modified according to the context with which the student artist engages. Empathic knowing in artmaking is a way of embodied knowing performed through each student's personal inquiry. It is emergent from the pedagogical relationships afforded in the VA studio classroom.

The Ecology. The concept of ecology to describe the VA studio teaching and learning landscape clarifies interrelated elements in the multiple relationships that occur in classrooms. It is an "interchange of closely related elements" (Genosko, 2009, p. 102). Guattari (2014) defines these ecological learning domains as environment, social relations, and human subjectivity. Knowledge across these elements is facilitated by relationships between teacher, student, and subject. The significance of this study is in the attention given to defining qualities of learning and making that centre Artful Empathy. These are characterized by two vital aspects of diversity, giving marginalized voices spaces to be heard in the relational conditions that exist for learning (Knutson et al., 2011). A visual art learning ecology is student-centred and appreciates that all learning is different and does not "conform to a standardized notion" (p. 327). Through acts of making, exhibiting, and critical discussion, as well as the use of symbols and metaphors, student artists create meaning in order to make sense of their world (Grushka, 2007a).

Evoking an Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology

Reflections on the data findings will be used to bring to life the elements of the ecology that draw on the theoretical and participant inquiry evidenced. On the outer limits is the Lifeworld, within it lies the Artworld found in the performative acts facilitated by curriculum and its pedagogies. Student artists' Lifeworld includes their relationships with family, friends, and peers, both inside and outside school, and functions as interrelated factors that inform students' worldviews.

VA studio pedagogy and curriculum promote intellectually and practically driven autonomous student practice. Across the three sites of the case study, the freedom for student artists to move around the classroom, undertake artworks of personal interest, and engage in conversations, which are both explicitly and tangentially linked, was central (Grushka, 2009). Empathic journeying dwelt within these conversations. Evoked through the interrelational spaces created by the Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology, tolerance for diversity and marginalized voices emerged as empathic journeying. Empathic journeying is a way of describing the learning within classroom conversations. Empathic journeying is moments of empathy displayed as caring actions, interactions, and conversations facilitated through the curriculum, pedagogy, and VA studio practice.

Artful and Empathic Learning: Lifeworld, Artworld, and Lived Experience in Making

Interrelational conversations in the VA studio classroom draw on and cross over many different aspects of students' Lifeworld. Recollections and references to life outside school covered many different aspects of students' lived experience. Conversations about past events emerged alongside discussions about a student's current mood and health, as well as aesthetic deliberations around the progression or completion of artworks. VA studio conversations saw student artists engage with their Lifeworld and experientially with the Lifeworld of their peers. In the following examples, student artists converse about one another's life outside school, referring to their own experience and experiences of friends and family members. The selection and investigation of subject matter is personally oriented and grounded in their social and political understanding of the world. The following images of student work and associated conversations and reflections; other fragments of captured conversations; and photographs of classroom learning; render moments of empathy in the VA studio learning ecology.

This extract (below) from a spontaneous classroom conversation, shows one student talking about a past experience, with an ambulance. This led to a peer recalling a similar ambulance story which they had also found to be a distressing event, as the person in their story was their father.

S2: So, he almost died, like, three times. It was very bad.

S1: Oh my God! (Classroom conversation, February 20, 2020)

The student (S1) responded to their peer's recollection by engaging with empathy to the distress expressed by her (S2) in the retelling of her story. These students engaged with empathy as they participated experientially in the lives of their peer, evoking memories of lived experiences through the retelling of stories. This included stories about being different and marginalized.

The interplay between Lifeworld, Artworld, and Making, that can articulate this feeling of difference, is demonstrated clearly in the following examples of one student's practice. Occurring during the reflective interview, the student selected their VAD cover illustration with excitement.

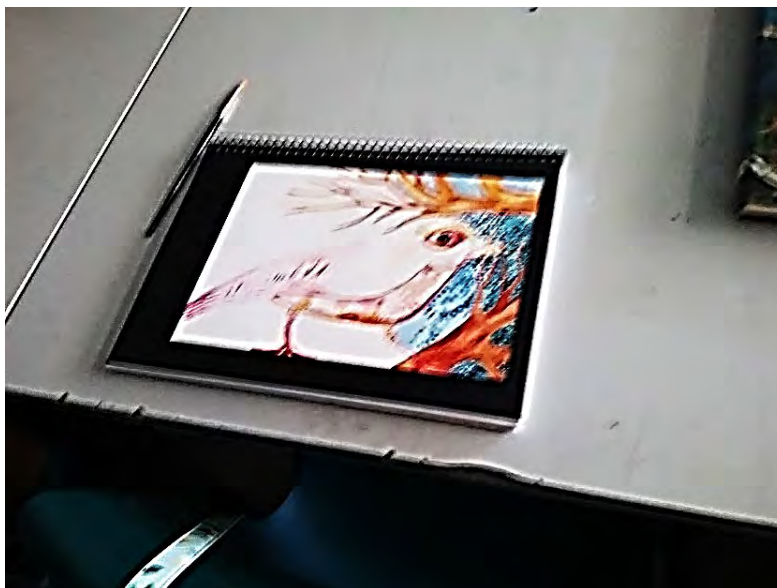


Fig. 2: *Associations with painting birds*. (Photograph of student Visual Art Diary.

Photograph by Shirley Clifton, February 27, 2017)

Shaniya reflected on how it evoked memories of time spent with their sister, and that these memories were further associated with their sexuality. This appeared to affirm Shaniya's identity as an individual and as a sister by engaging in self empathy (Sherman, 2014) and self-affirmation when recollecting painting birds with their sister.

Well, for starters this one, the reason why I did this for my cover is because I'm a part of the LGBTQ community, I am bisexual, so I found this, like, relating to me in some way. I don't know.

Like, this is the only image that I really wanted to make, like, to put onto my cover.

And I don't know why. Maybe because me and my sister, because my older sister is a lesbian, and we were painting birds but in rainbow.

And it just brought back to a lot of memories on that. (Student interview, October 9, 2020)

During the interview, Shaniya also reflected on the way in which they expressed their inner feelings, through making art. These connections were metaphorically shared with the researcher as Shaniya described painting bright flecks of colour on a dark background, juxtaposing their outer brightness with inner feelings of darkness and sorrow and of feeling marginalized.

Like, that's when I was using the darker colours on the canvas because that's how I was feeling. Because I like colours in art, but behind the scenes, I wasn't feeling that. And I put little things in my artworks that represent that, but it doesn't really seem like it. (Student interview, March 19, 2020)



Fig. 3: *Reflecting inner feelings in artmaking.* (Photograph of students in the VA classroom.

Photograph manipulated for the purposes of participant deidentification. Photograph by Shirley Clifton, February 20, 2019)

Shaniya expanded on this reflection referring to another image from their VAD. The image chosen was the head and shoulders of a female figure with a rose in place of the mouth and thorns twisting down around the neck of the figure (Figure 4).

And I always felt like I couldn't say anything, because I thought it was normal. I thought, like, the fighting was normal, the screaming and yelling every night was normal. And then when I came to school, it was all different. I'm, like, well, it seems like I am the only one that suffers this? So, I always felt like my mouth was overgrown with stuff that I couldn't say. That's why there's a rose growing out of her mouth. (Student interview, October 9, 2020)



Fig. 4: *Couldn't speak.* (Photograph of student Visual Art Diary. Photograph by Shirley Clifton, February 20, 2019)

Shaniya’s story, shown in these examples, establishes how Visual Arts learning provides authentic contexts for students to explore and reflect on their identity, relationships with others, and place in the world. Such deeply personal interrogations of subject matter and feelings are afforded by student centred curriculum content and pedagogical decisions. In the research, critical case studies were selected by teachers with sensitivity so that they resonated with the direction of the class’s thinking. Teachers displayed an open tolerance for difference while focusing on a particular artist and technique or, by exploring art movements across time with relevance to the overarching themes emerging in students’ work. These are professional decisions and, as such, they provide opportunities for student artists to not only articulate personal stories, but to also empathize with the stories of historical figures, places, and events, and indeed the ideas of the artist themselves, affirming the importance and depth of the artists’ ideas.

Artful Empathy: Student Artists as Social and Political Commentators

Observations of student VADs illustrate empathic and reflexive engagement with people, social figures, issues, and events, that students selected as their subject matter. One such example is a student who chose Marilyn Monroe as subject matter. In a classroom conversation, Daisy responded to a query as to why Marilyn Monroe had been selected as a case study for portraiture. Daisy described how they viewed the Marilyn Monroe story to be such a sad one because the actress was so famous and regarded as a sex symbol, yet never seemed to have been happy. There is also intrigue and controversy surrounding the famous actress’s death, which is the aspect of Marilyn Monroe that was emphasized in the work. The contradiction between the actress’s public image and her poor mental health in private life, together with unanswered questions surrounding her tragic death, drew Daisy to the story. It was evident to us that Daisy engaged reflexively and empathically with the tragedy in Marilyn’s life that was accentuated by unresolved questions surrounding her death.



Fig. 5: *Marylin conceptual and practical development VA diary entry.*

(Photograph of student Visual Art Diary. Photograph by Shirley Clifton, November 6, 2017)

The image repeats, and the student artist reflects on their interests, lived experience, and ways of interacting with the world.

In the work of another student, political commentary was evident. In a classroom conversation the teacher remarked on and affirmed the validity of the political content in the student's work. The work addressed the plight of refugees on Manus Island.

The Classroom Teacher: Oh I love the division of the mottos. Oh my god that's great.
S1: So, I'm going to do it probably down here. Freedom, no freedom and then up here we're going to do...
The Classroom Teacher: Look at you. I love the concept.
S1: And I'm going to put boats and put Manus.
The Classroom Teacher: Yeah.
S1: And so down the bottom...
The Classroom Teacher: Is it Manus? Manus Island?
S1: Yeah and I'm going to put down the bottom no freedom.
The Classroom Teacher: That's awesome. Good job Manny.
(Classroom conversation, September 11, 2017)

Thus, the focus shifts to artists as social and political commentators, as the student artists engage with broader social and political issues. Such engagement acknowledges the role of student artists as agents of change (Finley, 2005, 2008; Krznic, 2008) who challenge, question, and (re)represent real world events and issues as artefacts.

Lifeworld and Making: Family as Subject Matter

VA studio practice can also support grounding self in familial connections, which were strongly represented as subject matter. Bobbi's preference for sketching is a deeply embodied practice embedded in their awareness of self and memories of childhood. During interview, Bobbi talked about how they are particularly fond of sketching with pencil. They selected an image from their VAD that was a portrait sketch of Rihanna, a popular singer. The sketch was a preliminary work for an oil painting that was the assessable item. Bobbi stated that while happy with their sketch, they were disappointed in the oil painting, explaining that they preferred working with pencil because it held strong associations with their grandfather. There is a clear link between memory and medium in Bobbi's artmaking practice. The obvious enjoyment in sketching and the association of the practice with their grandfather were important to Bobbi, and through memories taking material form in artmaking, enhanced their well-being by empathically engaging with fond memories.



Fig. 6: *Intersection of memory and medium*. (Photograph of student Visual Art Diary.
Photograph by Shirley Clifton, November 1, 2017)

Researcher: So what made you proud of it?

Bobbi: I just thought it was really good, to be honest, I didn't get a good mark in it, but I thought it was great. I like drawing with lead pencil more than anything else. Well, the reason I got into it, is when I was little, my pop used to draw all the time like all the time, and I liked to draw with him, and my mum was like 'you've got like his talent' and he never did it as his profession, he just did it as a hobby, he was like very good at it, he never traced anything, Nan had this tray with these trees on it and he literally just sat there and like drew it and I was like 'that's cool', and then I tried to do it and then I have kept doing it and doing it. Yeah, I was very close to him because my nan was a cleaner so she would work, and me and him would like go shopping, and I'd always get two chocolates, and I'd always get the same chocolates – and then come home and then he'd like draw, and I'd like watch him. (Student interview, November 6, 2017)

This example clearly demonstrates how embodied VA practice incorporates the Lifeworld of student artists. Similarly, during another artmaking task which was a portraiture assignment, Shaniya chose their sister as the subject matter. Students were tasked with creating a realistic portrait of a family member or someone that they knew personally and well, and was a significant figure in their lives. Shaniya chose to do a portrait of their sister as someone with whom they have a deep connection, and who is a person of significance to them. The VA studio learning environment allows Shaniya to articulate inner musings, and honour and acknowledge significant relationships in a supportive, safe space. Indeed, without the teacher's assistance, Shaniya may not have been able to successfully achieve the project concept in the portraiture task. Shaniya found it challenging to attain the correct shading when sketching the portrait, so the teacher demonstrated how to identify the light source and shadows in the photograph, and apply them to the working sketch.

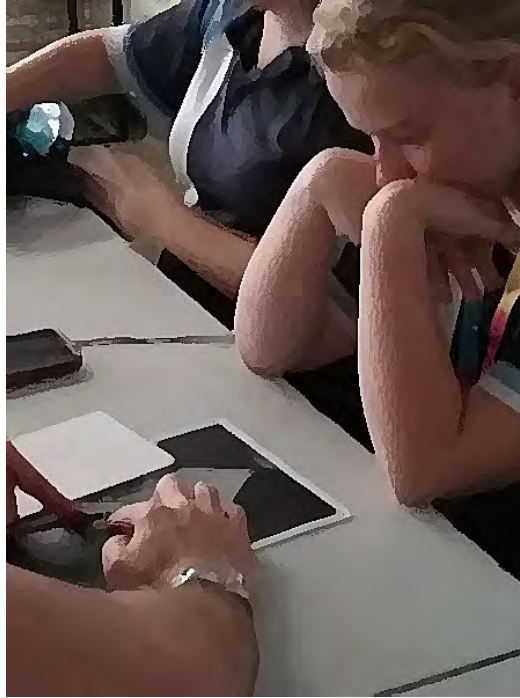


Fig. 7: Finding the shadows. (Photograph of student and teacher in the VA classroom.

Photograph manipulated for the purposes of participant deidentification. Photograph by Shirley Clifton, March 12, 2020)

In the image the despondency of the student is visible, but the teacher honours the lived experience of the student knowing that the artmaking journey is as much about articulating and resolving personal dilemmas as it is about making a resolved artwork. He is explicitly showing the student how to identify the shadows and light source of the source photograph, gently persisting until they understand.

The Classroom Teacher: Well, look where it is. It's under the collar bone, it's here, it's under the chin, down the side of her face. See, that's quite distinct shadow there, so all the shadows are on this side, really. Isn't it?

Shaniya: Mmm.

The Classroom Teacher: So that would say maybe the light came at, not front on but this way.

Shaniya: Mmm. Maybe.

The Classroom Teacher: Well, that's what it looks like to me. It's much, much darker on this side, so this is the side for your predominant shading. So that side is going to be darker. See how that's darker?

Shaniya: Yeah...and here on the face...it comes round. (Classroom conversation, March 12, 2020)

The image below (Figure 8) is from the portraiture project too. Here, Charlie chose to develop a portrait of a close friend nursing their niece.



Fig. 8: *Caring for family*. (Photograph of student Visual Art Diary. Photograph by Shirley Clifton, November 1, 2017)

The photograph selected for the portrait was carefully chosen to show a deep sense of caring. It privileges the importance of family relationships and reflects the student's cultural values.

The selection of subject matter in *Making* is a pivotal intersection of Lifeworld, Artworld, and lived experience in the VA studio practice of student artists where portraiture features significantly (Grushka, 2007b).

The Relational and Aesthetic Conversations: Tolerating Difference and Supporting Each Other

In the conversations between students, the student artists offered advice and support for each other. In the examples selected, the focus has been on being different, being apart. Students and teacher support ranged from their artmaking decisions to empathic perspectives of caring for their peers, acknowledging difference. The empathic co-construction of learning becomes normalized as feelings and relationships are shared while journeying together. Making art sees the students co-construct and enact empathic meanings. Conversations took the form of negotiating ideas between one another and providing aesthetic advice. These conversations in the classroom are demonstrated in the following exchanges. The first is in the context of developing an artwork through aesthetic decision-making.

- S1: Should I add like an eyelid? I have to make it look bigger.
- S2: Oh yeh...that'd be so good!
- S1: I'm not using that idea, but...
- S2: You should do that... (Classroom conversation, August 26, 2016)

The second is a conversation where one student artist links the aesthetic quality of mood in their artwork to the mood in the artwork of their peer as relational and complementary.

S1: Oh my God, it's like this was what they looked like when they were alive and then yours is what they looked when they were dead.

S2: Mine are pretty dark too.

S1: Yeah, and mine's like darker so that's like a mirror image of life and death.

S2: Yeah. And mine's, like, lighter. So, that's, like, a mirror image of life and death.

S3: God, that is so cool.

S2: Ours is a mirror image of life and death. (Classroom conversation, December 5, 2019)

This exchange establishes a relationship between the two artworks that is embraced by both students and admired by their peer. These connections facilitate close relationships between student artists, and together they co-construct a shared understanding about the meanings being communicated.

Artful Empathy: Caring as the Heart of Practice

In the very heart of the ecology is caring and tolerance. Artful Empathy emerges in the intra- and inter-subjectivities of student artists, and their shared meaning making. Intra- and inter-affective actions, interactions, conversations, and reflections, authenticate student artists' caring for self, others, and the world. Empathy occurs in the *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology* as student artists are making and appreciating their own artworks and the artworks of others. The performative possibilities or potentials are evidenced in the art-based learning of students, as artefacts, their conversations of becoming, and their continuous reflections as voice.

The *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology* shows the learning assemblages that make up the ecology. There is always movement and flow, where student artists are creating and embody being as becoming empathic. The interrelational affordances draw together students' lived experience of the world; relationships with friends and family embedded in the intra- and inter-affective conversations during artmaking; and relational and aesthetic conversations about artworks; that are intrinsic to VA studio practice.

Student Voice: Self and Others in Making

The VA classroom is an environment which affords opportunities for students to refine their own ideas through ongoing conversations with teachers, peers, family members, and friends (Grushka, 2007a). Critically, it also provides opportunities, through the process of artmaking as embodied practice, to engage personally, culturally, and socially with the worldviews of others. Authentic conversations occurring in this space therefore embody essential truths about students' experience of the world and their relationships with each other, albeit that they remain processual and in constant flux. In line with Dewey's (1934) notion of "assertability," the concept of truth is operationalized, linked "to practices and processes of inquiry, focusing less on what truth is and more on what truth does" (Capps, 2018, p. 39). It allows the students to journey in and through their lived world.

Devised through an artful and empathic inquiry lens, the *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology* centres the performative act of Making. It is here that Artful Empathy emerges in the intra (VADs) and inter (classroom and interview) reflective voice of student artists. These authentic renderings of empathy are made possible due to the empathic relationships developed between the researcher, as an authentic member of the classroom community, and participants. Through an empathic ethnologically oriented approach to being in the site, the subtle and intimate nuances of actions, interactions, and naturally occurring conversations during artmaking classes, were able to be closely observed and documented. Exploration of self and world are performed through performative acts as artefactual evidence, identified and revealed as artful empathy, enacted through and, dwelling within, visual forms. Being artful is not the exclusive domain of learning in the Visual Arts and has traction beyond the VA classroom, wherever students are afforded the conditions of Artful and Empathic learning.

Artful and Empathic Learning: Resonance Across Disciplines

An artful and empathic lens is presented as attainable for all students when one takes a broader view of the classroom, beyond a VA curriculum learning context. The *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology* presented was identified in a VA classroom context, but essentially empathic connections are shaped through aesthetic and embodied practice via performative acts (Deleuze, 2005). All learning can be performative if it centres the student and their authentic learning.

The ecology's interrelational affordances are about an empathic journeying and have the capacity to resonate with teaching and learning in other curriculum areas where the space between individual, society, and the environment, combine in the learning, whether it be Science or History. In the ecology there is a flattening of the teacher-student hierarchy, which nurtures a tolerance for difference facilitated through the pedagogies present in artful and empathic learning. Artful and Empathic learning ecologies facilitate student artists' empathic engagement with each other and provide a context for diverse voices to be heard. The student voices present here articulate inner sadness; give voice to past trauma; engage empathically with famous figures and contemporary political events; work with fond memories; and affirm collective, cultural, and gender identity. Providing authentic forums that give form to this diversity and marginalization require the kinds of pedagogies that are present within the interrelated elements of the *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology*. Student-centred and co-constructed teaching and learning practices provoke personal and collective insights that support student well-being and continuing engagement in education.

If the affordances are reflected upon in a sincere way by teachers, it will encourage student agency to create thoughtful informed citizens ready to empathically respond to marginalization and act on the world to make change. The discipline areas and their pedagogies all have a contribution to make towards developing empathic students and nurturing environments for individual and collective well-being. Empathic learning ecologies, which will have unique discipline resonance, can afford all students opportunities to:

- i) link their learning with their lifeworld through everyday actions and interactions (Habermas, 1984) while sharing conversations with teachers and peers;
- ii) support learning by valuing enacted and embodied insight;
- iii) experience inclusive classroom cultures through bodily engagement that responds to lived experience, with aesthetic and expressive openness;
- iv) to articulate personal inquiry as embodied through performative inter-subjectively communicated acts; and
- v) render a self-assemblage praxis at the core of becoming artfully and affectively experienced.

These core affordances stimulate expressive experimentation realized through subjective thought and experience as performative actions for learning.

Conclusion

Authentic VA learning experiences establish meaningful relationships between students and teachers where empathy emerges as a state of artful becoming via interactions and reflections. The capacity for VA education to provide aesthetic learning experiences that embed the conditions to support the well-being of young people in schools is conceptualized as the *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology*. It is a learning space where Lifeworld, Artworld, and Making create the conditions where empathic actions and interactions are made possible. In spaces where adolescent vulnerabilities are articulated in conversations and through performative actions, student artworks emerge with communicative potential that can speak poignantly to feeling different or marginalized.

Artful and empathic inquiry has emerged as a conceptual and empathic metaphorical lens for the researcher. Through careful observations and attention to conversations and student voices, empathic journeying was performed through making. The ecology has affordances that emerged through the research process that were seen to support well-being for young people in schools. There are no spaces for teacher hierarchies—simply spaces for sharing and co-constructing meanings together. This research approach recognizes the criticality of student agency to foster deep learning and engaging learning experiences that incorporate student's Lifeworld in curriculum for the development of the whole child. Investigations of applications of the *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology* to diverse education contexts would be relevant across the full spectrum of education from preschool to primary and secondary, as well as tertiary education endeavours, if learning is seen as holistic and builds empathic relationships in the classroom and with the world.

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Paths, Maps, and Pirates: How a Preschool Class Overcame Limits of the Pandemic Through Drama

Keely D. Cline, Meghan Sheil, and Cindy Rouner

Abstract

This article spotlights the power of pushing limits and boundaries through emergent curriculum and process drama as told through the story of a preschool class's exploration of the topics of paths, maps, and pirates. The story is framed in terms of the three phases of the class's project adapted from the Project Approach (Katz et al., 2014), which started prior to the Coronavirus pandemic, but continued and concluded in the midst of it. Reflections and insight are provided by the classroom teacher including as she drew inspiration from the Reggio Emilia Approach and other professional development and experience.

"In our experience, it has been important to have what I call a 'transgressive attitude.' In Reggio Emilia, we have made many choices to transgress or go beyond arbitrary limits. " (Sergio Spaggiari, 2004, Former Director of the Istituzione Scuole e Nidi d' Infanzia - Municipality of Reggio Emilia)

Mrs. Sheil had come to embrace the expectation that with the start of each new school year, there would be new opportunities not only for the children in her classroom at the laboratory preschool where she taught, but also for her, to push limits in exploring and constructing understanding. However, like educators across the globe, she could not have anticipated the unique challenges that would be presented by the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020. In this paper, we share the story of how Mrs. Sheil, inspired by the Reggio Emilia Approach (Edwards et al., 2012), and using emergent curriculum (Biermeier, 2015), listened to the interests of the children in her class and supported their exploration of paths, maps, and pirates, including by incorporating process drama (Brown, 2017). We explore how Mrs. Sheil continued to connect with children and families when the pandemic prevented the class from meeting in person and how she still offered children an opportunity to conclude their project. The story is framed in terms of the three phases of the project, adapted from the Project Approach (Katz et al., 2014). It is also considered in relation to the concept of pushing limits and boundaries and is paired with reflections and insight offered by Mrs. Sheil based on her professional development and experience.

Literature

Pushing Limits in the Preschool Setting

Sergio Spaggiari (2004), former Director of the Istituzione Scuole e Nidi d' Infanzia - Municipality of Reggio Emilia, reflected on the idea of limits and boundaries and young children's education. This included considering the perspective of Loris Malaguzzi, founder of the Reggio Emilia Approach:

The last centuries of our history have been obsessed with limits: geographical limits and borders, divisions in specific fields and disciplines, religious limits and limits to rationality. I think Malaguzzi's attitude was to see the limits and immediately go through them. The impulse of our experience has often taken us well over the limits. Many of you have seen the exhibition, 'The Hundred Languages of Children.' The original title of that exhibition was 'If the Eye Jumps Over the Wall.' It meant that the children's eyes and the adults' eyes must see beyond the wall. This is our aspiration . . . to be able to jump over walls. Children want to go over the wall . . . to go over the wall of banality, to go over the wall of established educational procedures. That is why we chose this title for our first exhibition. It is important to acquire the skill of going over walls, going beyond boundaries, seeing limits and passing through them because, in everyone's life, there are times when you will find barriers that seem impassable, when there are obstacles you feel you cannot overcome. To be able to go over the wall means you can topple cultural paradigms that seem fixed. It means you can turn things on their head. It means you can start with fresh eyes. (pp. 2–3)

Early childhood educators may perceive limits and boundaries imposed at different levels of their environments, ranging from the level of their society to the level of their specific school or center setting. Importantly, there are also limits and boundaries that the educators may impose upon themselves.

The very nature of emergent curriculum, in which "[...] learning is the product of the child's guided construction rather than simply the teacher's transmission and the child's absorption" (Biermeier, 2015, p. 73), sets the stage for pushing limits and boundaries. Biermeier explained:

Emergent curriculum is not a free-for-all. It requires that teachers actively seek out and chase the interests of the children. This kind of teaching environment demands a high degree of trust in the teacher's creative abilities, and envisions an image of the child as someone actively seeking knowledge. (pp. 73–74)

This emphasizes the importance of trusting in the capabilities of the teacher and children. Administrators' and families' lack of trust in the abilities of teachers and children to engage in meaningful learning in the absence of a set curriculum may be a barrier for pursuing learning through emergent curriculum. Additionally, a teacher's lack of trust in her own abilities to effectively follow children's interests, or her lack of trust in the children to be able to actively seek out meaningful knowledge, is also a barrier.

Some teachers may be intimidated by the unpredictability associated with emergent curriculum. Having a set curriculum may feel like a "safe" option because the control is in the hands of the teacher. Chasing the interests of children may take the class into uncharted waters, perhaps forcing the teachers to navigate how to respond to children's interests, with which the teachers themselves may not be fully comfortable. One way teachers may accomplish this is through play and drama in the classroom.

Process Drama

Rigid, compartmentalized views about curriculum that separate subjects and concepts place limits and boundaries on the richness of learning in the preschool classroom. Alternatively, holistic, arts-based teaching helps break through such limits and boundaries. Cooper (2016) asserted:

[...] integrating the performance arts—music, drama, and dance—into core subjects helps young children learn better across the curriculum. Arts-integrated teaching taps into children’s natural desire for active learning through the senses. By singing, dancing, imagining, and connecting their bodies and minds, children learn more deeply and meaningfully [...]. (p. 17)

One approach to integrating the arts into the curriculum is “process drama” (also called “creative drama,” “child drama, and “drama-in education”; Brown & Pleydell, 1999). Brown and Pleydell defined and described process drama as “[...] process-oriented drama with children - not presentation, but exploration of ideas and situations through drama” (p. 4). Brown (2017) also explained:

Process drama is a medium for learning: a dynamic teaching methodology in which teacher and children collaborate to create an imaginary dramatic world and work within that world to explore a problem, a situation, or a story, not for an audience, but for the benefit of the children themselves. (p. 165)

Process drama is an application of the arts that has the potential to provide meaningful experiences in early childhood classrooms. Process drama is especially relevant for young children because it aligns with how young children learn through dramatic play, which may involve pretending to be someone else and/or somewhere else (Brown, 2017). Teachers who engage the children from their early childhood classes in drama in the classroom support the children’s social, emotional, physical, cognitive, and creative development, offering opportunities for children to gain experiences engaging in dialogue, empathy, collaboration, and creative problem-solving (Brown, 2017; Brown & Pleydell, 1999). Meta-analysis research demonstrated that using drama in the classroom has benefits for young children, including increasing achievement in the areas of story understanding, reading readiness and achievement, and writing (Podlozny, 2000).

Responding to Limits Imposed by the Pandemic

Starting in the early months of 2020, early childhood educators around the world were faced with new limitations and boundaries posed by the Coronavirus pandemic. The pandemic brought to the forefront and exacerbated existing issues in early care and education systems and created novel challenges, including in the United States (Hashikawa et al., 2020). There were concerns about the various ways that the pandemic could potentially affect children, including decreased social interaction with peers and loneliness (e.g., Ullah et al., 2021) and increased screen time associated with virtual learning (e.g., Wiederhold, 2020).

While the pandemic has created numerous and multifaceted challenges and hardships, it has also offered unique opportunities for providers of early care and education to adapt to meet the needs of children and families (Hashikawa et al., 2020). The National Association for Education of Young Children collected reflections and recommendations from directors, teachers, and other early childhood professionals in a feature titled, “What Has the Pandemic Taught You?” (NAEYC, 2021). Professionals focused on adaptability and resilience and emphasized the importance of maintaining relationships and connections.

The story of Mrs. Sheil and her preschool class presented in this paper captures how one teacher responded to the limits and boundaries presented by the pandemic, including through offering children opportunities to engage in drama. Staying true to her core beliefs about children and learning, she made adaptations that allowed her to continue to connect with families and provide meaningful experiences that were responsive to the children's interests after they moved to a virtual learning format.

Context

The Phyllis and Richard Leet Center for Children and Families (renamed in 2012 in honor of the generous donation from its namesakes; henceforth referred to as the Leet Center) originated in 1968 in a small house. In 1986, it moved to Brown Hall, which houses the university's School of Education, to serve as a laboratory preschool guided by a child-centered philosophy where professionals could collaborate and aid education students in developing skills in working with young children.

When creating the space that is currently the Leet Center, those involved considered if the preschool's child-centered philosophy was truly leading the direction of the work. This put the preschool on the path toward becoming a place where the administration and teachers explored and tested out progressive approaches consistent with a laboratory school setting. They began to study the Reggio Emilia Approach (Edwards et al., 2012) with Mrs. Rouner, the director, and Mrs. Sheil being part of the first Leet Center cohort to participate in a Study Group to Reggio Emilia. The director and teachers also worked together to develop a model to guide them in implementing the three phases of the Project Approach (adapted from Katz et al., 2014). This model, referred to throughout this paper, was informed by insight gained from their professional development experiences, including study tours to various schools, as well as their understanding and skills developed through their own practice. It reflected the common language they used in discussing their work with children. Additionally, at the time that the story featured in this paper took place, the director and teachers were facilitating a virtual book study group of *The Importance of Being Little* (Christakis, 2016). These professional experiences provided a foundation and inspiration for Mrs. Sheil as she navigated teaching through the pandemic.

An Exploration of Paths, Maps, and Pirates

Phase 1: Getting Started With the Project

About a month into the school year, practicum teacher Ms. Lauren, working alongside Mrs. Sheil, noticed children's interest in riding tricycles around the pea gravel path in the outdoor classroom. Ms. Lauren designed a sensory experience by adding bubble wrap, secured with large wooden blocks, to the path. Ms. Lauren was surprised to find that rather than riding tricycles over the bubble wrap as she had intended, the children instead used the wooden blocks to form new paths. She was initially disappointed that her idea did not "work." However, Mrs. Sheil helped her see the opportunity to truly follow the children's interests. The teachers offered additional materials including colorful dots, wooden planks, and hoops. The children enthusiastically used the materials to create paths (Figure 1) over the following

weeks. Children compared their paths to ones from the “Mario Brothers” video game and this inspired the design of their paths and dramatic play.



Fig. 1: The children create and navigate paths using materials in the outdoors classroom with support from Ms. Lauren.

Mrs. Sheil wanted to support the children’s further exploration of paths. When the class gathered for a Family Meeting, Mrs. Sheil posed the journal prompt question, “Where can paths take you?” and provided the children with materials, including paper, markers, and dot stickers. She intentionally made the prompt and materials open-ended and avoided providing examples. The children used the materials to represent paths, with some children narrating how the paths could take them to different locations such as their houses. However, one child, Hans, described his path by saying, “I just drew a random path.” (Figure 2). Later, the teachers came up with an idea of how to bring the path exploration to life. They used the large colorful dots from the outdoors classroom to make a path that led from the preschool to Mrs. Sheil’s house, which was close to the campus. The children excitedly embarked on their journey of following the colorful dots without being told where the path led. (Figure 3). At the end of the dot path, they found Mrs. Sheil’s house (and popsicles). The morning after the journey, one child, Hudson, volunteered, “I live close to the school. I could draw a map to my house to see my chickens.” Mrs. Sheil noticed that this marked the beginning of the children starting to use the words “map” and “path” interchangeably. She could also see children starting to more deeply grasp that maps serve as models that represent the real world.

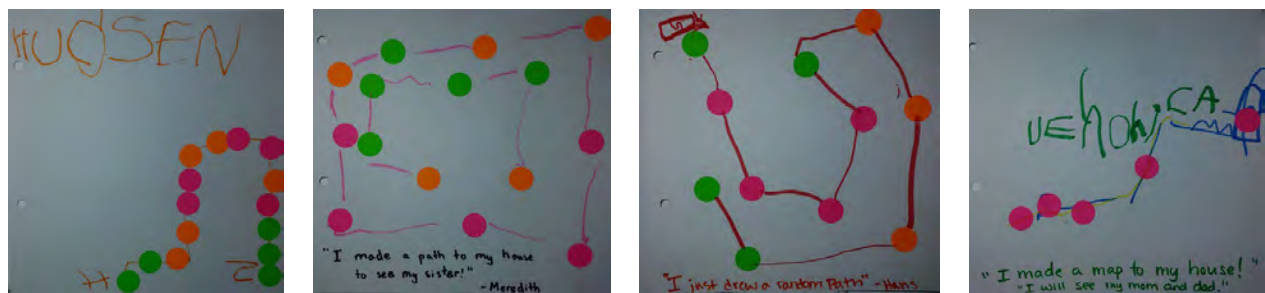


Fig. 2: Children’s dot paths.



Fig. 3: The children create and follow a path to Mrs. Sheil's house adjacent to the university campus.

Interest in paths and maps continued to grow. Path work continued inside with a group of children making paths for their class pets, hermit crabs, to navigate. One child, George, explained the path they made for the hermit crabs, "It's Kansas City and the road to get there."



Fig. 4: George intently watches a hermit crab navigate a path.

Figure 5 shows the components of planning Phase 1 of project work from the Leet Center's adapted model while Figure 6 details how some components of the approach provided structure for Mrs. Sheil in this phase. Figure 7 includes Mrs. Sheil's connections to ideas presented in *The Importance of Being Little* book.



Fig. 5: Components of planning phase 1 of projects; Adapted from Katz et al. (2014) by the Leet Center director and teachers.

- Mrs. Sheil listened to and observed children to gain insight into their “wonderings.” She embraced the view that children have unique perspectives that can take projects in new and unexpected directions.
- Mrs. Sheil collected data by observing children, asking them questions, and listening, recording, and reviewing their answers.
- Upon recognizing children’s interest in paths and then maps, Mrs. Sheil formed a plan to provide materials to support the children’s further exploration and introduced the activity of making a path to her house.
- Ms. Lauren communicated with families about the children’s explorations through a communication binder including text and pictures. Mrs. Sheil used social media to share daily updates.
- The communication binder and social media also served to document children’s learning and make it visible for children and families.
- Providing open-ended materials and helping the children follow the path to Mrs. Sheil’s house served as provocations for new ideas that led from an interest in paths to an interest in maps.
- Children were offered open-ended materials in the outdoor classroom and indoors.
- The “big idea” wondering was focused on understanding and using paths and maps.

Fig. 6: Key features of planning phase 1 of project.

- Mrs. Sheil recognized that effectively identifying children’s peak learning zones is dependent on children and adults having real connections and opportunities to engage in meaningful conversations. This guided her focusing on relationships and the social-emotional climate of her classroom.
- Mrs. Sheil attended to children’s language and sought out ways to help them think out loud. Engaging children in drama in the classroom offered this opportunity.
- Mrs. Sheil embraced the idea that play is the most reliable and time-tested way to make learning visible. She intentionally ensured that children had ample opportunities to engage in dramatic play and she observed and interacted with children in play to gain insight into their learning.
- Mrs. Sheil understood that there is often an absence of recognition that young children are unique people with their own ideas, feelings, thoughts, tastes, and experiences. She worked to ensure that children and their ideas were respected and honored.

Fig. 7: Teacher reflections on phase 1 of project based on ideas presented in “The Importance of Being Little” (Christakis, 2016).

Phase 2: Rich Study Leading From Paths to Maps to Pirates

The children’s interest in paths and maps continued to grow over the course of the fall and even after the children returned from the winter break. Mrs. Sheil recognized and followed this interest and also took the initiative to keep it “alive” by introducing new related provocations. The children became increasingly focused on the idea that maps could be used to find places of interest. In early February, Hudson introduced a new facet to the exploration. Hudson’s strong interest in pirates inspired him to spend an entire morning creating a pirate treasure map. Mrs. Sheil recognized that this development appeared to be a new direction in the exploration that started with paths and then maps. With this in mind, she engaged Hudson in a conversation about how the path work turned into his map idea, videotaping this conversation so that she could further analyze it.

Hudson wanted to share his creation with some of his friends. James and Charlie listened attentively as Hudson showed them his pirate treasure map and provided a detailed explanation of its features, complete with an “X marks the spot” of where the long lost treasure was buried (Figure 8). The small group of children excitedly embraced this imaginative plot and determined that they needed a pirate ship to take them on their adventure. This new development introduced a new level of imagination and adventure into the exploration.



Fig. 8: Hudson explains his pirate treasure map while other children attentively listen.

Mrs. Sheil considered that this could offer a rich opportunity for process drama focused on pirates, maps, and treasure, and she suggested inviting the other children in the class to take part in the exploration.

Following, at a Family Meeting, all children were invited to draw pirate ship plans in their journals (Figure 9). The planned ships reflected the children's unique personalities and interests. For example, one girl expressed her favorite color through her design that she labeled as "My pink ship." As another example, a boy who was a passionate fan of Batman drew this character aboard his ship. From these plans, the children discussed and made a list of what parts they would need to construct the pirate ship. Mrs. Sheil then accompanied the small group of children involved in creating the ship to the materials room (called the "treasure trash" room by the children) to find the parts. The children collected a large rectangular box, additional cardboard to make flags, a gold-colored fixture to serve as a wheel, and a rope.

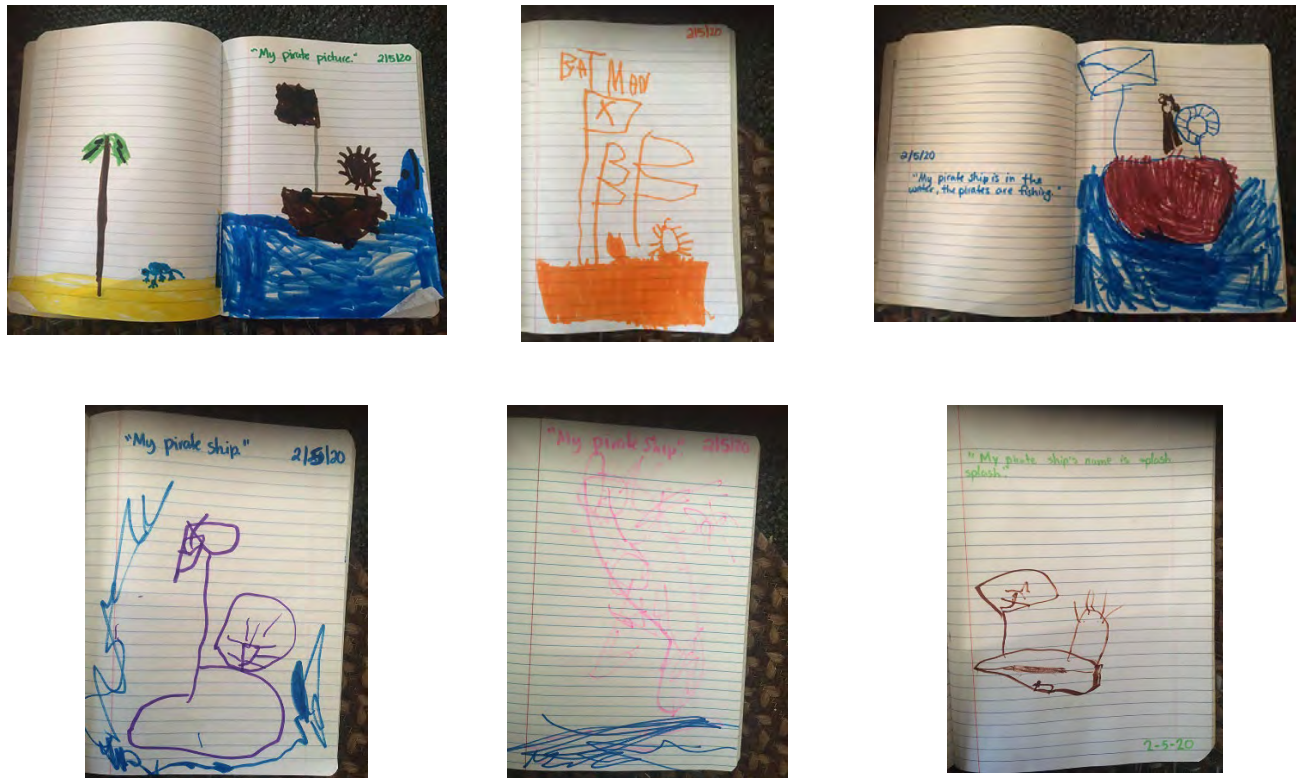


Fig. 9: Children's pirate ship plans in their journals.

After gathering parts, the children began the process of constructing and painting their ship. This work spanned across two weeks. Upon initiating the work, they made some modifications to their design. For one, they realized that they needed to add an anchor. Mrs. Sheil helped them get some Styrofoam to make the anchor. Also, as they were testing out their ship, the children discovered there was not enough room for all of their group members. To solve this problem, they decided to add a lifeboat attached with their rope to make more room (Figure 10).



Fig. 10: The children paint their pirate ship, create the anchor, and engage in dramatic play as they test out their pirate ship.

As the children continued daily work on the pirate ship, the topic of pirates was further integrated in class discussions. The class considered what they knew about pirates. While some children were highly engaged in this exploration, a couple of girls expressed that they did not want to learn about pirates because pirates are “bad guys” and that they wanted to learn about princesses instead. Mrs. Sheil reflected on this sentiment. This was not the first time that Mrs. Sheil had taken a pause to question whether she should be supporting the children’s exploration of pirates. Was focusing on pirates celebrating the “bad guys?” Would families have concerns about this? Should Mrs. Sheil redirect children’s focus to a different topic?

When reflecting on the above questions, Mrs. Sheil kept returning to insight she had gained during her participation in her study tour in Reggio Emilia. When visiting one of the Italian preschools, she was surprised to see children playing with plastic toy figurines depicting characters from a popular animated movie. Up to that point, she interpreted what constituted Reggio Emilia Approach practices to be relatively narrow and specific and she expected that plastic toys and movie characters would not be allowed to avoid a commercialized environment. When talking to the Italian teacher, Mrs. Sheil received the message that “nothing is off limits” in their classroom. Any materials could be on the table; it was how the materials were presented and used that mattered. This provoked Mrs. Sheil to question some of her previous assumptions and left a lasting imprint on her. She experienced a newfound freedom and sense of permission in knowing that she could find inspiration in the theories and values of the Reggio Emilia Approach without feeling limited by boundaries in regards to what topics the children might explore and what materials they might utilize.

The concern about pirates expressed by some of the children prompted Mrs. Sheil to ask the children, “Are pirates ‘bad guys?’” As a class, they discussed that some pirates are indeed “bad guys,” with children noting that some pirates steal, kill, and have bad teeth. However, the children playing leading roles in the exploration volunteered that this was not the “kind” of pirates that they were going to be in their class. Rather, they were going to be what Hudson referred to as “treasure-looking” pirates. This seemed to comfort and appease the students who had been resistant to pursuing the exploration of pirates. With this shared understanding, the class proceeded with their project. Mrs. Sheil introduced resources about pirates, including a children’s book, *Shiver Me Letters* by June Sobel. The class engaged in a game and dramatic play inspired by the book that involved groups of children hiding “pirate treasure” (i.e., large

wooden letters) around the classroom for their classmates to hunt. The children took turns hiding and hunting for the letters. Exploration and representation of pirates and related topics continued in other forms such as captured in Figure 11.



Fig. 11: Children get ready to hide letters like “pirate treasure” (left); Charlie and Hudson discuss as Hudson represents Captain Blackbeard’s ship in his drawing (right).

Figure 12 shows the components of planning Phase 2 of project work from the Leet Center’s adapted model while Figure 13 details how some components of the approach provided structure for Mrs. Sheil in this phase. Figure 14 includes Mrs. Sheil’s connections to ideas presented in *The Importance of Being Little* book.

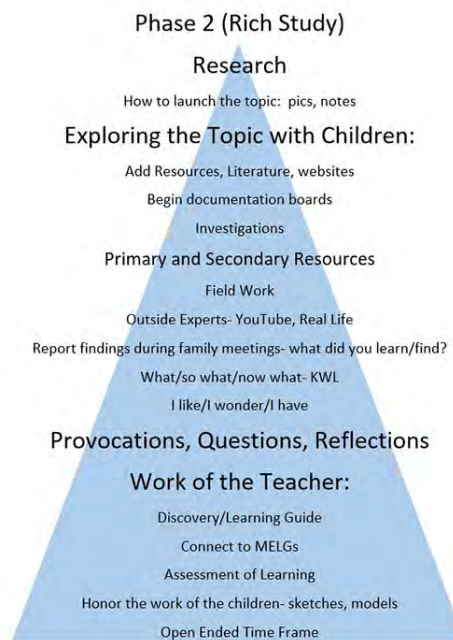


Fig. 12: Components of planning phase 1 of projects; Adapted from Katz et al. (2014) by the Leet Center director and teachers.

- Mrs. Sheil **explored the topic** of pirates with the children. This included discussions about what children already knew. One child was highly interested in the topic and contributed what he had learned through his exploration of pirates at home through books and movies.
- Mrs. Sheil **added new resources** including children's books about pirates.
- Mrs. Sheil facilitated a discussion in which the children reflected on the provocation, "I wonder if pirates are bad."
- Mrs. Sheil **honored the ideas and work** of the children by inviting them to sketch their pirate ship plans.
- Mrs. Sheil ensured that the children had an **open-ended time frame** for working on their project. The exploration that started with paths and then moved to maps and pirates spanned over months. Children were not limited in the time allotted for designing and constructing their pirate ship. Without time restrictions, the children continued to add to the complexity of their design, adding an anchor and a lifeboat.

Fig. 13: Key features of planning phase 2 of project.

- Mrs. Sheil reflected on the idea that preschool can be boring if teachers underestimate children's cognitive capacities and insult their intelligence with foolish and unimaginative curricula. She was attuned to children's potential and interests.
- Mrs. Sheil pondered on the question of, "What motivates children to learn?" She knew that children pay attention to letters that mean something to them. Children in her class were interested in pirates and treasure-hunting. Rather than using a traditional "letter of the week" approach, she integrated an alphabet book about pirates and provided a treasure-hunting game where letters were the treasure.
- Mrs. Sheil considered that if children are engaged in purposeful activities, it is the purposefulness, not the topic or kind of activity, that matters most. She asked herself, "Does it matter if pirates are good or bad, as long as the children are engaged in the exploration?"
- Mrs. Sheil was mindful about giving children space and time to enact their plans.

Fig. 14: Teacher reflections on phase 2 of project based on ideas presented in "The Importance of Being Little" (Christakis, 2016)

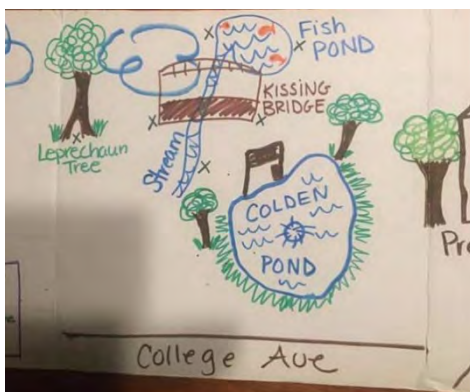
Phase 3: Adapting Process Drama to Find Treasure During the Pandemic

By March, the pirate ship had really come together. The children were engaging in dramatic play with it, and it just needed the last finishing touches to really be complete. The Leet Center was scheduled to have a one-week spring break aligning with the university schedule. Mrs. Sheil was excited to see the children truly "set sail" on their adventure when they returned from spring break. Corresponding with the concept of process drama, Mrs. Sheil intended to dedicate time over the break to move the children's pirate ship into the dramatic play area and to add a few props (e.g., a blue sheet to lay under the boat for water). She also planned to engage the children in discussion after the break to see what additional props they thought they needed and to then invite families to donate items. Props she had in mind included pirate dress-up clothes, bandanas, eye patches, binoculars, and a sand table where children could bury items; with emergent curriculum in mind, though, she wanted to see what ideas the children came up with before offering her own suggestions. However, as the pandemic's grip on the world tightened, a decision was made that the university (including the Leet Center) would not resume meeting on campus for the remainder of the spring semester. The preschool director and teachers decided that they would work to engage with children and family in a virtual format, though they were not sure exactly how they

would approach this. When Mrs. Sheil returned to her classroom to quickly gather a few teaching items she paused and took in the empty classroom. It pulled at her heartstrings as she reflected on how the school family would never again come together to sit on the carpet, and how the nearly finished pirate ship would never set sail.

Over the coming weeks, Mrs. Sheil and her fellow teachers and director strived to maintain connections with children and families and provide meaningful experiences and opportunities in a virtual format. As they experimented with different strategies, the teachers and director discovered it was important to keep school family traditions alive. Prior to the pandemic, children in Mrs. Sheil's class brought favorite items from home in the class "Share Bag" to show the other children. During the pandemic, Mrs. Sheil delivered "Share Bags" to the individual children's homes and invited them to talk about their special items in a virtual meeting with the class. Mrs. Sheil also moved the pre-pandemic school family tradition of the "Counting Jar" (where children guessed how many items are in a jar) to a virtual format during the pandemic. The teachers and director also noticed that children seemed to be more engaged when the teachers used familiar locations from campus as the backdrop for their virtual class meetings.

As the weeks of the pandemic passed, Mrs. Sheil continued to think about the children's pirate ship, anchored in the classroom, abandoned and empty. Was there a way for Mrs. Sheil to keep the magic going? How might she breathe life back into the project, and by doing so honor and celebrate the children's ideas and plan to follow their map to the buried pirate treasure? After much reflection, Mrs. Sheil came up with an idea. For the final virtual class meeting, Mrs. Sheil started out videotaping from a walking path on campus. She had with her a treasure map (modeled after the one created by Hudson) and the children's pirate ship. She also had the book *The Lost Treasures of Skull Island* by Martin Taylor and Duncan Smith. She read the book to the children. She then "followed" the treasure map to the X's near Colden Pond (i.e., at the Leprechaun Tree, Fish Pond, Kissing Bridge). Here she found treasure (i.e., plastic jewels and gold painted shells that she previously planted). Mrs. Sheil encouraged children and families who were watching virtually to also follow the map to find the treasure at their convenience (Figure 15).



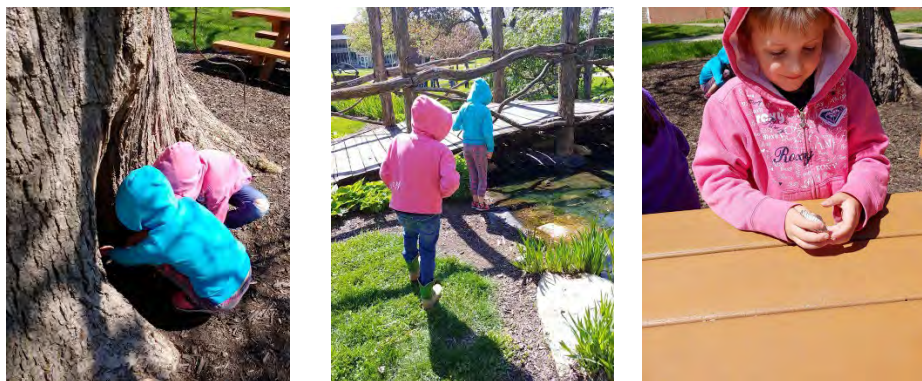


Fig. 15: Mrs. Sheil shares with the children (via the virtual class meeting and the class social media platform) her pirate treasure map, which according to August, looked like the one made by Hudson (as communicated by August's mother via comments in the class social media platform) (top); Hudson and his sister hunt for treasure around the pond after participating in the virtual class meeting (bottom).

Additionally, Mrs. Sheil planned a special surprise for Hudson whose interest in maps and pirates had played a special role in the project. She coordinated with Hudson's family so when Hudson returned from searching for treasure at the pond, he would find the pirate ship (filled with the book about pirates and pirate-themed dramatic play materials) in his yard (Figure 16). Though this was not her original plan, through her adaptive approach, she was able to help the children conclude their project in the spirit of the concept of process drama.



Fig. 16: Upon returning from their treasure hunt at the pond, Hudson and his sister discover that the pirate ship and other pirate materials have been planted in their yard.

Figure 17 shows the components of planning Phase 3 of project work from the Leet Center's adapted model while Figure 18 details how some components of the approach provided structure for Mrs. Sheil in this phase. Figure 19 includes Mrs. Sheil's connections to ideas presented in *The Importance of Being Little* book.



Fig. 17: Components of planning phase 3 of projects; Adapted from Katz et al. (2014) by the Leet Center director and teachers.

- Since the pandemic disrupted the plans for constructing a dramatic play area in the classroom where children could further carry out their process drama focused on pirates, Mrs. Sheil had to be adaptive to find an alternative way to **wrap up** the project.
- Mrs. Sheil came up with the idea of featuring the pirate ship in the final virtual class meeting as a way of **celebrating and sharing** the children's project work.
- While children could not **gather** together as a class to set sail in the pirate ship and hunt for treasure, the virtual class meeting, followed by the invitation for families to later come hunt for treasure at the pond, offered a socially distanced alternative that was in the spirit of process drama.
- Mrs. Sheil **made the children's project work public** for families in the final virtual class meeting by featuring the pirate ship in her dramatization of following the map to the treasure and inviting children to come find the treasure with their families.

Fig. 18: Key features of planning phase 3 of project.

- Mrs. Sheil embraced the idea that playing and laughing together can be more important and educational than drilling on numbers and letters in her virtual class meetings.
- Mrs. Sheil wanted children to have pride in the mastery of the complex skills that went into designing and creating their ship and ownership of the finished product. Even though the children could not all be together in one place to celebrate and engage in dramatic play/process drama with the ship, Mrs. Sheil honored the children's work by integrating the ship into her final virtual class meeting and planting the ship in one child's yard.

Fig. 19: Teacher reflections on phase 3 of project based on ideas presented in "The Importance of Being Little" (Christakis, 2016).

The Rest of the Story

For Hudson, the adventure did not end with finding the pirate treasure. As the pandemic continued through the summer months, the pirate ship that Hudson constructed with his friends at school became an important prop in his dramatic play at home. As an incoming kindergartener, Hudson participated in the virtual summer school program offered through the Horace Mann Laboratory School that collaborates with the Leet Center. A focus of the summer school program was movies and drama. Hudson became interested in the idea of putting on plays with his siblings during this time. After watching a videotaped version of *The Pirates of Penzance* with his family, Hudson wanted to act out the story of the opera (including the song “I Am the Pirate King”) with his siblings. They used a recording of the song that they sang and danced to (in costumes) while using the pirate ship as a prop. Hudson also had the idea of using a homemade “rainstick” (made with a paper towel roll, dried beans, tinfoil, and tape) constructed as part of the virtual summer school program to make the sound effects of the ocean while they engaged in the drama. Figure 20 shows Hudson engaged in this play and drama, including with his siblings. At the time that this article was written, the pirate ship remains stored in Hudson’s garage and he periodically requests to get it out so he can play with it.



Fig. 20: Hudson engages in dramatic play with his pirate ship at home.

Conclusion

The intentional choice to transgress and go beyond arbitrary limits is an important feature of the Reggio Emilia Approach (Spaggiari, 2004). Gandini (2006) reflected on the founder of the Reggio Emilia Approach, explaining:

Malaguzzi loved to cross boundaries, he loved to inhabit the border areas. Not boundaries which have been established once and for all, or defined a priori; but boundaries perceived as places for meeting and exchange, where knowledge and action pursue and feed each other. (p. 170)

Mrs. Sheil had engaged in studies of the Reggio Emilia Approach, including in a Study Group to Reggio Emilia. This helped inspire her to appreciate inhabiting the “border areas” in her work. She had become reflective and intentional about asking herself “Why?” before she made decisions to say “no” to children’s requests or to redirect their interests. This was evident in how she responded to the children’s interest in

exploring the topic of pirates. Even though the idea of doing a project focused on “bad guys” gave her pause, she was reminded of her reflection that “nothing is off limits” and decided to support the children’s exploration while being sure to monitor the directions of the project and to support children in framing topics appropriately. Appreciating how children learn through dramatic play, Mrs. Sheil envisioned how she could collaborate with the children through exploration, including by incorporating process drama (Brown, 2017).

When the pandemic hit, Mrs. Sheil, was faced with new challenges, limits, and boundaries. As she continued to teach through the pandemic, Mrs. Sheil drew on her years of teaching experience and her core beliefs about children and teaching informed by her studies of the Reggio Emilia approach.

When education was moved to a virtual format, Mrs. Sheil was sensitive to the children’s loss of the physical environment of the classroom and the university campus on which the school was located. This relates to the concept of place-based education. According to Franz (2019):

Place-based education uses local cultures, heritage, landscapes, opportunities, and experiences to create a curriculum in which literacy, mathematics, social studies, science, and arts learning occur in the context of place. That is, learning focuses on local themes, natural resources, and content; it is relevant to children’s daily lives and experiences.” (p. 4)

The pandemic prevented children from being together in the places that had become familiar and emotionally significant to them. Mrs. Sheil wanted to integrate a sense of place into her final virtual class meeting. As explained above, she used two familiar places from the university campus where the school is located (i.e., a campus walking trail and the pond adjacent to the preschool) as the backdrop for the virtual meeting. This offered children an opportunity to reconnect with significant places that had regularly been part of their lives and educational experiences prior to the pandemic. The excitement associated with Mrs. Sheil’s invitation for children to engage in dramatic play (as treasure-hunters seeking “pirate treasure” around the pond) with their families was further enhanced by children’s familiarity and prior experiences with the setting.

Mrs. Sheil’s beliefs about children and teaching have been influenced by continued professional development and her teaching practices have been further cultivated by working in a laboratory preschool setting where administration and fellow teachers embrace questioning current practices and testing out progressive approaches. These experiences and supports provided a strong foundation as Mrs. Sheil’s class (figuratively) set sail on their journey of exploring the topics of paths, maps, and pirates. The pandemic could have resulted in an abrupt end to the project, leaving the children feeling lost at sea or marooned on their own desert islands. However, Mrs. Sheil’s creative approach, which was in the spirit of process drama (Brown, 2017), supported children in concluding the final phase of their project, giving them a path for discovering that the “X” on their maps indeed marked the spot where they would find treasure. However, we suggest that the true treasure was the rich experiences offered by the opportunity to engage in meaningful and authentic learning, even in the midst of the pandemic.

Note

Children's and teachers' actual names were used unless it was requested that a pseudonym be used in place of the actual name.

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Meghan Sheil, MS, has been an early childhood instructor for 22 years. She recently began a new journey at Tree Top Academy, a Reggio Inspired school setting in Jupiter, Florida, as a pre-kindergarten teacher. Prior to this, she taught in a multiage preschool and mentored preservice practicum teachers at The Phyllis and Richard Leet Center for Children and Families, a NAEYC accredited laboratory school located on the campus of Northwest Missouri State University. The opportunity to teach young children, mentor practicum students, teach in Northwest's early childhood teacher preparation program, present at local and national conferences, and attend the study tour in Reggio Emilia, Italy, has guided her own professional development.



Cindy Rouner, MS, works with the Regional Professional Development Center at Northwest Missouri State University. This position allows her to share the wealth of knowledge and experience with other professionals that she gained in her 11 years of serving as the director of the Phyllis and Richard Leet Center for Children and Families. Her professional interests revolve around inspiring teachers and families to honor children, including their abilities to think and learn. Rouner attributes her deeper understanding in honoring the intellectual and emotional integrity of children in part to the opportunity to participate in a study tour to Reggio Emilia.

Poetic and Visual Explorations in Pandemic Teaching

Jason D. DeHart

Abstract

This article considers the experience of a literary professor working to maintain connections and creativity—as well as model pedagogy—in the context of Fall 2020. The author created invitations for undergraduate and graduate students to reflect on experiences and engage with texts/course readings, using poetic and visual choices for composing. This article includes examples of creations from this context, including mentor text work, as well as implications for creativity in online instruction.

Framework

Since 2008, the author has explored the use of visual and poetic arts in classrooms, beginning with their experiences as a middle school/grade 8 English teacher. This piece explores a series of next steps in creative, analytic response and responsive writing that students engaged with in the Fall 2020 semester, in the context of hours of online interactions in web-based conferencing platforms.

Though explored in other contexts, including India (Varma & Jafri, 2020) and Pakistan (Gul & Khilji, 2021), the notion of responsive teaching during the pandemic is still fruitful for discussion. The problem of reflecting on experience, uniting creative expression and research, and finding creativity and poetic encounters in composing, has been explored recently from a perspective that focuses on gender studies and feminist critique (Mandalaki & Daou, 2021). Writing from a vantage in chemistry education, Wilson (2020) noted the challenges and affordances of moving instruction online into a web-based platform. These moves and adaptations frame this conversation in terms of the technical skills and the needed balance between online interactions and in-person laboratory work. This range of consideration across space and throughout disciplines speaks to the overarching nature of questions of online engagements that educators from a variety of situations in life have found themselves attempting to negotiate since 2020.

For this author's courses, the adaptation of face-to-face interactions to online facilitation was guided by the questions: "What stays in the safe in face-to-face and online instruction?" and "How can teachers still facilitate learning and maintain relationships in online instruction?" These questions were central in framing online encounters, particularly as the author is a teacher of preservice and in-service teachers and wanted to frame practices in a replicable way. In partial answer to these questions, the author devoted time to checking in with students both through informal conversations and anonymous Google form surveys, to get a sense of the time students were spending online. Students reported anecdotally that much of their time was consumed with screen-based interactions; in the context of the pandemic, this was not surprising. Many students also engaged with work-based responsibilities in online platforms. Hillyer et al. (2021) have written about the difficulties and affordances of balancing virtual and in-person

instruction and composition in literacy instruction. When the screen is our safest way of encountering one another, doing work, and sustaining relationships, the result is great exposure to digital texts and ways of being/interacting.

Given the author's acknowledgment of these challenges and hopeful perspective on what could be accomplished, students were invited to explore texts and experiences through a range of methods. For example, as expanded on in this article, the author used both poetic and visual/comics-based approaches to allow students a range of ways to respond to course readings and time to step away from the screen so that responses could be composed using paper, pen, and other media. One student reported that this was the first time they had used paper in close to a year in a course. All of this work stemmed from a theoretical foundation in responsive teaching. Smith et al. (2016) have noted that characteristics of responsive teaching include a future-framed orientation as educators work to prepare and support students in the present, as well as in anticipation of challenges to come, and that the individual's path or development toward learning is at center.

Van Manen (1995) mentioned framing a "pedagogical thoughtfulness and tact to describe the improvisational pedagogical-didactical skill of instantly knowing, from moment to moment, how to deal with students in interactive teaching-learning situations" (p. 8). Certain tenets ring true for this author's approach, including the notion of future-orientation in thinking about challenges in the moment and to come, as well as the opening of multiple avenues of artistic expression to reflect on course readings. Finally, the improvisational nature of this approach, as Van Manen (1995) described, is ontologically embedded as the author did not begin the semester with this artistic and open-ended approach in mind, but adapted flexibly and in response to student experience, to shape a course that could meet students where they found themselves emotionally and physically.

This article traces both the poetic and visual/comics-oriented responses that students created in the pandemic context.

The Poetic Journey

The emotional affordances of poetry and the brevity of the form were uniquely suited to the fast-paced and uncertain nature of the Fall 2020 semester. Lahman et al. (2021) pointed to poetry as a means of processing experiences and emotions during this time, and noted the challenges that educators felt in translating work into online spaces. Hanauer (2004) has pointed to both the ubiquitous and essential nature of poetry as part of life and as part of curriculum, as well as the ways in which poetry affords personal expression, and Cahnmann (2006) suggested that, "The act of reading poetry is an underused resource for developing teachers' abilities to attend deeply to what students are saying and how they say it" (p. 347). This author's experience began with using poetic texts as read-alouds, including picture books and verse novels. *I Am Every Good Thing* (Barnes & James, 2020) and *Other Words for Home* (Warga, 2019) were two text choices that were used either as stand-alone read-alouds through a shared e-reader screen in a virtual synchronous space, or as page-based asynchronous interactions.

The author used their own work and process as a mentor text for the engagements, including the poem seen in Figure 1, which was part of a previous research project. This use of mentor text aligned with Gallagher's (2011) framing of writing, a practical step that has been part of the author's repertoire as they have travelled across a range of teaching contexts.

The Seer

A three-year vision,

swirling with **dreams,**

now compounded in a

sigh,

building **rapport,**

finding that voice

through **elements of story,**

being careful not to

miss the message,

I know I'm not alone.

Fig. 1: The author's poetic mentor text.

The poem presents unique affordances in the way it combines words from a teacher, who was part of the previous study, with the author's own phrasing that works as a literary connective tissue. Elements of the poem aligned with the author/instructor's intentions for framing course interactions in the pandemic context, including the experience of connection, the sense that individuals are not alone, though isolated physically, the elements of story that were central to course content, and even the emotional response of sighing as a normalized aspect of human response. From the mentor texts provided by literature and the author's work, students composed on paper and were encouraged to step away from the screen.

The poetic prompt, "Tell me about life right now," generated both images of toppling houses as metaphors for broken experiences and disconnections, as well as invitational reading of poetic pieces. One student posted their response anonymously on the class Padlet, seen in Figure 2. The post begins with the poet's intentions to share the piece, as well as their expression of appreciation for the use of poetry as a way of processing. The poet's note about the future again circles back to the theoretical framing of responsive teaching that the author has sought to employ, and which continues to be work that is shaped as circumstances shift.

Poem for "Life Right Now..."

Just wanted to share the poem
I wrote! (: Love writing poetry
and really does help me process

Life right now seems,
confusing.
I feel like I am wandering
around
Having so many questions
About what the future will look
like.

What future will look like for my
Students
Family
Loved ones
Friends
Myself
Professors
Those who are sick.

Fig. 2: A student poet's response, posted on Padlet.

These poetic interactions took place both within the space of the class meeting online, as well as within the engagement students wanted to practice outside of class time. Students had the opportunity to share in the class meeting, but were not required to do so; similarly, students could post their work on Padlet, but were not required to do so. Emotional processing was more important, in this case, than accountability.

The poetic text captures the uncertainty and questioning that the student experienced in stanza one, and concludes with a question about the future as a not-as-yet clear reality. This future view is explored in stanza two in relation to a range of people, including those close to the student and those who were part of the educational community, as well as general concern for those who might be sick. The use of poetry through mentor texts and invitation allowed for processing of these feelings and experiences, which were often not as easily or comfortably stated in informal class check-ins.

The use of mentor texts has been noted in teaching memoir writing, including poetic and graphic novel memoirs (Meixner, 2018). The author next turned their practice and attention to graphic novel/comics-based interactions and multimodal mentor texts.

Using Comics

The author's understanding of the multimodal power of visual and artistic texts stem from a personal history as a comics reader, as well as the work of Albers and Harste (2007), who situated visual and verbal, as well as digital, composition not as separated or binary approaches, but as a seamless range of tools and methods for reading and writing practices. This focus on the multimodal has further foundations

in the work of Jewitt et al. (2001) in their examination of how students make meaning and negotiate text through multiple modes of communication, including visual, digital, and verbal modes.

The beginning steps of multimodal memoir were shared by using *I Am Every Good Thing* (Barnes & James, 2020) as a read-aloud, pairing image and text on a digital screen. The term “multimodality,” used by scholars in the literacy field, refers to the sharing of meaning across multiple modes of communication, with each mode enabling a sense of affordance and entailing a set of designs that allow for specific communication practices. In the case of Barnes and James’s (2020) work, the poetic form of the printed page acts as one way of communicating experience and, in this case, breaking down stereotypes. The images contained in the text are juxtaposed with the words to allow for additional meaning-making through design elements like color and line. Jewitt and Kress’s (2010) work is seminal in this author’s use of multimodality, which considered both linguistic and semiotic ways of making meaning. Comics and graphic novels present these modes in a unique design that interweaves images and words as overlapped and integral features.

Once more, elements of the poetic nature of written response and the practice of writing with a mentor text, were traced through this work over the course of the semester. Figure 3 demonstrates the author’s use of a mentor text to serve as an inspiration, rather than only a guide, for student responses. The author shared this example in the meeting prior to the due date for responses.



Fig. 3: Author’s multimodal mentor text.

The author composed this initial mentor text in response to the novel *Milkweed* by Spinelli (2010). One concern in this process was the difficulty of finding a range of materials for making, and so the piece was made from scrap sheets of junk mail that were laying around the house, a “canvas” which could be fashioned from a cardboard sheet, black marker, and three colors of paint (black, white, and yellow) that could be mixed to create different shades. The author sketched the image of Poland at the bottom of the canvas across the back of an unused envelope using a reference image, with notes above the cityscape about texts that might be used to connect to *Milkweed* in a text set.

The “jackboot” image above this was sketched in black marker on a mail catalog page, illustrating a vocabulary word from the novel that would lead to more conversation and exploration, and the figure of the character to the right of this image was composed on a similar page. The use of dark colors and shadows from black paint, sometimes mixed with white paint, helped to contribute to the atmosphere, while the yellow sun image, somewhat obscured, points to hope, as well as the overlaid white milkweed blossom above the jackboots scrap, which is another symbol of hope that is endemic to the book.

This use of found materials for the mentor text stemmed from the author’s thinking and the collaboration of a teaching team who noted that the raw pieces of what could be fashioned into artistic responses in the context of pandemic, or at any time, might be limited in some households. The author introduced the use of a multimodal option for making in response as a choice for the second text in the course, and carried into responding with the third text. Those readings were, respectively, *Other Words for Home* (Warga, 2019) and *New Kid* (Craft, 2019).

A range of responses were collected, and the author presents three such examples in the context of this article. They are depicted in Figures 4, 5, and 6.



Fig. 4: Sandie’s response to “Other Words for Home.”

A student composed the first response after reading the verse novel, *Other Words for Home*. The central image of Jude, the main character, takes up the foregrounded space of the image and illustrates the largest investment of coloring on the page. The character's hijab is prominent, as it is on the cover of the book. Sandie, the undergraduate student who composed this response, writes a setting, as well as elements of the story and theme, in a heart shape at the center of the character. Students shared responses through an online turn-it-in platform and students could then have the opportunity to showcase their work in our class meeting—again, this presentation to peers was not required.

Around this central image, a number of words are included, such as questions that Sandie might ask future students: “How does stepping into her identity change her P.O.V.?” and “How does her past influence her future?” Other textual renderings on the page share key terms and ideas, character names, and cultural elements of the story. Images include reflections on the dramatic/theatrical cultural elements that exist in the book as Jude becomes a figure who disrupts stereotypes about cultures as removed entities that do not overlap with the experiences of children in the United States.

Sandie's comics-inspired page does not include panels, gutters, or other features that are conventional in the medium (McCloud, 1994), but does include thought bubbles and a juxtaposition of words and images which align with this method of composition.



Fig. 4: Caitlin's response to "Other Words for Home."

In Caitlin's response, a similar juxtaposition of words and images is employed, with some differences. The composition of the page included a painted aesthetic, and word art/lettering is incorporated with the word "Big." The image of the home is central, with representations of other characters depicted in space around this image. Caitlin depicts the difficulty of negotiating language, the violence that Jude's family

members endure through the inclusion of fire, and the emotions contained in the book across the faces that the reader/viewer encounters. The image of the plane at the top of the page indicates the journey that the character would find herself on, from one side of the page to the other. A supporting character is depicted on the side of the page where Jude is traveling from. While Sandie's response leans more heavily on words with some smaller images, Caitlin's response features both in relative balance, with eight to nine images existing in juxtaposition to collected thoughts and quotes from the text.

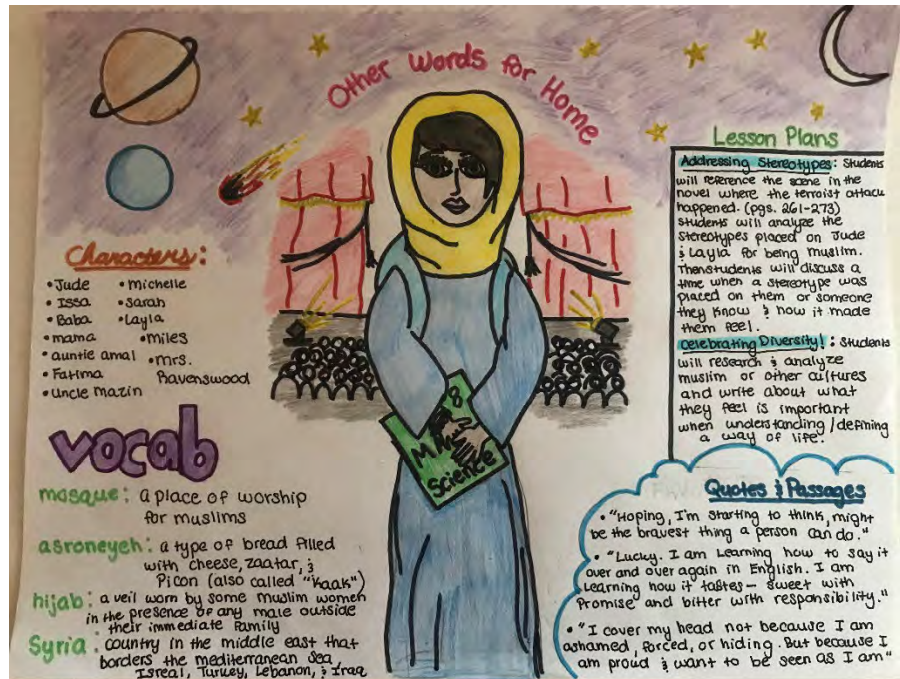


Fig. 6: Sara's response to "Other Words for Home."

Sara's response to the verse novel acts as the third and final artifact to document this dynamic of visual/verbal comics-inspired response. In this example, the artist uses color across the page in word art, with variance in word art, in order to represent the character and other aspects of the verse novel. The image that acts as the background for Jude in this depiction stems from the framing of the end of the book. The use of setting is unique in this way, as Sara depicts the clouds and skyline to frame the upper part of the image, as well as this sense of where the character might be. Jude is both centralized and showcased in this artistic response.

Sara drew upon the affordances of the graphic novel/comics medium, including word art and the use of artistic styles in lettering, as well as the overall balance of words and image to work together in composition, in order to create an almost lesson-plan-like response, which includes vocabulary, quotes from passages, and other key ideas alongside visuals. The depiction of the words themselves act with designed features in this example, setting them apart from other aspects of the page.

Discussion

In the course of this work, the author notes the dynamic of the individual instructor, processing their emotions and experiences as they simultaneously attempt to navigate groups of students through similar and different lived moments. This similarity could be found in the sense of isolation felt by teacher and student during the pandemic, while such isolation did not exist in the same way for all members of the class. For example, the author notes their connections with colleagues in virtual spaces, which at times were greater in duration and extent than in the pre-pandemic context. In all cases, students were invited to share multimodally, but could opt for a traditional typed response if they wanted.

The challenges that have come since the Fall 2020 context have included greater resistance in some spaces related to culturally relevant texts, as well as the debate over mask mandates in K-12 schools. The phenomenon of students moving back and forth between the classroom and quarantine, and the seemingly ubiquitous nature of virtual academies and hybridized solutions, are markers of this time that were less prominent in the all-online context of the Fall 2020 semester.

While each presentation retains similar features, including the centralizing of figures on responses, and the exploration of narratological details, the differences in the ways that students chose to compose proves to be of further interest. The individual style of each student could be presented in visual terms, alongside their thoughts about teaching the works. The use of symbols illustrated the elements of the readings that were resonant for individual students. A discussion-only approach to unpacking the meaning of the reading might not have facilitated such encounters with the text, and would not have given an indication of the ways in which the student envisioned the characters and world. Students were, in essence, visually displaying what the book meant to them through the use of creative methods. This working through a shared experience resonates with the poetic approach, with the initial examples drawn from life and daily concerns, before being applied to readings for material compositions in a range of styles.

Responsive teaching, from the context of this discussion, has been a useful framework for continuing engagements and seeking to make positive connections and welcoming experiences for students. A cultural and critical framing is an essential component of this approach, fostered by the increasing legislation in the United States, which would seek to limit the voices that are honored in classroom spaces, and the push-back educators might experience when using some texts or approaches.

In the iteration of responsive teaching that exists more in this author's current context and has indeed existed in educational spaces for decades, a culturally responsive and culturally sustaining framework is essential. As Ladson-Billings (1995) suggested, such an approach is an aspect of quality instruction. Further examination might focus on the ways that responses to texts can situate and even challenge assumptions of texts, including the addition of voices to the compositional world through a range of meaning-making practices and through exposure to a wider sense of where texts can be located, and how practices of writing can be honored beyond prescriptive and limited framing of literary canon.

In short, multimodal responses allowed for voices to be part of the classroom experience in ways that a singular and monolithic pathway to response might not have fostered, including explorations of identity and experience.

Final Thoughts

Meixner et al. (2019) pointed to the tendency to use multimodal texts, including graphic novels, comics, and other media, “in the classroom as a tool rather than studied as a narrative genre” (p. 495). A range of stories exists from the pandemic, as well as from the pre-pandemic routines of daily life. Comics and poetic form have been explored in this piece as textual spaces for narrative response that have included reflections on literature, emotional processes, and complicated experiences.

The work with these texts has continued into the present context in which the author is writing now, and in which instruction takes place in face-to-face, online, and hybridized settings. In a recent assignment, nearly half of the students in a class of 13 opted for a multimodal response to a text, without the prompting from the author. Were these approaches not generative, they would have been discarded after the first invitation. Rather, returning to the foundation of responsive teaching, these invitations have issued into responses that might, in fact, be part of this author’s routine moving forward into future semesters. It should be noted that these moves link to the author’s practices in the K-12 educational world, and find resonance with undergraduate and graduate learners.

As an educator working to prepare future educators, the use of poetic and multimodal texts are potential ways of creating avenues of emotional and artistic expression—as well as providing an outlet for the rich textual and storied experiences of children of all ages who have lived through and continue to process a difficult and divided time in history.

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Indigenous Pedagogies: Weaving Communities of Wonder

Ramona Elke

Abstract

Indigenous metissage weaves together life writing, poems, scholarship, and images, as a way of sharing strands of my experience of how, while not innovative to us, Indigenous research methods and transformative, participatory pedagogies, such as dreaming, ceremony, making, and drumming, offer suggestions around ways in which to create communities of learning which are inviting for all learners. This is particularly so when we work in arts-based practices, approaches, and paradigms. These transformative Indigenous pedagogies have become the sites of rich, healing conversations with myself, with the land and waters, with my Ancestors, and All My Relations.

Me and All My Human Relations: Situating Myself With My Ancestors

Aniin. Boohoos. Tansi. Ramona Lynn Elke Nindizhinikaaz. I identify my Ancestors¹ as Anishinaabe/Metis from my mother and Celtic/Germanic from my father. All were people of the dust, the dirt, the land in what is now known as Saskatchewan and Ontario. I live and work on the ancestral, traditional, unceded, shared territories of the Katzie and Kwantlen peoples, where I feel, honour, and send gratitude to all Spirits—all Beings—of this place. I am a daughter, mother, and Nokomis (grandmother). I am a poet, artist, and dreamer. I am a teacher, a learner—a student of life, ceremony, and all of creation. I have been taught (Absolon & Willett, 2005; Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008), as an Indigenous scholar/searcher, to introduce myself in ways that connect me, relationally, to people and place and spirit so that I may reveal myself to those with whom I walk. This beginning in reciprocity creates relationship of connection between you, me, and all beings and Ancestors around us who bring us teachings and prepare us to gather knowledge together.

A Metissage of Transformative Pedagogies

This Indigenous Metissage weaves together my life writing, poems, scholarship, and images, as a way of sharing strands of my journey and my experience of how, while not innovative to us, Indigenous research methods and pedagogies offer suggestions around ways to create new communities of learning which are inviting for all learners. This is particularly so when we work in arts-based practices, approaches, and paradigms. Indigenous Metissage is:

a counternarrative to the grand narrative of our times, a site for writing and surviving in the interval between different cultures and languages, particularly in colonial contexts; a way of merging and blurring genres, texts, and identities; an active literary stance, political strategy, and pedagogical praxis. (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009, p. 9)

Papachase Cree scholar, Dwayne Donald (2012), adds ethical relationality to the above idea of metissage:

One central goal of doing Indigenous Metissage is to enact ethical relationality as a philosophical commitment. Ethical relationality is an ecological understanding of human relationality that does not deny difference, but rather seeks to understand more deeply how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other. (p. 535)

In this way, my Indigenous Metissage seeks to speak to the relationality between myself, the youth with whom I work, my teachings, the lands and waters of my community, and the peoples who are the original caretakers of this land (Katzie and Kwantlen). As a methodology, Indigenous Metissage differs from other forms of metissage work in that it consciously brings in ethical relationality and Indigenous understandings of reciprocity and respect for the work, the teachings provided by the work, and the relationship between the reader, the writer, and all beings in between. As an Indigenous scholar, I must honour and acknowledge all of the teachings and teachers living in the liminal spaces between the threads of the weaving of this work, the breaths in the pauses of my words, and the pixels in the colours of my images.



Fig. 1: A Saskatchewan sunset from a trip “home” in July of 2018.

My poetry weaves the pieces of this work together, as a way to enter into ethical relationality with the teachings/pedagogies/practices I have received from my teachers and Elders. In sharing what I have learned about how to create community through making, ceremony, and the participation in transformative Indigenous pedagogies, I am fulfilling a promise I made to the Elders when I received the gifts of their teachings. Such teachings have not only become medicine for my learning Spirit² (Battiste, 2010) and the learning Spirits of others who have received them, but have also come to form the foundation of my teaching/learning spaces and my life ways. These transformative Indigenous pedagogies have become the sites of rich, healing conversations with myself, with the land and waters, with my Ancestors, and All My Relations.³ Through the transformative pedagogies of dreaming, ceremony, making, and drumming, I have learned to re-make myself, hopefully, to become who I was born to be so that I may help others do likewise.

Dreaming the Way: How Everything Usually Begins

After I fell asleep, I was having an animated conversation with a group of people...we were all very excited and heightened about what we were saying. Not arguing, just passionate about the topics. One [topic] that I remember was about the word "pedagogy." I wanted the word to have an "i" instead of an "a" because, I suggested, pedagogy—what we did—had to have legs. We had to move around in it, walk inside of it—do it. (Taken from my morning pages, September 4, 2021)

I am certain that nothing has been "usual" in my wayfinding through my journey as a "teacher" or as a "student." I have placed these terms in quotation marks because I believe that we are all teachers and students simultaneously. The Haida teachings of sk'ad'a state that the teacher and student are always one in the same (Davidson & Davidson, 2018, p. 13). For me, there needs to be a humility in the process of learning from others. In this way, I feel odd to use the term "teacher" for what I do because even though I have a few pieces of paper hanging on my wall to show I have completed formal training, this does not mean that I am finished learning. This way of thinking keeps me humble with my "students" who have taught me more than decades of university ever could. From Indigenous perspectives on teaching and learning, this means we are all equal and valuable in learning spaces and all of our gifts count—not just mine. I have discovered that my change in perspective around this has opened the space for youth to feel safe with their ideas and growth, as well as empowering them to feel that their gifts are worthy of sharing and important for everyone in the space, not just the youngest ones. I let the youth know, regularly, how I learn from them and how much I value their teachings and how grateful I am to have them as such wise, generous "teachers."

Everything is a teaching and "teachers" are everywhere. I have always been keenly, profoundly linked to the liminal spaces between the waking world and dream world—a world richly populated with Ancestors, Spirit Beings⁴ and answers, not only for Indigenous peoples, but also for many spiritually rooted peoples around the world. My Celtic Ancestors are dreamers, my Germanic Ancestors are dreamers, my Anishinaabe Ancestors are dreamers. The story of my journey to the power of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing, begins in dream 10 years before I had even realized I needed these practices as ways of healing myself and the youth and adults with whom I walk.

The first few years of my "teaching" journey were rough, as they are for many early career "teachers." For me, though, I found myself quickly realizing that the colonial system did not have room for how I centred relationship, the importance of creativity, and wholism, as ways to establish nurturing communities for youth and other adults. Deep in my centre, I struggled with an existential wound formed by the knowledge that what was being offered by colonial ways of competition and separation were "not sufficient" (Kelly, personal communication, September 15, 2021) to the longing I was witnessing in the youth with whom I worked. They wanted more than had been offered them in the oppressive and profoundly damaging traditional offerings of colonial education. I needed more, too, than was being offered to the traditional role of "teacher" in the colonial understanding of what a "teacher" needs to be for the benefit of myself, the youth, and the planet. I needed to be seen, re-recognized in the eyes of the youth, the eyes of my colleagues, the eyes of the land and waters witnessing the work I was trying to do respectfully and humbly. I knew the youth needed to be doing something to help them access pathways

into the light of their own recognition, but I was not sure what it was that they needed to do. This “something” had to come outside of what was being offered by colonial learning systems. I knew that I needed to do something to help me with this same journey for myself, but I was also lost. I knew I needed something new and unexpected to reawaken me. Once I had been a playwright. Once I had been a poet. Once I had painted; I had sewed clothing for my children. Once I had been an actor. At that time, over a decade and a half ago, I knew I was a better human when I participated in the ceremony of those activities. In my woundedness, I could only see those activities as a distraction, rather than the medicines I sought for myself and my students. My Ancestors knew what I needed, so they sent me dreams to guide me.

Dreams have been important for our Ancestors. In Shawn Wilson’s (2008) “Research Is ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods,” Cree scholar Lewis Cardinal shares the importance of dream for solving problems:

they’d come to a point perhaps where they couldn’t decide about what it was they were going to do or what recommendations they’d make and they would say ‘Let’s sleep on it.’ And pretty much the meeting would end at that point. They would do their personal ceremonies...then...they would be sitting and talking about what they dreamt... They’d be comparing information from the dream work, and they’d start to realise that the various symbols were being dictated to them from a different part of their being. So, we’re starting to see something more. And suddenly they’d come up with an answer. (Cardinal in Wilson, 2008, p. 113)

I had two dreams which would become pivotal to the shift in direction I would take in the ways I would walk with my students and myself. One placed my feet on the path to the discovery of my Indigenous Ancestry; the other would lead me to the teachings of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing, which would utterly transform my practice and my life.

dreaming proof

They’ve done it again –
 those Ancestors in waiting –
 they have walked out of the deepest of yesterdays into my dreams,
 bringing teachings of the before to question the ways of the now
 and my head swims,
 the drunk fatigue of the sleep deprived,
 with the teachings handed to me in conversations I only partially recall.

As if to answer my fears –
 my questions of who I am to any of them –
 they reach out to me in the only way I understand
 and take me by the hand to show me where we live
 lived
 are living...
 without me

or my family.

A call home, maybe.
 Maybe that’s what that was.

It was, for sure, an answer to my questioning heart:
I know what I know.

My dreams call me from my DNA
that can never be quieted.

This should be enough. Oct 16/18



Fig. 2: Seymour Longhouse photo by Brian Lee. Shared with permission.

The second came to me the night before I was supposed to attend a ceremony for a professional development event in the Pierre family longhouse on Katzie territory near Maple Ridge, B.C. That night, I dreamed I sat across a fire pit from three Elders. One had silver braids, one wore glasses, one spoke while the others were silent witnesses to the words and the fire. The Elder in the middle told me it was time for me to learn the teachings of my Ancestors. I assumed they⁵ meant the teachings from the longhouse I was supposed to visit that morning. The teachings that day were not meant to be. What ended up happening is that I was late to pick up the person who knew directions to the longhouse (in the days before Google Maps). En route to her house, I fell ill with a fever and would have had to return home anyway. That was not the day I was, literally, prepared to learn the teachings of my Ancestors, but the spiritual wheels were in motion. I was now paying attention to the signposts along the way which would guide me to the practices and pedagogies which were innovative to me at the time, but have now become part of my everyday living. I realize now that this dream did, indeed, prepare me.

Seven years later, after being accepted into a Graduate Diploma in Education (GDE): Indigenous Education for Reconciliation at Simon Fraser University, I entered the longhouse I had dreamed about where those Elders sat across the fire from me. Through this GDE, I would meet the Elder with silver braids (chi miigwech to late səliłwətał [Tsilil-Waututh] Elder, Uncle “Iggy,” Ernie George) and the Elder with glasses (Elder Keith, the fire keeper of the longhouse). The third Elder ended up revealing themselves as Dr. Vicki Kelly, my professor in the GDE, Master of Educational Practice (MEdEP), and my PhD supervisor, who, in our first mid-term conversation, told me it was time for me to learn the teachings of my Ancestors.

We were brought to the longhouse for our first day of class, under the light of the full eclipse of the sun, to participate in a naming ceremony. The generosity of the Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish) and səilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) nations, formed the framework for our learning. It was necessary for us to set our intentions through ceremony, as a way to engage in reciprocal, ethical relationality with the nations, their teachings, the land and Ancestors of the territories upon which we were invited to learn. This experience grounded us in transformational Indigenous pedagogies which were to serve as the foundation of all our re-searching and inquiries throughout our time together and beyond.⁶ Our work began and ended in ceremony in the longhouse sent to me in dream all those years ago.

During our work in the GDE, Vicki shared with us that the idea for the program came to her in a dream . . . dream connected in dream connected in dream, a great example of Penobscot scholar and lawyer, Sherri Mitchell's (2018) teaching that our Ancestors dreamed us here: "*'we dreamed you into the future.'* [italics in original text] Our Ancestors lived for us; they died for us; and they dreamed for us. Through their collective imaginings, we were all brought into being" (p. 13). From what I was called to pay attention to in my dream world, I would say that my Ancestors have, as always, been right on target. I have had many informative dreams in my life, but none have been as important as the dream of those three Elders across the fire.

Everything Begins and Ends in Ceremony: Living the Call to Attunement

Me: What is the purpose of ceremony?

Old Woman: To lead yourself to yourself.

Me: How?

Old Woman: By giving you an idea of who you want to be and then allowing you to create the experience of being that way.

Me: Which ceremony is best, then?

Old Woman: Life. Choose what leads you to the highest vision you can have of yourself, and then choose what allows you to express that. What you express, you experience. What you experience, you are.

Me: How do I prepare?

Old Woman: Breathe. (Wagamese, 2016, p. 29)

Through GDE and MEdEP programs, I had begun the process of becoming transformed by the practices and pedagogies inherent in the Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing. These are life ways of my Ancestors and the Ancestors of many Indigenous peoples and Earth-honouring traditions around the world. We have ceremonies to greet the day, greet new relationships, and greet new life. We have ceremonies for gratitude, for grief, for regeneration. We have ceremonies for planting, for harvesting, for sharing. All our lives are ceremonies. Everything begins and ends with ceremony. Everything.

Even though Indigenous and non-Indigenous folk⁷ have differing protocols, teachings, and forms of ceremony, the purpose is pretty universal: “Ceremony is a vehicle for belonging – to a family, to a people, to the land . . . it marries the mundane to the sacred . . . the material and the spiritual mingle” (Kimmerer, 2013, pp. 37–38), a way to: “build stronger relationships or bridge the distance between the cosmos and us” (Wilson, 2008, p. 237). Closing our eyes to whisper words of gratitude to the beauty of a setting or rising sun; singing “Happy Birthday” to a beloved friend, family member, or our children; or sitting in a sweat lodge or long house connect us, at our centre, to the universe, the Great Mystery/Creator, creation, and All Our Relations. They remind us we are all related, all connected to each other through the mystery of what it is to become human.

I am grateful to have experienced the power of ceremony firsthand for myself and for the youth with whom I walk. As I have shared above, my journey to re-member myself to myself and my Ancestors began in a naming ceremony and ended in a celebration ceremony in the Seymour longhouse, on the territories of the Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tseil-Waututh) Nations. I struggle to find the words to describe the experience of the deep metamorphosis I witnessed and lived in that sacred space. The only way I could come close, was to use poetry to express my awe. I wrote this poem the day after the naming ceremony under the total eclipse of the sun:

smoke
 my hair smells of smoke
 from fires of my ancestors
 brighter than the eclipse,
 holding more prayers than handfuls of sand grains on beaches on Earth.

my hair smells of smoke
 and my dirty feet,
 blackened with the dust of good Mother Earth –
 pure and new,
 like my feet on this path to myself –
 my mother’s, mother’s, mother,
 keeper of this deep blood from men who came to her on her homestead.

my hair smells of smoke,
 fills my head with visions
 and dreams
 and drumbeats heard before I was born,
 vibrating through my genetic memory like an earthquake.

my hair smells of smoke,
 so I must remember to pray when I wash it.

r. l. elke
 Aug 22/17

I had been awakened; cracked open. The voices in me begging me to re-member them to my heart. To this day, I still feel the fine silt of long house dirt on my bare feet, my soles vibrating with the desire to root myself in ceremony. I knew, immediately, that I needed to find ways to bring ceremony into my practice. The first year I returned to the classroom after a decade of support work, I did just that.

In December 2018, my Grades 11 and 12 English First Peoples and BC First Peoples Studies classes served deer stew, Bannock and sweets; offered song and gratitude; and gifted carved paddles, smoked salmon, and Salish woven bags to the Katzie Elders able to join us that day. This ceremony of sharing transformed everyone in that room that day. From the communion through food and conversation, to the witnessing an Elder’s story of surviving St. Mary’s residential school in Mission, British Columbia, to the good feelings of giving what we made, each person was profoundly changed by the experience.



Fig. 3: Our classroom on feast day.

The ceremonies of hosting and preparing for the feast provided sites for our longing to be good relatives, praxes for our leaning into questions about what it means to live reciprocally within the web of creation. We learned about ceremony by preparing for ceremony in a ceremonial way. Our weavings wove us together; our preparation of food and spaces prepared our hearts, minds, bodies, and spirits, to be good hosts; and our witnessing the stories and teachings of others allowed us to become witness to ourselves within the human story, alongside the Elders, the animals and plants who fed us, and the guests who came to join us in our celebration and gratitude. These connections, and the process of lifting up and honouring these relationships, are important for youth to experience—especially Indigenous youth. We cannot separate ourselves into pieces (mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual). We are whole beings who must honour and lift up all of ourselves and others. Ceremony allows us to do this and, if we are going to heal educational spaces in order to begin to repair the damage done by colonial systems, we must acknowledge the spirit in our learning spaces:

When we share our knowledge, there is no separation between the spiritual realm and the one in which we live...we need to recognise that this spiritual knowledge is a significant aspect of the knowledge our students bring with them from their homes and communities to school. (Davidson & Davidson, 2018, p. 73)

My students, the youngest of whom graduated two years ago, still talk about that feast day. It was a beautiful day for all of us; a day of radical transformation brought about by practices rarely offered in “mainstream,” western educational spaces.

The Transformation in the Making: More Than Meets the Eye 😊

I have been tracking Indigenous Poesis or ‘making’ as a profound participatory pedagogy, a process that makes me and unmakes me. ‘Making’ needs the soil of the soul to enact its active alchemy. In its unfolding, it renders or transforms us, makes us available or resonant to the world around us. This sensitizing of our aesthetic sensibility creates an instrument that allows us to learn to entrain with the sounding of acoustic ecologies of being. (Kelly, 2019, p. 19)



Fig. 4: A student learning to bead.

On any given day, if you were to pop by our classroom for a cup of tea, you would see students working on any number of making projects. Some will be practicing their Salish weaving of bags to give to family or Elders for our next feast; some will be beading earrings or orange shirts for pins; some will be carving designs into yellow cedar—all during my lessons or during the times I read out loud the novels, stories, teachings, or poems, we are learning from that day.

We learn better, listen better, with “busy hands.” Traditionally, our Elders would have taught us life teachings through story while we were sharing in an activity with them. My own Granny would ask me to help her in the garden with the weeding or picking slugs off the tomato plants when she needed to talk to me about “life stuff,” from encouraging me in my schoolwork to suggesting ways I could get along better with my younger sister. The same would happen when she asked me to help with baking or cooking or other chores we would do together. The making and doing made it so much easier to talk about difficult issues with her because the calming, repetitive motion of pulling weeds or raking or hoeing took my mind off of being “in trouble,” and the invitation to help share the workload let me know that she valued my abilities and work ethic. I was contributing to our collective needs. This made me feel good about myself and my relationship with my Granny. She needed me. This made me feel valuable.



Fig. 5: Mother bear and her cubs carving in our classroom last year.

There are many teachings inherent in making practices for which children and youth are longing. They long to be tuned to the spiritual and acoustic ecologies of the land and waters of place, as well as of themselves, as Vicki states in the quote above. Making gifts us with the teachings of patience, when learning a new, complex skill (such as weaving or beading); the teachings of honouring and respect when working with cedar and sharp carving tools; and the teachings of generosity and gratitude when you give away the first item you make, to name but a few. Each presents itself to us when we are in the liminal space between the world we are in when we are in the acts of creation, and the world we are in when we are not. My students and I have learned, firsthand, from the making practices themselves, that how we approach our work has everything to do with how the work turns out. For example, if we are in knots within ourselves when we bead, our thread will become tangled, our bead counts will be off, and we will have to start over different sections (or whole projects sometimes) over and over again. If we approach our weaving with “bad feelings” or frustration, we will be passing those feelings to the person who will be receiving the gift we are making. Intentions matter. As a result, many youth have found weaving to become a practice that has helped soothe the symptoms associated with anxiety. When they are feeling the need for repetitious actions to calm their speeding heart and spirit, they sit with the weaving, and it teaches them calm—it teaches them to sit with themselves in all of their ways of being and make their way out of their crisis.



Fig. 6: Odeminon – Heartberry pins I beaded for friends.

I have experienced this medicine myself. In preparation for our final GDE ceremony, each member of our learning community was taught how to weave our regalia on a floor loom and to carve metal to make a shawl pin to finish that regalia. I was new to both practices, unsure and longing to do a good job to honour my teachers and my learning journey throughout the GDE. I had to come humbly to the process so I wouldn't ruin the copper, the walnut of the pin end, or the patterns I had dreamed into my weaving. At the same time, I was teaching myself to bead medallions and pins as a way to re-member myself to the making practices of my Anishinaabe/Metis Ancestors. Over one year ago, my daughter taught me how to bead earrings, a practice she learned when she was doing her Master's program at Carleton University in Ottawa, Ontario. She was gifted with story teachings and understandings around beading which she generously shared with me. Through her own Indigenous research methodologies, she learned from beaders like Sherry Farrell Racette who, in her 2011 article *Encoded knowledge: Memory and objects in contemporary Native American art*, teaches us:

Objects...embody their maker's knowledge and the times of their creation. The imprints of skilled fingers are everywhere: tiny stitches carefully laid in regular rhythm. Delicate materials pushed to their physical limits. The media used in their creation are the material evidence of science and technology, trade, relative degrees of wealth and poverty. Their forms and materials are narrative accounts of struggle, innovation and continuity. (p. 41)

All these ways of expressing myself aesthetically allow me to tune myself to the teaching stories of my Ancestors and the Ancestors of this place—the unceded, shared territories of the Katzie and Kwantlen people. I learn to resonate with all beings, seen and unseen, transforming my being into one who is receptive and sensitive to the resonance of others. What this means for me, I believe, is that I am a better mother, partner, friend, “teacher,” and learner, because of this honed sensitivity. I am taking up my responsibility to attune to the land and waters and to learn how to be fully human:

The responsibility to be fully human requires us to create profound resonances within our being: physically, emotionally, mindfully, and spiritually through a participatory pedagogical process that informs our being. This process helps teach us through the creation of an elegant symmetry within our imaginations. Thus, the land animates our traditional, cultural, and spiritual cosmologies, as an act of imagination within place. (Kelly, 2021, p. 190)

Weaving, carving, and beading, are tuning the youth with whom I walk to the land on which they live and the waters flowing in rivers, streams, and creeks, all around us. They re-member their imaginations to this place and the places in which they encountered themselves as children. Our making together allows us ways to encounter each other, too. We teach each other how to weave, carve, and bead, opening our creative and learning Spirits to the work, the world, and ourselves. Again, while these practices are not “innovative” in Indigenous spaces, I believe, deeply, that these practices are necessary to heal the wounds caused by colonial learning and teaching spaces. I have lived and been witness to the healing of these pedagogies as they work, like balm, on the chafed spirits of those who long for a place of belonging.

the unseen

All of this invisible magic seeps into the fibres of the “right now,”
so that we are reminded to pray deep prayers of gratitude with every breath
because what is unseen is not unfelt –
is as real as the lines on my face,
the ink on my skin,
or the ache in my knees from bending under the weight of faithlessness.

Now I should be levitating with weightlessness in
peace of all these answered prayers.

These helpers are always here and I should never be more grateful. May 4/19

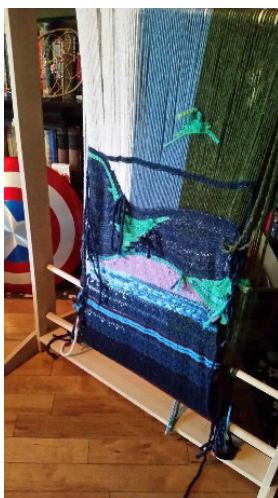


Fig. 7: My regalia shawl in process (July 2019).

Drumming: Sounding All Our Hearts Together

Me: Why do I use a drum?

Old Woman: To touch the earth.

Me: Then why do I sing with it?

Old Woman: To allow the earth to touch you.

Me: What am I singing for?

Old Woman: So that someday you might sing the one note that joins your heartbeat and the earth's heartbeat to the heartbeat of everything.

Me: You're saying that drumming and singing, anything that leads me inward and then outward, are just like praying and meditating?

Old Woman: You are getting wiser, my boy. (Wagamese, 2016, p. 93)



Fig. 8: Me drumming for the opening of our Grade 8 Indigenous Games in the winter of 2019.

At least once per day, one of my classes engages in drumming and singing songs I have been gifted by various teachers and Knowledge Holders from various communities. We sing Earth Songs, Water Songs, and Men’s and Women’s Warrior songs. On days when I don’t offer the drumming, the youth ask to drum and sing. I have noticed that I have a much stronger relationship with the youth in the classes I drum and sing with on a regular basis. I have great relationships in the other classes, too, but I find that I feel safer sharing cultural knowledge with the group with whom I drum and sing on a regular basis. We take the drums outside of our learning space into the school to sound into colonial spaces so we can shake up the school—decolonizing with music. We have four 10-inch cow hide drums, ten 16-inch elk hide drums, a buffalo hide rattle, and one 26-inch elk hide powwow drum. We are loud, proud, and bonded by the reverberations of the drums and our voices raised in unison to honour the beings and people of the place, seen and unseen.

Anishinaabe teachings of the drum (Johnston, 2013) tell us that the drum came in a vision to our Ancestor Nanaboozho when his dear brother, Cheeby-aub-oozhoo, died in a canoeing accident. He missed his brother so much, he wanted to communicate with him in the spirit world. Cheeby-aub-oozhoo visited Nanaboozho in a dream with instructions on how to create, bless, and care for the hand drum. He told Nanaboozho that the drum was the way we can communicate with spirit . . . all spirit. He taught us that the sound of the drum was the heartbeat of our mothers, linking us to the Mother Earth and all those beings who have raised us and sustained us. We use the drum to bring our hearts together. When we are in synch, my group of thirty can stop and start with me without a missed beat or an over-beat. We are one body, one voice, one spirit. This is medicine.

Part of my assessment practice is to have a conversation with the youth in our classroom communities, before report card times, as a way for us to come to a consensus about their “grade”; as a way to check in with them around how they are doing; and how I am doing as a “teacher.” I ask them if they are getting the support they need, how they are resonating with the teachings, what they are enjoying the most, and so on. Without fail, the drumming (and making) always top the list of activities they like best. They always talk about how good the soundings of the drum feel in their chests, how they feel connected to the whole

group when they drum and sing, and how they feel more focused and prepared to learn after they finish drumming and singing. Even when I initially decided not to bring the drums (and changed my mind), like I did a couple of years ago for the first in-person summer school group after the pandemic, everyone put drumming at the top of the list of activities they enjoyed the most. Even when we don't use them, those silent drums bring soundings from other places and beings which help to re-member our selves to those pieces we thought we had forgotten:

unused items are often thought of, and referred to, as dormant or sleeping with the potential to be awakened by movement, gestures, and words. Inaction does not reduce meaning; rather objects are viewed for their potential reanimation, but perhaps, more importantly, for the history and memory of actions they hold within themselves. They remember. They remember us. They remember for us. (Racette, 2011, p. 42)



Fig. 9: Our hand drums and our classroom.

Final Thoughts on Making Our Way Forward: Building Communities of Wonder

Communities need a shared story of their future from shared values and shared understandings. Achieving this requires that each member of the community become engaged in sharing the communal mindset and in caring about each other – in becoming emotionally and psychologically vested in the community's future. (Cajete, 2015, p. 108)

Wonder changes to reverence when we feel and honour the powerful presence or force of agency that lies within the living phenomenon of the land, it becomes a sacred ecology. We feel the presence of 'All Our Relations'; we sound and resound with the inner energy or sounding tone or voice of Creation. (Kelly, 2019, p. 20)

My journey into these spaces has been transformative. I have witnessed the metamorphosis of many youth and adults who have chosen to open themselves to the wonder inherent in Indigenous participatory pedagogies. Dreaming, making, ceremony, and drumming, have become the foundation of my own practice within and outside of the teaching and learning spaces in which I find myself. Until recently, these practices have not made their way into "main stream," Western education. By introducing colonial learning spaces to Indigenous pedagogies and practices, I hope "to weave a new basket of understanding for holding Indigenous Knowledges" (Kelly, 2021, p. 199). I am also working to create spaces where

everyone who enters, feels safe from “the trauma of erasure and separation” (Snowber & Bickel, 2015, p. 67). If the pandemic has taught us anything about community, it’s that we desperately need healthy communities to bring us back together after this long journey through separation. We need to be healed in a sense of wonder of the world around us, the wonder at our ability to create, the wonder at our own generosity and ability to survive challenges, and the wonder of our connection to the mystery of the cosmos. Youth need these pedagogies of dreaming, making, ceremony, and drumming, to bring themselves into the world we need to create as a community of spirits learning to be fully human. Deep metamorphosis is possible through these innovative practices. Gateways are opened into unseen, liminal spaces, where we may learn to take up the serious work of healing ourselves, our planet, and each other—spaces where the Ancestors are watching.

the Ancestors are watching

There is no going back now.
For any of it.
The vines part, clearing the path before me,
and I know this is my way forward.

I am rooted to the teachings,
whispers of Ancestors in my hair,
medicine smoke in the wind,
confirmations that this is the way
for now.

I raise my hands to the clear blue breaks in the sky praising the sun
and the drum
and the story song in my blood, thrumming like thunder in my ears.

I am where I’ve always longed to be.
So, now walk forward prayerfully.
The Ancestors are watching. (May 29/18)



Fig. 10: Sunset on the Fraser River. From my photos.

Notes

1. I have capitalized the “A” in Ancestor because in my teachings, our Ancestors are living beings who are powerful and present even though we may not be able to witness them in physical form. The capital “A” denotes respect and reverence.
2. Mi'kmaq scholar Marie Battiste (2010), teaches that the learning spirit guides us in our journey to become the people we were born to be: “What guides our learning (beyond family, community, and Elders) is spirit, our own learning spirits who travel with us along our earth walk, offering guidance, inspiration, and quiet unrealized potential to be who we are...with a purpose for being here and with specific gifts fulfilling that purpose. In effect, the learning Spirit has a Learning Spirit. It has a hunger and a thirst for learning . . . (pp. 14–15).
3. All My (or Our) Relations is a term used to describe all beings in all realms of our lives, seen and unseen. This may include spirits, Ancestors, more-than-human beings such as Rock People, Plant People, Animal People, and so on. It is a term meant to include all beings in our cosmology. For me, that is an Anishnaabe cosmology.
4. I capitalize Spirit Being because in my cosmology they are proper nouns. This is a show of respect for those ones we cannot see who are also teachers.
5. I use the non-gender pronoun “they” for Spirit Beings because they are not gendered in our understanding.
6. See Kelly (2021) for a detailed description of the necessity of this program and its role in the wayfinding to trans-systemic change for working in ethical relationality with Indigenous Nations and how the practices in the program’s creation and content have transformed the practices of over 60 educators, support teachers, and others working with youth.
7. Below is an excellent explanation and source for the use of the word “folx”:

Overall, research around the usage of “x” in language shows that there are generally four reasons it is used, says [Norma Mendoza-Denton, Ph.D.](#), linguistics expert and anthropology professor at UCLA.

1. To avoid having to assign gender within a word.
2. To represent trans and gender non-conforming people.
3. As a variable (such as in algebra), so it acts as a fill-in-the-blank term for each person. For example, in the use of “xe” or “xem” in [neopronouns](#), a category of new pronouns that can be used for anyone, regardless of gender.
4. For many colonized communities—whether [Latinx](#), Black, or other Indigenous groups—the “x” also stands for all that has been taken away from them by colonizers. For example, communities in Mexico call themselves Chicano/Xicano/a/x as opposed to “Mexican” because it signals identification with Indigenous languages that have always had or have lost their third gender. For example, the community in Juchitan, Mexico, is [reclaiming and celebrating their third gender](#) “muxe.”

All of these reasons reference the desire to escape binary language as well as colonization.

In reclaiming language, it is easier to pave the way for a more inclusive system.

<https://www.shape.com/lifestyle/mind-and-body/latinx-folx-womxn-meaning>

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Evoking Losing and Finding Community in Drama: A Methodology-in-Motion for Pandemic Times

Kathleen Gallagher, Nancy Cardwell, and Munia Debleena Tripathi

Abstract

Our article explores the impact of the global health pandemic on our five-year, multi-sited, collaborative ethnographic study titled *Global Youth (Digital) Citizen-Artists and their Publics: Performing for Socio-Ecological Justice* (2019-2024). We illustrate how our arts-led, youth-driven ethnographic "methodology-in-motion" responded to a destabilized world by planning, listening, and seeing differently across local and global research contexts through virtual fieldwork. By focusing on reciprocity and the relational, we examine how researchers, youth participants, and global collaborators, managed to "lose" and "find" each other through creative, artistic encounters.

The primary ambition of our Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council-funded project, *Global Youth (Digital) Citizen-Artists and their Publics: Performing for Socio-Ecological Justice* (2019-2024), which we like to call "Audacious Citizenship," is to respond to the need for new ways of thinking about and responding to pressing environmental and social crises.¹ Can theatre be a powerful voice in the ecological humanities? Can theatre help communities and societies lead to alternative ways of seeing and engaging with the world? Can performance become a site for new imaginaries for socio-ecological justice? We are considering these questions with our community of collaborators: drama teachers, drama students, theatre artists, and researchers in Toronto, Canada, Bogotá, Colombia, Coventry, England, Thessaloniki, Greece, Lucknow, India, and Kaohsiung, Taiwan. And we are asking these questions with drama methods, an artistic-scientific way to come to know the world and how we inhabit it. (See Fig. 1)

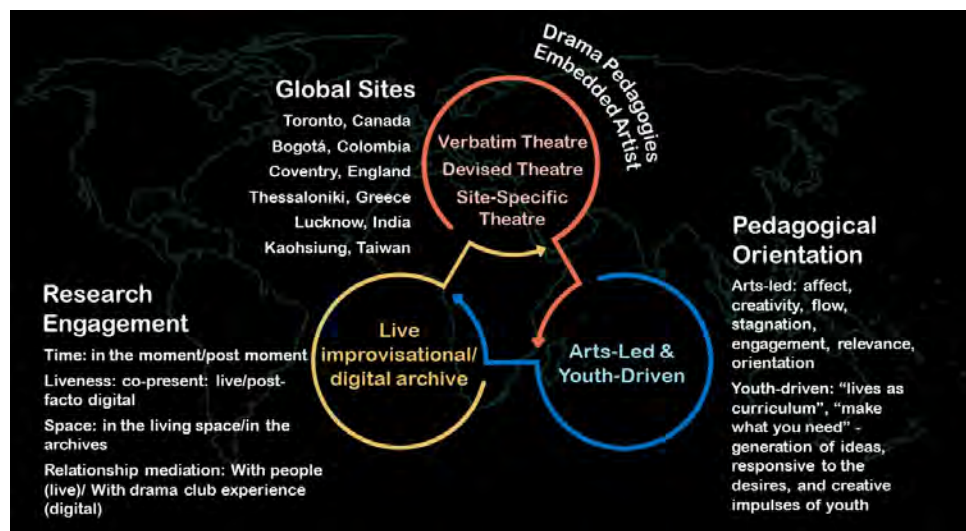


Fig. 1: The scope of the research.

Across the global sites of the research, we endeavour to create an arts-led and youth-driven research ecology, using specific genres of theatre-making (Verbatim, Devising, and Site-Specific), as enabling constraints or structures within which to experiment and communicate. The first year (2019/2020) focused on Verbatim theatre, a mode of theatre-making that is built from direct observation and the exact words of interviewees, carried out by the creators. The second year (2020/2021) was meant to exploit the possibilities of Devising, a theatre genre that uses collaborative improvisation and physical exploration of objects, texts, or ideas. With the sudden and unexpected impact of the global health pandemic, we found ourselves moving to the Zoom space in 2020. Our devising dreams took a bit of a turn as we listened to the "room," and listened for what the students needed. In that Zoom space, students were sharing how they had been engaging in "analog" activities to help them cope: knitting, sewing, reading physical books, cosplay, writing to pen pals . . . and so we found ourselves leaning into performative writing, which seemed a kind of imaginative balm for many of the students as they struggled to imagine from their solo spaces what their plays might look like on a stage inhabited by groups of real people. The following sections of our paper will take a deeper dive into this unexpected space of "making what we need" (see Harvey, 2016) from the space of individual boxes in a virtual, shared space. The third year of our study (2021/2022) is using site-specific theatre to create performances that explore and reflect "place." The pandemic carries on as we continue to ask: what is the nature of collaboration and "closeness" in these harrowing times? For theatre-makers and qualitative researchers who esteem co-presence, are there ways to cultivate proximity that do not involve in-person presence, still even now a tenuous reality?

We will share, in the following pages, how our fieldwork and post-fieldwork research and artistic practices have turned to the digital and the digital archive. And in this space, we have felt vulnerable and felt held; we have lost and found ourselves and each other in some surprising ways that we think might importantly inform both research practices and collective drama work. First, as a network of global researchers, we had to create closeness via regular Zoom meetings, virtually travelling to one another's spaces, where our "checking in" activities became a kind of life raft for many of us. Just like the weekly virtual drama club that we participated in with the youth in Toronto, we found ourselves, as a global research ecology, responsible to one another in surprising ways, upholding each other's realities in ways that seemed to matter. The unfolding of the pandemic through multiple waves varied wildly across our sites, with places like Taiwan seeming to have foregone the worst, at least initially, while Greece was completely shut down without the infrastructure needed after years of economic struggle. England went from dire circumstances to an impressive vaccine rollout, and back again to shocking infection numbers with new variants, while India somehow seemed miraculously unscathed until they suddenly were not. Colombia lived through multiple lockdowns until the social unrest under a repressive government regime became so overwhelming that our collaborators took to demonstrating on the streets, because, as our researcher-collaborator Jorge Arcila put it, "we will either die at home or die in the streets protesting. So, we will pick dying in the streets." And Canada, and especially Ontario, we felt was somehow lacking any form of leadership or clear messaging over many, many months, with expert advice being cast aside as a matter of course. Our Zoom sessions gave us a global picture far more profound than the news we were consuming about one another's contexts. It became a space for holding each other's fears and uncertainties. And, it also became a site for the exchange of important new pedagogies and aesthetic responses. Reciprocity, sustainability, community.

Our paper invites the reader inside our research and creative processes. We will use our articulations, our images, and our video footage, to walk readers through our research and pedagogical planning. Then, we will reflect on our presence/being there with the young theatre-makers and with our global collaborators, and finally we will share the interesting aspects of our post-field activities, of “seeing differently,” through engaging with the digital archive. Using the pedagogical work of an activity we called a “Time Capsule for Now,” which was a creative practice that invited all of us to voice those things that were sustaining us in such dark times, we aim to illustrate the intermingling of a creative practice in theatre-making and a research process. Our work with young artists became a “lost and found” space to remember, to renew, to dream, to grieve, and to uphold the words and worlds of others.

A Theoretical Framing for Reading, Listening, and Viewing

Before turning to the research and creative practices, we would like to offer the reader a brief theoretical guide for our storytelling, visuals, and video representation. These theoretical concepts have been useful to us in our work, but in this case, we are trusting that they may act as a guide for the reader’s engagement. There are infinite ways in which videos, stills, and words, can be perceived, so the following is an attempt to reveal one possible path for perceiving, one way—as an outsider to this work—of imagining into what was experienced by those of us in it, as an embodied mode of engagement with people, places, and creative work. And naturally, as an autonomous reader engaged from within a distinct cultural context, the reader will have their own relationship to climate change, to the pandemic, and their own histories with creative practice.

First, a research project so filled with diverse cultures, languages, geographies, intersectional identities, generations, political cultures, aesthetic practices, global North-South issues of power and access, we knew that developing our capacities to learn together, to surface our different histories and onto-epistemologies, would be the best way to build our research network and any resulting artistic products. Our instinctual turn to diversity (of perspective, social positioning, creative and research methods) is conceptually related to the current agricultural “permaculture” movement; planting polycultures to nourish, protect, and strengthen crops (see Solkinson & Chi, 2017), which itself learns from the deep wisdom of Indigenous traditional ecological and land-based knowledges (see Simpson, 2014; Wildcat et al., 2014). Environmental scientist Robin W. Kimmerer, of European and Anishinaabe ancestry, searches for synergies between Indigenous and scientific ecological knowledge at the intersection of nature and culture in order to find sustainable models for “the philosophy and practice of reciprocal, mutualistic relationships with the earth” (2002; 2012, p. 317). Our research interests also concern human stewardship and caretaking of a shared earth, but it is additionally the notion of “mutualistic relationships” with our collaborators (and their collaborators in each local environment) that paints for us not simply a reciprocity between constituents of a group, but a series of concentric circles of collaborators who are “in relation” with the spaces and people of individual sites as well as in a cross-site conversation about shared and different concerns; a “polyculture” of desires and vantage points. As the reader traces the work of our Toronto team, it is important to keep in mind that local contexts in each site are planning and experimenting in similar, different, and culturally specific ways; each site is building local relationships among artists, teachers, youth, and researchers. And we are all reflecting, through our shared research

questions and our theatre-making, on our greater relationship to the earth, its nurturing and its difficult reflections of negative human impact, like COVID-19 and climate catastrophes.

As well as "seeing" (reading, viewing videos), we wanted this article to especially invite "listening." In their work with a performative walking practice and dance documentary film, Jess Allen and Sara Penrhyn Jones (2012) have pointed to the dominance of the "visual," both culturally and in performance work, as the primary way of experiencing (see Mohr, 2007). However, Mohr (2007), suggests that the "listening body" is "engaged in finding its constantly changing relationship to the environment" (p. 193). Allen and Penrhyn Jones further put their "listening bodies to work" with their spectators and thereby felt compelled by the deeply personal things people felt able to share with them. We, too, have found, especially in COVID times, that listening, an active listening as a somatic practice, can invite profound affects and deeply intimate sharing. Many factors no doubt led to what we experienced as a deeply intimate context for sharing and creative imagining in our Toronto virtual drama club and with our global collaborators in our Zoom space, but listening, or the listening body, was a critically important one, as we hope our embedded media below reveal.

Lastly, and relatedly, collaborative ethnographic researchers Duncan McDuie-Ra and colleagues (2020) have asked an important question: how do researchers speak to the affective properties circulated during collaboration? As readers attend to our account here and watch the videos, and listen to what is intimately, joyously, tentatively, and courageously shared among collaborators, we invite them to consider what "affective inventory" (p. 1) is amassed and what it might tell us about our research concerns, our artistic work, and the social relations of our inquiry. McDuie-Ra et al. speak to the challenge of reading affect in collaborative research due to the ways that affect can be both personal and "transpersonal" in how it is located in, or expressed by, a particular person. They advise that as soon as you

[. . .] draw upon cultural-linguistic repertoires to identify a feeling as emotion, emotions then become embedded within power relations. We can read the discursive and symbolic elements of 'affect' and 'emotions', but our interpretations will always be shaped by our own affective biographies and cultural linguistic memberships (Wetherell, 2015). (McDuie-Ra et al., 2020, p. 1)

So how do we tease apart the complicated affects we feel in collaborative work, especially when the boundary between self and other can become so porous, yet also shaped by historic relations of power? And importantly, how do we resist the pressure in mainstream qualitative research to separate out the affective biographies of collaborators in order to make sense of all that is happening between and within people? One preliminary "answer" we have to this profoundly complex undertaking, is to share our affective biographies explicitly with one another, to be "listening bodies" to one another in ways that reveal the social, artistic, and power relations, as well as remaining attuned to what these affects afford us and how they may also delimit what is ethical to ask, and to know. And as with McDuie-Ra et al., we actively resist the impulse to smoothen our experiences or troublesome affects, before, during, and after, our research encounters. What follows, then, is one channel through the critically important, and unpredictable, affective landscape of our study.

Presence and Absence: Creative Encounters of Process and Practice in the Field

We describe that affective landscape, the methodological architecture, and relational ecologies, that structure our research and creative practices as a two-team approach, two different ways of “seeing,” “listening” and “experiencing.” We have researchers planning for the field, witnessing and experiencing “live” encounters with our participants, as well as a post facto team that engages digitally with collected data and artefacts. These two distinct perspectives offer us a complex engagement with our unfolding work, positioned as we are to ask what we can learn “in the presence of” and what we gain when we are “absent,” without the performative pressures of conducting research in the moment.

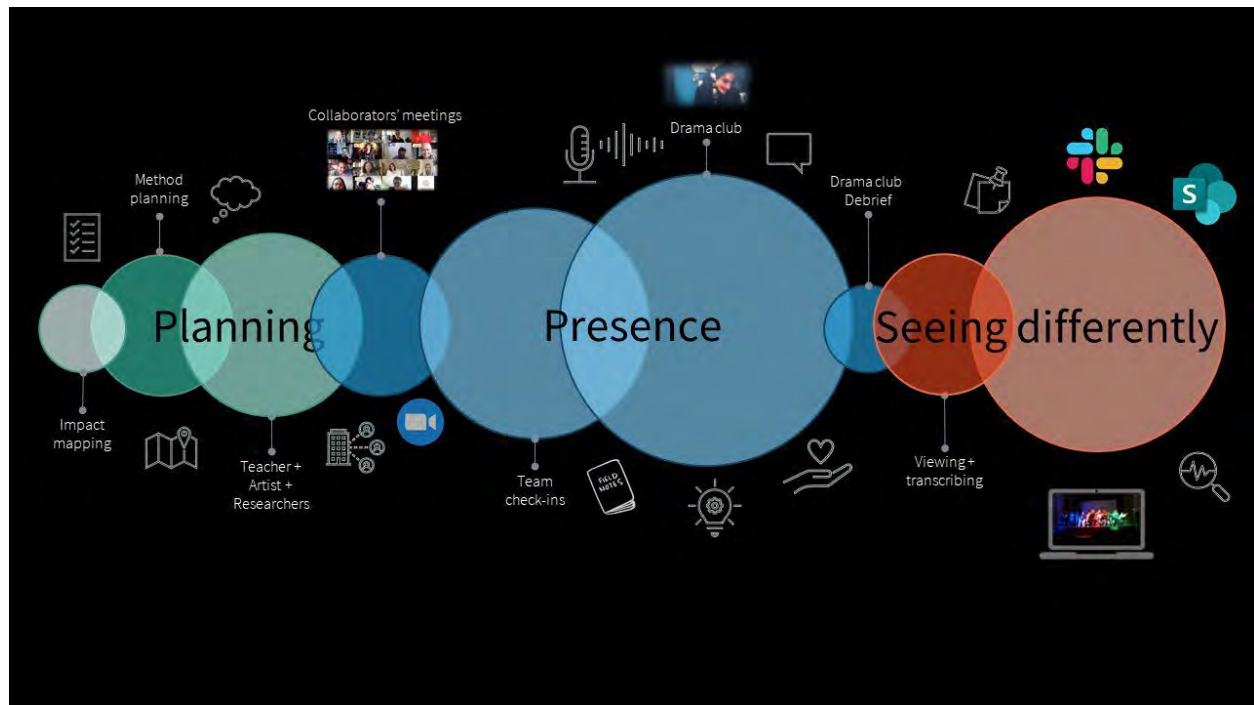


Fig. 2: Methodology-in-motion.

The past year (2020-2021) has also strengthened another methodological principle that is significant for our work. Our metho-pedagogical (see Gallagher & Wessels, 2011) practices are a relational and responsive mapping to the changing conditions we find ourselves in alongside our participants—what we have come to call our “methodology-in-motion” (Cardwell in Gallagher et al., 2020). We liken our methodology to a reflexive choreography where we recognize our “embodied and affective reactions as essential components that determine our research encounters just as they help determine our evolving pedagogies in the field and our subsequent ethnographic analyses” (p. 176). This methodological approach was troubled and tested as the global pandemic unfolded around us. How could we be “in motion” when the world had ground to a halt? How could we adapt our drama methodologies—those embodied and relational experiences in community—to what we initially perceived as the severe limitations of a virtual landscape? In the following writing, images, and video excerpts, the reader will come to understand how our arts-led creative explorations became a shared life raft for both our local and global research communities. We followed where the youth led, as they shared their worries and

concerns about COVID-19, as well as their desires and hopes that sparked unexpected and intimate opportunities for drama in digital spaces.

Planning for the Field

With in-person fieldwork not possible for Year 2, our teacher-collaborator “Mr. B” invited us to participate in his weekly Zoom-based, after-school drama club at Cityscape High School, our research site in downtown Toronto. This diverse group of youth from across all grades (9-12), identified along the gender/sexual orientation spectrum, some with learning exceptionalities. Over the course of nine months, the drama club became an important “world” for all of us, where a committed sense of interconnection sustained us by virtue of our shared experiences and the listening space we cultivated. Not always easy or comfortable, this transcendent connection illustrated what can happen in unexpected places and “in between” spaces, like the Zoom room where we were simultaneously both present with, and absent from, each other. These experiences brought to life what Rothko (2004) describes as “liminal and live encounters that can be expansive and pushes outwards in all directions or it contracts and rushes inwards” (p. 47). Living with constant uncertainty and in the grips of a global pandemic, our world seemed to pulsate between the two, requiring deep responses of care, responsibility, and trust from researchers, participants, and global collaborators, alike.

The video excerpt below illustrates the initial planning or brainstorming sessions that framed our creative explorations in the field that followed. Always leaving plenty of room for our youth collaborators, the research team worked alongside our teacher-collaborator, Mr. B, and embedded artist Andrew Kushnir, to come up with pedagogical ideas to structure our drama methods. These lively meetings evoke Deleuze and Guattari’s use of the rhizome as an “acentred, non-hierarchical, open system, ruptured by lines of flight which go off in all and any direction” (Deleuze and Guattari in Taylor, 2014, p. 243). This Deleuzian “logic of the AND” which allows for multiple entryways, is essential to both our imaginative planning process and to what transpires in the field (p. 244). In the following video, we come up with ideas about “what has sustained us” during the pandemic that ultimately becomes our imagined Time Capsule for Now project, picked up across our global sites.



Fig. 3: “Time capsule for now” activity (This thumbnail shows the Toronto research team members planning the “Time capsule for now” activity. Top from left: Mr. B, Lindsay Valve, Nancy Cardwell; Bottom from left: Kathleen Gallagher, Christine Balt, Andrew Kushnir). Click [here](#) to watch the video.

"Live" Encounters in the Field

From our planning stage, we craft a unit, a collection of ideas that we take into the field where we help create the conditions for youth to "make what they need" in response to their lived experiences (see Harvey, 2016, p. 35). Our roles in the field are often fluid as are those of our participants. We move between being experts and seekers of knowledge in our collaborative drama-making. There exists a strong current of reciprocity here, a multi-directional flow of support, comfort, discomfort, encouragement, critique, and spontaneous creating. The field can be an intense, beautiful, and challenging, space. We experience the affective, the "being with" and "being present"; we see things and we miss things as we attend to what is happening moment to moment, responding spontaneously and recording it—through field notes, through video and audio capture, through written researcher reflections and through our weekly post-class or club debrief sessions that happen immediately afterwards—our first round of sense or meaning-making as we marvel and wonder at what just transpired.

What really stands out "in the field" across this year of "presence" and "being present" with our local and global research community has to do with these unfolding new and unexpected ways we can be together across countries, languages, cultures, context, a climate crisis, and a global pandemic. For us, these discoveries have become new "measures of closeness" (Barad, 2012) and new ways to measure closeness—understandings that were not available to us before. The year offered us the particular paradox of being both present and absent at the same time. We had not been challenged like this before—to live in isolation, in bubbles, apart-together, to work in virtual spaces and to be "live" in 2D. While we had to work harder to make that "liveness" felt in cyberspace, this visual landscape became a kind of new space where remarkable things could happen—things that might not have happened "in person," like the Time Capsule for Now project. There was a strong current of risk and desire threaded through this sharing, a desire to be more deeply known to each other, and a desire, perhaps, to hold and inspire each other. The Time Capsule for Now activity was so full of meaning when we experienced it with the youth, that we repeated this creative prompt the very next week with our collaborators at our first global meeting of the fall. The video excerpt below illustrates that sense of sharing, and how things unfold in our local field and in our global research network.



Fig. 4: The thumbnail features Alice, a youth participant from Toronto.

Click [here](#) to watch a video of youth participants and global researcher-collaborators share their pandemic "time capsules."

Quantitative Methods

It is not only our ethnographic field work that is “in motion,” but our quantitative surveying as well. This work is in deep relationship with our ethnographic and our applied drama methods. The survey is not a tool to quantify our discoveries or to simply corroborate our qualitative findings. It is, instead, in conversation with the conceptual interests of our study and is also following the interests and preoccupations of our youth participants and global researcher-collaborators. It is a malleable tool less concerned with statistical significance, but more interested in the survey’s capacity to place our individual youth participants in a fuller context (social, political, domestic) beyond the singular sites of the school or club in which we come to know them ethnographically.

Team member and quantitative specialist Lindsay Valve writes about the value of differences between sites that compel an adaptive and refractive approach to quantitative analysis. What she calls a “refractive approach” works contrary to standard survey tools that often minimize variation, creating a linear path to impact or outcomes, captured at one moment in time. Instead, our approach stays alert to refractive impulses, desires, ideas, and responses, taking place in “real time” and at multiple points to further inform, as in an iterative process, our “methodology-in-motion” and to reveal variations or aspects of the qualitative data that may be hidden from our perceptual frame.

Embracing instead of resisting difference allows us to leverage the local site context as a meaning-making backdrop to guide the generation and analysis of data. This flexibility enables a more realistic representation of a global frame, while preserving the complexity, texture, and nuance of each site . . . bringing us closer to our collaborators and participants, by offering a new dimension of intimacy found at the intersection of global and local experiences. (Gallagher et al., forthcoming)

Seeing/ "Being With" Differently: Deferred Reciprocity

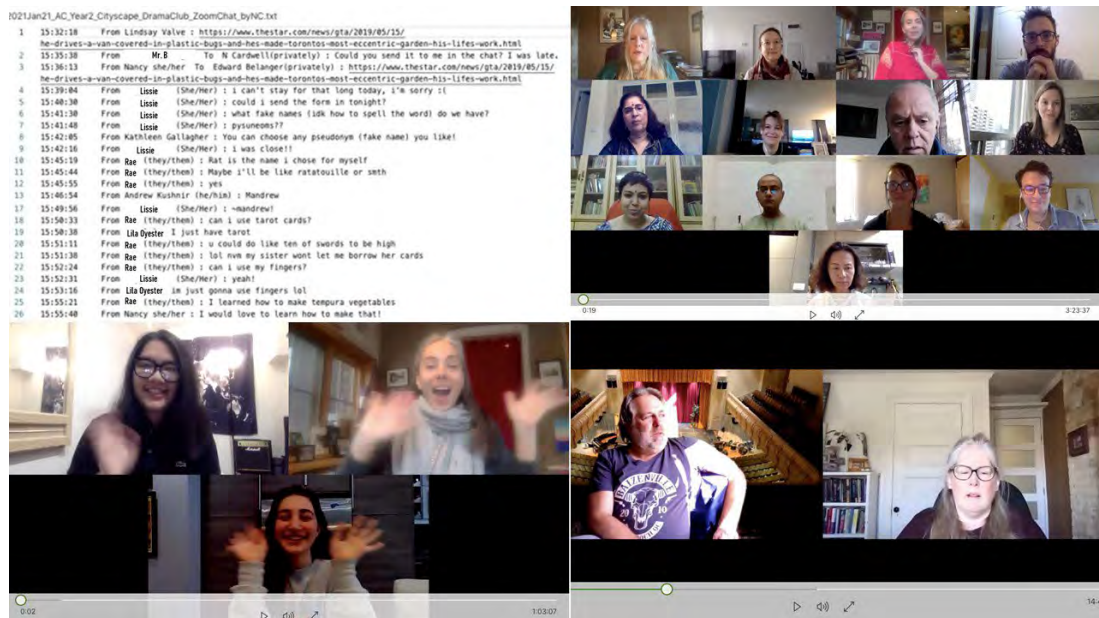


Fig. 5: View that the post-facto team sees.

After the time in the field (in-person in year 1 and virtually in year 2), the post-facto team then has the compelling experience of watching the process and relationships of the drama club from a later time and different space. Through the recordings, the post-facto researchers see both the researcher-participants and the youth-participants in the drama space, and witness the post-class debriefs of the researchers, which are often commentaries on the subtler tensions or moments of surprise within the classroom. While the in-field researchers are always both participants and observers in the field, hyper-sensitive to the needs of the moment and poised for action, the post-facto researchers watch from afar, without any immediate reciprocity expected from the people in the video. The post-facto team constitutes the first audience to the stories that the in-field team tells, and ultimately become coauthors of the stories that we (researchers, participants, and collaborators) tell together.

As the classes shifted online in post-pandemic times, the video data available to the post-facto researchers was in the form of Zoom recordings. The Zoom platform, “was built primarily for enterprise customers” (Yuan, 2020) and keeps us aware that it is primarily a business initiative, with its restrictions on non-paying users. In spite of the widespread apprehension about creative engagement over Zoom (or other online platforms) and misgivings about how this would restrict possibilities, what unfolded was not simply a lesser alternative to in-person engagement, but a distinctly different platform where new rules of engagement could be set. While Zoom has increased its revenue manifold since 2020, debuting in Forbes’s list of the largest public companies, it has also allowed people around the world to share their worries and dreams, across distances magnified by the pandemic (Messamore, 2020). In our most recent Zoom meeting with our global collaborators, one of our collaborators, Urvashi Sahni, shares how her India-based NGO Study Hall Educational Foundation (SHEF, 2021) had been battling the pandemic situation. Apart from providing people material support in the form of basic necessities, she also talked about “holding each other very hard; providing all the compassionate, caring listening . . .”

Such communities of care, based on active, empathetic listening, were created on different levels within the project.

The virtual drama club was always more about the experience of being-in-relation than it was about producing an end-product. The Time Capsule for Now activity, for instance, focused on shared-realities of the COVID-19 pandemic, experienced acutely by youth-participants as well as researchers. The activity seemed to be an end in itself, a version of "check-in" that did not have the pressure to make something beyond the world of itself. The researchers participated in this as the youth did, creating space for each other and sharing vulnerabilities and dreams. The videos feature researchers worrying over how their flat was not clean enough to showcase, or they were unable to keep plants alive before the lockdown, or how they are not an early riser. To the audience of these stories, these informally shared and ostensibly unimportant pieces of information come across not as self-deprecating comments, but as assurances to the youth that the research team members, too, struggle to cope in demanding times. This acknowledgment on one of the very first days of researcher presence in the drama-club was crucial in the formation of this shared platform, where the post-facto team continued to witness complex and intimate offerings over the school year. The check-ins became not just an activity, but a ritual of sorts, repeated in each class and in each global collaborators' meeting, opening, for each of us, windows to others' worlds.

Team member Christine Balt (2020) has written, in the context of a previous research project (see [Radical Hope](#)), about her encounters with the video data of participants she had never met, coming later to that project, during the post-fieldwork phase. She talks about the "relational screen" of the video recording device. As a post-facto researcher, she looked at the camera captures of the researchers who were moving around the drama space, participating as well as recording activities in the room, and Balt appreciated the lack of "objective stance" of the camera. (p. 161) As our research moved online, the "relational screen" was replaced by the objective Zoom screen in which people appeared in their small squares. The recordings, generally in grid-view (all participants visible at once), show data unmediated by the subjectivity of the in-field researchers. However, the data available was still transgressive. Each little box in Zoom—for those who had their cameras on—were windows onto different worlds. Like a proscenium stage, every item within these tiny frames seemed to signify something beyond itself. Each book, flag, poster, or wall art in the background, and later Zoom virtual backgrounds, invited readings. The boxes became their own small "plays," each sharing designs of living that provoked curiosity and communicated significance.

On Zoom, we generally see a "medium close-up" view of a person. In cinema, a medium close-up is a shot that,

[. . .] showcases the face of a subject, letting audiences see small nuances of behaviour and emotion while eliciting a higher degree of identification and empathy; the slightly wider framing [than the close shot] also lets body language convey meaning by the inclusion of a character's shoulders. (Mercado, 2013, p. 41)

Informed consent to this recording of a personal space of being implies trust in those to which this recording would be revealed. This trust calls for a sense of responsibility for the witnesses of these personal spaces, the post-facto researchers watching the medium-close movies of shared intimacies.

The post-facto and the in-field teams have regular “meaning-making meetings” together in which inferences, questions, and hunches from our differently situated observations are exchanged. The post-facto team and the research participants, however, do not directly meet each other, but they interact, in a way, once removed. The in-field team brings the nuances of the drama classroom to the post-facto team and takes back to the classroom and the youth participants the ethos of care of the larger research team, including the global collaborators, thus connecting global communities of care. Gallagher has called this phenomenon “deferred reciprocity” (Team meeting, May 19, 2021). The mediation of such a deferred reciprocity slows the process, giving us more time to think about, and to appreciate, what we share. This slowness is a deliberate part of the methodology of the project, as it creates a space for deeper engagements and interaction within and across our various communities. And, importantly, a carefully slow movement interrupts the race to “findings” or answers, letting “relationships grow at the speed of trust” (Steinem, 2015).

To Conclude

As with so many research and artistic projects during COVID, we too “pivoted,” the word now commonplace in our vocabulary. It is an especially suitable word for us because it signals movement, a shift from standing still, an about-face, a new direction. All of these things came to pass in the context of our global collaborative ethnography. With our global collaborators, we reached out more often and in surprisingly intimate ways; we were helpful to others and felt held by them in return. With our youth participants, we let the theatre-making take a back seat while we found a way to embrace the uncertainty of the time and gently turn towards the fear and concern that were inescapable. We came together in our isolation. Apart-together.

All the while, the theatre-making stood quietly in the background, an old, patient friend waiting to be invited in, whispering, “make what you need,” friends; we can make this drama space anything we want it to be. And so, the research followed the whisper of the theatre, taking its cue in turn from the gentle and supportive pedagogy of the teacher, Mr. B. And we, the researcher-participants, chanced breathing our own worries into the space, and then, deeply benefited from the care and compassion we found. We lost our research plan, but we found ourselves and each other. We became the listening bodies we needed to be for one another. We created what was mattering to us. And, in that seemingly dispassionate Zoom space, we became highly attuned to our “affective inventory” and it did not steer us wrong. The space itself became a community project, a “work,” and our research and theatre-making, are likely forever altered.

Note

1. Audacious Citizenship Project (2019-2024). Click [here](#) to listen to a soundscape of the “Voices of youth participants, global collaborators, and Toronto research team members.”

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“And So We Write”: Reflective Practice in Ethnotheatre and Devised Theatre Projects

Jonathan P. Jones

Abstract

This paper follows the author’s trajectory as he collaboratively experimented with ethnodrama (theatre scripts generated from interviews, media artifacts, and written media) and devised theatre performance (theatre collaboratively created with a group), culminating in the analysis of a performance with high school students combining elements of these forms. The author defines the forms, illuminates how he engaged with them over time, and how he adapted elements of them for work with his high school students. The author proposes a framework deduced from these experiences as a provocation for future performance projects and as a demonstration of an educator’s reflective practice.

It’s funny. People are beat up and thrown out of their house and stuff, and I’m saying all this about some name-calling. For some people, though, the name-calling is just as bad as being beat up. But for me, it wasn’t. I’m not sure why. I just let it go. I never took it personally.

Maybe it was the Oprah influence.

In the early 90s, she’d interview celebrities, and they’d talk about the lies that were printed about them in the tabloids. Oprah would say that at some point you have to realize that they’re not writing about you, they’re writing about their perception of you. It has nothing to do with you personally. I guess that’s my philosophy. (Jones et al., 2003)

This excerpt is from *Voices*, a devised ethnodrama in which I performed. My colleagues and I produced the work in collaboration with the NYU LGBT Center in 2003 following a theatre-in-education model wherein a theatrical performance is presented with a workshop experience for the audience. In creating this project, my colleague Brad Vincent generated a questionnaire about personal experiences of LGBT youth which the members of the devising team completed. We read our responses to each question at our first devising session and discussed possibilities for how we might bring those narratives to life on the stage. *Voices* represents one of several experiences from when I was a graduate student in which I collaboratively experimented with theatrical forms. In this paper, I define terms, including devised theatre and ethnodrama, to give insight into those forms and illuminate the reflective practitioner methodology undertaken. I document and analyze a few of the aforementioned collaborative experiences from my graduate career and discuss how those artistic processes shaped my subsequent work as a drama educator implementing a framework for devised theatre grounded in ethnodramatic practices. Throughout the paper, I draw upon my two decades of drama teaching (at both the secondary and university levels) in order to better understand my work, such that it might serve as inspiration for other drama educators to engage in similar reflective practice.

Definitions

It is often said that theatre is the ultimate collaborative art form, requiring the time and talents of a diverse body of artists and technicians to come together and contribute to a unified artistic endeavor. Within that collaborative frame, there are particular approaches to theatre that center collaboration over the singular artistic vision of a playwright, director, or producer—among which is devised theatre. According to Alison Oddey (1994), devised theatre is:

determined and defined by a group of people who set up an initial framework or structure to explore and experiment with ideas, images, concepts, themes, or specific stimuli that might include music, text, objects, paintings, or movement. A devised theatrical performance originates with the group while making the performance, rather than starting from a play text that someone else has written to be interpreted. (p. 1)

Given the collaborative nature of this form, devised theatre fundamentally depends on the aesthetics of the collaborators—the artistic sensibilities they bring to the experience as well as those that emerge in the collaborative encounter.

In his innovative text, *Ethnodrama: An Anthology of Reality Theatre*, Johnny Saldaña (2003) defines ethnotheatre as a theatrical genre employing, “the traditional craft and artistic techniques of theatre production to mount for an audience a live performance event of research participants’ experiences and/or the researcher’s interpretations of data” (p. 1). This definition is in contrast with ethnodrama, “the written script,” consisting of “dramatized, significant selections of narrative collected through interviews, participant observation field notes, journal entries, and/or print and media artifacts such as diaries, television broadcasts, newspaper articles, and court proceedings” (p. 2). The ethnodramatist arranges excerpts from this body of material into a performance script. Some commonly known examples of this work include Moisés Kaufman and Members of the Tectonic Theater Project’s *The Laramie Project*, Eve Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues*, and Anna Deavere Smith’s *Twilight: Los Angeles*.

As a theatrical genre, ethnotheatre is a form that evolved over time both in qualitative research (as performance ethnography) and as an emergent theatrical form. Victor Turner (1982) describes performance ethnography as a process that would allow the ethnographer to get “‘under the skin’ of members of other cultures, rather than merely ‘taking the role of the other’” (p. 90). Ellis and Bochner (1996) further explored the potential of ethnotheatre when writing,

The dramas are public performances heard and responded to by a wide and diverse population of people who have something at stake in the issues addressed by the plays. Fieldwork is transformed into dramas that are explicitly political and public. (p. 38)

In describing her initial work in this form, Anna Deavere Smith (1993) wrote,

My goal has been to find American character in the ways that people speak. [...] At that time, I was not as interested in performance or in social commentary as I was in experimenting with language and its relationship to character. (p. xxiii)

From this perspective, Smith approached this work as a performer and a researcher: “If I listened carefully to people’s words, and particularly to their rhythms, [...] I could use language to learn about my own time” (p. xxv). Taken together, we understand ethnotheatre as an arts-based research methodology grounded in qualitative inquiry and performance that balances insights into a population, the researcher/artist’s experience of the population, and performer/audience discourse. The ethnodramatist invites the audience to gaze closely in on a particular population, time, and/or place, provoking them to reconsider their preconceived notions and examine other perspectives.

Methodology

When faced with a challenge, reflective practitioners draw upon their prior experiences in order to analyze the problem and adjust in the moment. Schön (1983) first articulated an approach to reflecting-in-action, which formed the basis of his reflective practitioner theory. According to Schön, the reflective practitioner considers the following:

What features do I notice when I recognize this thing? What are the criteria by which I make this judgment? What procedures am I enacting when I perform this skill? How am I framing the problem that I am trying to solve? (p. 50)

In this paper, I took a more expansive view as a reflective practitioner. Rather than reflecting in the moment on a particular challenge, I am looking back on my experiences in three theatre projects (*Assessment: Putting the Pieces Together or AH—SSESS*, *Folktale Journey*, and *Voices*) in order to make sense of how those experiences informed my future teaching and artistic practice. As Schön instructs, I consider the features of those experiences, I tease out criteria that framed the work that followed, and I investigate the procedures that I employed in that subsequent work.

My Experience Being Ah—sessed

In preparation for *Assessment: Putting the Pieces Together or AH—SSESS*, Lisa Donovan (2003) interviewed educators and school administrators in Berkshire County, Massachusetts, about their views on assessment in K-12 schools. Donovan collaborated with Joe Salvatore (an expert in documentary theatre and verbatim performance) on the script, coding the interview data into themes and developing the data into a traditional ethnodrama. Philip Taylor (2003), the production’s stage director, described the script as: “A dramatic and comedic commentary on school assessment which raises many intriguing questions about what is and isn’t valued as educators, administrators, parents, students and the wider school community make decisions about human progress and achievement” (p. 34).

The circumstances of the production guided our artistic process as the piece would serve as a provocation for discussion at two international conferences—the International Drama in Education Research Institute: IDIERI Goes 4th in Northampton, UK, and the Forum on Arts Assessment at NYU in New York. We were tasked with conveying the thoughts and ideas expressed by the stakeholders that Donovan interviewed, and this superseded any particular artistic vision. The audience could read the script, but what value would be added from the performance? This was our task. In rehearsal, we spent a lot of time talking about the subject—what did we know of assessment in the arts or drama? What were our experiences in

the drama classroom? How did those experiences shape the artists and educators that we were at that time? Hours were spent working through our understanding of our experiences, what we understood the perspectives of the characters in the script to be, and in what ways we could best illuminate what was said therein.

Verbatim performance can be characterized as a subset of ethnotheatre wherein the script is composed only of spoken data (interviews, media artifacts, and/or audio or video recordings) without incorporating written material. Verbatim tasks the performer with replicating that spoken data word-for-word and gesture-for-gesture (in so far as gestures have been captured by the researcher). In his writing and teaching about verbatim performance, Salvatore (2020) speaks of disfluency as the moment where people reveal their unsanitized selves (p. 1047)—when words fail us—when we stop speaking in jargon and what we think people want to hear—what Anna Deavere Smith (1993) describes as the intervention of listening:

We can listen for what is inconsistent as well as for what is consistent. We can listen to what the dominant pattern of speech is, and can listen for the break from that pattern of speech. [...] The break from the pattern is where character lives, and where dialogue, ironically begins, in the *uh*. In the pause, in the thought as captured for the first time in a moment of speech, rather than in the rehearsed, the proven. (p. xxxix)

It is in these margins of dialogue that perspectives are revealed. Note how the text appears in the script from *Ah—ssess*:

I tend to think of assessment in terms of ...
what the student can do
rather than what's being done to the student
aaaaand so to me a-assessment includes authentic
if it's true assessment
and that means that you ask a student to show you
what the student can do
bring to that performance certain criteria to measure
how well the student's done (Donovan, 2003)

Here, the line breaks indicate a break in speech—be that from a pause, a breath, or a thought moment. The underlined words indicate that the interview subject emphasized those words as they said them, and the extended vowels are meant to replicate elements of the speech pattern. In these ways, the ethnodramatist indicates clues to the speaking cadence in the layout of the dialogue on the page (Salvatore, 2020, p. 1047).

Beyond the speaking pattern, as Smith (1993) indicated, we also gain insight into the character. As the speaker paused between lines one and two, perhaps they hadn't previously articulated a definition of assessment. As they extend the vowel in line four, perhaps they are grasping for what they think the interviewer wants to hear—that assessment is “authentic” and that it should “show.” But then comes the disfluency—“what the student can do...bring to that performance certain criteria to measure...how well the student's done”—what Smith described as a “thought as captured for the first time in a moment of speech, rather than in the rehearsed, the proven” (p. xxxix). If you are familiar with assessment jargon, you will note that all the keywords are included in that short excerpt, but their meaning is sometimes

unclear or misconstrued. And yet, in spite of the disfluency, the speaker manages to arrive at the heart of assessment—a measure of “how well the student’s done.” Providing the audience with the full stream of consciousness, the ethnodramatist reveals an educator who may be overwhelmed by the jargon but when you strip all of that jargon away, they *do* see to know what assessment is. In other approaches (be it in journalism, research, or playwriting), that disfluency is sanitized, often only presenting the most articulate moments or even cleaning up what the subject actually said, airbrushing away all the flaws, thereby preventing the audience from engaging as closely as we might like with those perspectives.

Capturing the unvarnished truth of human dialogue was a key takeaway from this project. When we worked on *Ah—ssess*, Taylor coached us to set aside our ideas about the content or the characters and to let the words speak for themselves—to allow the struggle to be articulate—the imprecision of it all—to wash over the listener. We were to embody the perspectives as they were—without judgment or critique—just put the words into our voice and body and let the audience come to their own judgments about what they observed.

The director proposed a framing device in order to highlight keywords in each sequence of the script: anal probes, lock step, cookie cutter, MCAS, question, pressure points, imagination. This sequence became part of a mantra (adding in multiple repetitions of “Ah—ssess” as well)—we chanted it in rehearsal; we chanted it in the performance. The ensemble created tableau to represent each term and re-created them in the moments between each segment of the performance. These keywords functioned like *in vivo* codes (themes derived from actual words in the text) and the director employed them as a way to break up the whole into discernible chunks—each code framing the section of text that followed. The director devised the codes from a Brechtian approach, with the codes serving as titles to disrupt the action and provide a moment of reflection for the audience: *what are anal probes? How might that image convey a perspective about assessment in the arts?* German dramatist Bertolt Brecht employed this technique of displaying titles during many of his plays to comment on the action in a particular scene. Though the codes in our production of *Ah—ssess* were pulled from a particular section of text, hearing them again when juxtaposed with a different section such as those framed by “question” or “imagination,” pressed the audience to engage with the material: *what might anal probes conjure when hearing about questions or imagination?* Not only were these titles Brechtian, but so too was this dialogic approach to the performance as seen in Brecht’s learning plays, wherein, “contradictions are provoked, and events are discussed from different perspectives” (Demirdiř & Aksoy, 2021, p. 147), which then inspire further conversation among the audience—and in this case, the dialogue occurred at the conferences where we presented the work.

Folktale Journey: Old Stories Told in New Ways

David Montgomery (who also appeared in *Ah—ssess*) directed *Folktale Journey*, a student-devised production of folktales for young audiences. In the production, Montgomery asked the cast (in dual roles, as we were also the devising team) to research folktales from different cultures. Over a period of weeks, we identified several stories representing American, Western European, African, and Chinese cultures and shared them within the group. Note that this was before a deep recognition of cultural appropriation was at the fore of social justice discourse—so our investigation was oriented towards stories that might

reflect the cultures of folks in our audiences rather than that of the performers—certainly different from what we would do today. We took it on faith that there was an absence of diverse folklore in theatre for young audiences repertoire, and under the guidance of our fearless director, we presented the work to New York City audiences.

In the initial devising meetings, someone would read the story aloud and following that initial reading, the group would improvise the narrative. As director, Montgomery would offer feedback on the improvisation and then we would do it again. After several run-throughs, the devising team and stage management would sort out a working script which remained fluid through the rehearsal process such that we might incorporate new ideas as we developed the script. As rehearsals unfolded, physical theatre, movement, and original music, were devised to round out the performances. We devised an original story, *The Forgotten Town*, about a traveler who collected stories from around the world and shared them with an audience of young people (the other performers). The traveler arrived in a village that was building a wall in order to keep the world out—and here the traveler sought to bring the world in (Montgomery et al., 2003).

Traveler: I'm traveling the world. Look, here's a book of all my travels. It's got pictures and stories.
 Hadley: Hey, what's that picture? Who are those people...and those strange animals?
 Traveler: Oh, those are llamas. That's a story from Ecuador. It's called *The Search for the Magic Lake*. Do you want to hear it?
 Kristen: This whole book is full of stories?
 Traveler: *(singing) These are folktales
 —from my many journeys.*
 Townspeople: *(singing) Won't you tell us what they are?*

Each time the storyteller began a new story, the other performers morphed into the characters and performed the story. The stories were relatively short in length and the intended audience was 6-9 years old. As such, rather than having a deep character exploration in our rehearsal, we set about focusing on conveying each narrative—*who did what, when, and where?*

In many respects, we had the same directorial orientation here as we did in *Ah—sness*—the young people could read the story, so what value would be added from the live performance? To that end, the perspectives of the townspeople were meant to reflect how the young people might interact with the Traveler character. This was similar to the Brechtian dialogic approach between performers and their audience as we experienced in *Ah—sness*: *what questions might the young people have, how might they respond to unfamiliar terms or ideas, and what might they be inspired to do with the information that was shared?* We devised dialogue that could take on these potential perspectives such that our young audience members might see their perspectives represented on stage. Like Brecht's work and what we sought to achieve in *Ah—sness*, we did not want a passive audience, but rather participants engaged in a shared dialogue about the topic at hand—in this case, cross-cultural storytelling. Often, this dialogue is merely a metaphor for the performer/audience exchange of ideas, but we followed a few of our performances with a post-performance talk back so that we could actually have that conversation with the audience.

Voices

Concurrently with the folktale project, I was also a member of the devising team for an applied theatre project: *Voices*. From our initial conversations about the project, we had one primary aim: in getting LGBT youth to hear our stories about our lived experience, we hoped to encourage them to share their own stories. The devising team believed that liberation from homophobic oppression was possible through this kind of artistic process—and with that, self-actualization (Freire, 1970). But how do you devise a script that will achieve that? In this experience, the devising team responded to the questionnaire mentioned at the outset of this article just to see what stories emerged within the group. Among the survey questions were:

- In my elementary school/middle school/high school, the students or faculty/administration:
 - physically harassed or assaulted students they perceived to be gay
 - verbally harassed students they perceived to be gay
 - expressed their belief that gay people are morally offensive or sinful
- In my elementary school/middle school/high school, faculty/administration intervened when:
 - students made homophobic comments or used epithets based on sexual orientation or gender identity in a derogatory manner
 - people expressed their belief that gay people are morally offensive or sinful
- I felt unsafe in my elementary school/middle school/high school because others did or might perceive me as gay
- My elementary school/middle school/high school made special resources available to gay students.
- I felt a sense of “belonging” in elementary school/middle school/high school. (Vincent, 2006, pp. 267–289)

As we had a lot to say on these topics, there were reams of data to analyze. Without a clear path forward, we sat together in an early planning session and read the responses aloud. We left that evening with a firm sense that something was possible, but the sheer volume of material left us a bit perplexed as to how to proceed. Fortunately, one of the group members employed a close reading of the survey responses. In so doing, he discovered a narrative arc and generated a framework from which the performance script emerged. Through the devising and rehearsal process, we continually discussed LGBT culture and our experience of that as young people, youth culture in a variety of American contexts (from urban and rural Texas to urban California to suburban New York), and religious experiences. The culminating script then encapsulated the diversity of our perspectives such that we could best present similarities and differences among our own experiences in order to allow multiple entry points for the audience, as indicated in this excerpt:

ROBERT (Stepping forwards) I guess I was in high school.

DONNIE Preschool

ADAM First grade

NICK Elementary school

KELLY	Fourth grade
ARNOLD	Jr. High
ROBERT	when I first noticed I was attracted to men. His name was Jesse, and we were best friends. I never thought that much about it at the time. I just figured I was attracted to him because he was my best friend... nothing more, really. I was also pretty fond of stars: Brad Pitt, Ricky Martin...
DONNIE	Han Solo
NICK	Andrew McCarthy
ADAM	Kirk Cameron
KELLY	Farrah Fawcett
DONNIE	Butch, from <i>The Little Rascals</i>
ROBERT	I didn't think that was weird though. I freely spoke about the attraction toward the stars that was safe. It was okay to say that a celebrity was "hot." (Jones et al., 2003)

Given the range of ages and generational scope of the stars, the audience might either identify with one of the perspectives or situate their own experience among those that were shared.

Like the *Folktale Journey* process, we employed improvisation and physical theatre strategies to flesh out the performance, but also drew upon the in-vivo coding approach from *Ah—ssess* in order to develop a new mantra (fag, fudge-packer, dyke, pansy, queer) that drew upon the many homophobic slurs used against us at different points in our lives. As in the prior experience, we used the mantra as a framing device for transitions between vignettes. The performance script was deeply personal as we were portraying scenes and monologues from our own lived experience. We regularly asked what value would be added from the live performance—and at which points a scripted scene could safely invite the audience into an emotionally fraught experience—or when might the material be better conveyed as an observational, omniscient monologue.

As we presented the work as part of a workshop experience, that now-familiar Brechtian dialogic approach was not limited to metaphorical audience discourse; instead, we had those conversations directly with the audience following the performance. We invited the audience members to free write or draw as an initial response to the performance. Thereafter, we invited them to share words or phrases that occurred to them during their reflective writing or drawing which were then categorized. We then asked the audience members to gravitate towards the category that best described their reactions to form breakout groups. Within these groups, the teaching artists facilitated a discussion where the audience members could elect to share their own stories relating to the thematic category. Following this sharing, each small group composed a short dramatic representation of their discussions and then shared them

with the larger group. In the closing activity, we asked each audience member to respond to one of three prompts: I feel..., My voice..., or Sharing my voice....

Final Destination: “And Yet I Write” – Children of the Holocaust: Journals and Diaries

A few years after the *Voices* project, I was teaching high school and collaborating with a colleague, Barbara Rottman. We were interested in developing an interdisciplinary unit of study that would deepen connections to what our high school English language arts students were studying in their history classes. We were surprised to learn that their history teacher spent an inordinate amount of time focusing on World War II and that students characterized the content as “hard to grasp.” I had recently attended a professional development training with the organization Facing History which focused on the Holocaust and human behavior (Strom, 1994), so I knew that there were existing methodologies that would allow for a more critical look at students’ identities and socio-cultural connections, but Barbara and I wanted something more. The students traditionally read *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* (1967), *Night* by Elie Wiesel (1960), or *Farewell to Manzanar* (Wakatsuki Houston & Houston, 1973), so we were aware of the opportunities that personal narratives presented to the students, allowing them to see the experience from a firsthand account, but we wanted the students to make focused connections, reflect on the experience, and share that with the larger school community. Barbara was previously curator of the Los Angeles Holocaust Museum where she brought the *Anne Frank in the World* exhibition in 1986. As part of her work there, she crafted a performance script (Rottman, no date) from victims’ and survivors’ personal diaries and journals (Ehrmann et al. in Zapruder, 2002; Hillesum, 1996; Lieblich, 1993; Zucker, 2020). As such, we drew together Barbara’s experiences and my own history with devised theatre and ethnotheatre to devise an original ethnographic performance with our students.

In this devising process, the students read from the journals and diaries and crafted personal writing that reflected on or responded to what they had read. They selected passages from the texts to share with their classmates and identified excerpts from their personal writing to share. Working across three classes, Barbara and I worked with student representatives from each class to compile segments from the student writing and excerpts from the journals and diaries into a draft script. The classes could then expand or shape the script with additional student responses, dramatic readings of selections, or dramatic interpretations of active moments. Throughout the process, the students were engaged in ongoing cultural critique—looking both at the historical context as well as their experience of contemporary youth culture in Southern California.

From the final scene, here are a few excerpts from the performance text (Jones et al., 2007):

Speaker A	The Holocaust showed how evil people can be.
Speaker B	So why do people hate? They know it doesn’t do anything but cause danger. Do people want danger?
Speaker C	According to Elie Wiesel, hating is self-destructive.
Speaker D	Adolf Hitler hated so much, that at the end of the holocaust, he killed himself. By tearing apart the lives of others, he also tore apart his own life.

- Speaker E Hatred is everywhere. It's not just in Sobibor or Auschwitz—it's in the entire world. You don't hate people because you don't like them, you hate because it's put into your head. The whole world is full of hate. Can anybody stop that?
- Speaker F I don't understand...
I feel bad for the children who did not get to live a full life.
I feel bad for the elderly people that did not get to live out their retirement.
I feel bad for the people who did survive; who had to work hard labor while their families were gassed; they had to listen to their families scream while they were being brutally murdered.
I don't understand how all those Germans just stood there and did not help the Jews.
I don't understand how the Germans knew what the Jews were in for—
The Germans knew the Jews were going to be killed
The Germans knew the suffering the Jews were going to experience
Yet most stood there and did absolutely nothing.
- Speaker G During the holocaust, many people stood by and watched Hitler kill Jews and gypsies. People wonder if standing by is a crime. I say it is, but it's not as bad as the crime itself.
- Speaker H If one stands by and fails to act, that is evil. It might never be as evil as the crime, but it is still evil and should be considered a crime.
- Speaker I Recently, there was a case in Las Vegas where an 18 year-old guy raped and murdered a seven year-old girl. His friend was a bystander and did nothing to stop it. The bystander was seen as unethical but never charged with a crime.
- Speaker J How come when something happens to America, everyone has to get involved, but when another race or nation has a problem, no one does anything? It's just weird, because all men are created equal, so if everyone helps us when we have a problem, we should be the first ones to help others.
- Speaker K It's sad because we are alive and still complain about our lives when thousands of children were killed and their bodies turned to dust before they had a chance to live in our world.
- Speaker L Many of the people we have heard from died in the Holocaust. Fortunately we still have their diaries which, with their collections of thoughts, feeling, and personal experiences, have survived. In a way then, you could say the writers have survived.
- All And so we write.

We wanted the students to experience history through the frame of personal examination and reflection: in what way did these voices from decades ago speak to this contemporary generation, what was lost in that horrific time, and what does it mean for us today? Through this process, Barbara and I intentionally sought to make the unfamiliar familiar. I drew upon the experiences I had in each of the preceding theatrical projects—but rather than thinking about audience when asking what value would be added from the live performance, we turned that question around as an assessment of our teaching and facilitation—what value would *our students* gain from devising the script and participating in the live performance? And I think the above excerpts give a sense of what the students took away from their experience—and this was stated right in the performance.

The students gained a closeness to the texts in evaluating what to include in the performance—but also through scripting and developing improvisations based on what they had read. They drew upon their own experiences as similarly aged young people and were often most connected to the most mundane

of the diary entries—as these moments showcased the diarists’ humanity. These were Holocaust narratives—and the disfluency of the mundane—as Smith (1993) stated, “In the pause, in the thought as captured for the first time in a [diary entry], rather than in the rehearsed, the proven” (p. xxxix)—those were the moments that our students identified as those that best illuminated what made the Holocaust so horrific.

And Now, You Do It

Reflecting on our rehearsal process in *And Yet I Write*, we employed many of the approaches detailed earlier in this article. These included:

- deep conversation about the subject matter
- selecting ethnographic material (be that found or created through interview, dialogue, or written response) that can be incorporated into the performance text
- Brechtian approaches including titles and a dialogic approach to the text that showcase multiple perspectives
- decoding those perspectives through the devising process and in the performance script
- exploring in-vivo codes (words taken directly from the text as themes for a particular section) in order to organize the performance into thematically linked segments
- drawing upon physical theatre, movement, and music in order to diversify the performance aesthetic
- interrogating what value the audience might gain from viewing each part of the live performance

In service of proposing a methodology for devised ethnographic theatre, this list provides a framework for what we did. Know that it was a process that developed over time, rather than some predetermined protocol that we followed. Recall that I prefaced all of these experiences with the notion that we were working without a framework, and while I think this list is a good start, it should not be viewed as exhaustive.

As in all devising processes, engage your devising team in experiences that task them with sharing their aesthetic sensibilities and experiences—such that these can provide additional approaches to working that are best suited towards your particular group. When thinking about the material and subject matter, note how I began this article: “they’re not writing about you, they’re writing about their perception of you” (Jones, 2003). Ask your devising team what their perceptions are and what perception or perspective they want to put out into the world; what will their audience gain from viewing this performance? In qualitative research, we promote the value of member checking to confirm that the research participants feel their perspective is being appropriately represented. Should you have access to the population that is being presented, check in with them. If the devising team will present their own perspectives, ensure that they are comfortable sharing them. In one of my recent pedagogy courses, a student was critical of devising theatre in this way, noting, “We don’t have a right to our students’ trauma.” Let that alone serve as provocation for more reflection and writing. Employ an ethic of care for the research subjects and your devising team and see what develops.

More than just considering how to devise ethnographic theatre work with your students, I recommend we step back from the particular content here to address a more general query: how can you reflect on your own experience and teaching practices in order to inform your current and future teaching? As I mentioned earlier, Schön (1983) tasks the reflective practitioner with asking “What features do I notice when I recognize this thing? What are the criteria by which I make this judgment? What procedures am I enacting when I perform this skill?” (p. 50). I keep binders of notes, scripts, lesson plans, and the like from every production I am a part of or class I teach so that I can reference that work when needed. You might do the same. Reflective practitioner work often puts the onus on the teacher—*how will you draw upon your prior experience to navigate a challenge you experience?* What if you include the students in the discussion—what might they draw upon from their prior experience to help navigate a current challenge? Or, what if you shared some artifacts from an old unit or artistic endeavor and asked them if they observe any process or procedure that might help us/them navigate a current challenge? Just as theatre is collaborative, so too are teaching and learning and we all benefit from diverse perspectives within the room contributing to the process.

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Mapping Presence: An Exploration of Embodiment and Knowledge Transfers in Cyber-Mediated Classrooms

Kendra N. Kahl

Abstract

As teachers and students navigated the forced transition to online education, their physical and social interaction became possible only through technology. How did this mediated interaction affect learning outcomes, teacher presence, and their performance, in synchronous classroom spaces? What was lost in the translation of in-person instruction? What might this lost element tell us about the epistemology of embodiment, the transfer of knowledge in the classroom, and the roles of teachers and students within these knowledge frameworks? Through autoethnographical performative inquiry, this paper argues that embodiment—individual and collective—and multidimensional proximity construct sites of knowledge transfer.

Mapping Presence: An Exploration of Embodiment and Knowledge Transfers in Cyber-Mediated Classroom Spaces

Prologue: Stuck on Mute

“Oh. I can’t hear you, Jamie. Would you unmute yourself?”

Jamie continues to talk with a puzzled look in her eyebrows.

“Hi, Jamie. We still can’t hear you. You’re muted. Would you click the microphone button on your device? This will turn your microphone on so we can hear you.”

Jamie’s face gets larger and larger as she leans in toward her camera.

Nothing happens.

“Do you see the microphone button?”

My amateur lipreading skills tell me that she says, “No.”

I describe the location of the button and what it looks like, drawing it on a piece of paper close by and holding it up to my laptop’s camera, watching it fill my rectangle on the screen.

She tries something (I think).

Still nothing.

The student becomes frustrated, not knowing how to interact with me. Being five years old, she is not old enough to type into the chat feature what she’s thinking, nor can she troubleshoot her problems. And I cannot assist her beyond my verbal and visual offerings.

“Is someone there that can help you get your microphone turned on?” I ask.

Her blonde curls shake back and forth. No.

“That’s okay, Jamie. We’ll get it figured out. Why don’t you tell us about the puppet you created?”

Silence. I see the student talking, very animated as she holds up her puppet made from materials around the house. The red microphone with a slash haunts the corner of her screen frame. My students and I watch as Jamie finishes her thought.

“Wow! That’s really awesome, Jamie. Thanks for sharing with us. I like how you used different colored yarn for the hair. That was a brilliant idea.”
The other students in the class nod and agree. Jamie smiles. We move on with our class. Jamie shares her thoughts two more times during class and participates in group activities. Anytime she speaks, we hold space and silence for her. We thank her for her contributions. The class is incredibly supportive, but sometimes we don’t know what to say in response. She doesn’t seem to mind—she’s happy to be “heard.” She forgets that we don’t understand what she’s saying.
But I will always wonder . . .

Introduction

The recent forced transition to online teaching provides a point of access for the investigation of “presence” within classroom spaces. As teachers and students navigate online education, their physical and social interaction has become possible only through technology. How does cyber mediation affect learning outcomes, curriculum design and instruction, and the performance of teachers and students in synchronous classroom spaces? How does presence play out in online classrooms when there is limited teacher-student and student-student “contact”? When utilizing a platform of cyber mediation, what is lost in the translation of in-person instruction? What might this lost element tell us about the epistemology of embodiment, the transfer of embodied knowledge in the classroom, and the roles of teachers and students within these knowledge frameworks?

To investigate these questions, I turn to my own practice as a drama educator. Through an autoethnographical approach, I reflexively examine my experiences in synchronous learning spaces. Autoethnography “systematically analyze[s] personal experience in order to understand cultural experience” (Ellis et al., 2010); the approach treats research and writing as a political and socially conscious act. Using personal anecdotes from my virtual classrooms, I pull from tenets of both autobiography and ethnography, organizing my paper around and through interludes. I want to stress that my experiences in the virtual classroom do not translate to every classroom—I do not wish to generalize, downplay, or overwrite, the experiences of teachers and students during this time, especially as accessibility to technology and support varied widely. However, I display my experiences here as a way of systematically analyzing my own pedagogy within such a historically significant cultural moment for educators, starting from my own experiences in order to map the interactions I had with students.

I also draw upon performative inquiry as a means of tying my educational inquiry with that of performance studies. Performative inquiry “calls our attention to those moments that invite us to pause and reflect on the pedagogical significance of such moments for our work, for our relationships with others, for who we are in the world” (Fels, 2012, p. 51). Furthermore, David Applebaum (1995) offers the notion of a stop—a moment in which educators listen to the possibilities of a particular point within their teaching, allowing embodied data of pedagogy to transcend the temporal and enlarge the possible (Fels, 2012; Applebaum, 1995; Milloy, 2007). Utilizing reflexivity in my online pedagogy will allow me to interrogate the intersections between myself and the educational culture within which my practice lies as well as my personal feelings within the greater societal and political climate (Adams et al., 2015).

The focus of my research centers on synchronous classroom spaces—spaces which were translated to online platforms when in-person instruction could not continue due to safety and health guidelines. This distinction is important for several reasons:

1. Online instruction is the best possibility for some individuals. Their choice to pursue online education should be supported by educational stakeholders and systems. Learning outcomes and strategies of synchronous and asynchronous teaching in these instances is designed to benefit students' journeys, and support systems are in place to scaffold and design these programs to be fully online experiences. My own teaching practice did not benefit from long-term structures of online curriculum design, and instructional planning occurred experimentally, rather than within a system of long-term support. My investigation of presence and contact in online spaces is directly related to what I call "translated instruction"—a mediated experience translated from an embodied experience of pedagogy.
2. I do not examine augmented reality (AR) or virtual reality (VR) educational interventions within the argument of this paper. In my research, I am drawn to investigate the ways augmented or virtual reality experiences in education might roll into the online classroom and how I might apply these findings to my own pedagogical stop moments. However, these experiences are often conducted within the context of in-person instruction and not in an environment of complete online instructional translation. While AR and VR educational pursuits certainly offer an avenue to discuss the presence of students within a particular mediated environment or experience, I do not attempt to bridge this gap within this paper; translated instruction is much broader than a specific experience of AR or VR and should be treated as its own full and complete experience.
3. The efforts of teachers to translate their instruction to online spaces should be celebrated and not taken for granted. The challenges addressed throughout this paper support and validate the struggles many teachers faced when turning their instruction online. My focus on cyber-mediated classroom spaces and teacher-student presence within these spaces, recognizes that teachers encountered (and continue to encounter) pedagogical challenges unique to the synchronous online classroom. It is within these differences of pedagogy and educational transfer that I investigate presence and contact between students and teachers.
4. I will assume that teachers, once their teaching realities became cyber-mediated classroom spaces, designed their instruction to fall within their new online teaching realities. Even so, these pedagogical translations fall into structures designed to be in-person experiences (i.e., class size, class time allotment, structures of power and positionality within in-person schooling, etc.). While some of my youth drama classes received the benefits of online program design and a team of online teachers developing and selecting material that lent itself to online class, many teachers were not afforded the luxury of time to brainstorm and plan their next moves together nor did they have the opportunity to change the trajectory of their standards-based and test-based curriculum for the school year. As I pursue an autoethnography of my own teaching experiences designed to be synchronous online sites of knowledge transfer, I will position my own pedagogical experiences within the framework of intentionally designed educational transfers in cyber-mediated classrooms. Cyber-mediated instruction seeks to create the most successful environment for student engagement, opportunity, and extension of curiosity. Teacher positivity when approaching such mediated courses is crucial to student success; however, I know firsthand the differences that in-person instruction provides, and I will seek to articulate these elements in regard to the presence of teachers and students in order to gain a greater understanding of embodied knowledge transfer in the classroom.

5. In-person classroom spaces are no stranger to performance studies. Many scholars have investigated the intersections of performance models and the roles of students and teachers in the classroom. I will translate these understandings of in-person classrooms as a site of performance studies to their cyber-mediated and translated counterparts in order to examine the roles of teachers and students in these spaces.

My performative inquiry focuses on two sites of my own pedagogy. In the wake of building closures and social restrictions, I began teaching with Childsplay Theatre Company's Online Theatre Academy in spring 2020, developing classes to extend learning into students' homes and imagining successful programming titles and activities for online drama instruction. I continued with Childsplay's summer programming, utilizing drama-based pedagogy to teach drama skill-building classes as well as creative drama classes for students aged 5-14. I then taught an undergraduate dramatic analysis course at Arizona State University, straddling a hybrid space with one student who attended in person and the other 17 attending online; my in-person student often joined the mediated classroom site, stepping outside of the microphoned physical classroom in order to complete group work and discussions with other students. I can directly compare all my teaching experiences in these mediated spaces to classes I have designed and taught in-person, providing an access point for noting the differences in my instructional design, planning, and implementation; the level of contact with my students; the apparent engagement of students with both me and the course material; and the moments of challenge, frustration, and "missing pieces."

Interlude I: Puppet Master with Invisible Strings

I have sent my students into breakout rooms to peer review their analytical papers on a work of tragedy we've been studying. They have 25 minutes to read each other's work and discuss strengths and moments of possible improvement, following a document of questions I have prepared and linked for them in the chat feature. This is not the first time we have done this activity, which proved helpful to their writing and reviewing practices for their first analysis paper.

"Hi, Kendra."

The greeting takes me by surprise. I look up from my personal laptop where I am marking the attendance for today on our Canvas page. I turn my attention back to the university computer.

"Hey, Maggie, what's going on?"

"I think I need a new partner."

I scroll through the partnerings I have randomly generated as she continues.

"I've tried talking to him, but he doesn't say anything. I don't think he's there."

The student she's referring to hardly turns their camera on during class, sacrificing participation and attendance points regularly. I want to say I am surprised by her account. And to a point I am—he has not been so bold about active dis-participation.

"Okay, Maggie. I'll put you in a room of three. Let them know what's going on. Hang on one second while I shuffle."

Like a puppet master, I send her into another room with students I know have prepared for class—picking up her frame and dropping it into a separate “space.” Her picture freezes as she disappears.

I can still see the other student’s name sitting in a room all on his own. He accepted the invitation to join the breakout room but refused to engage in the activity or the class, just selecting the pop-up box as it appeared on his screen. I doubt he even knows that he is alone in his own room now.

He was there on the other end. But he “wasn’t there.”

Mapping as Metaphor

Maps record pathways, topography, intersections, and shape and size in a relative manner, and a directional manner. Additionally, maps record connections and relationships between a Point A and a Point B; they are a tool for understanding and streamlining movement, navigation, and destination.

As I investigate knowledge transfers and instructional design in mediated classrooms, I am concerned with this idea of Point A to Point B as knowledge transfer itself. How can I map the site of the transfer to record how knowledge is passed and shared and moves through pathways, designed by teachers and morphed by systems, structures, and the limitations and possibilities of the virtual? This specific metaphor and framing device provides an avenue (both figuratively and literally) for me to articulate my autoethnographical frustrations and successes as an educator as well as identify the mystic, ever-evolving yet ever-present idea of presence itself. As I navigate my own experiences, I am able to play the role of cartographer, utilizing my own classroom experiences as a baseline for systematic analysis and cultural experience. My research into knowledge transfers in synchronous translated instruction maps the topography of presence in virtual space: *What is present? Who is present? How do we measure and record this kind of presence? What does presence look like (so that we might replicate or improve it)?*

Maps are also a two-dimensional representation of a three-dimensional phenomenon. In this way, they mirror our cyber spaces. Three-dimensional teachers and students experience instruction in their own three-dimensional space, but they become two-dimensional representations online. My contact with my students in cyber-mediated spaces reduced my multidimensional self into a smaller, two-dimensional version during classes. I could control and manipulate what students were able to see of me and around me. My students were able to do the same. This site of manipulation and controlled representation falls under the umbrella of “mediated framing,” a term I use to describe the ways in which online synchronous instruction allows us to selectively present our own learning environment and state of being. The concept of mediated framing relies on an understanding of personal, environmental, and instructional presence, in the classroom. We navigate the spaces of performing identities at all times—presenting ourselves in ways that differ depending on context and social relationship—but rarely do we have the ability to perform and present identities, control our physical appearance dimensionally and spatially within a frame of visibility, and manipulate the environment in which we are situated. Mediated framing accounts for gained and lost control of individuals in their learning environments and states of being.

The Act of Performing “Presence”

As I began investigating presence in classrooms, I realized that no one definition of this concept exists. When discussing presence are we referring to a concrete existence? An ambiguous or liminal space? An epistemology of practice or embodied knowledge? My understanding of performing presence in online classroom spaces relies on research in performance studies and educational curriculum design and instruction. I situate my argument within the work of Don Hufford (2014), claiming that true presence is a student’s ability to live out their own identities in a classroom space; Cormac Power (2008), drawing upon the “liveness” and “energy” of a theatre event to create presence between performers and audience; and Shea and Bidjerano (2012), describing presence as the ability for interaction within a Community of Inquiry educational model. These definitions and discourses on the concept of presence draw upon performance studies and the ways in which we can fully “perform” our roles of teacher, student, audience, and performer, in shared realities and environments. The liveness of the event, the fullness of a student’s existence in the space, and the contact and interaction between teacher-student and student-student, create an environment for presence to occur.

My discussion of presence within this paper relies on both the synchronous physical existence of multiple bodies in a “room” and the readiness or willingness of these bodies/minds to engage with their social, learning environment. These two conditions provide an access point for mapping knowledge transfers in cyber-mediated classrooms by providing clear parameters for the guideposts in a destination-focused pathway of knowledge: Point A (an individual as performer of knowledge); Delivery (the ways in which knowledge is and can be constructed or conveyed between Points A and B); and Point B (the same or another individual as receptor and practitioner-performer of knowledge).

Point A

An individual as performer of knowledge. The starting point of a knowledge transfer rests in the body of an individual. Here, there is the potential for sharing and/or coming to knowledge. The individual must in some way have the capacity to perform their knowledge so that individual(s) at Point B might receive and observe the knowledge.

Delivery

The ways in which knowledge is and can be constructed or conveyed between Points A and B. Knowledge is transmitted via environment and relationship (either interpersonal, social, or reflexive) and relies on communication with self and/or others. The performance of knowledge itself (the action done by or at Point A) makes up a Delivery—or active connection between Point A and Point B, often called engagement. Types of Delivery may include instruction of knowledge (i.e., lecture, reading material), external or internal questioning leading to knowledge (i.e., verbal group discussion, writing assignment), practicing knowledge (i.e., attempting to juggle in order to learn how to juggle), or other types of knowledge performance (i.e., experiencing an artwork).

Point B

The same (Point A) or another individual as receptor and practitioner-performer of knowledge. Whereas Point A is an individual with potential for sharing and/or coming to knowledge through exploration, Point B is an individual with potential for receiving and/or practicing the knowledge delivered during exploration. Point B individuals become practitioner-performers when they exercise their knowledge (in their everyday lives, within assessment tools, etc.).

My definitions of Point A, Delivery, and Point B, rely on an epistemology of embodiment—learning and knowing is a *practice* that learners must engage with in their physical existence. Meskin and van der Walt (2018) claim “practice to be *always* embodied—it always happens in *action*, and thus, by definition, it happens *through* and *of* the body” (p. 41). Additionally, Ben Spatz (2015), in his discussion of what bodies can do, outlines the ways in which bodies in action construct sites of knowing, engaging with Aristotle’s *techne*, or craft knowledge. Of course, some argue that there are other categories of “knowledge,” such as theoretical (*episteme*); but even these ideas must somehow be rooted in practice-based application in order to foster true understanding in educational settings. On a grand scale, educational models and theories revolve around formative and summative assessment: measurements of knowledge in action by students performing practitioner-performer roles. In synchronous learning spaces, presence—the physical existence of multiple bodies in a room and the readiness or willingness of these bodies/minds to engage with their social, learning environment—both depend upon and cultivate an epistemology of embodiment and practice.

Mediated framing and reduced dimensional contact transform the landscape of Delivery, changing the capacities for Point A and Point B to experience engagement. My attempt to map presence in cyber-mediated spaces causes me to ask: *How does this new mediated environment dependent upon technology complicate, exacerbate, and interact, with an epistemology of embodiment?* I further ask: *How does accessibility affect student and teacher presence within classroom spaces?* If students are asked and expected to perform and engage with an epistemology of embodiment, we should also map the structures and strategies that are (or are not) in place for them to navigate the Point A, Delivery, and Point B, understanding of knowledge transfer.

Interlude II: Frozen

I’m frozen.

I’m sitting in a chair at my kitchen table in my tiny apartment. The temperature outside of my window is 117 degrees of Arizona dry heat—I have turned my thermostat up to 80 degrees in order to save money on my utility bill. I am sweating, but I am frozen.

My laptop sits on a box on my kitchen table so that I don’t have to stoop while teaching. Its screen shows six rectangles: four images of students, my co-teacher, and myself. None of us is moving.

A student just finished sharing a poem she composed for my poetry composition and performance class. We are in the process of selecting our pieces for the end-of-week virtual

sharing. I am facilitating feedback for the student’s poem and performance, or I was. Now my mouth is open on my screen as I try to make my way back to my own words, back to my class.

The buttons of my WiFi router flash—normal. I haven’t lost power. My WiFi icon appears at the bottom right corner of my laptop screen, I move my cursor—

“Oh. Oh. There you are!”

The pictures begin to move once more. My movements are mirrored in my own little rectangle above “Miss Kendra.”

“You’re back!”

“Yes, I’m back,” I say. “I thought I’d lost you!”

Frozen. Lost. Disconnected.

Broken Contact and Dimensionality

The actual mapping of knowledge transfers provides a closer look at the effects of mediated framing and reduced dimensional contact. My initial maps in Figure 1 show the pathways for knowledge transfer. This visual representation of in-person instruction, alongside online engagement, highlights the ways in which mediation plays a strong part in radically changing the topography of embodiment and Delivery as it relates to knowledge embodiment, performance, and practice.

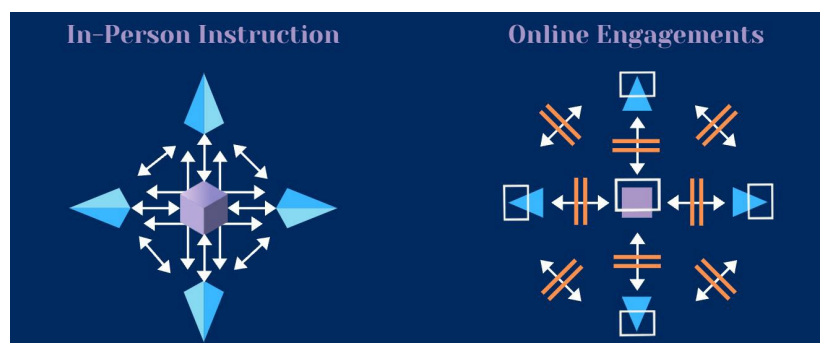


Fig. 1: Mapping knowledge transfers in translated pedagogy.

In Figure 1, we see a relational model of pedagogy—knowledge constructed through relationship. My autoethnographical and performative inquiry methodology, centering my own experiences as an educator in these spaces, result in a centralized position of the educator in my initial knowledge transfer maps. As I further explore the ways in which presence inhabits educational space, I will work to decenter the educator from my investigation of presence, contact, mediated framing, and Point A and Delivery guideposts. Additionally, future maps will consider and illustrate other forms of mediation, not just cyber mediation. The simplicity of this initial mapping focuses on the translation of in-person instruction to virtual classroom spaces; however, there is much more work to be done in order to illustrate the varying accessibility of in-person instruction and the ways that other mediations (i.e., distractions, basic needs, mental health, differing abilities, etc.) affect an epistemology of embodiment.

In the map of In-Person Instruction, I illustrate the educator as a purple cube and students as blue pyramids. The white arrows represent pathways for the transfer of knowledge and the ways in which bodies existing in a space create a network of presence and embodiment for Delivery to occur. My illustration of Online Engagements is a translated version of this in-person map, mirroring the concept of translated instruction. In online instruction, there are a series of changes and mediations: rather than a cube and pyramids, the educator becomes a square and students become triangles; each individual in the space has a white rectangle cutting through their shape, signifying the camera's capture of only some of the body; the white arrows of knowledge Delivery are spliced by orange lines, representing the reliance on dual-technology mediation as well as the separation of learning environments between individuals; and not all pathway arrows are translated between students, portraying the ways in which screen size or other technology limitations and connections complicate holistic online interactions.

The points of mediation—where technology intervenes to fill a gap in distance—become a source of gap in contact. The orange lines and white rectangles break the shapes and arrows in such a way that individuals are unable to make a true embodied connection, relying on technological tools to provide a stand-in for educational environment. Additionally, cyber mediation reduces dimensional existence. Not only does the dimensional reduction affect Point A's ability to perform Delivery action, but Point B perceives and interacts with only reduced dimensionality, even seeing and monitoring themselves within a mediated frame.

Contact and dimensionality factor into an epistemology of embodiment and complicate knowledge transfer pathways. The multidimensional proximity within a shared learning environment that in-person instruction provides, offers more ways for presence to permeate, network, and travel across the physical space to, through, by, and with, learners. The large-scale turn to cyber mediation for translated instruction in spring 2020 offered an avenue for educators to continue to connect with students; however, the technology intrinsically broke dimension and contact. This breakage is perhaps the "missing piece" that so many educators articulated as a phenomenon in their translated instruction.

My own experiences as an educator in the cyber classroom support this missing piece. As a theater educator, I am often on my feet, making circles, passing movements, maneuvering power with my students through nonverbal communication in activities, making bold and zany choices in the context of story and space. My online classroom space muddles my ability to be in action at times, instead causing me and my students to rely on more verbal communication, slow the pace of activities for all of us to understand instruction and have a chance to participate, and minimize the action we can perform on screen. I can feel the diminished presence. I rely on the energy of my students to adapt or modify activities in the moment; I can feel the lack of energy in our collective digital environment within my body—emptiness. My Delivery methods of instruction, largely rooted in engaging multiple learning styles simultaneously and offering avenues for students to try out in real-time new techniques as practitioners and owners of their space, translate to a centralized me as the facilitator in the digital medium. I don't want to be confined to a rectangular box, a flattened existence, a liminal learning environment.

I want to be in the room with my students.
I want to sing together and hear all of our voices mixing together.
I want to create and hang up posters and drawings and return to them at a later time.
I want to feel the energy of the space and the people who occupy it.
I want to complete silly tasks as part of a transition.
I want to seamlessly hand off power because we can all “feel” the power moving.
I want to see and be seen.
And I want my students to feel like they can see and are seen by their peers and me.

Visibility and Vulnerability in Classroom Presence

Seeing and being seen by others create an awareness of visibility and vulnerability among individuals in a learning environment. These elements contribute to the performance of presence for educators and learners in these spaces, and their alteration in this new cyber medium has heightened my understanding of their importance in the learning and embodied experience.

Visibility refers to the representation of our bodies in space—our physical existence as perceived by others. We often associate visibility with eyesight, but this principle also extends to other senses such as our ability to be heard or even touched within a space. Visibility largely relies on contact and connection and lays the foundation for vulnerability.

Vulnerability is our capacity to “be seen” in a multifaceted way, encompassing our emotions, our desires, and our energy. This principle also extends to the ways we share our ideas in a social context, offering ourselves up to failure or success. Brené Brown (2017), a pioneering researcher in the field of shame and vulnerability, claims that, “without vulnerability there is no creativity or innovation. There is nothing more uncertain than the creative process, and there is absolutely no innovation without failure” (p. 106). Learning environments which encourage students to be courageous in their failure within the safety of a learning community and a listening facilitator benefit student innovation. Students’ abilities to be seen and show up with their own identities in the space (vulnerability) is a large part of student presence, built upon the foundation of their existence in a space with others to begin with (visibility).

In-person instruction inherently fosters an environment of visibility and vulnerability. Students attend class, they gain literal multiple perspectives within their learning environment, and they become practitioner-performers in real time with others. Multidimensional proximity and the ability for embodiment to occur in the same space creates presence possibilities in these classrooms, and the consistent capacity for student-student and teacher-student contact creates a seamless experience with knowledge transfer pathways. There are, of course, limitations placed upon the physical and emotional readiness and ability of students and educators to tackle unfiltered learning in this way, and more research and writing must account for the true accessibility of these pathways, especially in spaces of marginalized communities. However, in-person learning, as compared to virtual learning, at least structures relational pedagogy in such a way that Delivery is possible in real time and space with Point A and Point B.

In online synchronous learning, students may not be seen or heard at all. With reduced dimensionality and mediated framing, students have a higher capacity to hide themselves and forego participation. They

must stare at their screen to see others, reducing the peripheral spaces of a learning environment. With the switch of a button students can turn their camera off, breaking themselves from the learning community. Not to mention actual technical problems that cause freezing and lags. The technology used by students through mediated framing reduces their visibility and vulnerability, illustrated by the mediated breakages in my knowledge transfer maps.

Students and teachers are losing their ability to see and be seen online, and this lost element of presence—the ease with which we can disengage or not be able to engage with others at all—complicates the delivery, reception, construction, practice, and performance, of knowledge.

Interlude III:

“It’s not a good practice to require students to have their cameras on.”

I’m reading the course evaluations for a large lecture class in which I taught one of seven recitation sections. My check-in meetings with the other instructors throughout the semester often revolved around class participation online; some instructors started to demand cameras be on in order for students to gain participation and attendance points that day.

I did not require cameras on for classes as part of my practice of care amidst vulnerability, but I did expect verbal engagement or answering questions in the chat during large group discussions. I also relied on small group work for creative interventions with film and play analysis—student engagement became most apparent in the preparation of these engagements in breakout rooms and their presentation in a large group format.

“If I’m in the Zoom I’m there.”

I will be the first to admit that learning environments must account for student vulnerability with material, instruction, and assessment methods and should incorporate a reciprocal amount of facilitator vulnerability. In this course alone, I made special arrangements for two students that were triggered by content in films assigned to the larger class. In each case, we discussed and determined together the best way to move forward and accomplish the learning outcomes for the assignment along with the individual goals of the students. But this student, in an anonymous course evaluation, does not point to specific moments in which they wanted or needed their camera off—they make a sweeping pass at “good practice.”

Should student visibility be an option in the classroom? Is this student commenting on the instruction or revealing more about their own vulnerabilities or willingness to engage in the classroom space?

“You should not have to see me in order for me to get attendance points.”

If this class were conducted in person, would this student object to physically showing up in order to get their attendance points? What was this student really saying in this course evaluation?

The fact is, I don’t know if students are “there” when they are in the virtual room, and I believe that there may be varying levels of there when we engage with questions of presence and contact. I wonder if students forced to orient themselves in virtual classes without physical visibility caused a reluctance on the part of these learners when they reentered physical classrooms.

Reading this comment leads me to question how my pedagogy (in-person or online) does or does not reflect my belief that student vulnerability leads to growth while simultaneously accounting for my valuing of student consent and safety. How successful am I in this pursuit?

Conclusion

In conclusion, embodiment—individual and collective—and multidimensional proximity, construct sites of knowledge transfer within in-person classroom spaces. The translation of instruction to online classrooms reduces dimensionality and the ability for contact, resulting in the reduction of visibility and vulnerability. The missing piece that so many educators have articulated surrounding their online instruction directly relates to limitations on presence in cyber mediation and the broken routes of knowledge transfer they must now navigate.

More presence mapping must be done in order to account for movement within classroom spaces for an even greater understanding of dimensionality and its impact on visibility and vulnerability. Additionally, my experiences as an educator must be taken alongside others' experiences to create a true phenomenological understanding of presence in synchronous translated instruction. We must also turn to our students, experts of their own autobiographies and learning experiences, offering a path to relevant perspective that decenters the educator in these instances of illustration.

Looking ahead to a time when classroom instruction resumes fully in-person once again (sans the mediation of masks and other protocols), how will educators' experiences with broken visibility and vulnerability affect our curriculum design and instructional delivery? How will virtual learning experiences forever change students' abilities and willingness to connect to in-person learning? How might we center reciprocity with students and account for all potential pathways of contact and knowledge construction in student-student and teacher-student relationships inside and outside of the classroom? How might we design our learning environment spaces to account for an epistemology of embodiment, and encourage students to see and be seen? How might we articulate a Dimensional Pedagogy?

I look forward to the answers.

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How the Reflexive Process Was Supported by Arts-Based Activities: A Doctoral Student's Research Journey

Janet L. Kuhnke and Sandra Jack-Malik

Abstract

This paper showcases how a reflexive practice, that includes arts-based activities, deepened understandings experienced by a doctoral student of psychology while completing the data analysis section of a metasynthesis. The metasynthesis focused on qualitative studies, examining the mental and spiritual care of persons living with diabetic foot ulcers. Reflecting on the experience, this work argues for spaces where researchers stop and engage in reflexivity, making the work more robust.

Introduction

This paper showcases examples of reflexive practice¹ and arts-based activities² completed by Janet, a doctoral student whose dissertation this manuscript references. This paper focuses on the analysis and discussion sections of the qualitative metasynthesis. The metasynthesis³ was part of Janet's doctoral studies (Kuhnke, 2018). It focused on understanding the mental health and spiritual care of persons living with diabetic foot ulcers. As part of the metasynthesis process, Janet engaged in reflexivity activities to improve the validity of the study (Faulkner et al., 2016; Sandelowski & Barroso, 2003, 2007). She also used a reflexive practice to understand the stories she read, particularly to understand the “social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed and enacted” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, pp. 42–43).

This paper follows a previous publication (Kuhnke & Jack-Malik, 2019) where the authors focused on the literature review of the metasynthesis and how reflexivity supported the exploration of perspectives, biases, values, and knowledge systems, and therefore it added rigour, credibility, and trustworthiness to both the literature review and Janet's clinical work. Questions arising from Janet's reflexive practice were related to clients' struggles, sociocultural knowledge, intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), and privilege (Kovach, 2010; Regan, 2010). These questions, and Janet's subsequent reading and reflecting, influenced her understandings and pushed at what she imagined holistic and culturally relevant care might involve.

Background

Reflexivity Comes Alive in Doctoral Studies: Beginnings

The concepts of reflexivity⁴ and reflexive practice were introduced to Janet during her doctoral studies. As a result of the reading she did and the activities she completed, Janet came to understand reflexivity contributed to the rigour, robustness, and validity of her metasynthesis (Finlay, 2012; Horsburgh, 2003;

Jootun et al., 2009; Watt, 2007). As well, she learned it supports qualitative researchers to take responsibility for “one's own situatedness within the research” (Berger, 2015, p. 220) processes in which one is engaged. This was significant to Janet, because at the time, she was working as a nurse specialized in wound, ostomy, and continence care, as she completed her doctoral work.

Reflexivity is an essential part of qualitative research and requires one to examine their presence and positioning within the research processes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Finlay (2017) reminds us that one's approach to reflexivity should align with the purpose of the research and consider introspection, intersubjective reflection, mutual collaboration, social critique, and discursive deconstruction. Janet immersed herself in reflexivity; she created art as the medium to represent her thinking and feeling. She came to appreciate and understand that reflexivity and reflexive practice are different from a reflecting or “a-thinking-about” after life events occur (Finlay & Gough, 2003). Rather, a reflexive process “expose[s] relational and ethical dilemmas that permeate the entire research process” (Finlay, 2012, p. 317). Moreover, Janet came to appreciate the energies and efforts of researchers who illuminated and demystified the art of reflexive practice (Bishop & Shepherd, 2011; Finlay, 2002, 2012; Watt, 2007).

Frameworks Guiding This Work

Theoretical Framework

This study leans into Dewey's (1938) theoretical understandings of experience (interaction and continuity). The first criterion, interaction, happens continually between an individual, objects, and other people. An experience is always what it is because of the transactions between an individual and her environment. Dewey's second criterion, continuity, draws attention to how each experience carries over and shapes and reshapes earlier and later experiences, such that what one learns in one situation becomes a lens through which to experience and understand later experiences. Dewey wrote: “every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after” (p. 35).

Janet's nursing education had trained her to utilize a “logico-scientific reasoning process, which relies on replicable steps, including observation of phenomena, empirical data collection and analysis and the assumption of generalisability of findings” (Clandinin et al., 2016). This training resulted in moments of tension (Clandinin, 2013), as Janet worked alongside individuals in clinic and read articles, including stories of clients' lived experiences. Wanting to understand her tension, Janet leaned into Morris (2002), who described the theoretical differences between thinking about stories and thinking with stories. Thinking about stories, according to Morris, focuses a researcher's attention on stories as decontextualized, objective data. Thinking with stories, on the other hand, “put[s] us in contact with valuable resources for moral thought and action... [and] provide[s] unobtrusive and gentle but steady moral guidance” (p. 56). The stories worked on Janet, her thinking, and her actions. In efforts to understand what she was experiencing, she made art while engaging in reflexivity.

Conceptual Framework

In this study, art, painting, and poetry, express a form of communication and dialogue (Dewey, 1934; Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962). Dewey noted, “pictures can express every object and situation capable of presentation as a scene. They can express the meaning of events when the latter provides a scene in which a past is summed up and a future indicated” (p. 244). Moreover, Finley (2011), argued arts-based activities utilized throughout the research process can take many forms and “make... use of affective experience, senses, and emotions” (p. 444); art shifts the “focus away from the written text” (p. 436). Janet's reflexivity practice included dialogue, text, images, collages, and art-created (Faulkner et al., 2016). Janet sketched with pencil, created visual timelines, composed poems, ink drawings, oil painting on canvas, and soft charcoal drawings on paper in a wide array of colours (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962).

Methodological Framework

Finlay (2012) described a “number of typologies...identifying different ways of doing reflexivity” (p. 318). In this study, contextual-discursive reflexivity was used. This approach to reflexivity “considers the social context and world of shared meanings, in terms of both the proximal research situation and the broader structural (sociocultural) domain” (p. 321). Sandelowski and Barroso (2007) argue:

[. . .] a discursive reading takes what is presented as research findings, not as empirically verifiable results generated from formal modes of data collection and analysis, but rather as the results of language and other social practices (i.e., discourses) involving researchers, research participants, and reviewers of research reports. Research findings are viewed, not as databased truth, but rather as historically and culturally contingent social products of unique encounters between reviewers and texts. (p. 238)

Reflexive data were created over 18 months (January 2017 to June 2018) and again, while collaboratively (Riddell, 2018) preparing this document. At times, the practice of reflexivity was daunting and complex. When this occurred, Janet returned to the literature and read about the “swampiness of reflexivity” (Finlay, 2002, p. 209). Finlay noted:

When it comes to practice, the process of engaging in reflexivity is perilous, full of muddy ambiguity and multiple trails. To what extent should researchers give a methodological account of their experience? How much personal detail can be disclosed and what forms can it take? How are researchers to represent a multiplicity of voices while not hiding themselves? In some ways, embarking on reflexivity is akin to entering uncertain terrain where solid ground can all too easily give way to swamp and mire. The challenge is to negotiate a path through this complicated landscape – one that exposes the traveller to interesting discoveries while ensuring a route out the other side. Researchers have to negotiate the ‘swamp’ of interminable self-analysis and self-disclosure. (p. 212)

Importance of This Work

This work is important because it is an example of what a reflexive practice can involve, and look like, as researchers conduct metasynthesis. It is also important because it provides of a visual and detailed

example of how art and poetry can be employed as mediums to illustrate and express reflexivity in health care (Rae & Green, 2016).

Positioning of Self

As Janet worked toward completion of a synthesis of the literature, she was working as a registered nurse alongside (Clandinin, 2013) clients in a community wound care clinic. Clients shared stories that were similar to ones she was reading in the literature. Janet journaled to understand her experiences:

I wonder and ask with regularity, how are my clinical experiences shaping the metasynthesis? Am I reflecting and creating art solely from immersing myself in the literature? Is the back and forth between my clinical work and the metasynthesis, appropriate or acceptable? My internal dialogue and journaling are regular, asking, and seeking to understanding. (Journal entry, February 2017)

The Parallel Process of Ongoing Reflexivity Activities

Participants' Stories Emerge Through the Reflexivity Process

Through the metasynthesis process, the voices of 206 participants were identified from 18 qualitative studies. Following Sandelowski and Barroso (2007), event timelines were used to describe key findings along a chronological path. Using direct quotes from the studies, Janet created the timelines. They were used to focus the analysis and discussion on key points and themes emerging from the data set. Simultaneously, Janet engaged in a parallel and intertwined process of reflexivity, which summarized what she was thinking, feeling, learning, and wondering about. This paper reports on the reflexivity Janet engaged throughout the metasynthesis process described above. Four themes emerged from the reflexivity activities: timelines (past, present, and future), the importance and weightiness of time, pending amputations, and amputations.

1. Journal Timelines: Past, Present and Future

Janet sketched as she read and reread participants' stories. Over time and after multiple readings, participants' voices emerged as an aggregate.⁵ In her journal Janet created the following aggregate narrative (Dewey, 1938) from the participants' stories:

Past life:

I go to work and fulfill the role my employer asks of me...or, I am self-employed, and I am operating a small, but successful business.

Present life:

I go to work and my day is interrupted by medical appointments, diabetes-related fatigue, yet I continue to work and operate my business. I struggle to go to work. I am using short/long term disability benefits. I have lost business equity due to the foot ulcer. I am being asked many

questions: My use of sick time by my boss, to leave my role, if I have considered accessing government pensions and if I have thought about taking early retirement. I am not prepared to quit my job. I need the benefits and the work sustains me.

Future and forward looking

I am sad I am unable to work. I prefer to be at work...this is not what I planned for my life. I thought I would complete this work project, or develop a unique engineering tactic, or build my family business. I have a sense of hopelessness and powerlessness. Will the ulcer ever heal? I am not always optimistic about the future; I thought this foot ulcer would close, heal, and not come back. (Journal entry, January 2018)

Visual Narratives of Deteriorating Well-Being

To move reflexivity into the visual domain and to utilize Janet's proclivity for visual representation, the first painting created was *I'd Rather Be Working* (see Figure 1). It began as a pencil sketch and, over time, was transferred to a white canvas. Colours were added. A tall, elegant female came to life. Janet's intent was to illustrate how those living with diabetic foot ulcers sometimes feel off balance, leaning to one side, while carrying a bag of prescriptions to be examined by the nurse. All the while, the woman is attempting to compose a meaningful life, including full-time work. The woman created in Figure 1 reflects patients who would rather be at their place of employment; employees who enjoy the comradery of colleagues and miss work routines and being valued and respected through their employment. In her journal, Janet wrote the following reflection:

I painted the woman standing tall to remind me to keep participants' voices at the fore-front of the synthesis. I don't want their stories to get lost in dense, word only, texts. Framing the painting adds permanency to her voice; it is bounded. I have hung the painting in my office as a constant reminder that foot ulcers are a shaping influence on the mental and spiritual stories clients share. (Journal entry, March 17, 2018)



Fig. 1: I'd rather be working (Oil on canvas).

2. The Steps Are Too Great: Use of the Colour Blue and Clocks to Represent Time

To continue to visually represent participant voices, Janet created poems and sketches (Finley, 2011). She purposefully selected colours that increase awareness of movement and time. Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) reminds us of colours that heighten our “sense experiences” (p. 240) of the topic being studied. Janet drew using blue ink and white, crisp paper. Merleau-Ponty stated the following: “Blue is that which prompts me to look in a certain way, that which allows my gaze to run over it in a specific manner. It is a certain field or atmosphere presented to the power of my eyes and of my whole body” (p. 244).

Time was an important factor in participants' *Joe and Bev's* stories (see Figures: 2 and 3). In an effort to illustrate this reoccurring theme, Janet used clocks. Participants described receiving constant messages from health care professionals to:

Come to the clinic for dressing changes
Lose weight
Manage your blood glucose better
Purchase glucose testing strips
Buy proper shoes
Take your medications as prescribed
Quit smoking
Are you 'still' working?
The doctor wants to see you.
Have you seen a surgeon yet?

Clients received these messages within contexts, including time, employment, mental wellness, self-care management, and the ever-present possibility of wound deterioration. All clients know and are fearful because as the wound deteriorates, the probability of infection and amputation increases.



Fig. 2: Joe, the steps are daunting (Pen on paper).

I created Joe to represent and understand the voices of participants immobilized by the multiple and complex burdens of diabetes mellitus. His wound is slow to heal. He dislikes the off-loading⁶ boot he must wear. He feels off balance and unsteady even when using a cane. He is aware time is not on his side as he observes his glucose levels increasing. He feels hopeless and is fatigued by his efforts to reverse his deteriorating health. (Janet's journal entry, May 2018)



Fig. 3: Be, leave me alone: I am trying to breathe (Pen on paper).

I have been reading about and reflecting on the underlying medical conditions with which persons living with diabetes and foot ulcers often endure. In response, I sketched.

Bev represents participants who do not always attend medical appointments as scheduled. She is telling me that she is “a bit busy trying to breathe”! Time weighs on her; she is tired, fatigued and shames⁷ herself as she knows she should have gone to the clinic. She knows she needs to lose weight; the clinic staff remind her. Costs-associated with diabetes worry her, as she lives on a fixed monthly income of \$1,173. (Janet's journal entry, May 2018)

3. Pending Amputations

Engaged in ongoing reflexivity, Janet moved between her office, where she read the studies, and her easel, where she created reflexive art moving her thinking and feelings to sketch pads, canvasses, and notebooks. She purposefully sketched in charcoal and colored pencils to reflect the seriousness of amputations alongside the professional and medical proclivity to ignore thinking with stories (Clandinin et al., 2016; Morris, 2002). When the focus is solely on thinking about a pending amputation, the only

narrative in the room is medical science. Janet sketched *Robert* (see Figure 4) to illustrate participants feeling overwhelmed by what they perceive as the inevitability of a pending amputation.

The colours in this image reflect Robert's diminishing voice. Grey toned paper, charcoal, and coloured pencils, were used to reflect how his voice is lost to the now dominant medical narrative (Finley, 2011), singularly focused on a scientific lens (Morris, 2002).

In this sketch, Robert appears exhausted. Medical professionals recommend foot amputation. He does not want to participate in these conversations. He delays, pushing the decision into the unknown future. He negotiates for more time because he wants to be a human with two legs. He knows he will not only lose his leg, but his life will also change dramatically. As he waits, his wound deteriorates. Robert is daunted by having to make too many decisions; he continues to live his life and attend to his responsibilities. He receives antibiotics intravenously and regular wound dressing changes. These things distract him from the decision he knows he must make. He develops dark circles under his eyes; some days he struggles to get out of bed. Time presses on his shoulders; he must make decisions about amputation.

He wonders if he waits long enough if the decision will make itself. He remembers a time when he felt he had agency. Now he knows there is a single way forward, amputation. He remembers when he was first diagnosed, he had been offered educational pamphlets. He thinks about all the decisions he has made since his diagnosis and how he could have made others that would not have led to a moment in time when he must decide about having his foot amputated.



Fig. 4: Robert (Charcoal and coloured pencil on toned).

In reflecting on Robert's musings about his self-care, I am thinking deeply about my role and responsibility as a nurse who engages in preventative foot screening and client education activities. I am also thinking about what we can ask and or expect from a person living with a foot ulcer that will not heal and the looming possibility of amputation. It has been my experience that often, clients having to make this agonizing decision are concurrently dealing with many issues (medical, emotional, spiritual, familial, and social). (Journal entry, April 2018)

4. Amputations: Meet "Harry Pain"

In the synthesis, Janet reflected and journaled about participants' pain and their progression to amputations; an aggregate poem emerged, titled "Harry Pain." Harry's voice is a description of his experiences with neuropathic pain.⁸

Harry Pain –
I live with pain.
I try to protect my feet; I have diabetes,
but I cannot bend over to see them.
I live with NEUROPATHIC PAIN but, I **do not** have an ulcer
One day I stubbed my great toe,
I did not feel it!
I have a blood blister on my great toe
I got my wife to peel the top off the blister, oh no, oh no!!
I went to the clinic; they sent me to the emergency department
I have a new and different pain
She gives me a mirror and I see my toe is dark black.
The meds are not working
This morning they talked about amputation.
Early this evening they amputated my toe
And the pain continues.
My wife drove Pain and I home that same day.

Waiting . . . and Worrying . . .

In Janet's reflexivity journals, this individual is waiting to possibly hear devastating news (see Figure 5). He represents clients who have lost one limb and who are at risk of losing a second limb within five years; he may or may not know the statistics are against him (Botros et al., 2021).



Fig. 5: Waiting... (Coloured pencil on toned paper).

Janet drew Worrying (see Figure 6) to create a space where she could safely linger and ask questions. What does it mean to have a limb amputated? What does it look like? How might it feel? Does the individual have regrets? Does she wish she had made different choices? How do nurses feel when they look at this painting? What might a nurse, or health care professional, have done differently that might have prevented this amputation? How do nurse educators train up nursing students to listen to this woman and to think with her stories, in ways that support her and possibly prevent her from arriving at this moment?



Fig. 6: And worrying... (Oil painting).

Discussion

This study highlights the reflexivity activities, including the products Janet created while completing the analysis and discussion phases of her doctoral metasynthesis. Her reflexive activities (painting, drawing, poetry) led to a deepening of her awareness of patient voices, contexts, temporality, and how they are shaping influences within the studies synthesized (Berger, 2015; Faulkner et al., 2016). The reflexivity activities interrupted the reading required by the metasynthesis methodology. It was in moments of reflexivity that Janet paused, imagined, and then illustrated her understandings. As a result of the visuals, Janet imagined and created representations of the people she read about. In so doing, numbers and statistics faded, and humans became more dimensional and therefore less likely to vanish within population data sets. Increasingly and alongside her reflexivity activities, Janet found studies richer when patients' voices were present, because Janet works with humans and not statistics. Reflexivity alongside the metasynthesis allowed Janet to think deeply about her clinical work and how practices and/or procedures did, or did not, result in spaces where clients felt safe to share their stories and where their concerns regarding their psycho-social and spiritual well-being were listened to, respected, and accounted for in the individual's care plan.

Carefully selected colours, artwork, and poetry, allowed Janet to represent individuals' stories while avoiding reducing human voices to mere text (Finley, 2011). Finley's (2011) notion of arts-based activities, states, "creativity is an act of defiance. You're challenging the status quo. You're questioning accepted truths and principles" (p. 438). Reflecting on this quote allowed Janet to ask questions, listen and push back on medical descriptions of human experiences, and to also push back on the proclivity to eliminate voices through statistical amalgamation.

Furthermore, creating “art as event” (Greene, 1995) provided scaffolding for Janet to explore, create, and wonder, as part of her qualitative research process. Finlay (2012) states that qualitative studies, in fact, have “beneath their apparently straightforward stories lurk[ing]—other stories” (p. 321) that can be told. Creating reflexive art allowed those stories to emerge (Rae & Green, 2016). Participants’ stories of loss, pain, sadness, and missing work life, were in the background; they were hidden by health care professionals’ focus on the wound care related to the foot ulcer (Pereira et al., 2014). Through Janet's reflexive practice the background stories were heard, listened to repeatedly, and visually represented.

Thinking With and About Stories

Morris's (2002) distinction between thinking about stories, and thinking with stories, represented new learning for Janet. It interrupted her training which focuses on science, leaving little-to-no room for thinking with the clients' stories. She began to wonder how the provision of care for persons with diabetic foot ulcers and amputations might be different if the medical model shifted to include purposeful spaces to listen to and think with clients' stories (Clandinin et al., 2016). While considering these wonders, she was also working in clinic, experiencing the demand to see clients, treat them, and move on to the next in a timely, efficient manner. She was struck by the irony between the demands nurses experience to provide timely care and the pressures clients experience as they wait (Mate, 2018).

Conclusion

While limited to the experiences of a single researcher, this study showcases how arts-based methods can be advantageously intertwined with a metasynthesis. This paper highlights the importance of enacting a reflexive practice while completing a metasynthesis of persons living with diabetic foot ulcers and/or amputations. Reflexivity, alongside an appreciation for Dewey's (1938) interaction, helped to shift Janet's understandings of what might be accounted for when creating care plans. Listening to and illustrating clients' stories, wonders, and worries, allowed her to know “every art so uses its substantial medium as to give complexity of parts to the unity of its creations” (Dewey, 1934, p. 10). Janet understood this to mean that her reflexive activities represented the complexity of clients' lived experiences. Moreover, Dewey's notion of continuity allowed her to appreciate, by attending to the complexity, the likelihood of the client having an educative (Dewey, 1938) experience with the health care system improved. It was Janet's experience that, in the listening, spaces and time were created where clients could be more than the details of their wound or disease.

Notes

1. Reflexive practice in this paper is utilized as an overarching term in which reflexivity activities emerged including art-as-event (Greene, 1995, 2001), discussions, listening, hearing, writing, and typing (Finlay, 2002). Reflexive journey is used metaphorically as an overarching umbrella to the many activities included in reflexivity practice.
2. Arts-based activities contribute to text and include “visual representations” (Finley, 2011, p. 435).
3. In this paper, the qualitative metasynthesis follows the recommendations of Sandelowski and Barroso (2007). Reflexivity is a “ubiquitous, varied, and, at times, contentious concept in qualitative inquiry” (Faulkner et al., 2016, p. 197).
4. Reflexivity in research is described as the “use of a critical, self-awareness lens to interrogate both the research process and our interpretation our representation of participants’ lives in our social world” (Finlay, 2017, p. 120).
5. Participants voices (in a secondary data analysis) are presented as an aggregated voice (American Psychological Association, 2020).
6. Offloading devices are used to prevent and aid in treatment of diabetic foot complications and foot ulcers (Botros et al., 2021).
7. “Shame is regularly experienced by people, it may lurk in our day-to-day activities, responses to life, body image and perception of shape” (Brown, 2007, p. xxiii-xxiv).
8. Neuropathy related to diabetes “classically present as a distal symmetric sensorimotor neuropathy and is the leading cause of foot ulcers” (Botros et al., 2021, p. 19).

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Trans Young Adults' Building Communities: Narratives and Counternarratives of Identity and World Making

Michelle Lavoie

Abstract

This paper draws on a three-year inquiry, in which I lived alongside three trans young adults amid their unfolding lives. I used narrative inquiry, a relational methodology that holds relationship central, to explore asset-building processes within relational learning. This article showcases participants' use of artworks, stories, and counterstories to understand experiences and engage communities. Additionally, this study highlights how trans young adults transform their identities at the intersections of race, citizenship, ableism, and health. This research demonstrates the complexity of trans: identity formation; intersectional tensions, and creative possibilities; and, performativity of intersectionality and identities across multiple communities' spaces and places.

Introduction

As I look at Max's, Espen's, and Adebayo's experiences, I see their trans identity-making unfold alongside traces of absent, missing, and invisible communities; pop-up, intermittent communities, and emergent communities. (Michelle's reflective note).

This paper highlights Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's stories of identity making and world making as trans young adults. Their use of artmaking, and telling stories and counterstories, is forefronted to illuminate the complexities they negotiate both within Sexual and Gender Minority (SGM)¹ communities and in the public sphere. Elsewhere (Lavoie & Caine, 2021; Lavoie, 2021a, 2021b), I have focused on participants' use of artmaking to create generative, transgressive, and transformative spaces to support their lives. This paper unpacks how Adebayo, Espen, and Max employed artmaking, narratives, and counternarratives, to counter hegemonic narratives and make sense of their lives as they transformed their identities. Halberstam (2018) posits that trans is a multiplicity of transgender identities and possibilities, which embody liminality and plurality. It is within these emergent possibilities that Adebayo, Espen, and Max, navigate intersectional challenges and priorities (e.g., citizenship, race, ableism, health, mental health). This paper explicates Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's trans identity making as a highly nuanced and heterogeneous process, always in the making, and in relation to intersecting challenges and priorities.

This research received university ethics board approval from The University of Alberta Ethics Board as part of a doctoral dissertation. This dissertation (Lavoie, 2021b) was approved March 21, 2018 (Pro00079772). Approval was obtained prior to commencement of this study. Adebayo, Espen, and Max asked that their first names, as well as all their stories and artwork, be publicly visible in all research texts and in all forms of dissemination proceeding from research.

Background/Context

Sexual and Gender Minority (SGM) communities often serve dual roles, both social and political (Warner, 2002). These communities² constitute what hooks (1990) calls a homeplace, a space that fosters a sense of belonging and safety and supports advocacy and activism. Many SGM communities trace their advent to specific civil rights events, such as The Stonewall Riots³ and civil rights movements, such as the Gay Liberation Movements⁴ of the 1960s and 1970s⁵ (Duberman et al., 1989). These communities also develop in relation to highly localized and community-specific contexts⁶ (Lavoie & Wells, in press). SGM communities are complicated, often constituted of multiple and diverse identity groups and communities, each with unique histories and narratives, as well as continuing and emergent needs (Stryker, 2008).

Framing the Research Puzzle⁷

My research puzzle emerged from my experience working with queer and trans youth as Artist-in-Residence at Camp fYrefly.⁸ My interests pivoted around relational ways of thinking and knowing. Specifically, I wondered: how relational learning might act to support queer or trans identity formation of young adults. Initially, some of my research questions were influenced by narrow definitions of mentorship in relation to support. These understandings broadened over time, as I began to reimagine mentorship as relational learning, dynamically co-constructed in social interactions and often within conflicting constructions of identity, agency, and resistance. Reflecting on my experience of Camp fYrefly, I realized mentorship might comprise a piece of a much larger “research puzzle” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 124), such as trans young adults’ experiences of identity and world making.

Methodology

I utilized visual narrative inquiry design (Bach, 2007; Caine, 2007; de Mello, 2007). Visual narrative inquiry is ground in narrative inquiry’s (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) theory, methodology, and methods, but emphasizes participants’ and researchers’ art creation, alongside narrative, to elicit storytelling, and respond to, and tell stories (Bach, 2007; Caine, 2007; Caine & Lavoie, 2011, 2015; de Mello, 2007; Lavoie & Caine, 2021; Lavoie, 2021a, 2021b). Narrative inquiry is a qualitative methodology that focuses on understanding experience and reflects a relational ontology (Clandinin et al., 2018). Connelly and Clandinin (2006) explicate the relationship between story, experience, and narrative inquiry, explaining that “story . . . is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful” (p. 477). In seeking to understand the complexities of experience, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) were drawn to Dewey’s (1938) insights into life as a continuous temporal unfolding, taking place in relation and within discreet events. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) based the three-dimensional space of narrative inquiry on Dewey’s (1938) criteria of experience: continuity, interaction, and situation. I paid close attention to the three inquiry spaces of narrative inquiry in this study in relation to participants’ stories of experience.

Methods

This study took place in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Informal settings included The Society of Northern Alberta Print-artists (SNAP) community printmaking studio. I engaged with participants in settings where stories are remembered and contextualized (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). I worked with three trans young adults, aged 18 to 24. This is a typical sample size of a narrative inquiry, as narrative inquirers are interested in constant engagement and sustained interactions (Caine et al., 2013). I initially met participants in 2016 in informal arts-related group activities. I subsequently worked alongside all three participants in 2017 for a short time, when I co-curated an art exhibition they participated in called *Re-Imaging Normal*. Participants formally agreed to be part of the study in 2018.

Field Texts

As I engaged with participants, we included diverse field texts, which consisted of recorded conversations and field notes. Additional data sources included the creation of artwork and poetry. These creative activities took place both on an individual basis and in small groups with other participants in this study. Artistic methods were used to facilitate autobiographical exploration and storytelling (Caine, 2007; Caine & Lavoie, 2015; Grace & Wells, 2007; Lavoie & Caine, 2021; Lavoie, 2021a, 2021b) and served to “queer” or disrupt hetero- and cisnormative discourse and identity formation. The use of all data sources was negotiated with participants. I met with participants for multiple and ongoing conversations over a two-year period. Because the purpose was to learn about the diverse experiences of relational learning for trans young adults, I engaged in open-ended conversations. I also provided monthly opportunities to create artwork in a well-supported community artmaking studio to deepen reflections on experience. I could facilitate this given my work as an artist and art instructor.

Data Analysis

Consistent with narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), data analysis involved examining, reading, and rereading field texts. Narrative accounts were co-written with participants who shared evolving stories and contributed feedback (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). This iterative process involved interpreting the participant's experiences by examining them in relation to familial, cultural, societal, and institutional narratives (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). In addition, analysis involved making visible my relational commitment to participants. The narrative accounts were negotiated and finalized with each participant's feedback. Final narrative accounts (interim texts) include: a play, short stories, poems, artworks, and stories (Lavoie, 2021b). The final analysis involved exploring narrative threads that resonated across the narrative accounts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Narrative Threads

Two narrative threads that emerged from this study are explicated in this paper. These include: 1) Building complex communities through ongoing negotiations of identity; and 2) Telling counterstories to make spaces for identity and world making. Narrative threads that resonated across Max's, Espen's, and Adebayo's interim narrative accounts formed intricate patterns, while each story thread remained distinct. Gaps and absences are visible across their experiences and some stories were not shared.

To appreciate the nuanced complexity of these threads, I attempt to think *with* Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's artwork and stories. Turning to Morris (2002), I discern the difference between thinking about stories and thinking *with* stories; while "[t]hinking about stories conceives of narrative as an object. Thinking *with* stories is process in which we as thinkers do not so much work on narrative [... but allow] narrative to work on us" (p. 196). Thinking *with* story, "creates a narrative vantage point from which lived experience is understood in relation to personal and collective stories (i.e., familial, social, cultural, and institutional stories)" (Lavoie, 2021b, p. 38). Allowing Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's stories to work on me, I begin to see their identity-making processes emerge as they each engage in distinct communities.

Building Complex Communities Through Ongoing Negotiations of Identity

I'm surprised by the amount of queer resources we have in Edmonton... But it's almost as if those resources are only accessible to people who come upon them by chance. Although my mom took me to a Pride Parade when I was five, which looked cool... I perceived it as a one-time thing, with no community beyond that. Like everybody just got together one day a year to party, party, party. Then they go home – that's it. Whereas, at this point, there are multiple facets of the community doing activism or community get-togethers, but unless you know someone, unless someone introduces it to you, it's hard to find. (Max and Michelle in conversation, Michelle's field note)

Thinking *with* Max's story, I consider SGM pop-up communities that appear and disappear just as quickly. An event, like a Pride Parade, brings community together for a short time, then disperses. From childhood, Max recalls SGM community as a one-time thing; later, as an adult they still experience SGM community as elusive. This sense of absent or missing community seems to have shaped Max's *stories to live by*. A phrase coined by Connelly and Clandinin (1999), "stories to live by" is a narrative process for understanding identity; it "helps us to understand how knowledge, context, and identity are linked and can be understood narratively" (p. 2). "Stories to live by" provide insights into how "individuals contextualize past and present experiences, while constructing their identities in relation to the stories they carry" (Lavoie, 2021b, p. 49). Looking to Max's past and present stories, I see their continuing challenge finding and connecting to community. Max states, "*unless you know someone, unless someone introduces it to you, it's hard to find.*" Thinking *with* Max's experiences, I recall SGM communities being named "spectral" by Grace and Benson (2000, p. 109). These communities are "a loose confederation of people with shared experiences of marginalization because of their sexual orientation or gender identity" (Grace et al., 2004, p. 302). Spectral is a useful term when thinking of SGM communities,

suggesting an invisible and illusive presence.⁹ Further complicating issues of SGM communities are the intersections of power within communities; some SGM populations and identities (i.e., trans communities and individuals) remain more spectral and invisible than others (Stryker, 2008).

Returning to consider how some experiences seem more significant than others in relation to identity making, I recall Espen's experiences finding spaces of SGM intergenerational community at Camp fYrefly:

I didn't have many friends who were out, and it was awesome to be surrounded by people who had all these different stories and experiences.... Again, it's that information sharing that you don't get. Because it's not like other minorities where you can pass down information from generation to generation. (Espen in conversation with Michelle, Michelle's field note)

Thinking *with* Espen's story about the challenge finding SGM community spaces, McAdam's (2003) reminds me "that life stories echo gender and class constructions in society and reflect, in one way or another, prevailing patterns of hegemony, the economic, political, and cultural contexts wherein human lives are situated" (p. 201). Thinking *with* McAdams (2003), makes visible the complication of SGM identity making in relation to absent SGM communities, and highlights the significance of telling and hearing SGM life stories to potentially counter hegemonic narratives (i.e., hetero- and cisnormativity) and make space for SGM identity making and world making.

Although both Max and Espen's experiences of intergenerational SGM communities were fleeting, the fact that they chose to highlight these stories, suggests these experiences remain impactful and important to their SGM identity-making processes. Turning back to think *with* McAdams (2003), I recall that evolving quality of each person's life story is uniquely and purposefully composed, with some episodes being "more central to self-definition than others" (p. 195). "Stories to live by" are those impactful stories that shape identities. They are the "stories we carry, which have become part of how we understand our world and who we are in relation" (Lavoie, 2021b, p. 24). While Max's and Espen's stories point to challenges for young adults coming out alongside absent, missing, and invisible SGM communities, they also point to Max's and Espen's determination to find and create opportunities for SGM intergenerational conversations and community making.

Telling Stories to Live by Alongside Pop-up & Intermittent Communities

SGM pop-up and intermittent communities are opportunities to participate in SGM communities through short-term, and non-reoccurring events, or, opportunities to participate in SGM communities through short-term, regularly scheduled events. Although online forums create a continuous online presence, I would also describe online forums as intermittent communities because members' participation can be sporadic.

I recall looking to the audience of about eighty people gathered to hear Max's and Adebayo's stories as young emerging trans artists in a provincial touring show. As co-curator, I sit back, delighted, Max and Adebayo will fill this public space with their stories and artwork. Adebayo shares stories of coming to Canada as a trans refugee and refers to his image showing two people

hugging. Thinking of continents, he crossed, Adebayo shares “You never know how far people have travelled, what they have gone through to get that hug”.¹⁰ Max speaks of the stigma and transphobic violence their friends have encountered. Referring to their artwork, Max states: “these ‘victims’ are resilient and that’s very inspiring. While things have improved, there are still many challenges [in Alberta], especially in rural communities. Through this [art]piece, I’m telling people to keep going and show their colors”.¹¹ (Michelle’s reflective note)



Fig. 1: Michelle Lavoie. (2018). Photograph of Re-Imaging Normal exhibition. [Photograph]. Collections of the Artists, Edmonton, AB, Canada.
This image shows Adebayo’s woodblock print (top) and Max’s painting (bottom).

This pop-up community came together to celebrate artwork and stories by SGM emerging and established artists. Importantly, the exhibition was the first exhibition in the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Rural Exhibition Program (TRES) to circulate stories and art with SGM themes to schools, libraries, and community centres in rural Alberta. Adebayo, Max, and Espen participated by sharing their stories and artwork. Adebayo’s artwork (Figure 1., top) speaks of looking for, seeking, and finding community, and a sense of belonging. Max’s artwork (Figure 1., bottom) tells community members to *Be Loud* and *Stay Strong*, despite violence and threats of violence.

Turning to reflect on Espen’s stories, I recall his experiences of identity making within the intermittent community of Camp fYrefly, Espen recalls:

I did make friends. I didn’t stay in contact with them though. Which was okay, because it felt like you could go and try on a bunch of identities and see what fits and not be afraid of who’s going to see you or need to maintain something you’re not. (Espen and Michelle in conversation, Michelle’s field note)



Fig. 2: Artist: Espen (2019), Snake (right) [Woodcut Print]; Fig. 3: Moth (centre) [Screen Print],
Fig. 4: Jellyfish (left) [Woodcut Print], Collection of the Artist, Edmonton, AB., Canada. These images were created in relation to research conversations about beauty, change, and transformation.

What I find unexpected in Espen's story was his speaking of the intermittent nature of Camp fYrefly, a four-day annual camp, being in sync with his process of ongoing identity formation. Thinking with Espen's stories of identity making alongside community, I turn to Bruner (1990), who suggests social interaction fosters both meaning-making and identity formation. Bruner states, "realities that people constructed were social realities, negotiated with others... both mind and the Self were part of that social world" (p. 105).

As I begin to wonder how Espen is negotiating identity making and community making, I consider Carr's (1986) theory of narrative coherence to consider continuities and discontinuities in life stories. Carr (1986) suggests that continuities in life stories provide a sense of self across time, while discontinuities in life stories disrupt a continuous sense of self. Within this theory, Carr (1986) asserts that narratives function to unify individual's experiences by composing the self, "as subject of a life-story" (p. 128). It is the act of storytelling and acting out self-stories that fosters personal and collective agency by enabling the storyteller to act as the subject and protagonist of their life story (Carr, 1986). Turning to artmaking to think *with* his life stories and consider his process of transformation, Espen creates subjects that transform (Figures 2, 3, and 4: a snake, moth, and jellyfish). Continuing to think with Espen's experiences of transformation and SGM identity making, I recall one of Espen's stories finding community through online forums:

When I started drawing online, I thought it was incredible.... and you get to meet all these different people. And at that time, a lot of my peers were starting to develop crushes, and I just wasn't. I was very insecure about it and [then] I found online communities, which were the gateway to my LGBTQ personality. (Espen and Michelle in conversation, Michelle's field note)

For Espen, online forums provided spaces of community and connections that supported his identity formation. Importantly, Espen felt comfortable enough to stay connected to this online community as he explored his identity. I recall often sensing Espen's presence as tenuous or fleeting in spaces and places we attended together. I understood this sense later, when Espen revealed his health and mental stories, and how these experiences challenged his sense of well-being and ability to stay connected. After a prolonged absence, I recall meeting Espen by chance:

I was surprised and pleased to see Espen on the steps of the Legislature, following the Trans Day of Remembrance rally. I grew concerned when I asked if we could meet and he told me that his life had become complicated again due to health concerns, because I know what those complications can mean in relation to Espen's stories. (Michelle, reflective note)

I was delighted when Espen told me that a café, which we visited for our research conversations and lattes, had become a favourite haunt, because not all public spaces were comfortable for Espen. Thinking about Espen's sense of comfort, I recall how stories to live by "are expressions of an embodied knowledge of the landscape, of space and time, of borders, cycles, and rhythms" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 113). For Espen, it appears these online forums, like the café, provided a community space, where he experienced the comfort of a familiar landscape, and where he knew the time, borders, cycles, and rhythms; these spaces shaped his ability to tell and live his "stories to live by".

Developing Stories to Live by Alongside Emergent Communities

Adebayo's stories of coming to Edmonton as a LGBTIQ refugee and subsequently creating an organization to support LGBTIQ refugees highlights his experiences of identity making while building an emergent community.

My experience made me sit down and think about a thousand refugees, who are going to come in the same way I came in, and find these gaps. I wanted to make sure that I put something down that can help a thousand of them. (Adebayo in conversation with Michelle, Michelle's field note)

Adebayo's identity making centres around his experiences as an LGBTIQ refugee, a trans Black man, and community leader. Supporting others following in his footsteps strongly resonates across all of Adebayo's stories.

We're starting this organization to look out for other refugees who are coming in and need this [support]. To cover the gaps that were so hard. If I link up with them, they will help someone else jump the same gaps. (Adebayo in conversation with Michelle, Michelle's field note)

As Adebayo describes his community work and work as an artist, I am struck by Adebayo's stories of community as chosen family and how Adebayo has also joined a community of artists through his artmaking and shared stories.

Discussion of Resonant Threads

Thinking *with* Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's experiences, I see complexity as a thread woven through their stories. I see their complex identity-making processes as they engage in multiple, diverse, and, at times, complicated communities. Adebayo seems to thrive in activism, making space for himself and others in SGM refugee communities. Espen, on the other hand, withdraws from spotlights, seeking spaces to join communities at his pace. Max seems to travel to others' worlds to learn alongside.

From Espen's, Max's, and Adebayo's stories, we see complex SGM identities being formed in relation to diverse communities. Thinking with Lugones' (1987) concepts of selves and worlds, I consider how identities are endlessly formed and reformed in multiple communities that are always in the making. Letting go of the notions of selves as always continuous and unified, Lugones (1987) suggests the possibility of selves that exist in a continuous state of becoming, a state that can always be otherwise. Importantly, Lugones (1987) also highlights how playfulness and ease can allow us to travel to multiple worlds: those we inhabit and those of others. Artmaking, which is intrinsically playful (Dewey, 1934), seems to create and enable pathways to think *with* stories of identity and community making.

Self-stories, which inform identity and meaning making, can be heavily influenced to conform to societal and cultural expectations (Bruner, 1990). Hegemonic stories exist both in public and within SGM community spaces and places that may preclude or block SGM identity making. In response, counterstories need to be told to take, make, and hold open space for "othered" stories to be seen, told, heard, and lived.

Telling Counterstories to Make Spaces for Identity-Making

Counterstories are stories told to disrupt or counter mainstream hegemonic narratives (Lindemann Nelson, 1995). From Lindemann Nelson, we learn counterstories are told in communities, often by those asking, sometimes demanding, recognition and rights of full citizenship within communities and publics. SGM communities are an example of communities founded, in part, in reaction to hegemonic narratives (e.g., hetero- and cisnormativity) that inform larger discourse (e.g., cultural, societal, and institutional).

Max's, Espen's, & Adebayo's, Counterstories

Max travelled to multiple urban and rural high schools in the province of Alberta to teach gender theory and LGBTIQ+ issues and programming in public education for the flyrefly in Schools Program. This is one of Max's stories:

Yeah, it's not part of the curriculum, so it gets very complicated [...and] having to justify that to people as well... Especially when people are saying there are only two genders. I'm like, well, I know a bunch of non-binary people, and their existence simply proves that there isn't, but okay. (Max in conversation with Michelle, Michelle's field note)

From Max's story, we see complications in what is deemed to be legitimate knowledge and who are seen to be legitimate knowledge holders. These questions extend to whose identities are considered legitimate. Max points to academic research and his lived experience as a non-binary trans person to support his teaching. Max's story highlights the power of hegemonic gender norms. The double edge of normalcy is the stigma, biases, and discriminatory actions often enacted on those who fall outside the boundaries of "normal" expectations.

Max's counterstories, like the one below, make space for them to be their authentic self and stand in their truth as a non-binary trans person.

I don't super agree with a lot of the conservative teaching or whatever, for obvious reasons. Like they're kind of anti-me, so I'm not really cool with that... when I encounter people who sort of come back to me with, "Oh, everyone's allowed to have their opinion" or something, I'm like, yeah, but your opinion is that I cannot fundamentally exist. So where do we draw the line? [What's] the importance of this knowledge – is it telling you that I don't necessarily have the right to the same opportunities as you? (Max in conversation with Michelle, Michelle's field note)



Fig. 5: Max (2019), Untitled 1 (left). [Linocut Print]; Fig. 6: Max (2019) Untitled 2 (centre). [Woodblock Print]. Fig. 7: Max (2019) Untitled 3 (right). [Linocut Print], Collection of the Artist, Edmonton, AB., Canada. These prints were created thinking about the climate crisis, different forms of communication and navigating identities in relation.

Many of Max's counterstories revolve around the complexity of living and being acknowledged as a non-binary trans person, even within SGM communities. Max's story, below, highlights the complications of working within SGM communities, where multiple marginalizations still occur, but are seldom acknowledged.

[when] I'm working with other people in the queer community, there are some people who are like, we have legal same-sex marriage – we're done. I'm like trans people don't do it, but okay. And different experiences come through, like for disabled queer people and people of colour. There are still things to work towards, but just saying that [it's] the stuff that affects you, [and] that's done. But, I'm like, there's still so much work to do! And having to try to give them that push, and almost convince them, there are other people in the community that aren't you. (Max in conversation with Michelle, Michelle's field note)

Max's stories highlight a collective counterstory, which is the need to look beyond personal stories and identity group norms to gain broader perspectives on the scope of emergent needs of those facing multiple levels of marginalization within SGM communities.

Turning to Max's images (Figures 5, 6, and 7), we see Max's process of thinking and feeling *with* images. Figure 5, Max describes as their response to the terror of climate collapse. In Figure 6, Max combines a mouth and eye, overlapping senses, perhaps suggesting looking before speaking. In Figure 7, Max literally asks *what should I think*, both highlighting and questioning how people are taught and told to think. We see throughout Max's artwork a questioning and thinking process made visible through images.

For Espen, things were different:

I got into a very dark place because there weren't supports. I got juggled around by the system. I remember consulting help lines and they told me to go to the hospital. So, I had quite a jarring experience there. When I get upset, I stop displaying distress on my face. I just go flat. And that's not what they're looking for. So, they put me in a cement room for psychosis patients for six hours. When the psychiatrist came to see me, I said: "I'm really struggling here. Please give me something in my toolbox to help me". And it slipped out that I was also concerned about my gender. It was causing me a lot of stress. And he gave me a number and sent me home. And when we called number and it was the Gender Gatekeepers. So, to transition medically, you need to go to a gender specialist and it takes years on the waiting list. So instead of giving me something to help me in the moment, like actual therapy numbers, or talking through my problems, they gave me a number to a place that had a two-year waiting list. (Espen in conversation with Michelle, Michelle's field note)



Fig. 8: Michelle Lavoie. (2019). Tactile Expressions 2. [Digital Print]. Collection of the Artist, Edmonton, AB., Canada. This image was created to respond to Espen's stories and create a space to begin conversations about mental health.

Espen's experience highlights the silences around mental health stories. Espen's story also hints at the false narrative that LGBTQ+ communities are all inclusive and always welcoming places and spaces. Community is not always granted. For those, like Espen, struggling with mental health issues, stigma and silence often combine to result in further stigma and isolation. Figure 8 was my response to Espen's mental health stories. This image acted as a placeholder; it held open spaces for Espen and me to begin to speak about mental health. Espen's mental health stories likely would have remained silent without artwork that elicited conversations.

Many of Adebayo's counterstories are grounded in his experiences as a trans Black man and refugee to Canada. These counterstories respond to structural barriers in Canada's immigration system that were reinforced by levels of implicit bias, racist language, and (in)actions.

So, when I came to Canada, I got the resources I really needed, but there were gaps, and a lot of challenges. If I wasn't strong enough, maybe for different challenges, I wouldn't have survived. People telling me to go back home. People being racist, and then I had to prepare for my permanent residence, five hundred bucks, yet I didn't have the money. I didn't even have a work permit yet. Like all these things caught me and it was a struggle to work through them. This, along with all the trauma recovering from my story. (Adebayo in conversation with Michelle, Michelle's field note)



Fig. 9: Michelle Lavoie. (2019) Adebayo Printing (right). [Photograph]. Collection of the Artist. Edmonton, AB., Canada. Fig. 10: Adebayo (2019). Trans Africa (left). [Linocut Print]. Collection of the Artist. Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. The image on the right shows Adebayo printing a plate and the image on the left shows the plate printed on fabric. Adebayo printed hundreds of t-shirts to share within his community.

Adebayo's counterstory makes visible how barriers multiply at the intersections of race, citizenship status, and gender identity. His experience highlights the additional complexity of mental health and trauma suffered by many refugees and how these factors intersect with structural barriers (i.e., transphobia, racism, and xenophobia) to prevent refugees from accessing supports to gain a path to citizenship. Layers of bureaucracy sit atop layers of trauma, which cannot be addressed because of claimants' lack of rights to citizenship. As Adebayo eloquently states below, counterstories are an act of hope.

My life has the spotlight now. Someone else will have the spotlight later. This is not one person's fight. This is a fight for a whole community. I am trying to give a platform for all those stories, and all those people with similar stories, who are always pushed to the margins for being queer. I want to bring the community together, so nobody is left behind. I want to help give space to those people who have been displaced for whole parts of their lives. (Adebayo in conversation with Michelle, Michelle's field note)

Turning to look at Adebayo printing (Figure 9), we see Adebayo totally engaged in artmaking. I had cut printing plates for Adebayo, who had been away, working to prevent a community member from being deported to a place where it is not safe to be queer. Imagining a safe and inclusive future, Adebayo printed the colours of the trans flag on the map of Africa (Figure 10). The image is a powerful call for change. Figure 11 is Adebayo's response to tensions in the queer community that emerged during Edmonton Pride 2019. Adebayo printed this image after stating that within our queer community, we were not seeing each other, even though we are, in Adebayo's words, *like two sides of the same hand*.



Fig. 11: Adebayo (2019). Two Sides of the Same Hand. [Linocut Print]. Collection of the Artist, Edmonton, AB, Canada. I cut this plate and gifted to Adebayo, responding to his stories about tensions in Edmonton's queer community and members not seeing each other even though we are like two sides of the same hand. Adebayo printed the plate using colours of the Trans Flag.

Discussion of Narrative Threads

Creating counterstories are opportunities for missing stories to be told. They offer spaces for individuals and communities to think with previously excluded and still-silent stories. I am reminded of Lugones' (2003) concept of complex communities as creative spaces and concrete places that enable complex thinking, while countering reductionist and binary logistics and norms. Lugones' (2003) imagining of complex communities presents a radical reimagining of communities as unbounded and fluid, always transforming in response to emergent possibilities. While this concept might seem overly idealized, Lugones (2003) asserts it reflects the realities of communities and identities formed in relation. It is rather the concept of communities as ossified, geographically bounded, and protectionist, that reflects an overly simplified notion of what communities are and can become. The truncation of possibilities, erasure, and homogenization of difference are clues that bounded definitions of communities are at play, dividing people and groups into arbitrary assignments of Us or Them (Lugones, 2003).

Counterstories (Lindemann Nelson, 1995) seem to provide a mechanism to develop and support complex communities (Lugones, 2003). Counterstories are stories, lived and told, which counter hegemonic narratives. When told within communities, they may upend mainstream narratives and create space for new stories to be seen and told. Counterstories, enacted through telling and living stories, may further develop agency and manifest complexity, as reflected in Max's, Espen's, and Adebayo's stories and lives.

As Max, Espen, and Adebayo negotiate multiple worlds (Lugones, 1987), they prioritize certain experiences alongside their gender identity and expression as part of their identity and world making. For Espen, making space to tell his mental health stories was an important part of telling his stories of trans identity and advocating for trans inclusive mental health reforms. For Adebayo, his stories of racism and xenophobia intersected with his experiences of transphobia, and he responded by creating a community to support himself and other LGBTIQ refugees. For Max, it was important to challenge

intersections of ageism and ableism by telling stories of their experiences as being a non-binary trans person through public education, to make space for themselves and others.

Taking a Reflective Turn

Throughout their diverse community making experiences, Adebayo, Espen, and Max used artmaking and storytelling in their narratives and counternarratives to inform their identity making and world making. The three each used artmaking to think *with* and inform their stories of identity while negotiating complexity. Espen thought through transitioning by creating images about transformation. Max engaged in artmaking to query topics from climate change to normative thinking. Adebayo created artwork to disrupt and confront cultural, societal, and community narratives by offering alternative imaginaries, like trans and racial equality. I also used artmaking to bridge gaps and elicit hard-to-speak stories. Artmaking created space for stories to follow. Many stories surfaced because of artmaking.

In this research, artmaking and storytelling were used by Adebayo, Espen, and Max to foster a sense of connectedness, make sense of their experiences, combat social isolation, and form and transform community networks. In Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's stories and counterstories, communities are dynamic and emergent processes, rather than final destinations, continuously evolving in the hands of makers (Greene, 1995). Communities appear to be continuously made and remade through storytelling, artmaking, and direct action to communicate and connect lives. Adebayo, Espen, and Max demonstrate that communities are complex sites of negotiations of identities and always in the making. These complex communities promise not to erase differences, but forge new paths by acknowledging commonalities, learning from differences, and continuously imagining new possible futures shaped in relation to emergent identities.

Conclusion

Through artwork, stories and counterstories, this paper highlights Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's complex, ongoing processes of identity making and world making as trans young adults. Artmaking is an empowering process that Adebayo, Espen, and Max used to reflect on and communicate their stories. Making visible Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's experiences through artwork, stories, counterstories creates space to tell, hear, and honour their complex lives, while complicating notions of homogeneous trans and SGM identities. These stories illuminate complex negotiations and nuanced identity-making, community-making, and world-making processes that showcase each person's resistance and resilience. Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's counterstories may be challenging because they require de-centring of self-stories and collective stories to make room for new and long silent stories. Counterstories reverberate through webs of community connections in complicated and unforeseen ways, disrupting norms, while making space to address blind spots and imagine alternatives. Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's artworks, stories, and counterstories offer novel ways to see and imagine through liminality and multiplicity, enabling creative and complex choices to transform and reimagine possible identities, communities, and worlds.

Notes

1. That is Sexual and Gender Minorities. SGM is interchangeable with LGBTIQ+. SGM identities include: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or trans, intersex, queer, Two Spirit, plus those not identifying as heterosexual or cisgender.
2. Lindemann Nelson (1995) suggests communities of choice are built around common affiliations and may transcend geographic locations, while communities of place are geographically situated. Participants' counterstories take place in communities of place and within chosen communities.
3. The Stonewall Riots took place in New York City in 1969 when the police raided the Stonewall Inn and arrested SGM patrons (Duberman et al., 1989). This event is recognized as a pivotal moment in SGM and trans history (Stryker, 2008) that coalesced emergent communities through collective action to resist oppression (D' Emilio, 2014).
4. Gay Liberation Movements are often critiqued for not being trans-inclusive, erasing trans lives, and for transphobic attitudes (Namaste, 2000).
5. Although early (e.g., 1900s) SGM communities have been traced through archival research, much remains hidden from history (Duberman et al., 1989).
6. Communities are often built to respond to needs of individuals and collectives (D' Emilio, 2014; Lavoie & Wells, in press). For more on Edmonton's Queer history please see: <https://edmontonqueerhistoryproject.ca>
7. Within narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), research puzzles are used to frame inquiry; they are part of a process in which questions and wonders emerge throughout research in response to stories (Clandinin & Huber, 2010).
8. Artists-in-Residence provide art workshops to SGM youth. Camp fyrefly is an arts-based leadership camp for LGBTIQ+ youth created by the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services (iSMSS), University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada.
9. When considering visibility of SGM communities, there are many variables to consider, such as geography or age (Harley & Teaster, 2016).
10. Adebayo personal communication, at VAA CARFAC Gallery Edmonton, May 23, 2018.
11. Max personal communication, at VAA CARFAC Gallery Edmonton, May 23, 2018.

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Arts-Based Research in Precarious Pedagogy-Making Experiences

Christine Liao and James DeVita

Abstract

Framing through the concept of precarity, we share our arts-based research on the experiences of creating a collaborative performance-making project focused on connecting students from different education levels, to create a film-dance integrated performance to advocate for social justice issues in education. We, as instructors and researchers, embarked on an arts-based research journey creating sketches, poems, videos, and a dance performance to analyze and represent our research findings. Our performance from the performative inquiry shows our understanding of the collaboration project through the same art form we required our students to utilize: film and dance-integrated arts performance.

Introduction

In 2016 we developed an arts-based applied learning experience where undergraduate students majoring in elementary education, enrolled in “Integrating the Arts in the Elementary Curriculum,” and graduate students majoring in higher education, enrolled in “Social Justice Topics in Education” courses, worked collaboratively to produce an integrated film and dance performance. The collaboration centered on themes developed during a graduate course about social justice topics in education, and performances were intended to reflect students’ engagement with social justice topics and challenge traditional notions of learning by using an arts-integrated approach to embody their learning. By the second year, the project evolved to include dance students from a local high school, which allowed us to ultimately “create an integrated applied learning experience that supports the goals of the high school dance program, pre-service teacher education course, and higher education graduate course, respectively” (Liao et al., 2018, p. 88). The experience engaged students in collaborative performance-making that was precarious for all stakeholders involved in the project because of the complexity and unfamiliarity of the collaborative teaching and learning experience.

We frame the process of this pedagogy and the project as precarious, revealing the vulnerability of the pedagogy and project (Tsing, 2015). Tsing explained that “precarity is a state of acknowledgment of our vulnerability to others. In order to survive, we need help, and help is always the service of another, with or without intent” (p. 29). We intentionally developed this project to require interdependency among all students and instructors engaged in the experience. As instructors, we needed each other to not only support the production of the final performance, but also to support our respective course activities and accomplish learning outcomes. While our interdependence made us vulnerable, it also helped us to succeed in a world that was structured to challenge us.

In this article, we share our arts-based research on the experience of creating this collaborative performance-making project. We will first share an overview of the project. Then, we will discuss the scholarship we explored to understand the project through the lens of precarity and performance-making pedagogy. We will then discuss our performative inquiry into understanding the experience of collaborative teaching of this performance-making project. Our research findings are represented through an interactive film and dance performance shared via a recorded video link embedded in this article. We argue that both our project and arts-based research are performative and precarious.

Saying our pedagogy in the making is precarious acknowledges not only the risk of the pedagogy-making process, but also emphasizes the political challenge and precarious support for conducting such a large-scale project. Indeed, time and schedule restrictions, communication conflicts, restrictive school policies, access to funding, and the overall complexity of the project were challenges we encountered during each iteration of the experience (Liao et al., 2018). Our decision to engage in the project as pre-tenured faculty members alludes to the political challenges we also faced. There was a real risk that our work would not be valued in the tenure review process, which created a precarious condition for our own economic stability and security (Manning, 2016; Tsing, 2015). Saying our project is precarious also acknowledges the difficulty of making this project a stable part of the curriculum. The hiring of new faculty and staff members, lack of institutional support, and loss of school partners, in fact, contributed to a pause on this project after the 2018 iteration. Nevertheless, we believe the value and experience from this project can advance arts-based teaching, learning, and research as demonstrated through our research findings.

Overview of the Project

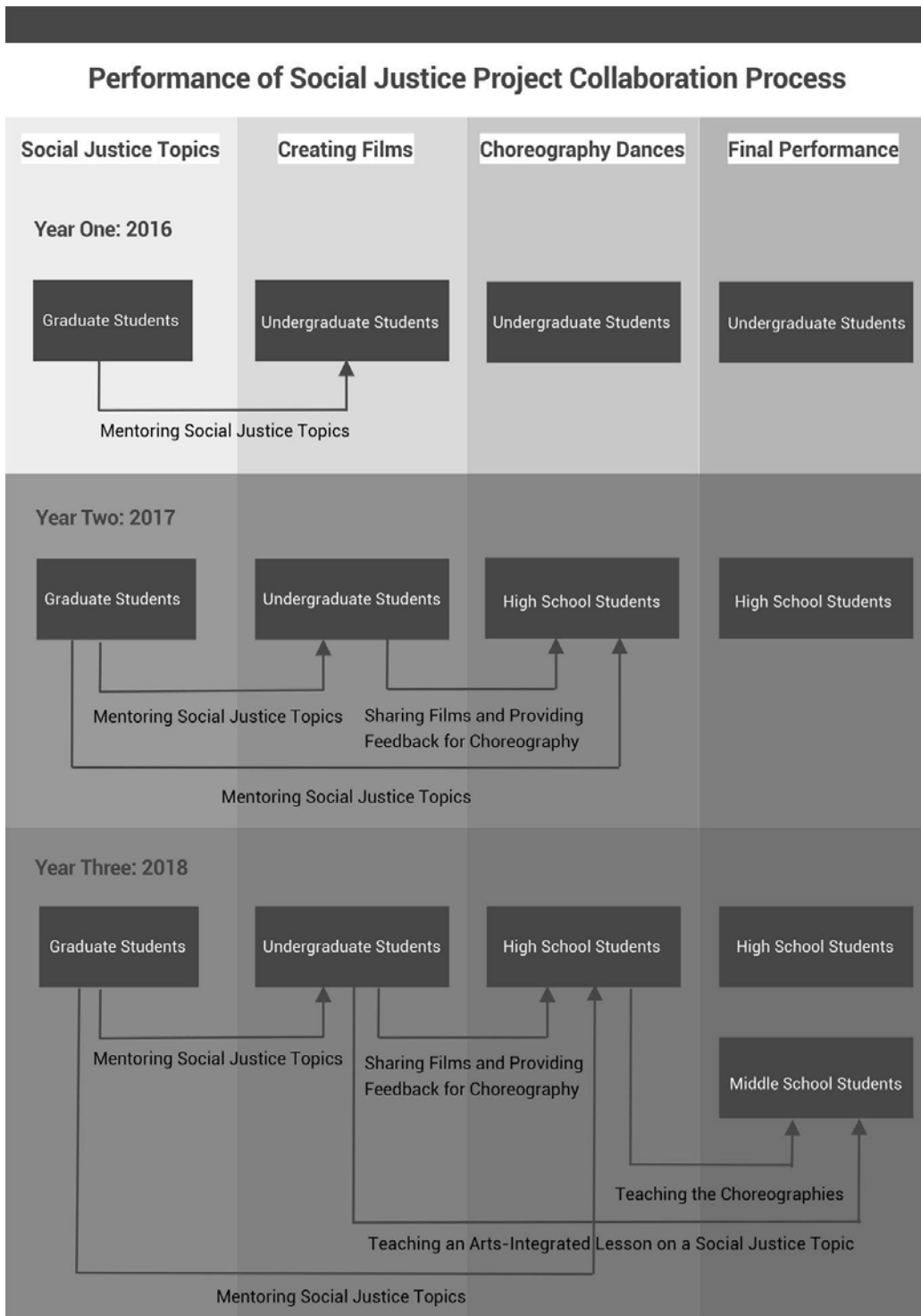
Collaborative performance-making is the pedagogy, project, and event we created over a span of three years (2016-2018). Initially, as a final class project for both the undergraduate and graduate students in their respective courses, the project was expanded after the first year to become a community outreach event in addition to a course project. During each year of the collaboration, we held a performance as a culminating event for advocating social justice issues in education, showcasing students' learning, and bridging the community. The performance required students to combine dance and film as a layered performance (see Figure 1) in order to convey meaning, as well as to transform the dance into a digital performance and the film into a live interaction.

We created this project and pedagogy as a way to engage graduate and undergraduate students with social justice issues through arts; as the project evolved, the teaching also reached high school students (who performed as dancers in 2017 and 2018) and middle school students (who performed as dancers and attended as audience members in 2018). Students from different levels, including graduate, undergraduate, high school, and middle school, participated in different stages and created different parts of the performance (see Figure 2). In the process, the graduate students applied their learning, acted as mentors for the undergraduate and high school students, and also learned to embody social justice action, rather than to statically identify as social justice allies (DeVita & Anders, 2018). The undergraduate students created films to present their learning and research of social justice topics in education

(e.g., racism, sexism, classism). In the first year, they also choreographed the dances and acted as dancers on stage. In the second and third years, the undergraduate students' roles shifted (each year's students are different), and instead of creating dances, they worked with high school dance students to share their films and provide feedback for high school students' choreographies. In addition, they went to the local middle school to teach an arts-integrated lesson on the selected social justice topics to sixth-graders. The undergraduate students engaged in the performance were challenged to learn about social justice topics relevant to their work in elementary education, as well as to express ideas through the arts. The high school students learned about the social justice topics from both the graduate and undergraduate students, and choreographed dances to correspond with the films in the performance. They also acted as dancers in the second and third years. In addition, they taught their dances to the middle school's students in the third year. The dance students reflected on the ways they were pushed outside of their comfort zones to learn about dance as a form of communication that can convey serious issues in addition to aesthetic appeal. The middle school's sixth-graders were involved in the project by the third year. They learned about the social justice topics from the arts-integrated lesson taught by the undergraduate students, and volunteers were recruited to work with the high school dance students to perform the dances. As instructors, we engaged in creating the performance-making pedagogy and researching the experience of this unique collaboration.



Fig. 1: Scene of performance of social justice, 2016.



* The graduate students and undergraduate students are different students each year. There were 15-20 graduate students and 35-45 undergraduate students each semester. There were about 25 high school students and about 10 of the high school students participated in both the 2017 and 2018 iterations. There were 26 middle school students who participated as dancers.

Fig 2: Performance of social justice project collaboration process.

We sought to provide a collaborative space where all participants in the project felt connected and utilized a layered mentoring approach to do so. Shaw and Byler (2016) noted that, “[u]nderstanding life as precarious suggests that social existence itself depends on interdependency through the care of others” (para. 1). Our project modeled this interdependency by encouraging all stakeholders to play an integral role in the production of the culminating performance. In order to develop a complete and integrated performance, all students and instructors made meaningful contributions that blurred distinctions among roles.

During the performance, the dancers and films sometimes interact, even contradict each other, in conveying complicated representations of social justice topics. We changed the collaborating components, involved more students each year, and reached new audiences as we expanded the collaboration. For example, in our third year of the collaboration, an in-school performance was offered as an assembly to all middle school students, and a second performance was attended by community members and parents; this was a significant increase in our audience from the first year when the performance was limited to mostly classmates and a few friends and family members. In each performance, there are several short pieces that focus on different social justice topics in education (e.g., racism, sexism, classism). The various social justice topics aligned with graduate students’ engagement in applied learning activities with members of the respective community they were learning about.

Precarity and Performance-Making Pedagogy

Examples of performative art and performance-making pedagogy exist across multiple disciplines (e.g., Bird, 2020; Buono & Gonzalez, 2017; McManimon, 2020). A special issue of *LEARNing Landscapes* in 2020 on “The Role of Performances in Educational Practices” included examples of arts-integrated projects from across the educational spectrum. One article, written by Boydell (2020), shared research on a project that used dance to represent psychosis among young people, which described the project as an “academic-artistic partnership [that] was characterized by managing reservations and taking risks” (p. 80). Boydell discussed challenges encountered throughout the performance arts-based research project she facilitated, including the need to balance the aesthetic aspects of the performance for audience appeal with both research findings and educational benefits of the work. Boydell also noted the stress associated with negotiating different viewpoints among collaborators, including researcher, choreographer, and performer, and the challenges of translating and representing findings through movement appropriately and effectively. The challenges encountered demonstrate the precariousness of performance-making pedagogy, which we discuss in greater detail below.

Precarity

A concept originally from sociological discourse about the uncertainty and insecurity of one’s livelihood, precarity has been applied to other fields, and the discourses around the concept have expanded in recent years (Choonara, 2020). We frame our work around this concept, acknowledging the risk of taking it out of the original context. However, as the core of our work is to advocate and spread awareness of social justice for the minority groups of people the performance project touched upon (e.g., Black male,

Native American, LGBTQ+), and the precarious conditions these people are living in, we build on and amplify connection and the need for the theorization of this kind of work.

Additionally, in the introduction to an edited volume focused on precarity and performance, Ridout and Schneider (2012) pointed out the discourses around “good precarity” and “bad precarity.” They stated that,

... precarity’s “positive qualities”—leaning away from habit, stepping outside of comfort zones, chancing the speculative and uncertain act of critical thinking—can be used to undermine or interrupt neoliberalism’s negative, fearmongering mode of precarity that imposes insecurity for the many in the interest of enormous wealth for the few. (p. 9)

While we see the precariousness in the process of our project, we also think that it is not all negative. Understanding our project through the perspective of “good precarity” connects our project back to performance art pedagogy’s critical stand and provides a way to see the possibility of making changes through collaborative performance-making. The positive outcomes experienced by students in all contexts point to the positive aspects of precarity. Moreover, the positive outcomes reflect the enacted social justice values learned through engagement in the project: community, inclusivity, and empowerment by giving voice.

Performance-Making Pedagogy

We call our collaborative teaching performance-making pedagogy. Similar to Charles Garoian’s (1999) performance art pedagogy, which includes three attributes: performance, performativity, and performance art, in using the term performance-making, we emphasize the performativity in the performance itself and the performative, precarious process of making the performance. Performance, as Garoian explained, includes making, doing and production in the arts and “the teacher’s pedagogy, the students’ interaction with that pedagogy, and their mutual involvement in school” (p. 8) in the education context. In other words, teaching and learning are performance. Performativity, according to Garoian (1999), “represents the performance of subjectivity, a means by which students can attain political agency” (p. 8). Performance art pedagogy emphasizes the political agency in which one’s subjectivity produces and the negotiation of “positionality within the culture” (p.8). Seeing performance art as a self-conscious and open form of art, Garoian argues that performance art pedagogy creates “a liminal space, an aesthetic dimension, wherein socially and historically constructed ideas, images, myths, and utopias can be contested and new ones constructed as they pertain to students’ experience of reality and their desires to transform that reality” (p. 10)

We consider the main difference between performance art pedagogy and our performance-making pedagogy is the emphasis on the collaborative process in the latter. The collaboration can be conceptualized through the lens of intra-action (Barad, 2007). Intra-action, according to Barad’s (2007) agential realism, is “the mutual constitution of entangled agencies” (p. 33). She explained, “in contrast to the usual ‘interaction,’ which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action” (p. 33). An example of an intra-action in our collaboration project can be

seen from the high school students' choreographies. The students' choreographies are not separated productions of the choreographers' exercise of their agency, but emerge through the intra-action with the graduate students' research, undergraduate students' films, the instructors, and other nonhuman agencies, such as space. The agencies, the students, teachers, and other nonhuman agencies, are entangled in the process and continually influencing each other through intra-actions. In other words, agencies are not fixed and stable, but precarious and uncertain. The continuing intra-actions in the collaborative performance-making, thus, render the pedagogy precarious.

Performative Research Into the Process of Performance-Making Pedagogy

To understand the precariousness in our journey of making the performance-making pedagogy and conducting such a risky project, we embarked on a layered arts-based research process (Buono & Gonzalez, 2017; Siegesmund & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2008) through performative inquiry and arts-based methods. We ask: what constituted the experience of creating the collaborative performance-making project?

Performative inquiry is an approach that inheres in researching a topic through performance. It is often used in social science and educational fields to expose narratives of injustice, create meaning, and promote participation in focal issues (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Performance inquiry as a research methodology fits well with our project because not only is our project art form performance, but it also "opens spaces of intertextual play within which social responsibility and individual and communal response may be investigated" (Fels & McGivern, 2002, p. 30). Aimed to create the intertextual dialogue between our students' final performance and our experience in creating this project as pre-tenured faculty members, we decided to employ performance inquiry in our research to show our understanding of this collaboration project through the same art form. As Fels (2012) suggested, engaging in performative inquiry through artmaking is a way to generate embodied and reflective data. We, as researchers, engaged in an analytical process after the collaborative project. We deconstructed and analyzed the processes through which we created our collaborative project and constructed new understandings of the collaborative experience through movement, poetry, drawing, and video making.

We began this arts-based research journey by creating a blog to share our initial individual reflective analysis of the raw data with each other. The data collected from the process, including written reflections from students, notes during our collaboration process, videos from the practices, and the final performances, were analyzed for emerging themes. In addition, we generated reflections on this project through our exchange on the blog, and the reflections became our data too. Using this initial analysis, we undertook arts-based approaches to illustrate these emerging themes and apply our artful interpretations. These emerging themes were translated into drawings (See Figure 3) and reflective poems as ways to analyze and crystallize the raw data (Gerber & Myers-Coffman, 2018). A total of five drawings and five poems were created from our data analysis.



Fig. 3: A sketch drawing from the research process.

Using the drawings and poems as arts-based analysis, we implemented a performative method to further interpret the imagery from the drawings and poems and created dance movements to represent the findings (Bagley & Cancienne, 2001). Next, the art pieces (i.e., the poems and drawings) were organized based on the categories that emerged from our analysis to create a video artwork through which we presented a narrative of our findings. This mirrors the format of the dance and film integrated performance project we orchestrated. We also created embedded interactive movements as a way to open up our research and invite others to join the dialogue. The interactive movements are also a disruption of the power dynamics that are expected to be at play in a performance. We invite the audience to engage by dancing with us. We invite them to think of themselves as a part of the performance, not merely an observer of it. The research “findings” were then presented through an interactive dance-video performance at the InSEA World Congress in 2019, engaging audiences from different fields to ponder the challenges and benefits of collaborative work.

Precarious Performative Research Analysis and Results

The Performativity

Our arts-based research led us to the conclusion that the integrated film and dance performances that students develop and perform as their culminating experience on learning about social justice topics are performative acts. Austin (1962) argues that the term

performative utterances. . . is derived, of course, from ‘perform,’ the usual verb with the noun ‘action’: it indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action—it is not normally thought of as just saying something. (pp. 6–7)

Performativity was described by Judith Butler (1993) as the “reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains” (p. xii). Lloyd (1999) noted that Butler’s concept of performativity means that we are always “doing” that identity rather than just being that identity. Additionally, Karen Barad (2003) stated that “[t]he move toward performative alternatives to representationalism shifts the focus from questions of correspondence between descriptions and reality (e.g., do they mirror nature or culture?) to matters of practices/doings/actions” (p. 802). Our film and dance performance asks students to not just reflect on what they have learned about social justice topics, but to embody and enact that learning with each other, with the audience, with the media they have produced. Because of these multiple interactions, the performances are opportunities for students to *act* out their learning and to *do* social justice work. The students do not simply tell us what they learned in their performances; rather, the performances enact concepts of social justice about which they learned and performed.

Barad (2003) noted that, “‘We’ are not outside observers of the world. Nor are we simply located at particular places in the world; rather, we are part of the world in its ongoing intra-activity” (p. 828). Her statement aligns with how we positioned students (and ourselves) throughout the development and performance of their social justice projects. We (as instructors) facilitated communication among all groups and provided workshops where students engaged in movement exercises and in-depth discussions about their experiences and ideas. We worked with the students to provide guidance on how to address the different elements of the performance, which align with the aspects of explicit performatives (e.g., mood, tone of voice, cadence, emphasis) identified by Austin (1962) (pp. 73–74). Each aspect of the collaboration was woven into elements of the others in order to achieve the complete performance. The inter- and intra-actions that were essential to the project demonstrate its performative nature as well as the complex ways in which learning occurred.

The Fear and Precarity

An initial theme that emerged in our research findings is fear. The project was precarious to us from different perspectives. As we discussed at the beginning of this article, we engaged in this project not knowing if it would be successful, and as pre-tenured faculty, there were risks of spending much time and energy on a project that might not be recognized. In a reflection from our arts-based research process, one of us wrote:

The fear feeling for me is like a stone sinking into the water. You never know how deep the water is. It keeps sinking. It is also like holding a stone in the hand and trying to squeeze it. No matter how hard you try, it is impossible. (C. Liao, personal communication, January 29, 2019)

The sketch in Figure 3 is the visual representation of this fear. The fear came from the precarity of the project.

However, we do not see fear as negative in this process. The performativity of our project transformed it into positive. Butler (2009) linked the concepts of performativity and precarity by stating that it recognizes,

[. . .] who counts as a subject and who does not, that performativity becomes linked with precarity. The performativity of gender has everything to do with who counts as a life, who can be read or understood as a living being, and who lives, or tries to live, on the far side of established modes of intelligibility. (p. iv)

Butler illustrates the connection by describing undocumented immigrants who gathered and sang in the streets of Los Angeles in 2006. She notes that “[f]or the most part, illegal immigrants stay away from any situation in which they might be caught, imprisoned, and deported. But in this instance, they made themselves very public, exercising a right that belongs to citizens precisely because they do not have that right” (pp. iv–v). She concluded by stating that,

In the end, the question of how performativity links with precarity might be summed up in these more important questions: How does the unspeakable population speak and makes its claims? What kind of disruption is this within the field of power? And how can such populations lay claim to what they require? (p. xiii)

We found Butler’s description of the linkage between performativity and precarity aligned with our work in multiple ways, and particularly through the three questions posed above. There are two ways in which we relate to the first question: “How does the unspeakable population speak and makes its claims?” depending upon which position we take as the “unspeakable population.” In one sense, the performance gives voice to the arts, which are often “unspeakable” in terms of demonstrating student learning outside of specific arts-related disciplines. In another sense, the performance gives voice to the social justice topics and communities with whom students have worked to develop their performances—another population typically silenced within higher education. The performances were intended to be disruptions “within the field of power” (question 2) by utilizing an arts-integrated approach that directly challenges traditional ways of representing learning. We wanted to disrupt traditional standards for demonstrating learning to our students, who will become future educators and may be empowered to do the same. Indeed, through the act of the performance, students challenge the social and cultural norms they have learned about through their social justice projects. Students are also challenged to think critically about the representations they portray in their performances to avoid reifying stereotypes they are attempting to challenge. Their performances are discourses on their learning and reflections on the social justice topics they have explored through applied learning projects.

In relation to “how can such populations lay claim to what they require?” we argue that our efforts to sustain and scale this work over three years helped to address this question. Our efforts created space for others to challenge the “modes of exclusion” (Butler, 2009, p. vi) used by higher education that value specific ways of demonstrating learning and scholarship. The arts are excluded by traditional norms that privilege PowerPoint presentations and papers over film, performance, or visual arts, among other alternative forms of expression. Positive feedback from students, school, and community members about our project helped us to challenge structures that restrict creative and imaginative approaches, such as ours, which also engaged in interdisciplinary and interinstitutional collaborations. In the end, although we started this project with fear, the performativity of the work guided us out of fear.

The Challenges

Participants, including the students and instructors, overcame internalized feelings of fear and challenges that were tied to both the performance and its outcomes. The uncertainty associated with how the live performance would proceed and be received by the audience contributed to the vulnerability and precarity of the performance. There was a clear sense by all participants that we were doing something unique and sending a message that challenged expected behaviors. Indeed, our performance-making pedagogy made students, administrators, and colleagues uncomfortable at times. In the end, the performance provided students with an opportunity to voice their engagement with social justice topics.

The challenges encountered on our project are directly connected to the precarity of the project's design and implementation. The project relies upon coordination across multiple courses at various levels and across multiple institutions. As the project evolved with each iteration from 2016 to 2017 to 2018, we introduced additional layers of complexity, which contributed to the precariousness of the project and added new challenges to overcome. Seemingly basic, but critical, challenges occurred in everyday tasks like scheduling for collaborations between student groups and maintaining effective communication. Boydell (2020) noted similar issues in her performance arts-based research project.



Fig. 4: The sketch representing challenges.

Figure 4 represents the theme of challenges, which is a negative aspect of precarity. We had to overcome multiple challenges that affected the progress of engaging in the project. Each decision we made had an impact on the other aspects of individuals engaged in the collaboration. This sketch represents the delicateness and fragility of the collaborative process because of the challenges we faced throughout the project. Each individual component of the project was reliant upon the other in order to achieve the final outcome: a film and dance integrated performance. The sketch depicts the ways in which the individual pieces are held together around a central axis of support. External and internal forces are constantly pulling, pushing, and threatening the stability of the network—yet it holds together despite those challenges in a beautiful mosaic. The interdependency of each piece is both a strength of the design and the basis for the challenges encountered.

Different levels of experience contributed to diverse points of view that needed to be negotiated. The respective areas of expertise for student groups (graduate students: social justice content; undergraduate students: film; high school students: choreography and dance) contributed to the interdependency among groups and established a need to work collaboratively.

Support and Collaboration

Over time we learned to anticipate challenges and identified creative ways to overcome them:

When I reflect on the project, I'm amazed at how many little pieces had to fall into place for it all to be successful; how many resources we had to cull together to make things happen: equipment from Watson, sound support from Roland Grise staff, costumes from mini-grants, brochure assistance from GAs, etc. The many tiny bubbles supported this huge rock because they all worked together. (J. DeVita, personal communication, February 10, 2019)

We found inspiration from our students' learning that helped us to support each other and sustain the collaboration for multiple years. Support and collaboration were necessary on our project in order to overcome the challenges we encountered, and they represent other themes from our research findings. The poems below represent our findings related to support and collaboration. Support relates both to what students identified as motivation to be active supporters for marginalized populations and their commitment to engage in advocacy work.

Support

At times disappointed in myself and my attempts at practicing inclusion
At times enlightened and empowered
The lights turned on
Marginalization is so intertwined across identities
Social justice is both a process and a goal
I can advocate for my students
Because I need to stand up for groups which I may not represent

Collaboration

It is hard to accomplish a common goal
Because of schedules
Because of different knowledge and experiences
Working with others opened my eyes
Gave me a chance to change my preconceived notions
Allowed me to connect on a different and personal level
To reflect on my own practices
Collaboration gave me strength to take a stand

Growth

While our challenges are linked to the negative aspects of the precarity of our work, the theme of growth is associated with the positive aspects of precarity. We found that growth could also be framed as the interaction between challenges, support, and collaboration. Students' learning and development (i.e., growth) was enhanced by their engagement in navigating challenges associated with the project. In fact, understanding the process and value of working through differences to overcome challenges was an outcome of the project for students. One graduate student reflected that:

A main challenge I faced was discussing my social justice group with undergraduates. Being a leader in such a sensitive project made it difficult for me to breach the subject, especially if the understanding may include negative/mainstream viewpoints of a group. Breaching this subject was tough for me because I needed to stand up for a group which I may not represent as an individual. (Student A, personal communication, 2017)

For this student, negotiating their engagement with the undergraduate students they were working with was a challenge they had to negotiate to effectively advocate for their respective marginalized group.

As Butler (2009) discussed, there is power in performativity; in our project, students used the final performance as a space to give voice to both the marginalized perspectives that were the focus of the project and the students' own voices and bodies. Similar to Boydell (2020), who concluded that "[e]mbodied inquiry focuses on the relationship between language and the experiencing body, and has the capability of highlighting the lived experience of individuals" (p. 79), we found that the final performances not only embodied lived experiences, but they also helped to reshape the lived experiences of the students who participated. One of the middle school dancers reflected at the end of the performance in 2018, that following her performance was the first time she felt like others in the school knew who she was; that it was the first time her peers recognized and complimented her.

Performance of Performance-Making Pedagogy

Our performative inquiry is not a fixed thing like those published texts. The interactivity of our performance is the variable in the performance. We would argue that each performance is different; it is impossible to produce the same performance twice. One representation of our work is a video recording of an integrated film and dance performance developed and performed by us. We aligned the final performance with the same product required of our students to reflect the blended process of research and teaching of the project. Although the video captures the performance at one time and lacks the opportunity for audience engagement, we invite the audience to interact with the movement while watching the video. As we (authors and dancers) transition between themes, we invite audience members to engage in upper-body movement that connects physically with the piece.

Link to the recorded performance:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kek72G3OY3zjPWPCqZJfg_WHv44ceSfq/view?usp=sharing

Conclusion

Although this performance was shared at a conference (Liao & DeVita, 2019) and recorded in the video shared above, we do not consider it to be the end of our research journey. In fact, we consider our arts-based research journey as precarious too, subject to reinterpretation. Our performance is a re-embodiment of the experiences of making this collaborative performance-making project. The five experiences identified in this research—fear, challenge, support, collaboration, and growth—are connected together, and one led to another. The fear is connected to challenges; with challenges, we seek support; with support, we collaborate; with collaboration, we grow from this project.

The project outcomes revealed several benefits among stakeholders that align with our implications for practice. The students engaged in the project benefitted from participating in a multi-layered learning experience that enhanced their growth and development. Students had to engage across peer groups and levels, think critically about adapting social justice concepts to media and movement, and communicate their messages effectively using film and dance. The project required a higher level of risk that helped to deepen learning across all groups. While students were typically uneasy about the uncertainty and risk associated with the project at the beginning of the semester, most found it both stimulating and rewarding by the end.

The higher education faculty and the high school instructor who worked collaboratively on the project benefitted from the partnership. Our respective positions at our institutions, as well as our respective skills in various art forms, were utilized throughout the project's planning and implementation process to support the overall project and helped to make it successful. The pause of the project due to the change of partnership further implies the essential role of partnership in this kind of collaborative project.

Considered a precarious project, the performativity of the project gives a positive impact to everyone involved, including the community members who participated in the performance events. We believe our performance-making pedagogy is an example of arts-based social justice education that has the potential to be expanded and reenacted in the future.

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“Before COVID This Was Not Normal:” A Photovoice Exploration of College Student Experiences

Elizabeth MacDonald and Kristin M. Murphy

Abstract

College students have experienced unique life disruptions and losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We conducted this study to gain an understanding of how the pandemic has affected the lifestyle of college students. Findings included: major changes in perceived well-being related to living at home with families, balancing online classes and work, stress and boredom related to isolation from peers, and coping strategies, including substance abuse and physical activity. Research and practice implications are related to increasing opportunities and activities to promote a sense of belonging for students, and also for increased accessible student support services on college campuses.

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has given way to the most significant global challenges across physical and mental health, the economy, and education in the 21st century. Higher education responded by swiftly transitioning to remote operations in Spring 2020. However, this came at a cost with adverse effects on students (Anderson et al., 2021). College students rely on schools for a variety of needs beyond education, including housing, food, technology, and health services. College is also a space where students cultivate personal and professional relationships. The uprooting of stability has resulted in mental-health-related consequences that we are only beginning to understand (Conrad et al., 2021). Schools have continued to have to make in-the-moment policy decisions about instructional modalities, along with policies about vaccination and masking, guided by public health guidelines and political climates (Sahu, 2020).

Young adult mental health is in crisis in the COVID-19 era: a survey administered by the CDC in summer 2020 identified that individuals aged 18-24 reported higher rates of anxiety, depression, trauma, and suicidality than any other age group (Czeisler et al., 2020). For college students, mental health is not only crucial to psychological well-being, but it also has ramifications for academic success and retention. Stress, anxiety, and illness in college students may result in lower grades, dropping courses, or extreme disruptions (American College Health Association, 2019).

Among college students closer to graduating in one study, 60.8% experienced increased anxiety, 54.1% experienced increased feelings of loneliness, and 59.8% experienced increased depression. The majority of students (60.9%) found it harder to complete the semester at home (Lee et al., 2021). However, school-based resources to support student mental health have struggled to meet needs and demands. Even pre-pandemic, research continually illuminated the challenges of universities trying to meet the

mental health needs of their students. College students experience high rates of mental health issues while universities often lack the resources to meet these demands (Auerbach et al., 2018).

Purpose of Study

Collectively, the evolving COVID-19 body of literature continues to provide an abundance of quantitative data about the ramifications for student mental health. Yet, there is less literature available exploring how college-aged students describe their experiences during COVID-19 first-hand. We conducted this study to gain an understanding of what effect the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the lifestyle of college students in one large city in the Northeastern United States.

Methods

The method used in this qualitative investigation was photovoice. Photovoice was first developed in the 1990s (Wang & Burris, 1994). This participatory action research (PAR) approach is used across health sciences, education, and beyond, empowering those who traditionally researched to become coresearchers. Photovoice integrates photography and critical discussion to examine issues from the perspective of coresearchers. Coresearchers take photographs illuminating the guiding research question(s). Next, the coresearcher(s) reconvenes with the researcher and engages in a structured discussion protocol centered around the photograph(s) (Breny & McMorrow, 2021). The goal of PAR methods like photovoice is to promote change at the personal and community level, and to promote a sense of empowerment (Wang, 2006). We used the SHOWeD discussion protocol to guide our photovoice discussions (Wang et al., 1998). While looking at one photograph at a time, the protocol includes the questions (1) What do you See here? (2) What is really Happening here? (3) How does this relate to Our lives? (4) Why does the problem or strength exist? and (5) What can we Do about this? The purpose of these questions is to critically discuss the research topic with a focus on ultimately identifying strategies to empower positive change. Dissemination is encouraged to go beyond traditional outlets, like peer-reviewed journals, and can often take place in interactive gallery exhibits where stakeholders can interact with the findings and each other with a goal of promoting change (Latz, 2017).

The following research question guided this inquiry: (1) What impact has COVID-19 had regarding life at home, school, work, and other extracurriculars for college students?

Theoretical Perspective

Dilthey's Hermeneutics (Dilthey, 1976) was the theoretical perspective guiding this study. Hermeneutics is concerned with understanding the experiences and events of specific groups of people. To reach an understanding, one must consider the whole of a person's experiences, followed by honing in on individual aspects of a person and then returning to the whole (Murphy, 2018). This is accomplished by entering the hermeneutic circle: first, examine the phenomenon from a bird's-eye view and then hone in on individual aspects of the experience before returning once again to the whole of the experience. This return yields a new, deeper level of understanding (Tappan, 1990).

Protection of Human Participants

We obtained approval for this research study through our University’s Institutional Review Board. I (the first author) communicated, verbally and in writing, the purpose of the research, in addition to the potential risks and benefits to the participants, before obtaining their verbal and written consent to take part in the study. I informed each participant of the voluntary nature of the study and that they could end the interview or withdraw from the study at any time.

Participants

This study focuses on two undergraduate students attending a university located in a major city in the Northeastern United States. The two participants were Richie (all names are pseudonyms), a 20-year-old university student and grocery store employee who was considered an essential worker during the COVID-19 outbreak, and Saquon, a 21-year-old student who lost his job early in the pandemic.

Setting

In March and September of 2020, Richie participated in photovoice exercises and semi-structured interviews. In August of 2020, Saquon took part in photovoice exercises and semi-structured interviews. Both participants were quarantined in the city where their university was located during the time of their interviews. All interviews occurred over Zoom videoconferencing.

Data Collection

Before photo collection, I met with participants over Zoom to explain the process of photovoice. For the photovoice exercise, I asked my participants to use their smartphones to capture images that they felt reflected the research question, “What impact has COVID-19 had regarding life at home, school, work, and other extracurriculars for college students in your city?”. I told participants there is no “right” or “wrong” way to take a photo, but their pictures could not include faces or any personal or identifying information. I emphasized to participants that it is their voice that matters while taking these pictures and there is no specific thing that I am looking for as the researcher.

Photovoice Participant Training

After photo collection, I met with participants over Zoom and reminded them that any identifiers in their data would be removed. Participants consented to having the discussion audio recorded. We discussed photos one at a time following the SHOWeD protocol (Wang et al., 1998). Once finishing the protocol, I asked the participants why they chose the picture, and then asked them to create a caption for their picture. Next, I asked the participants several semi-structured questions: (1) What impact has COVID-19 had regarding life at home, school, work, and other extracurriculars for college students in your city? (2) What impact has COVID-19 had regarding life at home, school, work, and other extracurriculars for college students of color in your city? These questions allowed the participants to further discuss the impact COVID-19 has had on their lives in an open-ended fashion.

Data Analysis

I analyzed data using Gilligan's Listening Guide methodology (Gilligan et al., 2003). The first part of the Listening Guide involves listening for the overall plot and identifying dominant themes. The second step is crafting i-Poems, which are constructed by identifying a portion of the transcript and extracting all "I" passages, including "I" and any corresponding verbs and other words deemed significant by the listener/researcher. Each "I" statement becomes its own line in a poem, with all statements remaining in the original order that they were spoken. By doing this, the listener can isolate the "I" voice and identify unique rhythms that may otherwise get lost. The third step involves listening for contrapuntal voices of the participant by focusing on emotions, actions, and beliefs that were present during the interview. The fourth and final step is to compose an analysis by revisiting the participants' entire story and processing the findings based on the first three steps of the Listening Guide. Following these steps illuminates the complex and multilayered nature of the experience of the participant (Gilligan et al., 2003).

Alignment of Hermeneutics With Data Analysis

We selected the Listening Guide because while it was conceptualized as a feminist method, it is also well aligned with, and has previously been used to guide, hermeneutic studies (e.g., Tappan, 2001; Gagnon et al., 2020; Murphy, 2018). The steps of the Listening Guide follow a sequence aligned with the hermeneutic circle, first examining a phenomenon from a bird's-eye view (whole), to examining specific parts closely, and then returning to the whole (Murphy).

Trustworthiness and Credibility

We employed several quality indicators recommended by Brantlinger and colleagues (2005) to establish trustworthiness and credibility. First, member checking occurred with each participant. They had the opportunity to review the interview transcripts and also the final Listening Guide. They had the opportunity to revise, remove, or add anything that they believed necessary to ensure a fair and accurate portrayal of themselves and their experiences. Then, the second author served as a peer debriefer across the study from data collection through to analysis and interpretation.

Results

Richie

Step 1: The Plot

Richie is a 20-year-old college student who works in a grocery store produce department. Richie self-identifies as Hispanic. He moved from Nebraska when he was 10 and now lives in an apartment with his parents. His mother has a preexisting health condition that increases her risk of complications with COVID-19, and his parents' age puts them both at a greater risk compared to Richie. He has been working at a grocery store for a little less than two years. As a grocery store employee, he is considered

an essential employee and has been called into work even though there is a Stay-at-Home order. Richie needs the income to be able to afford living expenses and pay for his college degree. Richie fears that when he goes to work, he may be harming his family, but because Richie is not immunocompromised and does not have any medical conditions that would put him at a higher risk for developing complications from COVID-19, he has been picking up more shifts in the produce department while his coworkers have been calling out sick. Richie needs to continue providing for himself and his family during this challenging time.

Step 2: I-Poems



Fig. 1: Empty train

Richie's First Poem: "Empty Train"

I was the only person on the train
I don't know
I take the bus and train pretty much every day
I guess we can learn that we can not use the train as much
I've never taken a train like that before
I felt weird

I took this first poem out of Richie's photovoice exercise based on Figure 1. He was very surprised to find himself as the only passenger on the train. Richie took the photo in the middle of the day, and he had never been the only passenger at that time of day before. With the COVID-19 pandemic, Richie was finding himself in that situation frequently.



Fig. 2: Panic shopping

Richie's Second Poem: "Panic Shopping"

I don't go to school anymore
I'm working more
I'm so far behind
I'm not confined at home

Richie described the picture as seen in Figure 2 as a good visual of how he felt. While working a shift on a weekend, Richie noticed that the table that normally contains potatoes, sweet potatoes, and bags of onions was empty. In all of his time working at this grocery store, this table had never been empty or even low before. Not only was Richie struggling to keep up with school and his studies, but the store he works at was not able to keep up with panic shopping introduced by COVID-19 concerns.

Step 3A: Contrapuntal Voices of March

Step 3A is grounded in interviews that occurred in March 2020.

The Voice of Need. I heard the voice of need from Richie's interview. Richie needed to continue going to work, he needed to continue his online classes, and most importantly he needed the time to balance his responsibilities and goals during an increasingly stressful and isolating lifestyle. During the interview, Richie told me he was working more now because his coworkers are calling out sick and he needs the money to support himself and his family. He said: "People are starting to not come into work because either they are sick, or scared of getting sick, so they need more people."

Customers have been overwhelming the store in spite of social distancing guidelines. There have been new policies almost daily that Richie needs to keep up with to ensure his own safety and that of others at work. Managers displayed signs all over the store for him and the customers to follow. Richie felt obligated to continue working because he is an essential employee experiencing pressure from managers

who need employees, as well as his coworkers who need coverage. Richie is healthy and still able to get to work, so he felt as though he needed to continue going and supporting himself, the store, and his coworkers who were unable to go.

Not only was he experiencing challenges at work, but Richie also faced the problem of being a college student whose class schedule became online overnight. He needed to set aside time to engage in his classwork, but Richie struggled to find the time without the structure of in-person classes. When we began discussing his academics, he told me: “I don’t go to school anymore. It’s all online ... it’s terrible. I’m so far behind in literally every class.”

Richie struggled with finding the time to continue taking online classes while covering multiple shifts at work. He did not find it easy to take online courses. He was behind and overwhelmed with school, but also found it hard to be studying and learning at home. Before the pandemic, Richie would spend time on campus taking classes and completing homework assignments. Things were different now. Richie said: “My dad’s also working from home so that gets uncomfortable when we’re both doing work there, but I’m not confined at home so it’s not that bad.”

Instead of being confined to his house with his dad, Richie appreciated being able to leave and go to work. However, he was also using this as an excuse to avoid his homework assignments. Completing schoolwork at home felt incredibly difficult. Richie seemed to be struggling with the number of responsibilities he was juggling during the outbreak. Richie found himself at a crossroads between needing the income and needing to set aside time for himself and his education.

When I asked Richie what we can learn from the pandemic and his experiences, his response was very grounded in the moment: “Don’t panic shop, just take it easy. Because when you do, you leave like nothing for the rest of us . . . It’s good to follow social distancing. Stand six feet apart, listen to the signs on the floor.”

Step 3 B: Contrapuntal Voices of September

In September 2020, the first author had the opportunity to follow up with Richie.

The Voice of Caution. I heard the voice of caution from Richie during his follow-up interview. Richie was still working and taking classes online, but he had since moved out of his home with his parents. Richie said:

It’s pretty much still all the same you know. School’s online, work’s still different than what it was before COVID, uh I guess the biggest difference is I’m not living with my parents anymore. I moved out ... It’s definitely easier because it’s closer to work and I don’t have to live with my parents anymore.

Richie was very cautious about spreading COVID-19 and moved into an apartment with his coworkers to limit the number of people he encounters as an essential employee. When I asked Richie what he thought about classes being remote for the Fall 2020 semester, he said: “My classes are alright. They are

a lot better than they were last semester. Everyone has had time to like figure it out, teachers and students, so it's obviously not ideal but it's not that bad."

Richie was not opposed to classes being online because he thinks it is the best option given the ongoing current situation with COVID-19. He would not want to go to in-person classes even though it was typically what he preferred. He thought the risk of COVID-19 would be too high for in-person instruction and was relieved that the semester was more organized than in the spring.

Richie was very concerned about the upcoming holiday and flu season because grocery stores become notoriously busier during the holidays, which means more people would be coming in and out of his small store. Although Richie has taken precautions to limit the spread of COVID-19, he cannot prevent an influx of customers. When talking about this, Richie said: "I'm kind of worried for the fall, especially for work because it's holiday season. And then you know we're supposed to get this whole second wave with the flu season and all that. So that kind of scares me."

Step Four: Analysis

Richie is a 20-year-old essential employee during the COVID-19 pandemic. He needs to provide for himself and his family and feels obligated to help others whenever he can. He was raised by his parents who are at higher risk for adverse reactions to COVID-19, and he wants to keep them healthy and safe. I then looked closer at the various components of Richie's story, such as his i-Poems and his contrapuntal voices, which showed me how he was feeling and thinking through his own framework. Through Richie's i-Poems, it became clear to me that the pandemic caused Richie to be overwhelmed at work and with his studies. I heard the voice of need and the voice of caution because he needed to continue going to work, taking classes, and caring for his family, but he also needed to be cautious with the pandemic and spreading himself too thin. By listening to his voice and individual parts of his story, I was able to better understand the whole of Richie and his experiences.

In the case of Richie, the most significant takeaway from COVID-19 had been an increase in stress. He had been working harder to keep the shelves stocked for customers who flood the stores during times of crisis. He knew that if he could help people such as his coworkers during this time, then he would cover their shifts because he is not immunocompromised. For Richie, an increase in work meant a decrease in the amount of time he had for schoolwork. This was especially challenging. He now felt as though he was on his own in terms of schoolwork because he no longer meets in person with his professors.

During the follow-up interview, I found Richie to still be experiencing increased stress. Richie seemed to have adjusted to the increase in work and classes online, but he still feared for his safety and the safety of his friends and family. Richie distanced himself from his family and moved into an apartment with coworkers to limit his possible spread of COVID-19. Richie was very fearful of the upcoming holiday season because work would become even more crowded, and he was worried about that risk of disease would also increase as the weather became colder.

Saquon

Step 1: The Plot

Saquon is a 21-year-old college student studying computer science and he self-identifies as half Greek and half Asian. Saquon lives at home with his mom and dad who are at a higher risk for adverse reactions to COVID-19 due to their ages. Because of this, his family has been strictly following state and public health guidelines.

Saquon is unemployed and unable to find a summer internship in his field. Saquon has been collecting pandemic unemployment benefits while spending time isolated at home. Before the pandemic, Saquon would spend his time out with friends, but due to COVID risks, he now just stays home. This isolation has led Saquon to turn to both marijuana and working out to relieve his stress. Saquon finds remote learning to be very challenging and is not looking forward to the fall semester. He feels as though he needs in-person instruction to retain information. He thinks it is too easy to wake up and open a laptop to access a class and finds it rewarding to put effort into getting up and going to class.

Saquon reflected on how many Chinese students were facing racial discrimination during COVID. While he described that he had not personally experienced any racial discrimination, he did say that his friends had made jokes with him about being of Asian heritage and potentially having COVID-19 because of it.

Step 2: i Poems



Fig. 3: Fun box

Saquon's First Poem: "Fun Box"

I had never really done any weed or vaping
I'm at home
I'm bored

I just put everything in
I just grab from it like every so often
I'm putting everything in a box
I do consider it substance abuse to an extent
I would be out and about
I'm kind of just home

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Saquon rarely used marijuana. Saquon was now at home with no real responsibilities until school started in September. He could not go out with his friends. He described how his substance use had increased drastically because he felt like there was nothing else to do. Figure 3 is his picture of his self-described "fun box" with marijuana products that he keeps in his room for when he is feeling anxious or bored.



Fig. 4: Responsibility

Saquon's Second Poem: "Responsibility"

I have a responsibility
I have to do it
I am working out
I can't see it being problematic
I can see the fun box being problematic
I'm going to have the responsibility
I have the responsibility to just be there and focus
I'm prepared to show up
I am
I am a student
I'm me

Saquon has worried that he was relying too much on substances and needed to motivate himself. He bought the watch to begin working out and give himself a sense of structure and accountability. His workouts revolved around the time. Once the clock struck noon, and again at 5 p.m., he would work out regardless of any potential excuses. Saquon needed structure in his life, and he was able to feel a sense of control by focusing on his daily schedule of workouts.

Step 3: Contrapuntal Voices

The Voices of Boredom and Accountability. I heard the voices of boredom and accountability tightly intertwined together from Saquon’s interview. Saquon found himself trapped at home over the summer and had no responsibilities or motivation to be productive. His lack of responsibility caused him to feel stressed because he felt like he should have been doing something with his time. Saquon turned to substance use because of this stress. Saquon said:

And I do consider it substance abuse to a certain extent, but to me other than school coming up there’s no real reason for me to stop. So, for me this is like oh this is normal, this is me chillin’ in the summer. But before COVID this was not normal. During the summer like last year, I’d be out and about like on the beach or something like that, like hanging out with friends. But now, like nobody really wants to hang out, nobody really wants to go to the beach. So, I’m kind of just home playing video games often.

Saquon struggled to find motivation because he had no real responsibilities. He had no reason to stop using marijuana as frequently. He began considering his behavior normal for him and many of his friends felt the same way about themselves. He had many friends who turned to alcohol instead of marijuana. Compared to them, he thought that he was being much safer, and his actions carried less severe side effects.

His COVID-related circumstances caused Saquon to feel anxious because he believed he was not doing anything productive and as a result, experiencing challenging times during COVID-19 mentally. He was able to change his mindset once he began working out. He said:

Because I had a lot of ups and downs during quarantine for whatever reasons. Like I had a lot of dark spots for some reason. Like I had some really dark spots ...a lot of what I think it was, was at night I would worry like I need to be doing something. That idea would always run through my mind like I need to be doing something productive, but I can’t. So, the one thing that saved me from being a nervous wreck all the time was working out because here I have like one thing to do and there’s a very clear goal.

Saquon described feeling better while he was working out. He knew that he needed structure and rules to feel physically and mentally healthy. He purchased the watch over the summer to give himself more structure to his day. Saquon motivated himself to work out by utilizing his watch. The usage of his watch provided Saquon not only with structure, but also with time management. Although Saquon had limited responsibilities and an abundance of free time, he said: “Eventually I learned like, hey the watch, it’s giving you time. And there’s only a certain amount of time in a day. And I made the realization that I need to spend my time more efficiently.”

Step Four: Analysis

In the case of Saquon, the most significant takeaway from the COVID-19 outbreak has been the implications of an increase in unstructured free time. To protect himself and his higher risk parents, Saquon stopped socializing, and his isolation led to increased anxiety. Saquon talked about how he experienced some dark times during quarantine. Isolation and lack of structure led him to use marijuana frequently. He said there was not much else he could spend his time doing, so using his “fun box” became the new normal for him. He mentioned that many of his friends also increased their usage of marijuana and alcohol. Saquon talked a lot about how substance use was his solution for relaxation.

After purchasing his watch, Saquon began to become more physically active to give himself something to do, and it was a way for him to motivate himself and provide structure to his day. He was very systematic with his approach to spend his time more efficiently. Overall, I believe Saquon struggled during COVID-19 because of a lack of motivation and an increase in free time, which led him to feel stressed and anxious. He was able to benefit from following a strict workout schedule every day.

Discussion

College students are in a distinct phase of development known as emerging adulthood, a phase bridging adolescence with young adulthood. This phase of life is associated with increased autonomy and a myriad of choices pertaining to personal, educational, and professional pathways. It can also be characterized as a time of rapid change and instability different than other life phases and is a peak time for the onset of mental health disorders, including anxiety, depression, and substance abuse (Auerbach et al., 2018). College students living through the pandemic have experienced unique disruptions and losses associated with this phase of their life, including moving back home to live with family, adjusting to online learning, and changes to or cancellations of milestone events (Sahu, 2020). Although both participants were students from the same college and both lived at home with their families during the initial stages of the pandemic, our participants illuminate different challenges associated with being a college student during COVID-19. However, both students experienced new stressors pertaining to time and concerns about inadvertently putting their family at risk for contracting COVID. Richie’s stress stemmed from not having enough time to balance academics while working, while Saquon’s stress increased because of an increase of unstructured time.

Consequences Related to Changes in Routine, Time, and Isolation

The results from this study aligned with Firkey et al.’s (2020) study. Similarly to Richie and Saquon, they found that students reported increased anxiety and decreased quality of life. Richie and Saquon talked repeatedly about how stressed and anxious they felt in light of dramatic changes in their lives. Richie struggled with balancing work with learning how to become an online college student, attending class, and completing coursework from his home. His home was a place where he felt it was difficult to concentrate on academics, and he was also stressed about harming his family each time he came home from his job at the grocery store. While Richie was balancing multiple roles, Saquon lost his job at the

beginning of the pandemic, and also made a decision to stop socializing in order to protect his family from COVID exposure. Saquon felt bored, and his days became very unstructured. Saquon immediately stopped seeing friends during the onset of the pandemic, leaving him isolated and bored. In response, he began to experiment with cannabis and over-the-counter pain medications and ultimately created a “fun box” to try to find pleasure and escape. The 2020 study by Firkey and colleagues also found that students reported an increase in alcohol and cannabis use. Even prior to the pandemic, adults aged 18 to 25 had the highest rate of drug use of any age group.

Protective Factors

We identified two protective factors in this study. For Richie, things improved for him when he decided to move into an apartment with his friends. This provided a space for Richie to feel a sense of belonging among peers outside of courses, and to return to the activities of emerging adulthood (Auerbach et al., 2018). Prior to this, Richie only saw peers in online classes. Otherwise, he was at work or staying at home with his family. There are a variety of reasons some college students may not be able to live independently, however, so this also illuminates the importance of offering a variety of inclusive opportunities to be involved with extracurricular activities in the school community. Extracurricular activities exist outside of academic grades and requirements with voluntary participation, typically centered around special interests (Bartkus et al., 2012).

Saquon illuminated the benefits of physical movement. Saquon described feeling increasing anxiety, boredom, and loneliness as a result of his new lifestyle during the onset of the pandemic. Initially, his solution was to develop a “fun box” of drugs to pass the time and numb uncomfortable feelings. However, purchasing a watch and making the decision to build a regular daily fitness routine was a positive decision point. In one study, 46.7% of college students chose to engage in physical activity (PA) to take care of their mental health (Lee et al., 2021). The benefits of PA for both physiological and mental health are well documented. Recent research studying college students and PA indicate that PA can serve as a critical facilitator for protecting and increasing positive mental health, even during a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic (Maher et al., 2020).

Limitations

One limitation to this study was directly related to COVID-19-related public health guidelines. Because of rapidly evolving conditions in March 2020, the participants in the study were identified via convenience sampling. The first author knew the participants well, and that may have affected the content and nature of what participants shared in photographs and interviews. Also, this was a stressful and unpredictable time for all individuals involved, which led to interviews that were concise in nature. During a different period, we may have had more time for lengthier interview sessions. Another limitation was the number of people involved in the study. It became obvious, even with only two participants, that each person was experiencing a very different situation during COVID-19. A greater number of participants from different geographical areas with different financial and cultural backgrounds would likely have yielded further diversity of experiences. Additionally, due to the nature of qualitative research,

the results of this study cannot be generalized. Rather, we hope to achieve particularizability through rich, deep descriptions so that the reader may identify how participant findings may apply elsewhere (Brantlinger et al., 2005).

Implications for Research

In the U. S. Surgeon General's December 2021 Advisory on youth mental health, he emphasized the need for more research to identify and support youth mental health needs in a timely manner. He explicitly identifies that, in order to design effective support solutions, we need to understand the experiences of, and directly engage with, young people, especially those with multiple risk factors (Murthy, 2021). We urge future researchers to consider including visual methods like photovoice, and PAR, in their research studies for several reasons. First, photovoice emphasizes empowering individuals as coresearchers and prioritizes how they view and describe their world experiences (Latz, 2017). Second, photovoice emphasizes personal and community action based on findings (Breny & McMorrow, 2021).

Photographs serve as a unique element for coresearchers to communicate their experiences and ideas for change, and for consumers of research to connect with the findings and promote change. Using photography as part of this study allowed us to connect with the participants in a deeper way. Especially during the early days of the pandemic, it served as a unique way to connect and share during a period marked by intense isolation for researchers and coresearchers alike. The photos conveyed their experiences in a way that may not have been captured in traditional interviews or surveys, which benefits the research process and also dissemination.

We recommend that researchers continue to explore the experiences of diverse college students across different types of universities. Finally, we recommend further research focusing on culturally and linguistically diverse students. This is critical because of the heightened likelihood of physical, academic, and emotional risks and consequences students of color face during COVID-19 and beyond (Murthy, 2021).

Implications for Practice

We echo other recommendations urging more availability of mental health support services for college students. Both of our participants described experiencing more mental health issues than before the pandemic, which is consistent with other research (e.g., Surgeon General of the United States, 2021). Saquon’s interview highlighted how students may be turning to substances to cope, and Richie’s interview highlights the many roles students play (e.g., student, employee, family member) and the associated stress that may accompany juggling those roles and responsibilities. In a multi-country survey on college student well-being, students reported that support from instructors and administrators played a mediating role in their well-being (Plakhotnik et al., 2021). However, research also illuminates that most students do not receive treatment, likely due to inadequate resources offered on university campus (Auerbach et al., 2018). We must make ample accessible student support services a priority.

Additionally, this study highlights the importance of cultivating opportunities for students to build relationships. Extracurricular activities promote a sense of belonging, and can decrease stress and increase life satisfaction across personal, social, and academic experiences (Çivitci, 2015). Both of our participants had experiences of loneliness and isolation. There was a noticeable absence of school-related discussion beyond challenges of online learning. We encourage universities to prioritize community building and extracurriculars.

Concluding Thoughts

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented higher education with unprecedented challenges pertaining to mental health, academics, and overall wellness. It is critical to continue to center the voices of college students to guide university decisions and policies affecting them. We strongly recommend photovoice as one way to support this endeavor and empower young people to be heard and included in plans to create and sustain new measures of support.

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An Arts-Based Exploration of Classroom Management Through Portraiture

Lisa A. Mitchell and Kerri Kennedy

Abstract

This arts-based research uses *portraiture* and *appreciative inquiry* to explore Bachelor of Education teacher candidates' conceptions of classroom management. A total of 270 sets of observational notes completed by 90 teacher candidates during their school practicum placements were used to inform the researchers' creation of arts-based literary and painted learner portraits. The research addresses the questions: (1) What characteristics do teacher candidates associate with different types of learners?; (2) How might teacher-educators critically unpack these assumptive characteristics to better prepare teacher candidates for working in diverse classrooms?; and (3) How might an arts-based way of knowing enhance teacher candidates' understandings of classroom management?

Background

This arts-based research uses *portraiture* (literary and painted) and *appreciative inquiry* to explore Bachelor of Education teacher candidates' conceptions of classroom management. In total, 270 sets of observational notes completed by 90 teacher candidates during their school practicum placements were used to inform the creation of arts-based literary and painted learner portraits. The research addresses three key questions: (1) What characteristics do teacher candidates associate with different types of learners?; (2) How might teacher-educators critically unpack these assumptive characteristics to better prepare teacher candidates for working in diverse classrooms?; and (3) How might an arts-based way of knowing enhance teacher candidates' or teacher-educators' understandings of classroom management? The research is grounded in an arts-based research approach, and as such, this article includes academic forms of writing, creative nonfiction narratives of understanding, and both literary and painted portraits.

Contextual Narrative

As I [Author 1] have mentored teacher candidates navigating their entry into the education profession, many stories of their learning have greatly influenced, and indeed challenged, my own conceptions of what it means to be a teacher in today's contemporary schooling landscape. The following is one of those stories, and I present it as a grounding entity for the research that has been undertaken:

The Unit

After finding the classroom and greeting the teacher candidate, Ms. Kirkman,¹ I settled into the back of the space, paperwork out, ready to take notes as she taught a grade three math lesson on estimation. Throughout the lesson, the students were largely engaged in the activities Ms. Kirkman had planned for them. Feeling relieved at seeing Ms. Kirkman's emerging success, I took a moment to speak privately with the host teacher: "She's doing really well, considering the circumstances," she said. "This is a very challenging group of students, even for me. Some days, I basically give up trying. This whole school is a mess." The conversation abruptly ended there, and I went back to observing the teacher candidate.

At the end of the math lesson, Ms. Kirkman asked her students to put away their notebooks and math manipulatives, tidy their desk areas, change into their gym shoes, and line up quietly at the back of the room. All the students followed her instructions without hesitation, except for one: an eight-year-old boy named Lucas.² Not only had Lucas neglected to put his math notebook and supplies away, but he also failed to locate his gym shoes, was not following Ms. Kirkman's instructions, and was instead lying flat on his back, motionless on the floor under his desk. I watched with anticipation alongside the host teacher to see how Ms. Kirkman would respond to this student's mildly disruptive behaviour. As the other students lined up quietly in anticipation of gym class, Lucas remained steadfast in his opposition, horizontal on the floor under his desk, ready to engage in a singular act of defiance. "Watch this," said the host teacher. "He does this nearly every day. It's always *something* with this kid."

Upon noticing that Ms. Kirkman was starting to look a little bewildered, the host teacher decided to lead the students down to the gym herself, and left Ms. Kirkman behind to "deal with the problem" of Lucas who simply wouldn't budge. After the students left the class, Ms. Kirkman calmly approached Lucas' desk. "We're going to the gym now Lucas. You need to get up off the floor and come with us. We'll miss you if you don't join the fun!" Unfortunately, no matter what Ms. Kirkman said to try and persuade him, Lucas would not comply. Finally, after realizing that his peers were long-gone from the room, Lucas proudly proclaimed, "I'm an inchworm! Watch me! I can get all the way to the gym on my back!" And so, Lucas literally *inchwormed* his way out of the classroom and down the hallway on his back all the way to the stairs (where he briefly stood up to take them two at a time), only to end up on his back again on the lower floor. Inch by painfully slow inch, he victoriously made it to the gymnasium, where he finally decided to join his peers for the remainder of the gym period.

At the end of the day, Ms. Kirkman and I had a private conversation to discuss the incident. Initially, Ms. Kirkman was reluctant to divulge information about her practicum for fear of implicating her host teacher and the school's administrator in what she believed to be egregious, prejudiced behaviour on their part. "You won't believe what they call Lucas and many of the other kids at this school behind their backs," she said. "They refer to him as a *unit*." During the discussion that followed, I learned what *unit* meant to Ms. Kirkman in this context. I was reminded that the school was in an extremely troubled area of the city, rife with poverty, social issues, unemployment, homelessness, broken homes, drug abuse, and other systemic community challenges. The school was near a large set of government subsidized low-income housing units, where Lucas and many other children like him lived with their families. Hence, teachers and administrators at the school surreptitiously referred to Lucas as a unit. "Oh, he's a

unit so there's not much you can really do to help him," was the mantra that Ms. Kirkman had heard repeatedly throughout her practicum. Despite my 20+ years as an educator, the dehumanizing language that had been systemically applied to this child's identity based on his social situation disturbed me. How could any educator, whose fundamental job it is to support, uplift, and encourage learners through the creation of a safe and healthy learning environment, become so desensitized to the systemic challenges facing a child that they readily practice the erasure of that child's identity in favour of an ignorant, unhelpful epithet such as unit?

Approaches to Classroom Management

As I have reflected on the experiences of Ms. Kirkman, I am reminded that classroom management is about much more than formulating simple plans of action for regulating and mitigating challenging student behaviour. Both conventional and contemporary research on classroom management reinforces the idea that the most effective behavioural management is grounded in a balance of practical teacher skills (Levin et al., 2016) and teacher attitudes resulting in a supportive classroom climate (Withall, 1979). I believe that any approach to classroom management should ensure that all students have access to supportive, trusting, positive learning environments and relationships designed to optimize opportunities for their success in the classroom. My observation of Lucas with Ms. Kirkman and the reflections that followed spoke of complex yet subtle power dynamics, stereotypes, and caricatures of students with low socioeconomic circumstances, and indeed, the dehumanization of an individual child who deserved so much more than what he encountered in the school environment. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) reminds us that teachers have the opportunity and privilege to:

[. . .] engage in acts (implicit and explicit) of social transformation, we create opportunities for dialogue, we pursue the silences, and in the process, we face ethical dilemmas and a great moral responsibility. This is provocative work that can disturb the natural rhythms of social reality and encounter; this is exciting work that can instigate positive and productive change. (p. 12)

Lawrence-Lightfoot's work resonates with me and strongly underpins my approach to shedding new light on classroom management in K–12 classrooms. I believe it is my ethical responsibility as a teacher-educator to guide teacher candidates as they learn to recognize, unpack, debunk, and proactively address social injustices and power imbalances that they encounter, and eventually help them to develop the tools to reimagine a socially just classroom.

Conceptual Frameworks

Appreciative Inquiry

This research uses elements of *appreciative inquiry* and *portraiture* respectively as a blended framework to explore Bachelor of Education teacher candidates' conceptions of classroom management. Appreciative inquiry is based on valuing personal, positive, narrative-rich stories, whereby learning can be fostered through engagement, and respect can be deepened among participants. The appreciative inquiry research process is therefore naturally inclusive and collaborative, giving equal voice to all

stakeholders (including researchers and participants alike). Essentially, appreciative inquiry “builds on positive experiences to spark positive change by honouring the expertise resident[s] in an organization and its people... by uncovering what works well in a system and devises ways to expand upon those strengths” (Filleul, 2010, p. 38). Although appreciative inquiry has primarily been used in health education (e.g., Lander & Graham-Pole, 2006) and educational development (e.g., Kadi-Hanifi et al., 2013) to conduct research that lends itself to program evaluation and systemic change, researchers in the field of education (e.g., Allen & Innes, 2013) are beginning to use it for reviewing, learning from, building upon, and subsequently strengthening and/or designing positive opportunities for developing innovative teaching pedagogies that better meet the needs of contemporary students at all levels of education. Framing this research through an appreciative model, rather than a deficit model, allowed me to focus on the depth of the stories arising from teacher candidates’ experiences that were forward-thinking and particularly compelling in nature. Most models for appreciative inquiry take the researcher through four distinct stages: discovering, dreaming, designing, and delivering (Shuayb et al., 2009). In this investigation into the nature of classroom management through the eyes of teacher candidates, the first stage of *discovering* was the focus. Here, the researcher focuses on observations, notes, and potential interview questions of the participants with the goal of investigating the nature of the phenomenon being studied.

Portraiture

I wanted to draw upon a second framework that would allow me the freedom to be creative in an arts-based approach to research and writing, while also allowing me to draw on elements from appreciative inquiry: the most significant element being the focus on the *good*. Both appreciative inquiry and portraiture seek to focus on the good in a phenomenon, while “resisting the more typical social science preoccupation with weakness and pathology” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2016, p. 19). It would be so easy, for example, to focus on the negative implications of the situation I observed in Ms. Kirkman’s classroom. As she herself expressed to me, she was reluctant to point out the flaws and inequities in the system she was embedded in. However, frameworks and/or methods that allow me to investigate the positive, present me with an opportunity to focus on the possible transformational and growth-affirming opportunities that can be gleamed from the story at hand. In this regard, portraiture reaches an important intersection with appreciative inquiry in that it speaks to me as a researcher who cares deeply about how words and descriptions serve us pragmatically, aesthetically, and conscientiously. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2016) writes, “portraiture is phenomenological methodology, but it is distinctive in that it is the first social scientific methodology that is explicit in blending art and science, bridging empiricism and aestheticism” (p. 19). Portraiture may offer researchers the opportunity to prompt teachers into re-evaluating their respective points of view, and it is through this re-evaluating of perspectives that teachers might be able to engage in a meaningful form of social justice (Chapman, 2007)—even on a small scale within their personalized classroom environments.

Portraiture as an artistic medium is also frequently referenced in K–12 curricular contexts and is therefore potentially easily accessible to educators as a learning tool (both for their own students, and for themselves as reflective practitioners). For example, portraiture is included in both the Ontario and

New Brunswick K–12 Arts curriculums as both a figurative and expressive genre of visual art. Historically speaking, portraiture is understood to be a genre or category of visual art, created using limitless mediums and with a specific identifiable characteristic (The Ontario Curriculum, grades 1-8: The Arts. 2009). The distinctive and defining characteristic of portraiture is simple: for an artwork to be considered a portrait, it must visually represent a person. In the Ontario Arts curriculum, the definition states that a portrait is “an artwork that depicts a person. They may be abstract or realistic and executed in a variety of media” (p. 200). Similarly, the New Brunswick Visual Arts curriculum (2014) provides a portrait definition that references characterizing a person within an artwork to convey their likeness.

Portraiture (whether visual or literary) may be used as a teaching tool to communicate complex ideas to students and beyond, as teachers and teacher-educators can portray more than just the likeness of a person with its use. For example, portraits can depict the inner life of a person: their emotions, personality, psychology alongside wider cultural and societal contexts. This makes portraiture an ideal artistic medium within an educational context. Throughout the Ontario and New Brunswick arts curriculum investigations, analysis and creation of portraits are referenced as a means for communicating ideas beyond just the aesthetic quality of said portraits. As an example, a specific curriculum expectation outlined in the grade 9 and 10 New Brunswick Visual Art curriculum (2014) encourages the expression of ideas, asking students to “. . . explore, challenge, develop, and express ideas, using the skills, language, techniques, and processes of the arts... (in) the making of emblematic self-portraits” (p.4). The Ontario Arts curriculum (2009) even recommends teacher prompts that support the power of portraiture in illustrating the characteristics of a person through guiding questions such as: “What aspects of your subject’s personality will you emphasize or exaggerate in your portrait?” (p 144). Portraits are used as a catalyst to emphasize emotional feelings the artist, student, or researcher has about the subject, aesthetically representing the personality of the subject through the elements and principles of design. Again, this is explicitly referenced in the Grade 9 and 10 Ontario Art curriculum (2010), where it invites students themselves to “create a mixed-media self-portrait that uses colour, line, and shape in the style of Frida Kahlo to convey their personality and elicit emotions from the audience” (p. 127).

Students are encouraged to use portraiture within the education context to express themselves, their ideas, feelings, and opinions, furthering their understanding of complex ideas within history, society, and culture. For arts-based researchers and other educators, the parallel understanding is also true: portraiture itself (whether literary or visual arts based) has limitless possibilities for exploration, investigation, and application of new learning within complex educational contexts.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data for analysis were 270 sets of handwritten anecdotal observational *learner portrait* notes that were completed by 90 teacher candidates in elementary and secondary public school classrooms during their practicum placements in K–12 schools in New Brunswick. On a trifold worksheet, teacher candidates were asked to fill each of three sections with handwritten descriptions of three selected students over a five-day period in the classroom. Teacher candidates were given basic instructions on what to include in those observational notes: First, that each of the three portraits should represent a

distinct student (respectively, learner qualities that teacher candidates identified as coming from “high achieving” students, “typical” students, and “challenging” students); and second, that the observations should be mindful of five key elements of portraiture methodology (*context, voice, relationship, emergent themes, and the aesthetic whole*) whenever possible. Teacher candidates were instructed in a basic overview of the nature of portraiture as a research methodology. This instruction included definitions of the five key portraiture elements, followed by an opportunity to discuss these definitions with the researchers and each other. Teacher candidates were subsequently asked to consider how portraiture might be appropriate to use as an observational tool in a K–12 classroom context. The resulting observational learner profile notes were not discussed with the teacher candidates’ host teachers, nor were these notes shared with the teacher candidates’ own students. Upon returning to B.Ed. classes at the university post-practicum, teacher candidates shared their learner profile notes with each other and discussed the complex learning environments and personalized needs of the students they had observed during practica.

What follows are three amalgamated learner portraits that were created by analyzing the qualitative data from the classroom management observations using both portraiture and appreciative inquiry as methodological guideposts. During the analysis process, each of the 270 sets of handwritten observational notes were coded for emergent themes, coded in light of the five key elements of portraiture methodology, and also separated into groupings for data originating from both elementary and secondary classroom contexts. Although the data collected reflected observations from both secondary and elementary classroom contexts, these three learner portraits will focus on the elementary classroom observational notes. The first learner portrait (Ethan) represents the learner qualities that teacher candidates identified as coming from “high achieving” students; the second learner portrait (Poppy) represents the learner qualities that teacher candidates identified as coming from “typical” students; and the third learner portrait (Jamie) represents the learner qualities that teacher candidates identified as coming from “challenging” students. The research is guided by the following questions through the unpacking and analysis of the three amalgamated learner portraits: (1) What basic characteristics do teacher candidates associate with each of the three types of classroom learner (e.g., high-achieving, typical, and challenging)?; (2) What complex characteristics do teacher candidates associate with each of the three types of classroom learner (e.g., socioeconomic status, race or ethnicity, cultural context, gender, sexual orientation, language ability, learning styles, or other developmental considerations)?; and (3) How might teacher-educators unpack, debunk, or otherwise utilize these assumptive characteristics present in the learner profiles to better prepare teacher candidates for the realities of working in diverse public school classrooms? Each learner portrait is presented in the first-person narrative voice of a teacher candidate and includes a visual painted portrait that was created by [Author 2] as a response to the written portraits. In addition, each portrait is structured around four of the five elements of portraiture: context, voice, relationship, and emergent themes. The fifth element of portraiture, the aesthetic whole, is addressed at the end of the three learner portraits.

Learner Portrait 1: Ethan

Context

The high-flyer in my class is Ethan, a grade five student who is smart, competitive, and naturally inquisitive. He often wears a proper buttoned-down shirt and polka dot bowtie to class because he thinks it makes him look “like a real professor of things.” He completes his assigned homework quickly, makes few mistakes in his work, and has a difficult time being still or calm if he gets bored. I know I will always have to have another task ready for him after his regular work is done. I sometimes worry that because he is so competent at this level of grade learning, that he will inevitably be ignored or passed over in class as the teacher is addressing issues with more obviously challenging students in terms of their behaviour and more complex learning needs. Overall, Ethan models good behaviour for his peers. As a teacher, I can likely count on him to be engaged in the learning for the day, and I have minimal concerns about his opportunities to succeed in this class based on these preliminary observations. I also noticed that, in addition to being academically successful seemingly without much effort, Ethan has a strong skill set and talent for drawing. Sometimes if he finishes his math or writing early, the host teacher will ask him to create a drawing for her based on a learning theme that they have covered in class. During my practicum, I was delighted to be gifted hand-drawn pictures by Ethan: an undersea landscape with a diver, a bowtie-wearing leopard whose spots were swirling off the page, and a perfect to-scale replica of a dinner menu from his favourite local pizza restaurant.

Voice

Ethan had the ability to articulate himself so clearly even though he was only 10 years old and in grade five. He had a preoccupation with demonstrating how adept he is at using (what he jokingly called) “fancy” language. Words such as “ambiguity,” “parsed,” “dénouement,” and “exponentially” flew from Ethan’s lips as if he had used and understood such complex words since he was a baby. He often corrected the host teacher or myself when something was amiss: once, he pointed out that he disagreed with my marking of one of his simple writing tasks. “I’m unhappy with your assessment of the words I chose to use,” he had stated emphatically. As the teacher candidate, I had to check my own ego as I was repeatedly challenged by this confident and sometimes brash, yet unexpectedly charming and intelligent, young boy. Though Ethan’s ability to use his own voice to his advantage was clear, it might have been interesting to know more about his home or family context. I wondered about how he became so confident, if that confidence was deserved and why, and about the kind of support he was or was not receiving at home to help him reflect and grow as he progressed through the school year and beyond.

Relationship

Ethan’s interactions with his teacher and peers were very positive. With his peers, he was outgoing and inclusive, often taking on the role of leader or guide during group activities, such as dramatic reenactments or physical play. He would often help others when he noticed they were struggling to participate in activities. He demonstrated compassion and empathy for those who were hurting or upset,

and he never hesitated to share his lunch or toys or learning supplies with peers. The host teacher regularly takes advantage of Ethan's tendencies in this regard; asking him to assist in tasks (perhaps to keep him from boredom) and to engage him in more advanced learning activities (perhaps to help him feel special or uniquely supported). As a teacher candidate, I believe that this was a clever and useful approach to take with a student like Ethan. My only cautionary note would be to make sure that although Ethan is capable of being fully independent in the classroom, allowing him to be too independent might rob him of further opportunities to learn how to cooperate with others, how to push himself beyond his own limits, and to learn from the discomfort itself that comes from not always being right in any situation.

Emergent Themes

As I reflected on my observations of Ethan, I noticed several recurring themes that bear further thought. I also question whether these themes are common to all high-flying students in elementary classrooms, or if they are unique to Ethan. I tend to believe the latter: that although these themes emerged readily in Ethan's case, these same themes may not ring true for other highfliers in other comparable elementary school classrooms. What I have learned from my observations of Ethan is that this kind of student needs to be challenged academically to alleviate boredom in the classroom; they have a tendency to engage in perfectionism which might either drive them to success or block them from success; they may be gifted in other non-academic ways such as the arts; they tend to be naturally confident and perhaps a bit competitive; they easily take initiative in learning situations and can support their peers who do not have that same ability; and they are socially and verbally adept when interacting with others such as peers or the teacher. As an individual, Ethan was insightful, critically minded, and full of genuine enjoyment for learning. I think that such high-flying students really need to be encouraged to be the full superstars that they are, without exception, so that they can dream and then reach their full potential.



Fig. 1: Ethan's portrait (Note: Ethan's painted portrait explores how his academic strengths sometimes cause him to be bored and daydream as a result of not feeling challenged. This is shown through a whimsical thought bubble of childlike doodles above his head, which he looks at in a bored and unengaged manner.)

Learner Portrait 2: Poppy

Context

Poppy is a 12-year-old grade six student who has an older brother in the same school. She is very quiet, loves to read, and seems to only have a handful of close friends. Though she is well liked by her peers, she neither seeks attention nor volunteers to take on a leadership role in group activities. When Poppy does participate, she does so with a positive attitude, but needs consistent prompting to continue in challenging scenarios where she feels like she is somehow on display or being judged in front of her peers. There is a certain level of shyness to Poppy's personality, and according to the host teacher, her younger brother is quite the opposite and was an "outgoing, absolute gem" to teach during the previous school year. Teachers in the school continually compare Poppy's participation and achievements in class with those of her older brother and they do not seem to try to hide this obvious comparison from her.

Voice

There seem to be a lot of what I would call "Average Joes" in this particular class, such as Poppy. If a student is not standing out, for better or worse, they tend to be invisible in this classroom. Poppy knows that other students in the room will garner more attention than she would, when they disobey the teacher or need extra help, and she is comfortable being ignored regularly. Oftentimes I would observe her reading quietly on her own or peeking at her phone in her lap during class. Once, I asked her what she was doing with her cellphone, and she said that the teacher had given her permission to only "look it up or listen to it," meaning she had permission to use her phone for Googling information or for listening to music and that was it. Poppy's voice was rarely the first to be heard in group discussions or class activities. She is a very quiet girl who prefers to read, rather than speak, and tends to take the safe route when it comes to the learning environment. Poppy is not a natural risk taker, and the teacher feels that this might be detrimental to her success later in school. Poppy's parents have remarked that they wish she was more like her older brother, whose personality is more engaging and spark-igniting.

Relationship

Poppy's relationships with her peers and teachers are positive, if slightly forgettable. She participates in classroom discussions and lessons but not without prompting, she tends to stick to safe and obvious answers in her academic work, she easily slides under the radar in front of the teacher, she is quiet and focused most of the time, and she is a good listener and follows instructions. Poppy's parents communicate regularly (if a little too often) with the classroom teacher, and they frequently express concern about Poppy's quiet and shy personality. It was only after I had been observing in the classroom for several days that I discovered Poppy's first language was not actually English, but French. I cannot help but wonder if this language issue is creating a barrier for her full participation in class, and perhaps is the cause of her shyness in taking initiative in group work. There may be cultural considerations that I am not aware of. For example, perhaps her parents are expecting a certain level of outgoing interaction from her that is a part of her cultural context

at home. When Poppy communicates in the classroom in English, I wonder if this is affecting her level of social confidence and if she is scared to say the wrong thing.

Emergent Themes

It seems that the average, typical student is usually a quiet one. This quietness or introversion might be commonly mistaken for disinterest or distraction. Poppy, for example, was very predictable in temperament and not a behavioural problem at all for the teacher, which meant she could easily hide or appear invisible in class. Poppy was exceptionally kind to her peers when interacting with them, but ultimately, she preferred individualism and needed options for independent work in class activities. The host teacher shared the following advice for how to work well with a typical, average student such as Poppy: give clear instructions to the student and make sure they are following through and not just “half-participating;” know that most students you encounter in the classroom are able to self-regulate and self-monitor but this will still require follow-up throughout the day; collaborative work does not come easily to students like Poppy (they will lean towards individuality when it is offered) so you will have to make purposeful non-optional opportunities available for collaboration; and interaction with parents might need to be altered to suit their contextual needs, especially if they speak a different language at home than they do at school (literally or culturally).



Fig. 2: Poppy's portrait (Note: Poppy's painted portrait focuses on how she blends in with the class, is quiet and shy, and escapes into a book, so she is depicted as being almost translucent and blending in with the more actively engaged students that surround her.)

Learner Portrait 3: Jamie

Context

Jamie is a six-year-old student in my grade one class. On the first day when I arrived as a teacher candidate, he purposefully avoided talking to me, and physically walked away each time I tried to engage him in conversation. During circle sharing time, as his peers were sitting quietly on the carpet with their teacher, Jamie suddenly jumped up from the circle and ran across the room to where I was sitting at the host teacher's large desk. "I don't like you!" he screamed while pointing a fist full of fingers in my face.

After the brief outburst, he marched back to the carpet, and rejoined the class. Although students in this age group mostly work in groups and at shared tables, Jamie has his own tiny desk along the side of the room near the classroom teacher. He calls his desk his own “island” and often arranges a ring of shoes around the legs of his desk to “protect him from classroom sharks.”

Voice

Jamie’s voice—both literally and metaphorically—is very loud, takes up a lot of space in the room, and is impossible to ignore. He is constantly vying for attention in the most disruptive ways possible. It is difficult to tell if he is being rude and disruptive by choice, or if he has no skills for proper communication at his level of development. The teacher tends to deal with Jamie’s overbearing attitude and vocalizations by largely ignoring them. Sometimes this strategy works, and other times it fails when Jamie realizes he is not getting the attention he craves. At age six, Jamie should be at the developmental stage where he no longer throws temper tantrums, but that is clearly not the case here. One day he threw a tantrum when he discovered that his mom had only packed healthy items in his lunch. After begging his friend to give him cookies from his lunch, he then starting crying and screaming before throwing himself on the floor by the classroom door. I honestly do not think he has developed, or even learned, good coping mechanisms yet. Despite the host teacher’s attempts to reinforce his good behaviour and redirect his inappropriate outbursts, Jamie might not be getting the same behavioural consistency in his home environment.

Relationship

Jamie’s relationships within the classroom are of complete opposites. If he is not being inappropriately friendly and over the top with his emotional and needy attention-seeking from the teacher, then he is being intentionally disruptive and combative with his peers when he sees that he is not in control of a given situation. Jamie almost always disobeys instructions in the classroom and as a result, has special rules that apply only to him (e.g., he is not allowed in the hall or to use the bathroom without special supervision). Despite Jamie’s challenging behaviour, he still has wonderful moments of kindness where he exhibits a great deal of concern and care for his peers. Though I am exhausted when working with this student, I know that this is the nature of elementary school teaching. This is where the really hard work is needed on the part of teachers. Jamie requires an investment that is worth making. I genuinely love working with students like this and getting to see them grow and change. Each one is a beautiful little human.

Emergent Themes

Students like Jamie tend to disrupt the learning of others, disrupt the teacher while they are teaching, present safety issues (both physical and emotional), and are often highly distracted or off-task. At the young age of six, it is impossible to tell yet if Jamie is simply behind his peers with respect to developmental stages, or if there is a more complex learning or behavioural disorder at play. Though his fundamental needs are met by his family (food, shelter, love, etc.), it seems as though something more

subtle might be really missing in his life, which is why he is such an attention-seeking child. As Jamie gets older, the behavioural issues will either lessen as he catches up developmentally with his peers, or the gap in acceptable behaviour will continue to expand as he struggles with an underlying cause. Jamie's complex needs at age six are managed fairly well by the classroom teacher. However, if he continues on his current behavioural path, it is likely that he will need further specialized assistance from an educational support worker or assistant in the classroom. As the focus remains on mitigating his disruptive behaviour, I wonder if his learning is being seriously compromised.



Fig. 3: Jamie's portrait (Note: Jamie's painted portrait shows the extremes of his personality, how he struggles with emotional calibration, tantrums, and outbursts, but also shows his empathetic and kind actions towards his peers, represented in intense, highly saturated colours and silhouettes.)

The Aesthetic Whole and the Pragmatic

Each of the three amalgamated learner profiles of Ethan, Poppy, and Jamie, were presented in the narrative voice of a teacher candidate and framed through four of the five common elements of portraiture: context, voice, relationship, and emergent themes. As a researcher, I found the fifth element of portraiture, the aesthetic whole, to be more difficult to consider in such a siloed manner. Literature suggests that indeed, the aesthetic whole is not meant to be an element unto itself. It is instead an opportunity for a researcher to blend insights from each of the four previous elements into an aesthetic presentation of the person or phenomenon being studied. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2016) suggests that the portraitist, or in this case, the researcher, is

[. . .]interested in mapping the aesthetic context that surrounds the person or the institution, seeking to capture sensory dimensions, the visual, the tactile, the auditory... [they listen for] the metaphors, the images, the allusions people use, and the repetitive refrains that lace their talk. Then the portraitist triangulates the data from these multiple sources. (pp. 22–23)

Having to parse the themes and learning down into impermeable categories, even through creative nonfiction narratives, can feel unnatural or counterintuitive. Consciously using portraiture as a methodology allowed me to acknowledge this conundrum, and to present learner profiles that were both pragmatic and factual, while also retaining the potential to be beautifully and evocatively written (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005) and thus, engaging the reader through compelling accounts of the students

being observed (the aesthetic whole—the final narrative portrait combined with the painted visual representation). It is my hope that this aim was achieved through sharing the amalgamated learner portraits of Ethan, Poppy, and Jamie, respectively, in both creative nonfiction literary *and* painted form. I believe that such learner portraits might be worthy of use as a teaching tool for both seasoned teachers and teacher candidates alike. Complex profiles that draw on both the pragmatic and practical, the aesthetic and affective, can prompt teachers into entering a paradigmatic crossroads, where they might find themselves confronted with a new perspective that had not previously been considered. For those who respond to aesthetic and affective modes of communication, portraiture lends itself nicely to calling forth new, unexpected ways of feeling, knowing, and doing.

Learner portraiture can also call forth pragmatic recommendations for action, as mirrored by the stages of appreciative inquiry (discovering, dreaming, designing, delivering). With respect to the more pragmatic recommendations that have arisen through this investigation of classroom management learner portraits, the following insights have arisen that teacher-educators themselves may want to take into consideration:

1. Teacher-educators are in a prime position to help teacher candidates learn professional ways to effectively disrupt narratives of inequity that they observe or encounter during their respective practicums;
2. Classroom management is a group effort that requires collegial reflection, revision, and reimagining;
3. The most challenging students in a classroom are not always the lowest academic achievers: academically successful students are also challenging in their own right, as are students who are navigating complex social situations outside of the school context regardless of academic ability or previous record;
4. Students in classrooms are highly dynamic individuals, which require teachers to have a huge repertoire of flexible strategies that can be adapted to suit the personalized needs of students;
5. Students who are operating under systemic fear and prejudice are more likely to act out in the classroom environment as a direct result of that inequity and will not be able to engage fully in the learning environment;
6. Systemic social inequities are pervasive in school and classroom contexts whether we personally experience them or not as teachers; we must recognize that children are unable to navigate the effects of these inequities on their own and that educators have an ethical responsibility to provide safe, student-centred learning environments;
7. Portraiture, appreciative inquiry, and other arts-based methods allow for a growth mindset to develop as the focus is placed upon the positives and the possibilities; and
8. Arts-based methods may allow teacher-educators to unpack complex classroom and behavioural management issues in creative and unexpected ways that are more accessible for teacher candidates than other traditional approaches.

Final Thoughts

At the top of my Bachelor of Education course syllabi, I always include a quote to set the tone of the learning for teacher candidates. As a part of my own initial reflection on Ms. Kirkman's experiences in the grade three classroom and her interactions with Lucas and his description as a unit, I revisited the quote I included in my Classroom Management course syllabus for the year when Ms. Kirkman was a student in my class:

What does it mean to listen to a voice before it is spoken? It means making space for the other, being aware of the other, paying attention to the other, honouring the other. It means not rushing to fill our students' silences with fearful speech of our own and not trying to coerce them into saying the things that we want to hear. It means entering emphatically into the student's world so that he or she perceives you as someone who has the promise of being able to hear another person's truth. (Palmer, 1998, p. 46)

For me, an experienced teacher and teacher-educator, and for teacher candidates such as Ms. Kirkman, there has never been a timelier quote to consider than one that calls us to listen and respond to our students with empathy and compassion, with an emphasis placed squarely on the promise of truth and honour in the classroom learning environment. Students in our classrooms, such as Lucas, Ethan, Poppy, and Jamie, deserve nothing less than our best attempt to fulfill this promise. The creative nonfiction narratives and painted portraits developed through this research and presented in this paper may prompt teacher-educators and teacher candidates to interpret the positive possibilities of classroom management, and address its complex challenges while appreciating the emotional and aesthetic qualities of the creative mediums in which these possibilities and challenges were represented.

Notes

1. Pseudonym used to protect teacher candidate's identity.
2. Pseudonym used to protect student's identify.

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He-ART-istic Journeys: Transformative Experiential Learning Through Applied Theatre

Sheila O’Keefe-McCarthy, Michael M. Metz, and Bernadette Kahnert

Abstract

Employing applied theatre techniques of playbuilding, research-grounded scene development, and facilitated workshops has the potential to provide transformative learning. The He-ART-istic Journeys-Heart *DIS*-ease play is one example that invites learners to experience (living with heart disease). This aesthetic encounter creates a reflective space that embraces the uncertainty of (un)knowing-necessary to participate in relearning. Engaging in Mirror Theatre’s method of dialogic exploration, we share two scenes that demonstrate the pedagogical potential and creative process for transformative teaching purposes.

He-ART-istic Journeys: Transformative Experiential Learning through Applied Theatre

Scene 5: *The Moment*

. . . [You see him] He sits quietly reading, [you hear] *The soft beat of a drum. **Thump-Thump. Thump-Thump.*** He begins to clutch his chest. [You hear] *the clang of metal against metal.* [You see her] She touches her head; it aches with dizziness. [You hear] *A sharp rattle.* Both grasp their tingling forearms. *The drum picks up in pace. **THump-Thump! THump-Thump! THump-Thump!*** *A cacophony of sound begins to overwhelm the body. Suddenly, silence.* A doctor stands behind the man and the woman, scribbling clinical notes. The Doctor says to the man: *“I think you’re having a heart attack.”* The Doctor says to the woman: *“I think it’s just anxiety.”* [He-art-istic Journeys-Heart-*Dis*-Ease, Scene 5. O’Keefe-McCarthy et al., 2021]. <https://mirrorthatre.ca/performance/heartistic-journeys/>

Introduction

Empathic and compassionate understanding of the lived experience of cardiac ill health, pain, and associated symptoms, as survived by one who suffers with heart disease, can be enhanced through use of arts-informed research and education that invites critical awareness of that human illness experience. This level of reflective, evocative un-learning, through use of research and arts-based forms of education, serve to challenge and dis-rupt often uncontested biomedical knowledge [shifting from disease-related knowledge to human experiential-related knowledge] about heart disease.

Utilizing a Forum Theatre approach (Boal, 1979), audiences are invited into the conversations of the early warning signs of heart disease through witnessing evocative, aesthetic, and research-grounded scenes. This creates an emancipated space for the audience/observers to shift from the passive role of spectator to co-reciprocal creators of knowledge (Freire, 1986). He-ART-istic Journeys challenges audiences to become part of the lived experience of the play by asking individuals to become critical and engaged learners. This allows for the creation of a productive and perhaps courageous learning environment where spectators are encouraged to ask difficult probing, and often disturbing questions, and engage in meaningful and evocative, challenging dialogues. The devising and creative process is continuous as new audiences bring new ideas/perspectives when engaging with the play.

The tenants of *Applied Theatre* (Prentki & Preston, 2009; Prendergast & Saxton, 2010), regarded as both an educational pedagogy and method of research, have harnessed the transformative benefits embedded in a dialogic educational encounter (Norris, 2009). Dialogic methods of education evoke a deeper level of reflection (Norris, 2017) or level of personal engagement of what is already known (challenging our previously held knowledge or uncontested assumptions about a topic) that is re-presented through theatre. This creative approach permits the learner to reconceptualize “heart disease” as experienced from the patient’s narrative. This form of arts-based research and education raises consciousness and challenges dominant practice ideologies (Leavy, 2015). Lapum et al. (2012) assert employing an arts-informed approach to education can elicit affective responses and create meaningful dialogue that engages people at an emotional level. This article provides two examples of this creative process, highlighting the pedagogical potential, with use of dialogic encounters, using scenes to facilitate learning of complex issues as they relate to course content, and targeted for specific audiences.

Background of He-ART-istic Journeys Project

The intent of the He-ART-istic Journeys project was to purposefully entwine the aesthetic benefits of art with science to make visible and provide meaningful education about the human experience of coming to the realization of symptoms leading to the development of heart disease. This creative arts-based knowledge mobilization encounter provides an opening space to validate, witness, and engage in personal reflection to contemplate what it may be like to survive and live on after a heart attack. It brings the learner into the subjective intimate interiority of an illness experience, making it real and felt; a viable connection to that “plight” of another. An arts-based, embodied, layered exploration (the ABELE approach) was employed to analyze the qualitative data of 23 individuals who experienced early warning signs of cardiac disease. Analysis included layers of qualitative description, literary techniques of poetry and visual art that resulted in four thematic poems and eight pieces of art depicting themes of: denial and disbelief; encroaching pain and early symptoms; and self-recrimination (O’Keefe-McCarthy et al., 2020) (See Figure 1).

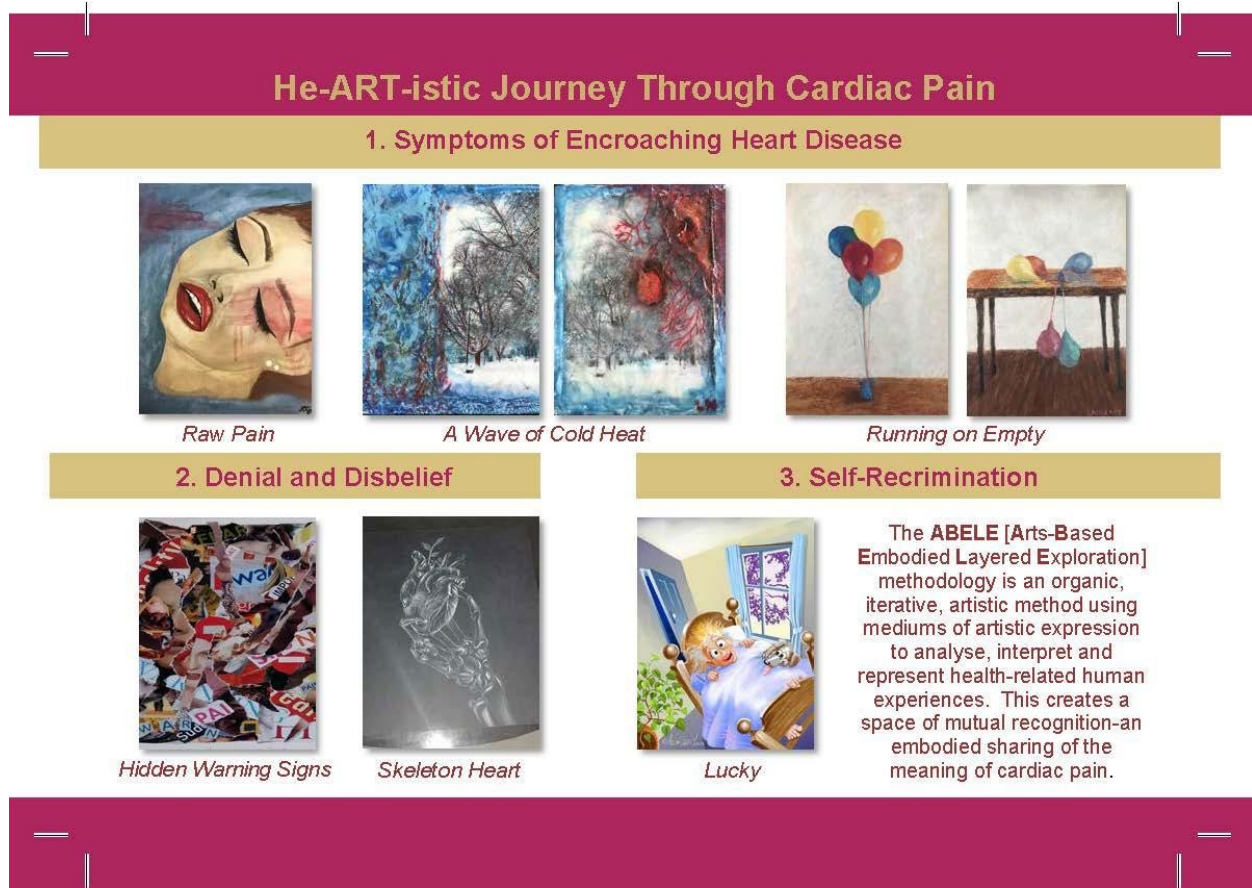


Fig. 1: He-ART-istic journey through cardiac pain: Infographic postcard

To further develop the ABELE approach and incorporate the benefits of playbuilding as a performative layer of inquiry and as an educational strategy, the first author sought out the expertise of Mirror Theatre (MT) to develop and devise an educational play based on the arts-based He-ART-istic Journeys data. MT, underpinned by a social justice perspective, is a non-for-profit theatre company that has created over 90 distinct performances that provide an aesthetic dialogic educational encounter to create awareness and promote discussions that leave audiences haunted with more questions than prescribed answers about the topics or issues portrayed. Through community engaged participatory arts-based pedagogy and research, MT productions are created to educate and increase the public's understanding of various social issues such as homelessness, implicit bias, or person-centred health care, for instance. The pedagogical intent of this kind of education is to evoke responses (Barone, 1990) and create meaningful co-reciprocal learning in participatory collaborative and engaged educational dialogic encounters.

Utilizing forum theatre, MT subscribes to what Boal originated as theatre with intent to generate knowledge (Boal, 2008) through participatory action among actors and the audiences to create change, whether at the micro, mezzo, or macro levels of society (Zarrilli, 2002). Boal's actors act, yet also develop critical thinking, social awareness, and pedagogical skills to effectively unpack an area of interest through the performance of theatre (Boal, 2002). As per Boal's instruction, forum theatre is not didactic in delivery

requiring a passive audience. Rather, it is pedagogical in the sense that all learn together, both actors and audience (Boal, 2008). Forum theatre plays are often centred around problematic issues. Scenes are then paused in the moment, so that audience members (whom Boal refers to as *Spect-actors*) are provoked into confronting the issue and developing new solutions to the problem. The transformative nature of forum theatre lies in its relative safety of a “fictional” environment, wherein the learned experience can be taken into real-life scenarios. As Jackson (2009) notes, “spect-actors forget their fear for a few precious moments—and the hope is that by forgetting their fear in a theatrical conceit, they may then be encouraged to forget their fear of upsetting convention in their real lives” (p. 43).

Performative Layer

Mirror Theatre / Applied Theatre / Playbuilding

MT is currently made up of a cast of professors, graduate and undergraduate students, teachers, and guidance counsellors, collectively referred to as Actors/Researchers/Teachers (A/R/Tors) (Norris, 2009). The devising process that MT uses can generally be broken down into three phases: data generation, vignette creation, and participatory dissemination (Metz, 2021). In the data generation phase, the A/R/Tors responded to the texts (poetry) and visual art previously derived from the He-ART-istic data, that resulted in an educational play titled: “He-ART-istic Journeys-Heart **DIS**-ease” (O’Keefe-McCarthy et al., 2021). The process evolved with members using devised theatre practices and creative exercises of storytelling to respond to how they witnessed or experienced heart disease. These explorations were interpreted with the creation of new themes and devising scenes (Norris, 2017). Over weeks, ideas, patterns, topics, phrases, possible titles, and coding of scenes emerged. Collectively, during vignette creation, MT decided what the scene and play was about. Several devised theatre techniques were implemented through the playbuilding process, such as choral speech, soundscapes, Voices for and Against, Inner Thoughts, and more (Neelands & Goode, 2000). Through this process, multiple aesthetic forms were implemented to inspire unique discussions on heart disease. MT works to approach situations through several different lenses to give voice to the authentic experiences that people have had, related to the topic of interest. Each scene is different in its form, devising process, and final execution. We three coauthors, all of whom were involved in the project, share two such scenes that demonstrate the creative derivation process using an arts-based level of inquiry that is both innovative research and effective pedagogy for dialogic teaching purposes.

Devising Process

The Moment: Scene 5

Genesis of the Scene

MTs initial phase of data generation allowed the A/R/Tors to collectively share potential scenes that could be devised as rehearsals continued. Immediately, we knew that a play with a focus on heart disease necessitated a scene that present symptoms of a cardiac event. Dividing into a smaller group, five A/R/Tors collaborated to create a first draft of this scene that would later be titled *The Moment*. Our brainstorming process is visualized in Figure 2.

Our first step in devising, after responding to the poetry and artwork generated from the He-ART-istic data, was to understand what the symptoms of heart disease were. Many of us did not have health backgrounds or experiences in heart disease, and only knew symptoms commonly discussed, such as chest pain or a tingling feeling in the arm. The first author led discussions among our group regarding the various symptoms that one could experience. Early prodromal warning symptoms have been described as unusual fatigue, shortness of breath, chest pain, anxiety, and tingling arms or hands, for example (Blakeman & Booker, 2016; McSweeney et al., 2016; O'Keefe-McCarthy & Ready, 2014; O'Keefe-McCarthy et al., 2015; O'Keefe-McCarthy et al., 2019; O'Keefe-McCarthy et al., 2020). In our first draft, we landed on six common symptoms: chest pain, headache, dizziness, tingling, shortness of breath, and back pain.

Determining how we present these symptoms left us with some artistic license. Rather than simply showing how the symptoms play out, we used percussive instruments to create a soundscape (Neelands & Goode, 2000) that would have both aesthetic and evocative qualities. Improvising with instruments, we connected sounds with certain symptoms. For example, we used the beat of a drum to represent a heartbeat that would quicken as the scene continued. We sequenced the sounds together such that the sounds would escalate into a cacophony, creating an overwhelming sensation, immediately cut off by a loud bang. A recording of our first draft can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rPwfrwCm8jk>

The initial thoughts of the group were that this scene could be central to the entire play; a climactic moment where the audience witnesses a portrayal of a cardiac event. However, some questions remained of how to end the scene. Some suggested that the A/R/Tor brush it off as “just heartburn.” Another suggestion was that someone come from off screen and say, “I think we need to get you to a hospital.” While there was a clear sense of importance in this scene, there was also an understanding that the scene had potential to develop further.

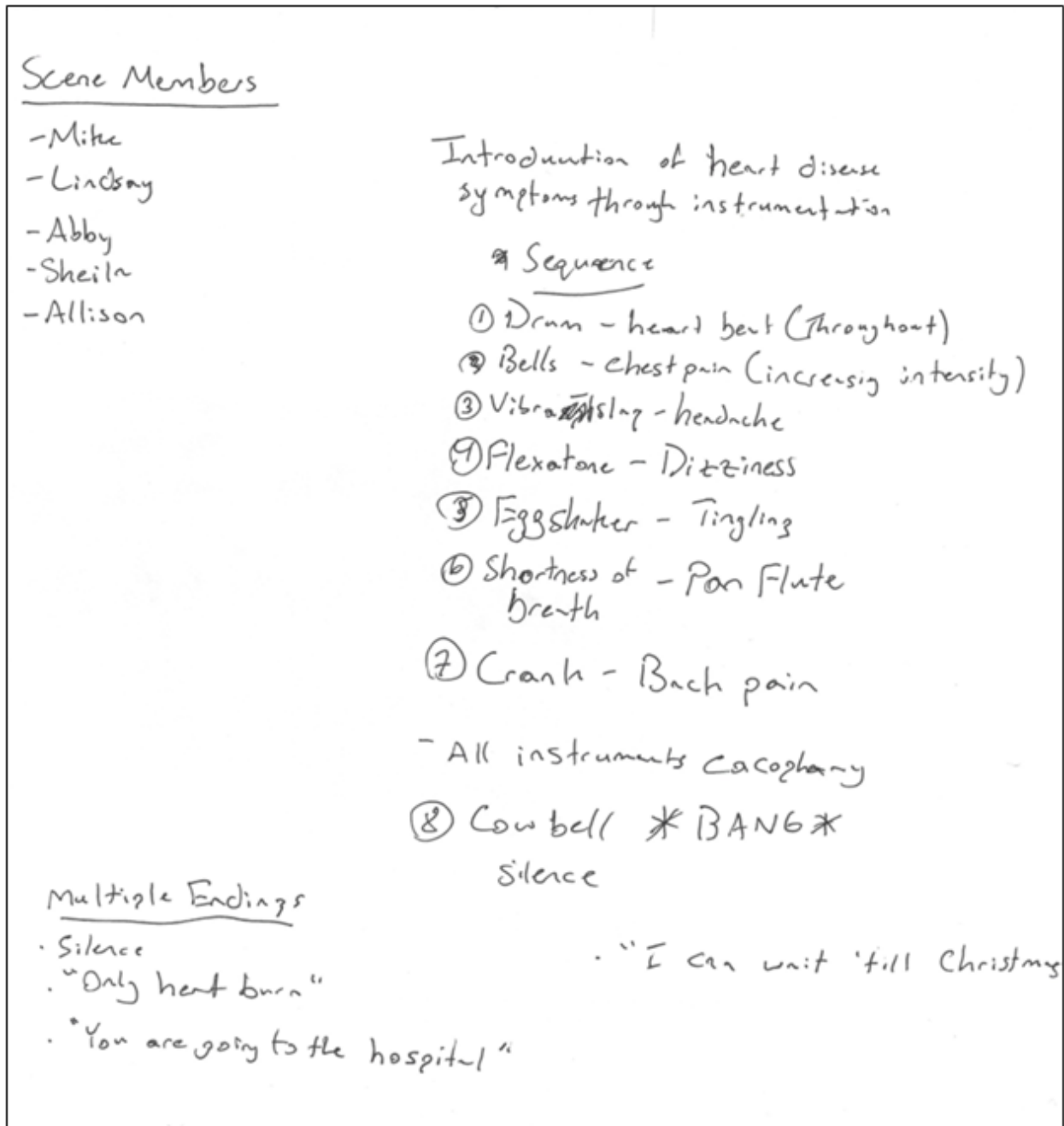


Fig. 2: Brainstorming for the moment

Derivation of the Scene

As MT continued the process of creating this scene, one major theme emerged in how *The Moment* could evolve. As we rewatched the scene, we realized that because the A/R/Tor playing the character appeared to be male, the scene was both sexed and gendered. However, the data, presented to us clearly, showed that there were sex and gender variations when experiencing heart disease (McSweeney et al., 2016; O'Keefe-McCarthy & Ready, 2014; O'Keefe-McCarthy et al., 2015; O'Keefe-McCarthy et al., 2019; O'Keefe-McCarthy et al., 2020). The scene was sexed, as the presentation of symptoms can vary

biologically from men and women. Additionally, the gender differences were found to play a factor in heart disease and for when one might seek treatment, and the differential diagnoses received from a health care professional.

In a second iteration of the scene, we decided to add a second female A/R/Tor to portray a cardiac event. Moreover, two A/R/Tors were instructed to portray Doctors and stand behind the patients, taking notes, and eventually give their diagnosis—heart attack for the male, and anxiety for the female. A rough version of this variation can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0sVWJpUx6dQ>

By adding a second A/R/Tor and two Doctors in the scene, we aimed to showcase how a cardiac event cannot only vary in how it is presented, but also in how it is perceived. McSweeney et al. (2016) notes that often women who are able to recognize the symptoms of a cardiac event “report that providers ignore their concerns or minimize the importance of their symptoms” (p. 1312). In our scene, the doctor minimizes the female patient’s experience as “just anxiety.” Women who have these experiences minimized might then be deterred from seeking care if a serious cardiac event were to take place.

Final Product

With the COVID-19 pandemic affecting our ability to rehearse in person, our rehearsals moved to an online format over Zoom. Many initial scenes that we created had to be scrapped, as there was no way of recording them in an online environment. However, *The Moment* was one of our least difficult transitions, only requiring that we pre-record our soundscape, rather than perform live. Our final version can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-6l2yYa5k8>

Scenes such as *The Moment* speak to the pedagogical power of arts-based educational encounters. Through witnessing enacted events in a relatively safe space, a facilitator of the performance can work with an audience to elicit conversations through the scene. In MT, we often say that our scenes do not seek to provide the answers, but they do make room for questions. In this space, learning becomes co-reciprocal and dialogic. For example, after viewing *The Moment*, we can enter into conversations about equity in health, and audience members can reflect on their experiences that might relate to the situation presented. Through this dialogic encounter, audience members can take agency of their learning, and are thus able to meet new realizations and understandings.

Inner Conversations: Scene 7

Derivation of the Scene

Inner Conversations is a scene that was created through this iterative devising process and was significantly changed from its original conception. As previously mentioned, MT was affected by COVID-19 and the social distancing legislation; therefore, the final scene was converted from an in-person performance to being filmed online. The original scene was devised in February 2020 under the title *Balancing Act* and included three people with one A/R/Tor playing the individual patient diagnosed with heart disease and the two other cast members who played the inner voices. The dramatic techniques of

“Voices for and Against” (Neelands & Goode, 2000) was employed to demonstrate the oscillation of inner thoughts and the polarity of feelings of hopefulness alternating with panic at the new diagnosis. The original scene ends with the patient character standing physically separating the two Voices (at close proximity to each other) saying, “I have heart disease, but my life isn’t over” as a display of accepting the arguments of each Voice. See excerpt of *Inner Conversations in Progress* [Balancing Act Rehearsal]: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8my_U5aviB8

When looking to restage the scene in a virtual setting, there were issues that needed to be resolved. The main issue was developing that authentic back-and-forth argument with the Voices, which proved challenging without physically being around one another and dealing with Internet delay—meaning that lines could not be as crisp with timing as they originally were. Staging video call boxes was difficult as it was the subtle movements of all characters that made the scene interesting; now A/R/Tors were having to confine themselves to smaller areas with less access to their entire bodies. The cast brainstormed and rehearsed various versions of the online scene. One idea was to enlarge the cast to nine people that would appear on screen in a grid with the Patient character in the middle. Each would speak a line that either eased the mind of the Patient or added to the stress that was slowly building until the character snapped with the original ending line, “I have heart disease, but my life isn’t over.” This scene idea proved hard to achieve due to the lack of additional A/R/Tors since the majority of the cast were focusing on adapting their own scenes to the online platform.

The scene became frustrating to work on and there were discussions about omitting it since it could not be done authentically. The main message of the piece was to represent the highs and lows that someone battles internally when dealing with the news of having heart disease. Looking at the He-ART-istic Journeys play, many scenes ended on a calm note that left the audience in a reflective state; therefore, this scene needed to bring something new to the viewer. The new concept of the scene used choral speaking techniques (Neelands & Goode, 2000) that worked to overwhelm the senses during three separate transitions in the scene (see Figure 3: Final script of *Inner Conversation*). The only visible person is the Patient character as they appear to be working on the computer. The Voices echo one another as they whisper about heart disease and state questions such as, “Will my insurance cover this?” and “Is my will up to date?” Realistic questions that are not always easy to think about, especially when asked one after the other in rapid sequence. After both Transition 1 and Transition 2, there is a period where the Patient character attempts to calm themselves and focus back on work using coping mechanisms like checking their phone and listening to music. In Transition 3, the questions develop into statements and the use of “you” echoes as “I” to show how the words/thoughts are internalized. The scene swells to a breaking point where the Patient character screams “SHUT UP! Just...shut up...” and breaks down in tears, flinging off their headphones and pushing away papers. It’s a raw moment of frustration, fear, and vulnerability where the Patient character feels hopeless.

With the dramatic shift in the scene format, the title changed to “Inner Conversations” as a representation of the inner dialogues people have with themselves daily, and how these thoughts can affect personal moods. *Balancing Act* was an exercise in battling thoughts with the opposite arguments to arrive on neutral ground;

never going too negative or too positive. Pointedly, *Inner Conversations* gives permission to feel those overwhelming emotions and recognizes how they can have a drastic impact on a person's mental well-being.

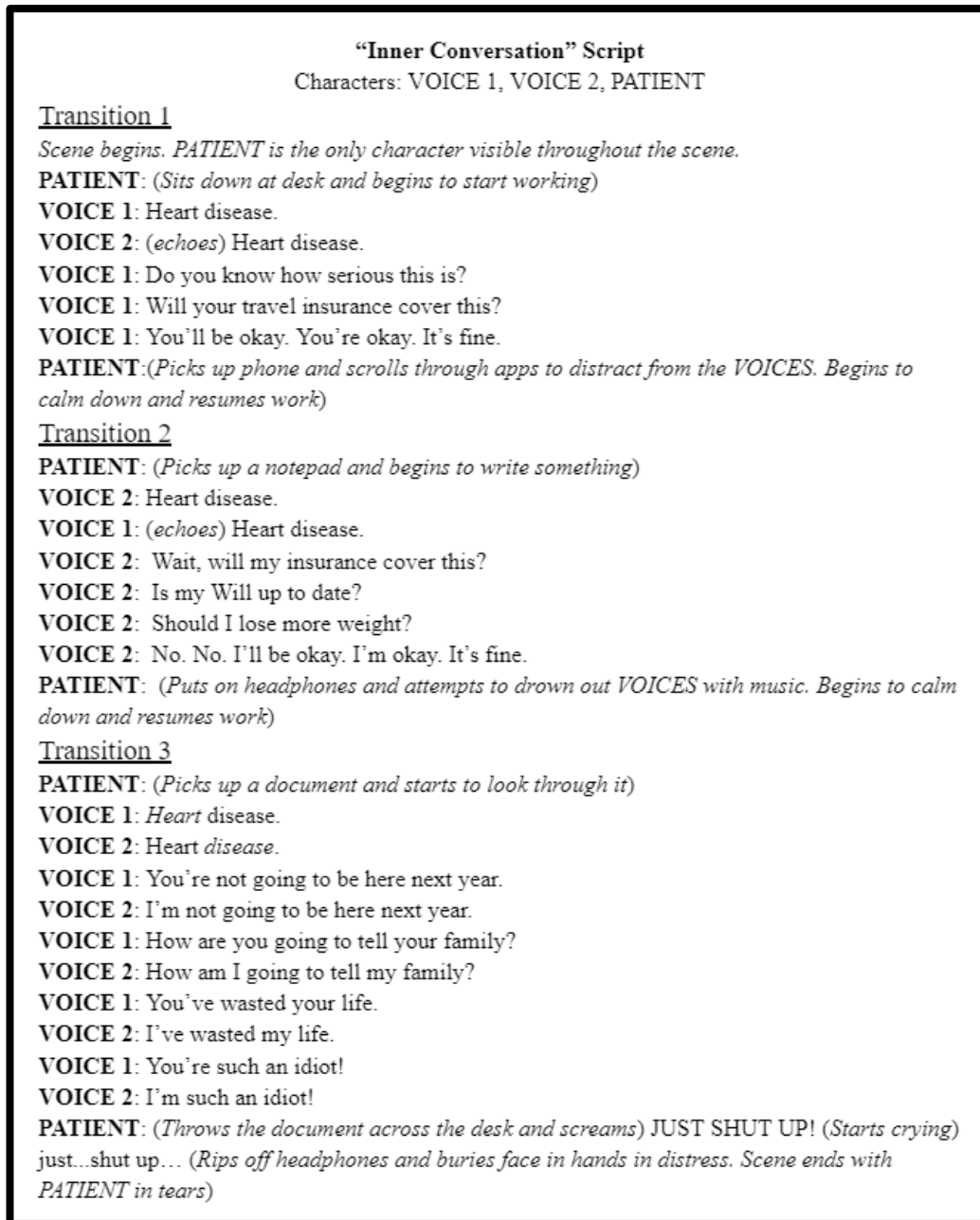


Fig. 3: Final script of *Inner Conversations*

Inner Conversations is an example of how the devising process is an ever-changing exercise that requires creators to be attentive, not only to the needs of the individual scene, but also to the entire performance. The scene exists as it does now because there was a need for a more dramatic and emotional scene that delves into the crushing reality of heart disease that people have described (O'Keefe-McCarthy et al., 2019; O'Keefe-McCarthy et al., 2020). *Inner Conversations* opens the door to discuss mental well-being and the ways that individuals cope with impactful news with regards to their heart health.

Application Through Workshopping

As with scene 5 – *The Moment, Inner Conversations* also can be explored dialogically through joked facilitation in diverse ways including the Transition Before/After and Hot Seating (Neelands & Goode, 2000). Joking (Boal, 1992) relies on the use of improvisation, which is a central theatrical technique used to cocreate knowledge and move the re-envisioned play along according to the learner's direction. When Joking, using the premise of the Transition Before/After, audiences focus on the lived experience of the patient character and decide on a point in time that they would like to play out. Examples of time prompts could include: five minutes before the start of the original scene; when the doctor informs the Patient character that they have heart disease; immediately after the scene when someone finds the character in distress; or several months later. The original A/R/Tor can play as the patient or an audience member can be selected; any supplementary roles needed for the scene can be filled in by other participants (i.e., medical staff, family members, friends, etc.). The process of constructing other moments (through improvisation) within the Patient character's life allows for the development of empathy, and audiences can begin to understand the internalized struggles on an emotional level. This exercise places the continued development of the scene into the hands of the participants and shifts the power from the A/R/Tors to the participants by providing a space for audience voice.

Another viable option to stimulate further conversations is to consider joked facilitation with use of Hot Seating. Hot Seating occurs when a character from a scene is asked questions by the audience in a press conference style (Neelands & Goode, 2000). The activity requires the A/R/Tor to improvise responses in character with the goal of developing authentic answers that enhance the experience of the original scene by providing justifications or reasonings that were not explicitly stated. Possible questions that could be asked to the Voices characters are: What was your thought process when questioning if you had health care coverage? What is going through your mind right now? What were the original thoughts you had when you discovered that the Patient character has heart disease? Further Hot Seating can take place by directing inquiries toward the Patient Character with questions such as: How long ago did you learn that you had heart disease? How are you feeling right now? What do you want to say to the Voices characters? Hot Seating can also lead to another run-through of the scene with some details being shifted to influence the final derivation. The purpose of Hot Seating is to cultivate an understanding of the characters' choices and intentions with use of targeted questioning (Neelands & Goode, 2000). Moment Before/After and Hot Seating both work towards the goal of stimulating conversations with the audience and bringing them into the devising process. Through use of Joking techniques, a dialogue can occur between the A/R/Tors and the audience that works to uncover deeper messages within the scenes to create thought-provoking and meaningful discussions and the creation of new knowledge. See Final Version of *Inner Conversations*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSiY9EoNHq8>

Discussion

Purposeful use of arts-based research and education are effective strategies to represent and educate about the human experience of cardiac ill health, pain, and early symptoms of heart disease to health care providers, undergraduate and graduate students, individuals with heart disease and the general public. Arts-informed research and education potentiates active audience engagement at an embodied or heightened level, permitting increased understanding and resonance with the topic of interest. Incorporating artistic creations and applied theatre to further interpret data allows for transformative learning in what we once thought about, in this case, heart disease (or pain) and challenges our often taken-for-granted implicit biases or uncontested assumptions of the experience. We assert that use of an artistic performative layer of applied theatre to understand about heart disease reaches beyond the limits of scientific and academic language. Aesthetic forms of education may position us closer to each other, permitting co-reciprocal creation of knowledge and a connection to the humanity of another.

Guided by the understanding that each of us brings what we know (and how we know it) to life experiences and learning, we seek through an aesthetic, dialogical, arts-informed educational encounter, such as workshopping the He-ART-istic Journeys-Scenes-an invitation. This invitation assists us to be reflexive and interrupt or re-rupt our assumptions, misunderstandings, and constructed knowledge(s) that may negatively affect or positively privilege the health care experience an individual has been living with, such as uncertain heart health. Aesthetic educational opportunities such as this open up our boundaries of how we come to know what we know, and allows us to take accountability for that understanding by asking difficult and disturbing questions. It is by being reflexive in our learning that we probe deeper and listen with an open and empathetic heart (Brookfield, 2017; Cunliffe, 2016), shifting our perspective and understanding from an individualistic one, to one of mutual recognition of each other in the development and co-creation of knowledge and transformative understanding.

This level of inquiry celebrates dialogical co-construction of meaning and knowledge (Grimmett, 2016). Dialogic co-construction is a reflexive approach to meaning making and familiar to dialogic pedagogies (Edwards-Groves et al, 2014). In this sense, it allows the educator and learner to examine, in tandem, their internal and external contexts attempting to make sense of themselves, their motivations and behaviours as they enact/react with the world (Lyle & Cassie, 2021). This aligns with what Ranci re and Elliot (2009) refer to as the shift from a spectator in theatre to one who is co-collaborator in the generation of new knowledge.

The He-ART-istic Journeys-Heart *DIS*-ease play [<https://mirrortheatre.ca/performance/heartistic-journeys/>] provides a creative space to engage in reflexive practice to raise consciousness of a specific issue. This echoes what Sloan describes as a space of potentiality (Sloan, 2018). A collective space to envision desired change or to explore an issue and reframe past (knowledges) experiences in a new way (Sloan, 2018). Adding to this, we suggest that this creative space celebrates a state of liminality of creative (un)knowing necessary to engage in relearning something anew. While suspending real life for a moment and engaging in this liminal creative space, the learner can re-play/re-work through an issue that warrants critical reflection and ongoing growth. Through this creative aesthetic learning space, the learner actively engages in unravelling the unknown.

As previously stated, applied theatre is often used as a vehicle to educate diverse audiences through participatory activities (Norris, 2017) that may lead to social change, provide therapeutic interventions, create self-reflection and critical awareness, and promote multi-level thinking (Massey-Chase, 2018). In this sense, the Heart **DIS**-ease play strives to build literacy in heart health for the cast and learners through the display of the different scenes. Pedagogically this allows for a variety of dialogic applications in how one may facilitate the topic conversations in class. The scenes then can be artfully discussed and unpacked through joked facilitation. A facilitator or “Joker,” as described by Boal (1992), helps to moderate and facilitate the discussion and organic learning occurring in the workshop. The use of creative re-imagining of the viewed play or scene, based on the liminal nature of the learning workshop experience, invites the learners to re-construct parts of the play to help further understand or articulate new developing thoughts in the co-creation of new knowledge. The use of theatre as an educational tool is a function of the Applied Theatre pedagogy and a way to invite participants to further their knowledge. So too with the Heart **DIS**-ease play, by calling on the data that surrounds the early warning signs of heart disease, the cast can work towards creating an authentic and factual piece of theatre that educates participants on multiple levels, whether that be with basic knowledge of heart disease and/or the development of a more emotional understanding of individual’s personal struggles.

What Applied Theatre and Dialogic Approaches Offer

Employing applied theatre and dialogic approaches have significant potential in the advancement of research knowledge creation and educational pedagogy. More so, utilization of applied theatre as both an educative strategy and research opportunity helps carve out a creative and reflexive learning space. Depending on the intent or course learning objectives, an aesthetic and dialogic space can be created that challenges preconceived notions held about (a topic), which in this case is heart health and symptoms of illness. We suggest that this may be a welcomed pedagogical shift—turning from an objective or prescriptive form of top-down education to an organic way of embracing the level of unknowing. This approach places the educator and learner on an equal plain, in a perpetual state of constant unfolding and learning—creating co-reciprocal knowledge that has the potential to be individually and/or collectively transformative.

In health care practice, not only will use of an applied theatre-aesthetic educational encounter provide evocative (un)learning for clinicians (having had the opportunity to see, hear and feel what it is like for individuals to live with a health concern or condition), but may also act to translate how they adapt their practice in caring by understanding the patient’s perspective. This would be a prudent and much needed area of patient/clinician practice research to explore in the future. Our example scenes, developed with playbuilding through use of applied theatre with the intent of curricular workshoping, will inform future curriculum development across all disciplines and unique contexts. Additionally, this approach may gain interest from academics, arts-based researchers, scientists, clinicians, and educators as a concrete example of transformative education through use of a dialogic process of inquiry.

Engaging the learner in this form of education can be important in designing interventional studies to determine the efficacy of this kind of aesthetic dialogic educational approach. Adapting dialogic educational encounters to any content, accessing the tenants of applied theatre may be important to consider as an educational intervention for educators, researchers, policy makers, healthcare providers, and so on, which warrant a deeper dive into the complexities of any human experience.

Conclusion

Creating learning landscapes that celebrate the unfolding nature of inquiry and making meaning of experiential data demands evocative pedagogies that stimulate critical awareness, reflective thinking, and active unlearning and re-knowing. Through use of audience interactions and discussions, Applied Theatre works to develop new ways of knowing and arriving at previously unseen conclusions with regard to the specific issues or topics. Moreover, aesthetic dialogic arts-informed educational encounters (created through entwining research and art), such as the Heart **DIS**-ease play, provide an intensified representation of a human illness experience or condition. The pedagogical power of this aesthetic dialogic encounter may offer an alternative view or challenge entrenched knowledge(s) through learning that gives way to a creative liminal space to freely question, so that both learner and educator may be transformed to see, feel, hear, speak, touch, and rethink through topics anew.

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“Where Are You *Really* From?”: “Mapping” the South Asian Diasporic Through Poetic Inquiry

Shyam Patel

Abstract

For the South Asian diasporic, questions about (be)longing and identity are almost undeniable. Through a personal reflection, I contour these experiences by way of poetic inquiry, specifically interrogating “performing” Canadian-ness (Alvi, 2020) and the meaning of “home” (Badrudjoja, 2006) that are a part of the living pedagogy of immigrant families navigating the “status” of emigration. It is in that intermediary of “straddling cultural divide” (Sharrif, 2008) that words of poetry emerge, tantalizing a processual capitulation of (be)longing and identity formation; that is, the constant trail of navigating the in-between of “here nor there” and the (im)possibilities that this hyphenation offers.

From Memories of the Land to Poetry of the Diasporic

there is a trail of dirt inside of me.
it is the soil of my ancestors
formed into a makeshift map.
it is written on me like a birthmark
its edges as smooth as the callus of footprints
that follow me where I travel.



Fig. 1: Old photograph of my father’s ancestral village.

In a family album, an old photograph of my father's ancestral village captures my attention, with dreams about a childhood that could have been and the one that I experienced away from the terrain, the dirt road of soil, long buried, but still etched into my memory. Even now, I can imagine myself running through the fields, stopping next to a sapodilla tree to catch my breath. The sweetness of the fruit, which at first is unfamiliar to my tongue, becomes a taste that I long for. As I enjoy the moment, it is my grandmother's stories—ones about this land—that remain the most prominent in my memories. She tells me about the way a tree is planted, settled into the soil, and nurtured by water. When we go home, I continue to be enamoured of how she and my grandfather turned a few acres of land into something more. With these experiences, while I do not know the word at that time, I start to feel the vastness of my (home)land.

As a child of immigrant parents from India, however, I am confronted with questions about whether I "belong" in so-called Canada and whether I am Indian "enough" in the homeland. Calling into question these identities are markedly disparaging and frame me as displaced. I am stifled at an impasse like Mohanty (2003), such that being South Asian comes with "a question of (in)visibility and foreignness" (p. 134)—and requires one to remain a stranger both in the homeland and in the new home (Trinh, 1991). These experiences have left me in a void, and I am looking to escape that nothingness. When the imaginative transport of an artist escapes, a lingering artefact remains somewhere in the periphery. It is that space of elsewhere stitched from memories of "neither here nor there" that I come to critical poetic inquiry as a marginalized being (Davis, 2018) in locating a living pedagogy (Aoki, 2003). It is also through this poetry that I respond with an arts-based approach to storying narratives of South Asian-ness in the diaspora as an artist, researcher, and teacher.

Examining the Question(s) of Being From "Here"

"Where are you from?"

"where are you from?"

and i tell them,

i am from here

but they ravage me

with disbelief, with more

questions that turn into

"you cannot possibly be from here..."

...so, where are you really from?"

While I cannot recall when I first encountered this question, my earliest memory of it is from high school, where questions about culture and ethnicity are framed in the classroom. It is in the opening slit of a conversation within that space where the perniciousness of the question emerges. It is another student, a white student, who asks me, “Where are you from?” and who then launches into an accusatory explanation that “my people” cannot be from Canada. Moreover, to claim otherwise goes against her [racist] definition of who belongs here and who does not. At the time, I did not understand the loaded nature behind this remark—of the history around the construction of racial bodies vis-à-vis colonialism that Ahmed (2002) attends to in her work. As the years would go by, as I try to make sense of such an accusation, I immediately turn to silence. The numbness paralyzes me from speaking, and that becomes a response on its own. By providing no answer at all, I engage in admitting that white people, as assumed by the question poser, are the “real” Canadians. Time and again, no matter how fleeting the moment, I am dissected by a question before I can even speak.

The question of “Where are you from?” reeks of a politics of futility that seeks to undermine those who are ascribed to the Global South, while also ignoring the duplicity of the white settler on stolen land. It is an exclusionary question that constructs a fictitious “Oriental Other” (Badrudjoja, 2006). As well, it is a reminder of identity denial (Cheryan & Monin, 2005), which emerges by way of the assumption that whiteness is the racial marker of normativity. In other words, to be otherwise is inherently different and unbelonging, and thus dismissed to being from somewhere else. My own experiences, as noted above, speak to being categorically trafficked in questions about being from “here”—questions that seek to place whiteness as dominant. Adding to this is the “Are you Canadian?” question (Shariff, 2008). When this question is framed, it is purveyed as innocent, but for me, as an Indian, it is archived in memories of erasure. According to Agnew (2003), “it implies that having a different skin colour (which is what usually prompts the question) makes a person an outsider and ‘not really Canadian’” (p. 1). As such, the space of “here” becomes a contested one for the South Asian diasporic.

“Where are you really from?”

dirty. little. immigrant.
words that are whispered
scream to me in a deafening way
to remind me of the following:
you are not from here.

Gradually, the question turns from “Where are you from?” to “Where are you *really* from?”. In my own experience, I can vividly recall being asked this question several times throughout my life. While those posing the question might be attempting to be culturally sensitive (Cheryan & Monin, 2005), I view it as an assault. When I articulate that I am from Montreal or that I am from Canada, other questions emerge such as, “What is your background?”. And like Henry (2003), “I remember being asked the question, ‘where are you from?’, and when I said, ‘Canada’, the questions almost always continued, ‘where are you *really* from?’, ‘where are you *originally* from?’, ‘where are your parents from?’, or ‘what are your origins?’” (p. 231). The response of “I am from here” never seems to suffice, but sometimes even the “desired” response is inadequate. When my response finally reveals that my family is from India, I am

informed that I am probably from Pakistan. Again, not only does the questioner ask a loaded question, but they also deny the response at every turn, even when the racist imagination is filled to the very end.

This is suffused in the problematics of satiating the appetite of the colonizer, whose curiosity turns to disbelief when the response does not fill the stomach of a vulture that is narrowing in on its prey. One question leads to another and then another, until the hunter supposedly becomes the hunted, where the person posing the questions feels a sense of disbelief and disorientation, as if the question of “Where are you from?” transported from the questioned to the questioner, who is upset with a response that does not fulfill the interrogator’s desire to know. These sentiments, whether said or unsaid, are marked through a barrage of questions. Even worse are the comments that accompany the questions. “Are people in India really that dirty?”, “Does it smell there?”, and “How do people there live in such poverty?” are some examples that I have been asked. Inevitably, the question turns into misrepresentations of being inferior and to being labelled as deficient in some manner. These are racist ascriptions and territorializations such as being conspicuously “dirty” (Gairola, 2016) along with racial slurs such as “curry-scented”, “Paki”, and “shit skin,” which are all assaults on the South Asian diaspora. Thus, a question considered innocent by the person asking it, results in splintering an already fractured Brown body—relegating and subjugating the body of colour even further. Therefore, it is less about “Where are you from?” as a query of curiosity, and more about the underlying posturing of “You are not from here” that categorizes borders out of invisible lines. This line of questioning inadvertently claims the “Other” as inherently from somewhere else, somewhere less civilized, and less modernized, and as Ang (1993) puts it, inevitably deviant.

“Go back to where you came from”

he whispers, nam-ass-stay
 hands clasped together.
 a sinister mantra chanted,
 lines he learned on
 some boat-ride in a dream
 before he already said,
 Konichiwa, bowing down
 to Chinese immigrants
 he confused for Japanese.
 cherry blossoms he once
 added to his repertoire
 of another foreign tongue
 to welcome to this land.
 lips sealed with such hate
 when really all he meant
 was to say, go home.

What also makes the question of “Where are you from?” so incendiary is that it operates on assumptions, which are sometimes postulated in the form of a statement, rather than a question. For example, I am often greeted by strangers with the assumption that I am Muslim, although I am an atheist, and my family members are Hindu. While this does not bother me, the assumptions carry racial undertones because the reading of my Brown skin places me as something that I am not. Said differently, filled with an archive

of assumptions, no matter how well intentioned, are the hurried salutations, always butchered, that categorize people into identities that are falsely attributed. A few years earlier, I remember the words “You do not look Indian” being expressed to me. To not look Indian, in its inchoate form, is a remark that momentarily descends me into a suspension of unspeaking, where I am unable to respond as I cling to the edge of bewilderment. In that same year, to someone else, I am Arab and to another person I am of South American descent. I mouth out “nam-ass-stay” and that seems to put an end to their perplexity around my “Indian-ness.” Without that, the questions that are rifled in succession, or rather the incursion, would never cease.

When these assumptions and questions, falsely framed as innocuous, are challenged, another form of exhaustion takes place; when references of “Canada” as being racist are mentioned, further assaults arise. Immediately or shortly after, “Go back to where you came from” or other statements that caricature that sentiment become the response. The vulture, turning its mouth from preying to unleashing, turns into a vociferous racist and launches into an attack. While racists fill their hunger, the stomach churns differently for me. It vomits fear. Even when empty it trembles. There are always reminders that “foreignness” defiles the anatomy of humanhood. For many first- and second-generation South Asians, these experiences of fracturing are accompanied by memories of “performing” so-called “Canadian-ness” to survive. To, so to speak, escape insults of “Go back to where you came from,” hurled at the assumed immigrant body. Emergent in this slippage are the navigations of culture and religion (Alvi, 2020). And in that navigation is the imagination of the racialized body (Ahmed, 2013), a body that comes to be the landscape of materialization by being related to other bodies, as a product that reels in a focalization of whiteness. In the case of so-called Canada, performing Canadian-ness means to perform in relation to the white body that is deemed to be at the centre and therefore more “Canadian” than everyone else, as Ausman (2011) reminds me that to be otherwise means to be at the fringes.

“You are not from here”

my mother folds saris into cupboards
hides letters and photos in between fabric

she holds onto old passports that turn brown
for all the memories she cannot let go

in a piece of furniture that closets her entire world,
what other parts of herself does she hide?

Reading Alvi (2020), barely clinging to the margins, I come to be aware that my own family has a history of engaging in a performance of “being Canadian” to fit in. Drifting in this thought, I cannot do so without realizing the split that my parents must feel. Although my mother has now been in so-called Canada for almost 30 years, the content of the words in these poems remains a part of her experience. In her own way, she survives—or learns to disguise parts of her culture and identity—in a place that strips everything away from her. And there is a part of this ritual, mainly by observing, that is passed onto her children. Namely, to hide the Indian-ness away from the space of whiteness. It is never articulated as such, but there are some actions that require no words. These are moments where the immigrant imagination dies

before it even lives, but such killing of the cultural or religious bearing is a form of protection. For the South Asian child, this act of hiding or leaving behind parts of the homeland, as a way of “passing” elsewhere, is precocious. It has an intergenerational impact (Alvi, 2020), carried from one generation to the next. In that attempt of passing an identity, to survive means to be less present, more absent in Brownness. As such, my family and I engage in a process of assimilation, which involves losing ourselves to something else, and to annihilate our own culture to take on that of someone else’s (Prashad, 2000).

This hiding, and even losing oneself, of being Brown, being South Asian, is trafficked in a sense of shame. Rushdie (1983) captures the feelings of shame that perforate South Asian households:

Wherever I turn, there is something of which to be ashamed. But shame is like everything else; live with it for long enough and it becomes part of the furniture... You can find shame in every house, burning in an ashtray, hanging framed upon a wall, covering a bed. But nobody notices it any more. (p. 21)

It comes in moments of never wearing Indian clothes unless necessary, namely for a religious ceremony or wedding, only to hurry back home to bury it into another memory. It means to be wary of “acting” too Brown or too Indian. In that same way, my family and I have cultivated a life around shame, and eventually the disappearing act is such that it becomes almost intrinsic and unnoticeable. For the South Asian diasporic, and for other people of colour, countering Canadian-ness means being categorically “Othered” and living with fraught tensions at a riving hyphenation—one that requires a hiding of sorts. That “performance” of hiding and unhiding, an engagement of rituals that Pariyadath (2019) identifies as journeying back and forth between homes, is known to many South Asians.

From “here” to there to fear

every street corner you pass
is another assault you escape

every traffic light you wait upon
are seconds and minutes of agony

every time you leave the house
is a memory that fresh air is a privilege

that to take a breath, to speak of life,
is a burden that you carry forever

Like my parents, I also learn to assimilate, to live outside of fear. I try to “hide” the Brownness, the Indianness, the South Asian-ness. From the way I dress to the way I talk, I attempt to not reveal myself, but something—mostly likely my Brown skin—betrays me. No matter how much South Asians, particularly first-generation immigrants, attempt to perform, followed by shame at every corridor, they are reminded of the following: “South Asian immigrants are astutely aware that they are here for their labor and not to create their lives” (Badruddoja, 2006, p. 7). In that reality, the “Go back where you come from” as an insult turns into a threat. Aware of this, there is a constant fear of slipping that is steeped in this ventriloquism of passing and its performance. This slippage is harrowed in moments of not

performing, where a person of colour breaks from hiding their culture and religion. It can be eviscerating otherwise. In knowing that, identity becomes a place of ongoing negotiation and tension (Alvi, 2020), which includes passing to survive. Striking another poem allows me to grapple with why passing and performing are so critical to how we move through the world, even when engaging in acts of everyday living. Furthermore, in this is the reality that South Asians and others ascribed as racialized immigrants are bound by a politics of disposability, wherein there is not only a reminder that being relegated “back to where you came from” is always a menacing reality, but that living is filled with precarity. Death is a constant reminder merely because you exist, and your body can be easily discarded and murdered.

“Fresh off the boat”

lodged into a river of memories,
flooded by the shipwreck, I wonder,
what is fresh about water that swims in dead bodies?

In addition to straying away from my culture and identity in order to fit in (Cheryan & Monin, 2005), I regret using the derogatory term of “fresh off the boat” (FOB), which is often ascribed onto racialized immigrants. In high school, along with other South Asian students, I would use the term, especially in reference to my parents or people like my parents, to indicate a way of being that fails to assimilate to the dominant culture. I make this admission because the remnants of “Go back to where you came from” are even more haunting for those who are “visibly” South Asian, or any other body perceived to be racialized, by way of culture, language, and religion. Whereas I can often pass in white spaces (Alvi, 2020), other South Asians are subject to the fresh off the boat racial microaggression (Poolokasingham et al., 2014). The accent, or the supposed Indian accent, readily sullies the performance. Thus, the very “accented” English that is spoken, described as incomprehensible (Shuck, 2004) and “heavy” (Chand, 2009), betrays the speaker who seeks to pass by without trouble. For the Indian accent that is ascribed onto the entire South Asian expanse, it is often the /v/ pronounced for [w] that has been iconic to Indian English (Chand, 2009), which has been appropriated and ridiculed. Usually, only one word is needed to reveal that, when “what” is heard as “vat” and the English that rolls out differently becomes subject to callous criticism. The racialized immigrant, in this case the first-generation South Asian, as read through the colonizer’s eyes, is thus reprimanded for expressions that are “fobbish” (Pyke, 2010). Again, coded in this remark, asserted in an accusation of fugitivity, is the violent threat that one can be “shipped back” elsewhere, and whether the boat sails without drowning is left unanswered. Its use—my use of it—feeds into the narrative of “Go back to where you came from.”

The Return to (Home)land and Its Tensions

Never enough for both

i am two rivers
in one ocean

plenty water,
overflowing

but still
drying out

What complicates the conversation around (be)longing and identity is that the “elsewhere” space is also contested. The search for (home)land is felt in the inadequacy of not being enough of something. It posits me as neither here nor there. When I visit India, for example, my relatives there view me as being from outside of India. To them, I do not embody what it means to be Indian because I come across and behave as a Canadian. For the diasporic like myself, especially children of immigrants born and raised outside of the homeland, the performance of Canadian-ness is not seen, at least not there and then, as a form of survival by family members living in the homeland. Those Brown spaces render us as “whitewashed” and doing “white people” things (Alvi, 2020). These assertions, however, are not piqued in problematics necessarily. Rather, it comes from a history of wanting a “better life” among a people grappling with the lies of post-colonialism, and so the image of a plump, apparently well-fed Canadian whose parents left the village is an example, at least as much as imagery allows, of a life free from poverty. Nonetheless, the insinuation still hurts. It is no surprise then that the homeland that I dream of becomes another site of contention, navigation, and troubled territory.

At the same time, my relatives in India do not necessarily view me as “not Indian,” but rather as being less Indian. Thus, it is also less about whether one is from there or not, but whether one is “enough” of the place in question. It is often the perceived “foreignness” that explicates the “enough-ness” of the diasporic. For me, it is my “accent” that betrays me. In a rickshaw, as I speak broken Hindi, the driver turns to ask me the dreaded “Are you from here?” question that has come to travel with me. Built into the mechanics of that curiosity, I am yet again at a standstill. Indeed, “we are faced with charred pieces of identification, shards of language, burned tongues, and cultural fragments” (Seyhan, 2001, p. 7). When those fragments make me a tourist in my own homeland, weaving me into a depth of unbelonging that descends ceaselessly, the diasporic in me wonders if living at the hyphens is always a site of being distant, removed from the homeland.

When cultures collide

there is no language that I can mouth out
without the edge of a sharpened tongue splintering it

It is not only language, however, that renders me not enough when I am in India. That excision is also laboured in the endowment of being creolized (Cohen, 2007), where two or more cultures and identities

collide to form another, such as the diasporic. For South Asians, instead of that being a merge of authentic identity formation, it is described otherwise. The term “American-Born Confused Desi” or “ABCD,” comes to mind. Having been born outside of South Asia, the diasporic body is categorically confused. In other words, they are meant to feel a sense of cultural inadequacy (Prashad, 2000). While it has been more recently reframed, with second-generation South Asians reclaiming the term by rephrasing it as “American-Born Confused Desi Emigrated From Gujarat House In Jersey Kids Learning Medicine Now Owning Property Quite Reasonable Salary Two Uncles Visiting White Xenophobia Yet Zestful!”, the original history of ABCD is rooted in the intent to delegitimize and reduce the diasporic South Asian. Furthermore, it acts as a counterpart to FOB (Badrudjoja, 2006), while seeking to undermine the corporality of Indian-ness from its cultural and embodied attachment. Through that detachment, the question of “What is Indian about you?” emerges (Das Gupta, 1997). In that way, pressed against the question of being enough as an Indian, I am, as a diasporic South Asian, relegated, even if fleetingly, in what Paudel (2019) calls nowhere-ness. So, if I am from nowhere, where is my home?

If neither here nor there, where is home?

a broken mother tongue slips out
spills heavy in water onto draught filled soil

Like a splintering thread, the disconnected, outcasted diasporic body starts to come undone. This takes form in the search for “Where is home?” that follows me everywhere. It is those cupboards and suitcases, even years later, that I am rummaging through, as a part of the detached diaspora in search for home. It is the pain-stricken feeling of never being enough of something. There is dislocation that comes from this process of dispersion (Bhabha, 1994), where complexities about “home” surface from the question of “Where are you from?” (Badrudjoja, 2006). It is that very interrogation, at least for me, which makes the place of home, as a construction of seeking out (be)longing and identity, difficult to imagine. An engagement of being unhomey, as the experience of not feeling at home (Paudel, 2019), strangles me through the neither here nor there feeling.

Through this poetic inquiry, however, home reaches me in a new way. According to Brah (1996), home is an experience that is lived. The author explains that the yearning for home is not necessarily a return to the homeland, as much as it is a longing for home. Thus, the diaspora is not necessarily “tied to the homeland or the past” (Canagarajah & Silberstein, 2012, p. 81). Instead, borrowing the words of Zhang (2004), I gravitate to re-homing and seek to “reconstruct home by moving beyond boundaries” (Paudel, 2019, p. 71). So, while the notion of home is riddled for the South Asian diasporic, and is both complex and contradictory (Shukla, 2001), I cannot be bordered. There is no map that can constrain me. There are no bounds that can trap me into an atlas. Even today, for some, I will never be enough. I will always be from somewhere else. Heeding the words of Zebian (2021), however, I do not build a home in other people. Nor am I interested in “always being in the waiting room of the nation-space” (Dayal, 1996, p. 51). Instead, I am making a home that is inspired by Brah’s (1996) poignant words:

[H]ome is also the lived experience of locality. Its sounds and smells, its heat and dust, balmy summer evenings, or the excited of the first snowfall, shivering winter evenings, sombre grey skies in the middle of the day...all this, as mediated by the historically specific everyday of social relations. In other words, the varying experience of the pains and pleasures, the terrors and contentments, or the highs and humdrum of everyday lived culture that marks how, for example, a cold winter night might be differently experienced sitting by a crackling fireside in a mansion as compared with standing huddled around a makeshift fire on the streets of nineteenth-century England. (p. 189)

It is that, with the depths of poetics which captures my own experiences as a South Asian diasporic, that brings me home, and I am back to the photography of a land near my father's village. If I look closely enough, I can see myself there, running freely and without trepidation of someone asking me the question, "Where are you from?"

Final Thoughts: A Map Is Only One Story

no trace of maps
no boundaries
no borders

my home
is written on me
like constellations in the sky

In breathing this poetic inquiry, a territory of both fear and hunger lingers at the inroad of a hyphenated diasporic like myself in search of a home, not simply as place for the displaced, but as a longing for the feeling of homeliness. For one, there is that exigency of belonging to somewhere, to any map that plateaus me to feeling less homely, and maybe towards journeying to a homeland that yearns for me, as I do for it. Located elsewhere, however, I am terrified of being Indian, South Asian, and Brown. Every contour of the homeland that rests on my body, whether on the text or within its depths, always "maps" me as unwanted. When that territorialization happens, I trace the following words:

When the colonialists came, they committed our edges to paper; they tried to cage us with their borders. A country is impossible to contain; a people are impossible to boil to the silt of parchment. A map is only one story. It is not the most important story. The most important story is the one a people tell about themselves. (Osman, 2020, p. 19)

It is these words that I repeat over and over again. A map is only one story. A map is only one story. A. Map. Is. Only. One. Story.

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Learning Through Laughter: The Integration of Comedy Into the Academic Curriculum

Jeffrey M. Schouela

Abstract

How can comedy be used as an effective tool and truly help innovate the learning experience? This paper outlines how aspects of comedy have been creatively integrated into primary and secondary academic curricula such as English Language Arts, social studies, drama, as well as in areas of mental health and wellness. The essay demonstrates, for example, how participating in stand-up performances helped sharpen students' critical thinking abilities and presentation skills. It also underscores comedy's pedagogical utility and versatility, its value in the classroom, and its promising potential as a stand-alone option in the domain of arts education.

Learning Through Laughter: The Integration of Comedy Into the Academic Curriculum

"Essentially, humor activates our sense of wonder, which is where learning begins." (Henderson, 2015)

Traditionally, when educators are asked to identify the various components that comprise the arts education curricula, comedy is seldom mentioned. Yet, teachers and students alike are both drawn to laughter. Humour is routinely used as an element of style incorporated across many spheres of the learning environment. While not all subjects are as conducive to creativity as the arts, the medium of comedy can cross over and play a meaningful role in the learning of most subjects. Using comedy as a platform in certain scenarios can also allow marginal voices to shine, and encourage greater active participation. Each generation of students brings new challenges and a need to adapt to current realities. Both humour and the medium of comedy are a welcome source of inspiration as we all attempt to adjust to the ever-changing landscape of education and life.

As a result of my 17 years of experience as a stand-up comedian, I have come to know and appreciate the importance of humour in personal development and social life. In addition, through my involvement in educational programs, I have become persuaded that humour can be a very effective way to create a sense of security and trust in a classroom that, in turn, can facilitate the processing of information and the acquisition of knowledge. For the past several years, I have held courses with students ranging in age from 11 to 17 and have integrated comedy into subjects such as English Language Arts (ELA), social studies, and drama. Drawing on my experiences during these classes for this paper, I will explain how the medium of comedy can enhance memory, facilitate processing of stressful information or social issues, sharpen skills in the classroom, and serve as a useful tool for improving student mental health and wellness.

Humour as a Memory Aid

Interestingly, more adults retained news stories at a higher level watching humorous episodes of *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* when compared with traditional sources of information like newspapers and CNN (Henderson, 2015). With this in mind, I sought to explore whether this would apply to retention of information among children and adolescents. It has been found that the attention span of the average middle school student is 10 to 12 minutes and that there is little evidence to suggest that this result might be improved (Vawter, 2009). Research conducted across 22 elementary schools has revealed that the average elementary school student is distracted more than a quarter of the time. These findings were consistent from kindergarten and up (Barshay, 2017). While a 2010 study by Bunce and colleagues measuring the frequency and length of attention lapses, concluded that there were fewer lapses in attention during periods of active learning methods such as demonstrations and questions (Bunce et al., 2010, as cited in Briggs, 2014). Through their study of British medical students, Stuart and Rutherford concluded that it was, in fact, the teaching style, and not the format of the lesson, that showed the greatest variability. Rutherford underscored the importance of teachers being able to create a satisfying learning experience (Stuart & Rutherford, 1978, as cited in Bradbury, 2016). As legendary comedian Jerry Seinfeld noted, "There is no such thing as an attention span. There is only the quality of what you are viewing" (Steinberg, 2004).

One of the proven results of using humour is that it helps create memories. Historically, we have an easier time remembering experiences that made us laugh (Carlson, 2011). Based on this notion, I wanted to investigate whether humour might facilitate the creation of memories in the classroom. In traditional secondary level ELA curricula, students are taught to explore and identify a set of literary terms that can be found throughout different genres such as novels, short stories, and Shakespearian plays, to name a few. Students are invited to evaluate certain texts and provide an interpretation of which literary devices were used by the author and how they contributed to the effectiveness of the text. While the aforementioned genres have traditionally been used to help teach the terms, I wondered if the use of humorous materials and funny writing exercises might increase students' comprehension of, and capacity to, identify these literary terms and devices. As a fun introduction to idioms, I invited students in a Grade 5 English class to twist the endings of classic idioms by explaining to them that the key element of effective humour is surprise. I provided a list of half-idioms and proverbs, and allowed the students to generate some of their own. Examples included: "You can't judge a burger by its condiments."; "Actions speak louder than texts."; "Don't put all your eggs in your mouth."; "Elvis has left the chat."

When we laughed as a class at some of their creations, it helped crystallize their understanding and build a memory. When the students needed to recall the terms during a quiz, some students remembered laughing at their friend's version and this helped them recall the meaning of the term. Students also used humour to imaginatively create their own euphemisms and hyperboles: On failing the test: "There were a few numbers short of an answer." On a goldfish dying: "They went back to hang out with Nemo." On snoring: "You are really a dynamic sleeper!" On slow drivers: "They really appreciate the scenery." On being under-weight: "He's horizontally challenged." Some of the hyperboles created were: "I was so tired my belt fell off!"; "It was so expensive I had to sell my house!"; "I was so nervous I turned into

Garfield!"; "I had so much homework a truck couldn't carry it!" Students can also use humour to learn about similes, metaphors, and imagery by creating their own.

Comedy Combats COVID-19

Essay writing draws upon a skill set that is of paramount importance for all students. Regardless of the type of essay, the student must acquire the basic principles of effective essay writing. Some of these skills include research and structuring their thoughts in an efficient, coherent, and presentable manner. Humour can be used as a persuasive tool and some of the same traditional lessons of essay writing can be applied directly to constructing a humorous piece.

In what was the most unprecedented school year imaginable due to the challenges of COVID-19, I used humour with a Grade 6 drama class to cope with the feelings and stress brought on by the pandemic. I asked the class to create a comedic monologue about the unique year they were living through. They quickly learned that the same principles of essay writing could be used to construct a persuasive piece. As a unit of 17 students, we researched every aspect of the difficulties of the prior eight months in school by creating a word list that enabled the students to mix and match ideas from two separate topics such as school and COVID-19. For example, they mixed the words "detention" and "social distance" and created the premise that, "It was the only year where getting detention was a good thing so I could properly social distance if people were getting too close." Many questions were asked to elicit their own unique perspectives on what it was like wearing a mask and being isolated from some of their peers. Once enough information was collected, we organized and prioritized ideas and jointly decided on the optimal order in which these jokes should be presented. We continued jotting down humorous thoughts and revising the sequence of jokes into the most persuasive and entertaining form. The students were able to understand both the creative and writing processes through the lens of laughter and they worked collaboratively with the shared goal in mind of delivering a humorous monologue to parents and peers, one that imaginatively and insightfully conveyed their unique perspective on what was a trying year. The following are a few jokes from the monologue:

But we deserve to have a voice too! We're the students, a.k.a. the original guinea pigs, sending us to school not knowing what would happen. And the Quebec government knew it too, because they kept saying everything was being done "Par PrecauTION," but if you listened carefully, through their masks, I think they were actually saying "Par pre-CoCHON": the pigs will try it first! We're on to you! Speaking of "Pre-Cochon," we actually had to quarantine for the past 2 weeks, and it wasn't easy. Sure, online learning had its perks: the commute was great, travelling from my bed to the desk was phenomenal, switching metro lines in the bathroom. But trying to learn while your mom goes full Billie Eilish in the kitchen isn't conducive to anything good. Ocean Eyes Mom? You're giving me Glacial Ears!

I mean, look, we don't want to come off like we really hated every day, but it was tough. We lost out on a lot of things. Like many adults, we sacrificed a lot of stuff too. Ok, fine, the curfew didn't really affect us. We're 12 years old, it's pretty much been like 8 pm our whole lives. But we actually missed out on a lot of fun stuff: going to Cepsom, our 2 camping trips, even regular gym class. Nothing felt lamer than a round of social distance tag. It was so bad my shadow wasn't even following me.

But many adults got some compensation, like the Canada Recovery Benefit, the CRB. Well, enough is enough, let's cut to the cake. We want to get our own CRB, the Child Reward Benefit! We're not crazy here. Don't think we're buzzed from all the Lysol fumes. We deserve compensation! A little retribution here, SVP!

First off, we want 2 Halloweens a year to make up for last year's disaster. Not only did people not approach us but they literally just hurled candy at our faces from their porches. I got a Tootsie Roll lodged in my Avengers' mask. Now I can't see and then felt defeated by Taffy.

We just want to go back to where there are more people in the music room than in the nurse's office. We were just going to have an infirmary choir this year with Nurse Tremblay conducting us with a swab.

Even though, for safety reasons, we were unable to present our comedy set in front of a live audience, every member of the class had the opportunity to get valuable practice reading in front of their peers; they all learned which words needed special emphasis and what voice tone and range would be most effective for their individual parts. This kind of practice can be very meaningful as they prepare for oral presentations in high school. It was also explained that many business presentations and speeches usually start with a simple joke or have humour sprinkled in to help keep the listeners engaged.

Universal Language

When international students come to Canada for the first time and spend the year in a completely new learning environment, it can be both intimidating and stressful. In a Grade 9 English as a Second Language (ESL) class, I explained to students from Japan and China that a platform like stand-up comedy can be an effective way to help them share and express their unique perspective of being in a new environment. Using humour in this circumstance would help them create a sense of comfort and provide their peers with a better understanding of living in a new culture. The group of students made contributions by recounting some of their own personal experiences and challenges of being in a new country and school. They began to compile and organize their findings, and together they learned which information would go in the most optimal places: Will this idea be better as an opening or in the middle? As a set-up, or towards the end? The students then generated drafts of their work and, although the monologue was never formally presented, we agreed that this work was both important and an informative piece of writing that would evoke empathy and help build a greater connection between the international speaker and their listeners. The following are some notes taken about challenges and cultural differences:

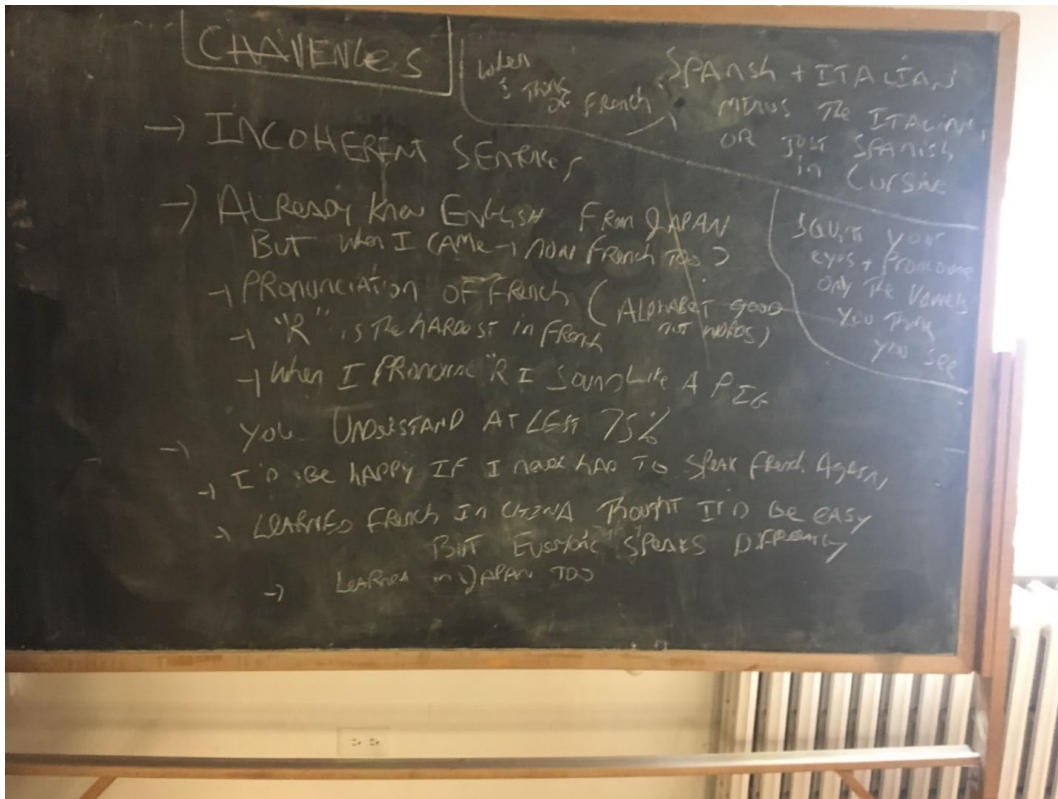


Fig. 1: Notes taken describing the challenges of international students both inside and outside of their new classroom environment.

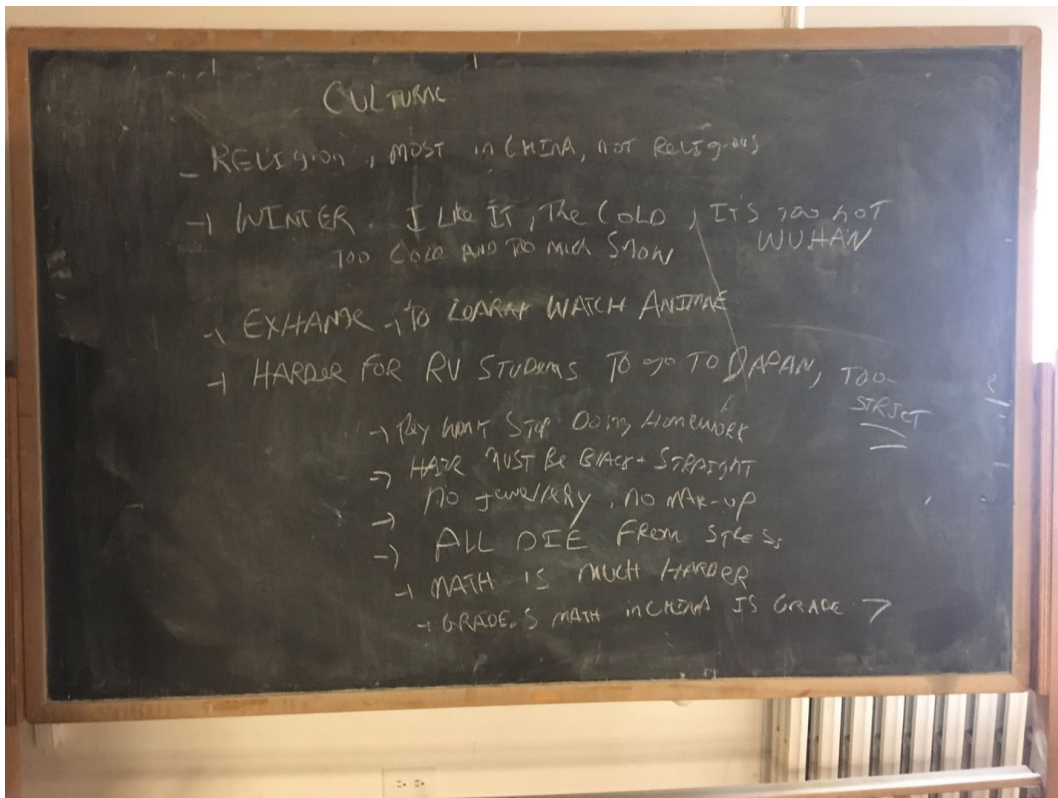


Fig. 2: Notes taken displaying some of the cultural differences shared by the international students.

They came away from this exercise learning that comedy is a language that can produce feelings of connection and compassion. The sharing of laughter helps to express an understanding and invites the listener to think more openly and critically about a specific subject. This sentiment can also be realized effectively in a social studies classroom.

(En)Lightening Social Studies

Stand-up comedy clips can be used not only to inform, but also to engage the viewer and to inspire group discussion regarding topics such as political and economic issues, environmental concerns, conflicts regarding immigration, gun control, and social sensitivity issues.

Thought-provoking comedians like Steven Colbert, John Oliver, and Trevor Noah, provide nightly monologues on contemporary issues and current events that can serve to introduce students to a subject with easy-to-digest facts and that can break the ice on what might be delicate social topics. Once the students have watched a monologue or a stand-up clip on a particular subject, momentum has been built not only to engage attention, but also to launch an exploration of the issue through both individual and group reflection. Through the provision of pertinent facts and the raising of a series of questions, students can begin investigating and shaping their own personal views on a specific issue. One fun activity revolving around comedy and learning, is to assign comedic premises based on a specific subject and ask a group of students to research and generate an original, less conventional viewpoint. A lot of premises in stand-up comedy routines are built on innovative thinking, allowing the individual to think critically and construct viewpoints that typically might be overlooked or insufficiently considered but that shed light from a different vantage point.

In a Grade 7 ethics class, students explored the environmental issue of climate change. Students gained interesting perspectives through the voices of different comedians. I then provided facts and statistics to help the students understand the importance of recognizing climate change and we discussed how community efforts can help to prioritize this issue and to appreciate the foreseeable consequences if efforts to mitigate aren't made. Students were then split up into groups of three or four and were given a premise to defend in a debate using the stats and facts provided. The following were some of the premises: "Climate change doesn't really exist."; "Global warming is a good thing."; "There are three bigger environmental issues than climate change."; "Humans aren't affecting the rise in temperatures."; "Corporations should not be held accountable for global emissions."

Over a series of three classes, students compiled information derived from research to help support these less than conventional viewpoints. In the development of their arguments, they had to cite a minimum of five facts as evidence in favour of their claims. The groups each presented their unorthodox stances, which both elicited laughter and conveyed to their audience unique and informed perspectives.

We then began a role-playing, improvisational exercise called, "World Court," in which an environmentally irresponsible individual or corporation was put on trial for allegedly having criminally harmed the planet. Members of the class rotated between the roles of judge, prosecutor, defense lawyer, and defendant, and a trial was then acted out. Using facts to build their case, the prosecution

and the defense attempted to persuade the judge to rule in their favour. Examples of charges brought included: polluting water and air, endangering wildlife, and the mishandling of contaminants and toxic waste. By taking on the more challenging role of the defence attorney, students had to get more creative with their case and, in turn, experienced a more light-hearted and humorous quality to the game without compromising the process of learning about the importance of working toward an environmentally responsible society.

An alternative approach that can be used in social studies may be built around thought-provoking texts written by comedians. For example, this joke from George Carlin may be fruitfully used to help students create meaningful conversations about the importance of critical thinking: “I do this real moron thing, and it's called thinking. And apparently, I'm not a very good American because I like to form my own opinions” (Carlin, 1992).

Another example from George Carlin, this one constituting an extended set of comments regarding the environment, demonstrates how the platform of stand-up comedy can be used to provide unconventional interpretations in a healthy and open-minded forum:

The planet has been through a lot worse than us. Been through earthquakes, volcanoes, plate tectonics, continental drift, solar flares, sunspots, magnetic storms, the magnetic reversal of the poles ... hundreds of thousands of years of bombardment by comets and asteroids and meteors, worldwide floods, tidal waves, worldwide fires, erosion, cosmic rays, recurring ice ages ... And we think some plastic bags and some aluminum cans are going to make a difference? The planet isn't going anywhere. WE are... The planet will be here for a long, long, LONG time after we're gone, and it will heal itself, it will cleanse itself, 'cause that's what it does. It's a self-correcting system. The air and the water will recover, the earth will be renewed. And if it's true that plastic is not degradable, well, the planet will simply incorporate plastic into a new paradigm: the earth plus plastic. The earth doesn't share our prejudice toward plastic. Plastic came out of the earth. The earth probably sees plastic as just another one of its children. Could be the only reason the earth allowed us to be spawned from it in the first place. It wanted plastic for itself. Didn't know how to make it. Needed us. Could be the answer to our age-old egocentric philosophical question, “Why are we here?” (Carlin, 2007)

This set of remarks by Carlin communicates to his readers the view that comedy is a legitimate and valuable medium through which personal or social issues and diverse, thought-provoking perspectives may be addressed and expressed, so long as this is done reasonably and responsibly. Considering these passages in class conveys the fact that humour has a constructive place in the classroom, in the learning process, and in the promotion of original thinking.

The Lessons and Impact of Stand-Up

I have outlined above various ways in which different forms of comedy can positively contribute both to the academic curriculum and to fostering and enriching the spirit of the learning environment. Stand-up comedy also can be used as its own long-term creative writing project to help students explore self and society, and to learn how to organize their thoughts and use humour to hone their presentation skills. I have now completed several semester-long projects in after-school programs and have reviewed and compared student writing samples taken from the beginning and end of the term. A trend I observed was

that the insights gained from these exercises led the students to produce stronger written pieces. As well, I observed students becoming more confident speakers and they were notably more comfortable in this role by the end of the course.

One of the first steps in this writing process is to help students consciously discover and reflect upon their own sense of humour and then to sharpen and extend it through a variety of individual and group exercises. It is essential for students to feel empowered early on, and these exercises go a long way toward demonstrating that they all have original thoughts and stories they can draw from as valuable resources and material.

In order to inspire students in this vein, I showed the class a variety of themed stand-up comedy sets (identity, family, story, culture, honesty, etc.). This represented an opportunity to begin to learn how comedians frame topics from unique and original perspectives and, specifically, how they bring into play a creative combination of analytical thinking and humour to build relatability and promote a shared, positive experience. I posed questions regarding each theme, and students were given time to reflect on these. Over the course of a few weeks, the students compiled multiple writing samples of material to draw from. To further develop their ideas, they were encouraged to keep a journal and to write down any interesting thoughts whenever inspiration struck. They also partook in various writing exercises such as stream of consciousness writing, producing stories with challenging word limits and having to use particular words in their sample. As they organized and developed all their favourite ideas, they slowly began to recognize their own voice and point of view. In the spirit of fostering collaborative work, group discussions formed surrounding the given themes and a “writer’s room” was created to help individuals looking for constructive feedback or a different spin on a subject.

As the creative process unfolded, students learned to organize their combined thoughts into a presentable body of work, which culminated in a final showcase in front of their peers. They each performed a short three-to-four-minute set, in which they shared their thoughts culled from all of the themes. Their presentations appeared to help strengthen their convictions, elicit empathy, and deeper understanding of others, and created greater comfort in the learning environment. They seemed to also emerge from the performance feeling more connected to their classmates and more confident in their own skin. In addition, they learned that even though the project ended with a performance, the material can always evolve further and be adapted in new ways with time.

Teachers also benefitted by connecting with and learning more about their students through their body of work, which could help establish a stronger rapport with their students and, in turn, facilitate the learning process. When students feel more comfortable and familiar with their teacher and peers, it follows that they will be more receptive to learning and more focused on the task at hand.

Adding Wellness

A significant emphasis has recently been placed on the notion of well-being in the learning environment. This theme has been prevalent at many education conferences, both here and abroad. These include the Positive Education Conference in June of 2019 at Ridley College in Ottawa; the Leadership Committee

for English Education in Quebec (LCEEQ) 2019 “Well-being – being well” conference in Quebec; the Canadian Educators Conference on Mental Health in Toronto, and the Optimus Education Mental Health and Wellbeing in Schools 2021 conventions in London and Manchester.

A conscious effort to incorporate humour both as an element of teaching style and as a daily classroom resource, would improve the spirit and morale for everyone involved. More specifically, using comedy as the vehicle to help pinpoint certain mental health and wellness issues is a great way to help discover and treat these issues, as humour contributes to building a sense of comfort and connection with others.

I have had the good fortune of conducting both teacher and student wellness workshops and the same methods are used for both. Despite everyone’s differences and unique backgrounds, laughter is a universal language they all share. In joining a group of middle school students for a student wellness workshop, I used the medium of stand-up to encourage those who are normally shy and introverted. Using the theme of identity, students began by watching specific clips of comedians talking about what makes them anxious and fearful, their pet peeves and personality quirks, as well as self-esteem and self-image issues. The participants then took some notes on how some of these subjects pertained to their own lives. This enables them to discover that, just like the comedians, they too have unique traits and thoughts that can be framed in positive ways and presented in a manner that would strike a chord with others. Students then participated in a two-minute stream of consciousness writing exercise in which they had to keep their pencil on the paper the entire time. This helped them identify recurring thoughts, allowed them to tap into their creative spirit, and highlighted some issues that might be elaborated at an abstract level and that might be shared with others.

Using their two writing samples, a comedy trick was then taught about how to weave some of their non-linear ideas together in a way that helps create an element of surprise and conveys the comedy law of incongruity. Once the students organized some of their thoughts, they were invited as individuals or in tandem, to share some of their findings in front of an applauding and supportive group of their peers. Using comedy as the platform, students felt more encouraged to share something personal about themselves and, by the end, students were able to step out of their comfort zones and had partaken in a group bonding experience. This allowed them to come to know more about their peers and created a greater sense of comradery, enabling them to feel more comfortable in their own skin and in their learning environment.

Collaborative and Independent Potential

For many decades, drama has been a staple of the traditional arts education curriculum. Based on one of the drama competencies for secondary level curriculum, students are taught to appreciate various dramatic works by interconnecting the dramaturgy, its connection to the world and how that relationship intersects with the individual’s own personal connection (Learn Quebec, 2011). This has traditionally been done through the reading and analyzing of theatrical plays.

Every year, drama students spend a significant amount of class time preparing themselves for a live theater production by learning a variety of acting techniques, mastering and rehearsing lines, as well as

developing sets and costumes. Students also spend a significant amount of time on performance technique through a variety of improvisation games, which also help them think quickly on their feet and develop on-stage rapport. By the end of the program, the participants emerge with a greater understanding of the importance and role of theatre in everyday life as well as having developed a wider range of interpersonal skills, such as learning to collaborate with others and managing relationships.

Naturally, comedy and drama are elements that are often interwoven; yet, each has its own independent lessons and value. In a Grade 10 drama class, I showed students some of the specific elements of comedy that they can apply to their own acting performances, both scripted and non-scripted. Watching stand-up comedians, students learned how to establish their persona and attitude on stage through both nonverbal communication and tone of voice. Students were then shown examples of comedians with different emotional sensibilities and different techniques used to distinguish themselves and their voice. They also learned through stand-up comedy the effect that pausing and using silence can have on the command and delivery of their performance. They practiced these techniques by reading their lines and through basic improvisation scenes. In addition, they learned the importance of having a wide vocal range to enhance the comedic aspect and how all these elements combine to strengthen the connection with their audiences.

The drama students also learn how to improve the pronunciation of their scripted lines by reading a series of jokes. Through a collection of one-liners and short jokes, students are able to identify which words need to be stressed more and determine the tone of voice needed for a particular joke. Some of the students shared their take-aways via email:

It did change the way I saw comedy in a sense. I found out how much more relatable comedy can be when performing in front of an audience or to anyone in general. People use their own life experiences as a way to connect with another person's life and in turn, find a path into their mind. By doing this it's not just making them laugh when a joke is told, it is actually making them happy inside and out.

Well, in fact, we did learn that it would be best to distribute the roles in our scene according to our personalities to reflect the comedic aspect of truth.

The one element that he brought to light that I had not fully understood the importance of, was the rule that silence is golden. This rule showed me the importance of taking much-needed pauses between our dialogue.

While the lessons of comedy can certainly be integrated into the drama curriculum, comedy should also be considered as having its own independent, stand-alone value as its own course. As opposed to a drama class in which students learn to interpret both character and dialogue in the works of others, in comedy class they would have the opportunity to spend a semester creating their own monologues through their unique lenses and accumulated life experiences. The idea of spending one semester preparing and performing a play and then another semester crafting a personal act is where the true promise and potential lies. One possible misconception of a comedy class is that it would heavily revolve around joke writing and joke telling. I spent one semester in a comedy program for adults at Humber College in Toronto and, to my surprise, the vast majority of people enrolled were individuals 40 years of

age and older who were working professionals and wanted to learn how to improve their speech-writing and presentation skills. They sought to learn how to use humour effectively in their business presentations and in the development of their communication skills. It has been noted that humour is something that can be learned and cultivated (Gavin, 2015). As we age, it is important to exercise that “humour muscle,” which contributes to shaping us as more well-rounded individuals in regard to social communication.

A variety of options can be covered in a semester-long course. There is always the three-month exploration project of the self where the individual can properly reflect upon and shape their own self-discoveries through the lens of their own comedy monologue. As well, jokes can be analyzed and interpreted to help shape the understanding of contemporary and historical events. Students’ critical thinking abilities can be inspired from a full transcript of a thought-provoking comedy act. Personal and social issues can be introduced and discussed through reflection upon a comedian’s social commentary. And finally, various writing exercises help students sharpen their creativity and the practice of sharing their ideas and go a long way to enhancing their public speaking skills which, in turn, will help them in future personal and professional situations.

The time is ripe to integrate a regular comedy course into the arts education curriculum. The medium of stand-up comedy is more prevalent today than it has ever been through widely accessible streaming platforms like Netflix and Crave. This is an age when people with various backgrounds should be given the opportunity to be heard through a craft as self-expressive as comedy. It is also critical that students be encouraged to learn how to listen to and empathize with others and to recognize how humour might be used as a healthy way of digesting and communicating important messages. Students are more educated about the world outside of their classroom and, as we all take in more information at faster and faster rates, it is more important than ever to connect with others and to learn how to parse through everything that comes to our attention. As I have documented in this paper, humour can provide benefits both in the classroom and more broadly in terms of students’ mental health and wellness. Humour has the potential to help us absorb and process information in a way that no other medium can. People of all ages are drawn to laughter. Comedy elicits forms of appreciation and enjoyment that can be creatively utilized in educational settings for the benefit of healthy, growing minds craving to learn more about the world in which they live.

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Jeffrey M. Schouela is a professional comedian and educator who resides in Montreal, Quebec. His unique school-based comedy program has grown out of the conviction that the use of humour in the classroom setting can enhance student engagement, strengthen relationships with teachers and fellow students, and contribute to learning and personal development. The program Jeffrey has been developing over the last several years has aimed to integrate the medium of comedy into the academic curriculum at both the primary and secondary levels, and a growing number of schools have shown great interest in exploring this creative approach to the educational process.

Carto-Elicitation: Improvised Performances/Narratives of Identity, Memory, and Sites of Fascination

Terry G. Sefton and Kathryn Ricketts

Abstract

This paper describes the pedagogical roots of the work we do, both as teachers and as performers; and how our work reaches beyond the classroom and into community, eliciting narratives and weaving them through improvised dance and music collaborations, eventually onto the walls of an art museum. Our concept was to solicit stories that told of some event that happened in a particular place, and that left a memory that was tethered to that place. We collected stories, pooled our own stories, “pinned” stories to their geographic locations, and then transformed these stories through improvised movement and sound.

Background

We met by chance in an art gallery at University of Regina. Kathryn was installing a show of her work, *The Anthropology of the Discard*, and Terry was visiting the university to do research in the archives. The seeds of this chance meeting grew in multiple directions, culminating in the work we created for the Windsor-Essex Triennial in 2017. We are both academics in the field of education, and performers in our separate disciplines of music and dance. The work we first explored together often included our students and colleagues, as we workshopped collaborative improvisation and storytelling in our university classrooms and performance spaces. The connections between creation, performance, research, and pedagogy, were intentionally intertwined (Carroll, 2006; Eisner, 2002). This paper will describe the pedagogical roots of the work we do, both as teachers and as performers; and how our work reached beyond the classroom and into community, eliciting narratives and weaving them through improvised dance and music collaborations, and onto the walls of an art museum.

In performance work, the performer brings a reflective practice that must be understood as both analogous to, and distinct from, other forms of evidence and text-based research. The creative work is a simultaneous experiential practice that requires preparatory research and knowledge acquisition, and is realized through performance praxis (e.g., practice and rehearsal that integrates and applies the preparatory knowledge to develop an interpretation through iteration, through ongoing formative analysis, and self-critique); and the performance event, when all of the foregoing research, preparation, and interpretation are presented in a public venue which is a fluid research moment during which the performer is actively creating, responding, adapting, and communicating. The performer/researcher can be described as a “mindful practitioner” engaged in “critical reflective investigative praxis which could include practicing theory, practice into theory, practical theory, theory into practice, theorizing practice, theoretical practice” (Stewart, 2006, p. 2). Practice, in this usage, is a living enactment of theoretical

knowledge and lived experience; and dissemination is a simultaneous process with the audience as a necessary coproducer (Woodruff, 2008). The performance can be seen as a laboratory (Wright, 2008), but one which takes place in the public eye (and ear) in real time. Performance produces a theory of possibility where “imaginative insight is constructed from a creative and critical practice” (Sullivan, 2006, p. 20). For the musician or dancer, it is also an act of identity, a constituting performance of self as artist (Smith, 2001). The work we do as musician or dancer is a performance of identity; and an extension of inquiry and knowledge production (Sefton & Bayley, 2012).

Kathryn is a dancer and has developed a body of work using a method that she describes as Embodied Poetic Narrative—embodied performative play with objects and narratives. Her dance/theatre improvisations are often in collaboration with other artists. Terry is a cellist and has often collaborated with composers, artists, and other musicians on new creations. As we first got to know each other, and found common ground in our previous performance practices, it seemed natural to meet in the studio, and to use dance and music to further our conversation. Over the following 18 months, we met and worked together in both Regina and Windsor, ran workshops and open studios with our university students and with other musician and dance collaborators, and gave public performances of our improvisations. One outcome of our collaboration is a process that we have named “carto elicitation”—mapping sites of fascination and memory and recovering stories that have been discarded or forgotten. We transform stories through improvised movement and sound.

Carto-Elicitation: Performance Pedagogy in the Classroom

In our earliest iteration of this process, we worked with Kathryn’s dance students in the Faculty of Education, and dancers from her studio dance classes. We had students draw pictures of “home”—representing however they wished the site of memory that they identified as home (Figure 1). Then Kathryn and Terry would improvise through music and through dance, using the image as a springboard to create a new narrative. This form of artistic transformation is called transmediation, which Darwin (2020) describes as “the process of adapting an existing text into another medium. This distinction is particularly relevant as it highlights the conventions, affordances and constraints of different media, and the diverse logics that govern each of them” (p. 6). The shift from one system of signs and signification to another is important, as “transmediation is a critical act in its resistance to the structure and conventions of an original text, and a creative act in its reimagination of it” (Darvin, 2020, p. 7). Telling a story with words, or by drawing a picture, or by creating a danced improvisation, all work with their own tropes, their own “diverse logics;” so the result is not a translation, nor an illustration, but dwells in difference.

The idea of home may elicit traumatic memory as easily as nostalgic longing. It may be complicated by historic displacement, colonialization, periods of mass internment, or cultural erasure. Artists have used many different disciplines to explore issues of identity and place through (re)storying and (re)presenting (Chin et al., 2021; Hill, 2015). As Chin (2021) observes, narrative transformed through art “performs a different form of remembering. Attending to these different approaches to history is not simply an

academic exercise. The different ways that pasts are produced have consequences for how belonging, citizenship, identity, and community are constructed” (p. 269).

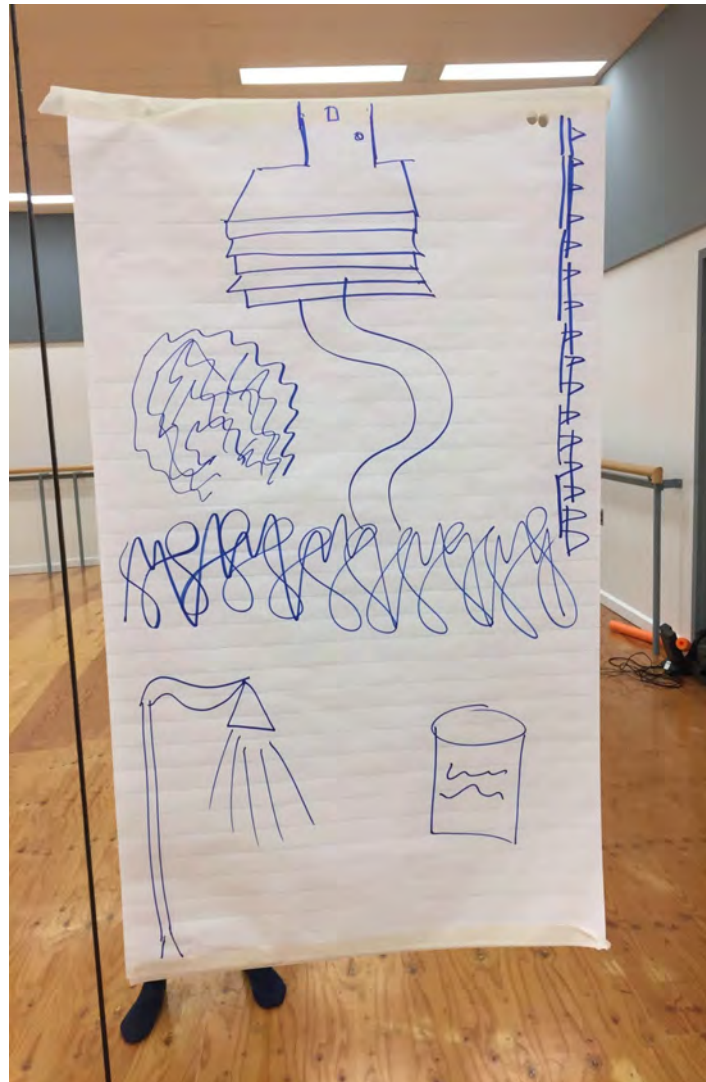


Fig. 1 Drawing of “Home.” University of Regina. Photo credit: Kathryn Ricketts.

The students volunteered to improvise dance, based on their story, or on someone else’s story of “home,” in conjunction with Terry’s improvisations. At the end of class, we gathered to view the drawings, laid out on the floor like memory maps. Sometimes the person who created the drawing would tell a story—the story behind the drawing. Which would be another transformation of the narrative, a different manifestation of memory, tethered to place.

The stories were fragmented and re-constructed through sound and movement, thereby losing some of the specificity and moving into a poetic space where new meaning could be read in the spaces between the words. The narratives travelled in and through movement and theatre vignettes, reshaped and reconstituted through music, creating new meanings by their reenactments (Figure 2). The author of the text no longer owned the story as it created another layer for someone else’s movement phrase.¹ This kind

of surrendering of authorship begins to cultivate a new ecology or culture in the collaborative team, which becomes the mechanics of making a community. Rather than erasure of self and of personal stories, it becomes an accumulation and layering of others within one's own personal framework. There is a sense of a collective generating of creative impulses and a collective sharing and crafting of shared storying.



Fig. 2 Dance improv of a story of "home." University of Regina.

Shapiro (2008) describes the memory inscribed in the body as a kind of surrender. These memories are recognized as tethered to larger socio-political constructs and are revealed collectively, and in this process, Shapiro, with her students, cultivates a shared language. This language speaks beyond them, as the memories and stories resonate commonalities within the human condition. This moves the meaning beyond the specificity of preconceived frameworks of understandings and dialects that may be cultivated within the intensity of a particular collected group. Shapiro (2008) situates this community-building work in a larger context, “To move into global aesthetics means to transcend the art itself and connect the meaning-making process to self and world” (p. 269). In this process, the students learn to use dance as a creative and vital tool for articulating visions of self and other.

Carto-Elicitation: Performance Art in the Gallery

When we saw the Art Gallery of Windsor call for submissions for the 2017 Triennial, with its theme of “Downtown—downtown destruction and downtown renewal,” it immediately spoke to us. Kathryn had visited Windsor in spring of 2016 to work with Terry’s students at the university, and as Terry took her on a tour of the city, Kathryn would hang out the car window with her phone, snapping photographs. What was it that drew her to a particular image? What was it that compelled us to stop the car and peer through the dusty windows of a long-shuttered store? We began to think of these sites, and the way they drew us in, as “sites of fascination.” Terry had moved to Windsor 12 years previously and told Kathryn her stories of Windsor and of the people and places she had come to know. Behind every site of fascination, we began to imagine how we could bring these stories into a shape that could find a voice and a space in the art gallery.

Our idea was to collect stories, “pin” stories to their geographic locations, and then transform these stories through improvised movement and sound. We submitted our work—more of a concept than a “work” at that point, as we had not fully developed how the work would take shape or be “shown” in a gallery venue over several months—to the Windsor Triennial of Contemporary Art 2017. This is a peer-refereed group exhibition in a public art museum. Proposals are refereed by a panel of professional artists. Once our proposal was accepted (Sefton & Ricketts, 2018b), we began “collecting”—soliciting stories that told of some event that happened in a particular location in Windsor, and that left a memory that was tethered to that place. We asked colleagues, students, and strangers to contribute stories. We printed postcard invitations (Figure 3), put out requests on social media, and put out a general call to the public when we were interviewed on CBC radio.



Fig 3. Postcard front: distributed to solicit stories from the public. Photo credit: Kathryn Ricketts.

We continued to develop new stories during the three months of the exhibition, and to upload these to the installation, keeping the dynamic of cumulative storying open-ended. By the time the exhibition closed, we had created, performed, video recorded, and uploaded 20 stories to the gallery installation. Some of the stories were as brief as a few sentences on the back of a postcard; others were pages long; one was submitted in Arabic, which we had to have translated. What they all had in common was a sense of located-ness—this event, this memory, happened here—in a place that we could “pin” on a map of the city.

Each story went through two transformations. We read the story in its entirety and then we extracted key phrases or images. We did this work separately, to keep from imposing or presupposing a particular reading on each other.

Simon’s Story: Campbell Street [extract]:

Windsor is strange for me. I am a male international student to do a master program at University of Windsor. I was picked up at the Windsor airport by the landlord who contracted with me for a year, living in Campbell Street. When he drove me on the high express way, I was homesick. Everything was uncertain. The landlord ushered me into my room with my two heavy travel cases. It was 1:00 am and dark outside. Due to the time difference, I was energetic; so, I decided to chat with my parents till morning. I was so hungry but I did not have any food with me. I came downstairs to find something eatable. There were some cold and hard pizza on the table. I took one slice. It was so quiet outside. What was going on? I was afraid to go outside. I spent my whole in the house without no one talking to me. That day was my birthday, July 1. I ate some

cold pizza to celebrate my birthday. My friends and parents all fell asleep. I just came upstairs and downstairs for several times. I realized that I could not do like this anymore because it consumed my energy. The pizzas were almost eaten up by me. I will soon starve. What flashed in my mind was the easiest way to keep energy: sleep. So, I was waked by the sound of the fireworks. I saw what happened through the window. Were those fireworks celebrating my birthday? I smiled bitterly. Gradually, all pizzas were gone. I did not want to go outside because I was afraid of speaking English and getting lost in the street. When my roommates came into the house, I almost “starve”. They explained to me why there was few people and quiet that day: July 1 is Canada day, which is also my birthday. What a coincident!

We distilled the original story into poetic form, which we then transferred to slides (Figure 4):

***I was picked up at the Windsor airport by the landlord
The landlord ushered me into my room with my two heavy travel cases.
It was 1:00 am and dark outside
I was so hungry but I did not have any food with me.
I came downstairs to find something eatable
There were some cold and hard pizza on the table
I took one slice.
It was so quiet outside. What was going on?
I was afraid to go outside
That day was my birthday, July 1.
Sleep.
I was waked by the sound of the fireworks
I saw what happened through the window
Were those fireworks celebrating my birthday?
I smiled bitterly
Gradually, all pizzas were gone.***

We recorded our performances in the television studio at University of Windsor (Figure 5). Each improvisation was based on, or inspired by, the narrative we had extracted from a story. Terry improvised on cello and Kathryn improvised dance. We set a framework of two to three minutes for each improv. This was a pragmatic decision, to keep the accumulated length of multiple stories from becoming overwhelming; and to recognize the finite attention span of the spectator in a gallery setting. The performances were video recorded by a university video technician. We then edited the video and developed a parallel show of slides which showed the edited story text, the location on a map, and photographs of the area in Windsor. In the gallery, two screens were installed side by side, one projecting our improvised performances, the other projecting the slides of text and images. We intentionally did not “sync” them (i.e., keep the timing so the text on one screen would be simultaneous with the video performance on the other). We did not want the viewer to see the text as “illustrated” by the performance; rather, we wanted the performances and the texts to exist and “breathe” on their own. The occasional accidental syncing of performance and text created chance moments of surprise—of “aha.”

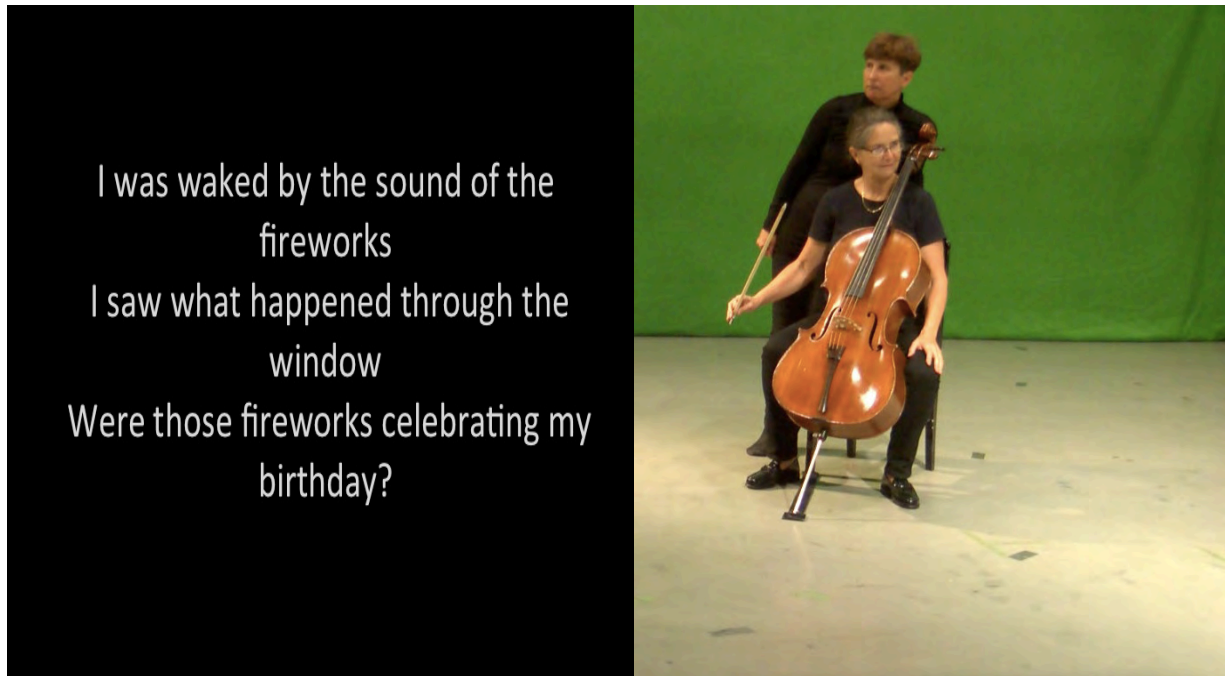


Fig. 4: Slide from Windsor Story: Campbell Street.

Fig. 5: Recording studio: Video still.

Collaborative work begins, proceeds, and creates, through a process that is distinctly different than sole authorship. Negotiation and navigation between the inner imaginary of each collaborator is a constant. In our current work, *Stories of Windsor*, we included an additional “unknown” collaborator—stories that were contributed by others. We began the process by each telling our own story, a story that was in some way rooted in place, in an actual site in Windsor. We then reached out, through friends and colleagues and social media, to invite stories from the public. This method introduces a random and unpredictable element, which prompts the next stages of response, translation, and improvisation.

Performance has duration. Live performance is a different creature than a video recording of a performance. Our work uses both of these modalities. The art object is the installation of video screens and projections, and the archived and looped recordings of video, images, and texts. While the videos have duration as a material aspect of the medium, the spectator controls the length of their own engagement with the art object. During live performance, duration is an essential element of the creative act, and is eventually determined by the interplay of each of us as we execute our art practice, as we performatively structure the narrative, and as each of us arrives at a sense of when the story is “done.”

What is “place” in the context of this project? Is it a site in the body? or the space mapped out by the dancer in motion? or the acoustical space filled by the sound of a musical instrument? or the built environment of the city, or of a room in a house? or the place of memory—once a physical location but now possibly only remaining as a trace in the mind? We began our research for this project by driving through the streets of Windsor, taking photographs of old signs, wrought-iron fences, dusty bottles in store windows, factory smokestacks. Objects are like fascia between the land we occupy and the meaning we infuse it with. There is a relationship between the object and the body, where history is both remembered and constructed.

The “real” world” in which we find ourselves, then—the very world our sciences strive to fathom—is not a sheer “object” from which all subjects and subjective qualities could be pared away, but is rather an intertwined matrix of sensation and perception. (Abram, 2012)

Carto-elicitation directly connects personal narrative to place. It burrows into eidetic memory—the smell, the feel, the taste of some moment in the past—to elicit a vivid image imbued with sensory and emotional meaning. We map the stories, knowing that these stories will provoke more stories, and it is this shared tracing of interconnected lives, both local and beyond, that continues throughout the living installation of this exhibition. In a small way, it is an attempt to recover some of what has been lost: “Post modern life is characterized by the erasure of history and the loss of social memory” (Deutsche, 1991, p. 201).

Kathryn: As a dancer when trying to remember a piece of choreography, I often go back to the exact place and orientation in the studio to help provoke the memory. With this project, I am fascinated by how the location is what holds the memory and there is an act of generosity and sometimes reticence, as our storytellers excavate through place to the narrative. To continue the metaphor, I feel that both Terry and I are like archaeologists brushing the soil away from the shards of memory and carefully cataloguing them but not without our own choice making in preserving what is essential to our re-imaginings of the story.

In our trans-mediation of the story from text to sound and movement, we filter the story through our own lived experiences and this fusion of both private and combined choices complexifies this process. The next layer is those who witness these performances then hold another iteration in their ‘read’ of the performance and this will often act as a catalyst for another story and so the cycle continues. The stories I work with are not necessarily and often not manifesting linguistic/vocal but rather kinaesthetic/performative. I believe that within the body we store information that is meant to be resuscitated not necessarily or exclusively through spoken or written language.

Terry: The question people most often ask about improvisation is, “how you do it?” The mechanics of improvisation are not easily explained. The intersection of text/story and music/dance performance are not two realizations of the same idea. We never talk about what we are going to do before we do it. First, we each read through the story, as we have distilled it. Then we enter the studio space which contains only a chair for me to sit on, and a “green screen” behind us. Sometimes I make the first “gesture”—a sound or a note on my cello, plucked or bowed, scraped or hit. Sometimes Kathryn begins, and her movement becomes the first “utterance” that I respond to. Improvising with another person is a conversation, but we are conversing in different languages. I always hold the story in my mind, like a tableau, or a series of tableaux. So, although part of what I do is influenced by or in response to Kathryn, I also am allowing the story to manifest itself through the sounds I am creating, and the gestures used to create the sounds.

Sometimes we do two “takes” if we feel that we haven’t quite captured it the first time—whatever “it” is—but without discussing it. This is an almost entirely nonverbal process.

The gallery location allotted to our installation turned out to be a significant factor; indeed, it became its own “site of fascination,” a space that inflected our creative work as it was in process, shaped the look and impact of the installed artwork, and inspired the performances and further narratives that took place there. We thought of it and talked about it as “our space.” From our first conversation with the curator, we had a territorial sense of how our work would inhabit a particular space. First, we were allotted a “nook,” defined by a half wall and an adjacent wall. We imagined the work in that spot, and we were

initially startled to realize that our work, based as it was on improvised movement and sound and on a sensorial and emotive response to oral history, was going to be presented as two “cool” screens. When Terry suggested projecting maps onto the floor, it began to reincarnate as three-dimensional; and when we proposed live performances, it grew a living, breathing body. After the curator offered us the entire space of an end gallery, our imagination filled that room, with darkness and with images and with performances. We each imagined it differently. When Kathryn arrived in Windsor to record our performances, and we visited the gallery and walked the space again, one of us had a vision of two screens talking to each other across the room, while the other imagined the screens side by side. We ultimately decided on two screens side by side, but not synchronized, with the historic maps projected onto the floor in a continuously changing loop. Once installed, the audio from the videos, projected from two speakers—the sound of cello and of dancer’s foot fall—spread out, lapping up against other artworks, insinuating our performances of place into the entire exhibition.

The generous exhibition space allotted to us provided enough room for third and fourth elements. The third element was made up of archival maps of Windsor. Terry visited the map archives in the Windsor Public Library, and with their help and permission, photographed multiple historic maps of Windsor, from the earliest arrival of European settlers, through its urban growth and transformation in the 20th Century. These images were then enhanced to provide exceptional resolution, so they could be projected from the gallery ceiling onto the polished cement gallery floor. The map projections rotated in random order.

The fourth element was live performance (Figure 5). For the opening of the exhibit, and again during the exhibit, we performed live(d) improvisations in the space that was lit by the two screens and by the map projection. Spectators gathered around the perimeter of the area lit by the projected maps.



Fig. 6: Windsor Stories: Public performance. Photo credit: Jaclyn Meloche, AGW Curator, 2017.

In the gallery, just off to one side of our screens, a box was located where the public could submit “postcard” stories of their lived experiences in Windsor. For each live performance, we took stories from this cache (Figure 6), read the story aloud, and then created an improvisation.

The following is one of those postcard stories, and our reflections on our improvised performance:

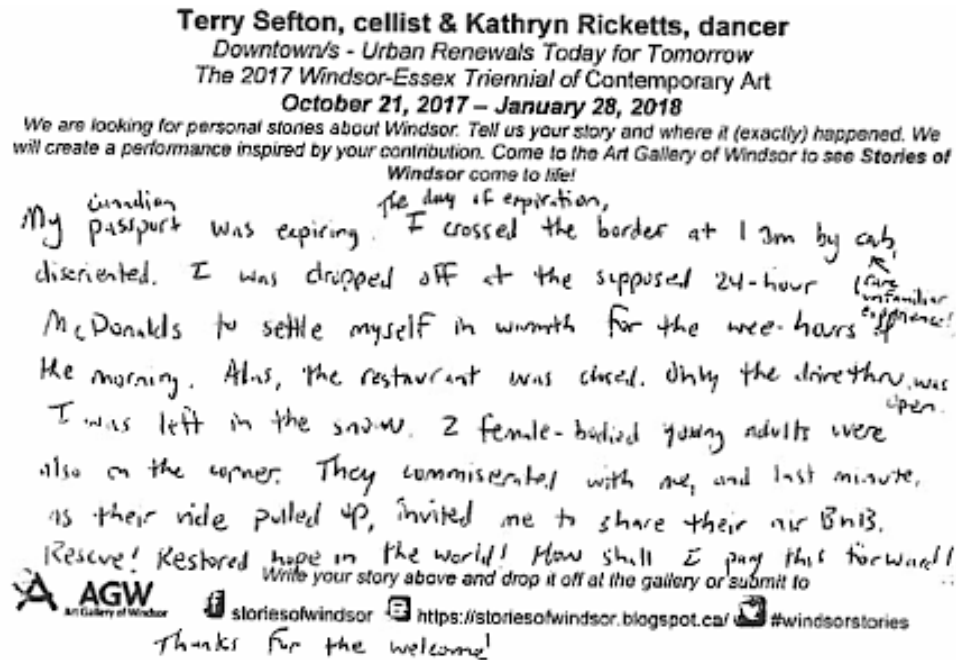


Fig. 7: Postcard verso: submitted during the gallery exhibit.

Kathryn:

I am moving with the idea of crossing the border at 3AM by Cab with an expired passport...disoriented. My movements are weighted as I cross from one threshold to another but my neck and head is spinning in my disorientation. But I start to hear Terry's music indicate the end of the story ... Rescue, restored ... I need to shift from my weighted turning to something that is light and linear to join her where she is in the story.

Terry:

We are performing in the Windsor Art Gallery in a space just 20 feet or so from the “prow” of the gallery, from windows that look over the Detroit River to the City of Detroit, the river an historic barrier to so many who sought refuge in Canada. The fragmented sound of strings plucked then silence then rapping my knuckles on the wooden belly, hitting the bridge of my cello with my bow – how precarious this passage from one side to another, and then, unexpected, the bow finds the string, smoothly draws out a sound that endures that resonates and wraps around the place we have created, as Kathryn reaches out, pulls at the last loose thread and weaves us together.

We assume the reader/spectator will take away their own interpretation. In leaving the exhibition open to new stories, by inviting the spectator to contribute their own story, we invite the unknown Other to join in the creative act:

What is it today to think or to imagine, to construct or to design, in relation not to “things made” but to “things in the making”?... To think about things in the making is... to think, and think of ourselves, “experimentally.” (Rajchman, 2000, as cited in Elsworth, 2005)

Research as performance and performance as research is a “queer” ground of inquiry, uneven and indirect, a zigzag process of connecting meaning with intent with translation with discovery with construction, and so on. This creates a zone of responsibility for the spectator. The outcome, in analytic terms, is a subtle change of atmosphere, a realignment of molecules, a being-ness that cannot be what was before, a growth of interior landscape, that finds new rooms in the dream house. At its core, at the site of its happening, is an intersection—of performer, of witness, and of space, in time.

What we tried to create together on this shifting terrain of narrative is a glimpse into the dim corners and the forgotten shops, into quiet stories of almost forgotten memories, of a place that now informs the next place. This space, and this time, was Windsor, Ontario, 2017. *Stories of...*, the performative re-imaginings of place and time, could be resituated and performed in any other place, wherever sites of fascination exist, wherever place is preserved in memory, and stories are shared. Each of the many stages of transmediation within a creative process serves as a highly individualistic approach to the subject matter. These interpretations will access or trigger personal associations which are integrated into the work, allowing for surprising material to surface. The unexpected outcomes are what we believe is the magic in this process of animating text or story, and ultimately what facilitates emotional meaning making, translated and transformed through movement and sound. Carto-elicitation and open-ended creative collaboration provided the key to taking specific linear narratives, pinned to a particular place, and moving them out into a broader terrain of possibility and interpretation.

Note

1. “The choreographic process may be divided ... into three phases: gathering together the movement material, developing movements into dance phrases, and creating the final structure of the work.” (Britannica, n.d.).

Acknowledgment

This paper is adapted from a catalogue essay published for the 2017 Windsor-Essex Triennial (Sefton & Ricketts, 2018a).

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Kathryn Ricketts has been working for the past 40 years in the field of dance, theatre and visual arts, performing and teaching throughout Europe, South America, Africa, Australia, and Canada. Her work in studios, galleries, theatres, and environmental sites focuses on social/political issues through the languages of dance, theatre, text, technology, and visual art. Her Doctoral research furthered this into areas of literacy, embodiment, and cultural studies with a method she has coined Embodied Poetic Narrative. She is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Regina and Director of the Field office.

Digital Education Research: Advantages, Disadvantages, and Video Illustrations

Peter Shaner and Robert Donmoyer

Abstract

Although anthropological methods have been appropriated by qualitative and mixed-methods educational researchers, visual anthropology has had virtually no impact on educational research. Furthermore, video, in general, despite its widespread impact on 21st century culture, has played only a limited role in the conducting of education-related studies, and almost no role in reporting study results. This paper explores what would be gained and lost if researchers began using video in the doing and, especially, in the reporting of their research. The paper uses clips from four author-developed research videos to illustrate the advantages and disadvantages associated with educational researchers “going digital.”

Background

The so-called paradigm wars (Gage, 1989) during the final decades of the 20th century helped legitimate the use of qualitative methods in educational research. Qualitative researchers often used different labels to characterize their methods—e.g., ethnography, critical ethnography, grounded-theory-oriented research, arts-based research, phenomenological inquiry—and the different labels often signaled important methodological differences. However, virtually all types of qualitative researchers had (and continue to have) at least one thing in common: They, like their quantitative colleagues, are oriented toward producing written expository text about the phenomena studied.

To be sure, some qualitative researchers have utilized less-than-traditional types of text to report qualitative data. Qualitative researchers employing Polkinghorne’s (1995) narrative analysis strategy, for example, often produce text that is more literary than expository. In addition, both within and outside of the educational research field, small groups of researchers have been inspired by the arts and have reported their research results as novels (Bandelier, 1890), drama (Goldstein, 2002), and poetry (Richardson, 1992). Video, however, has rarely been used to report research results. Furthermore, with some exceptions, video has not played a role in the educational research process, despite its widespread use in the culture beyond the ivory tower.

There is no reason, however, why the interpretivist goals of traditional qualitative researchers could not be achieved when video is used to collect and report data. Furthermore, although we, ourselves, have not yet done this, we suspect there also are no reasons critical or poststructural versions of qualitative inquiry could not use video to communicate critical- or poststructural-influenced insights from research studies.

In this paper, we will first document the limited role film and video have played in educational research. Then, the focus shifts to our efforts to use video in a decidedly different way, followed by a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of employing the different way we have described and illustrated.

Video Use in Research

Micro-Ethnographic Educational Research

Using video in the educational research field has mostly been limited to the subfield of micro-ethnography. One of micro-ethnographers' earliest uses of video was a study done in a kindergarten/first-grade classroom from 1974 through 1976. Erickson (2011) noted that this study's goal was to record "everyday classroom events as they occurred 'warts and all'" (p. 181). Erikson also noted that, during the ensuing decades, improvements in camera and recording technology led to "a burgeoning of video research" (p. 183) within the micro-ethnographic subfield of educational research (see, also, Sherin & van Es, 2005; Tochon, 2007; Green, 2007).

A key advantage of using video in micro-ethnographic work is being able to re-watch a single event many times (Derry et al., 2010). Only such repeated viewings can produce a nuanced understanding of the meaning of a given event, Engle et al. (2014) noted. Derry and his coauthors, however, also noted that one challenge in analyzing and reporting what was recorded on video is capturing "the full complexity of all verbal and nonverbal events" (p. 20) and that standard transcripts of recorded events cannot do this adequately. Consequently, these authors reported that micro-ethnographers devised ways to notate written transcripts to mark pauses during discourse, as well as nonverbal aspects of the recorded social interaction (Angelillo et al., 2007). It was these heavily notated transcripts that become the "data" to be analyzed in most micro-ethnographic studies, Derry and his coauthors tell us. They also added, "In most cases, the [actual] video records will be left behind in the reporting phase" (p. 23).

Initially, video may have had to be "left behind" when it came to reporting micro-ethnographic results because the limitations of analog technology made sharing video footage difficult. But the advent of digital video and ever-increasing bandwidth has made working with video easier and opened the door for using video footage to report findings. Indeed, in recent years, Olinger (2020) has criticized what she calls the "audio default" of using video where the primary end goal is a written transcript, and Miller-Scarnato (2019) contended that dissemination is where "the benefits of video methods are most obviously evident" (p. 390). Unfortunately, even today most educational researchers who utilize video for data collection and, in some cases, data analysis purposes, do not use video to report their results.

Video Use in Other Fields

In other fields, video is sometimes used to report the results of research studies (Bredbenner & Simon, 2019). Even in the hard sciences, video abstracts of published studies have been utilized since at least 2007 (Spicer, 2014). These abstracts communicate "the background of a study, methods used, study results and potential implications through the use of images, audio, video clips, and text" (p. 3) and are

intended to raise the visibility of research publications. A research study by Bredbenner & Simon (2019) suggested that video abstracts are more effective at communicating study results than written abstracts.

In some fields, video has been used for more than generating abstracts. Cultural anthropology, for instance, has a long history of using visual data in the form of both still photography and film to not only record what happened in non-Western cultures, but also to communicate about other cultures' rituals and events to Western audiences. Indeed, visual anthropology has long been a well-regarded subfield within the discipline (Collier, 1967). Today, the *Journal of Video Ethnography* is an online journal that publishes peer-reviewed videos from ethnographic studies "that feature video as a central methodological component and the primary form of output" (Leavy, 2015, p. 202).

At the same time, researchers in certain academic fields have begun to think of video as an integral part of doing *and reporting* research. Fitzgerald and Lowe (2020), for example, have reconceptualized documentary filmmaking "as a research process" (p. 1). Furthermore, Luttrell and Clark (2018) recently discussed how the editing technique of montage in documentaries can "create new ways of seeing and knowing" (p. 775).

Looking to the Future

Although most educational researchers have been slow to use video to do and, especially, report research, there is finally talk of the need to develop, in the learning sciences, "models for sharing video reports of research" (Derry et al., 2010, p. 24). Discussing the sharing of video research reports is one of the goals of this paper. In the next section, we provide excerpts from four studies that used video as a "central methodological component and the primary form of output" (Leavy, 2015, p. 202).

Four Digital Studies

Study #1: Turning College Students Into Leaders

Study #1 is a case study in leadership education as practiced by the Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps Program (AFROTC). AFROTC exists to teach college students who hope to become officers in the Air Force basic leadership skills. A key training component is Leadership Laboratory (LLAB), a yearlong active-learning curriculum in which all cadets (students) must participate each year. First year and sophomore cadets receive instruction and training during LLAB events from juniors and seniors. AFROTC officer-instructors (faculty) provide guidance and mentorship, but the junior and senior cadets are responsible for planning and implementing the program. The goal is to provide an environment for the students to experience (and experiment with) the many aspects of leadership, especially the affective aspects, under challenging (but supervised and at least somewhat controlled) conditions.

This study explored, via video, the emotion-laden experience of participating in the Leadership Laboratory from the student perspective and attempted to capture the students' four-year journey from novice follower through competent leader. Leadership Laboratory training events were recorded along

with pre- and post-event interviews with cadet leaders, cadet participants, and officer-instructors. Video data were collected at three higher education institutions in two states over a 15-week period; eight separate LLAB events were recorded; and 21 students and five officers were interviewed on camera. Additionally, on specified days, one student at each university was given a video camera with instructions to provide a “cadet’s-eye-view” of the LLAB event being conducted that day.

Data analysis and assembly of the interview footage was accomplished using a coding feature of the editing software. Interview clips relating to common themes and to specific LLAB events were grouped together and those groupings were further distilled to create singular narratives which condensed the common, recurring elements of each LLAB event and each leadership theme.

Assembling the footage was oriented toward achieving three specific goals:

1. To have the participants themselves provide all necessary framing to understand how the event was structured and the stated objectives of the event.
2. To capture the felt experience of participating in the event from the perspective of both the underclass cadets receiving instruction (or training) and the upper-class cadets running the event.
3. To show the leadership skills or lessons the event was designed to teach or reinforce.

A further goal was not to resort to either voiceover narration or the presence of a talking head narrator to frame or explain the events. Beyond being a response to aesthetic concerns, this commitment to letting the footage speak for itself was also consistent with the philosophy that the LLAB program was “owned” and run by the cadets themselves. Although the faculty provided necessary guidance and oversight, their objective was to allow the cadets to make all the decisions (and possible mistakes) associated with planning and conducting each specific LLAB event.

The overarching goal of the project was to provide a spectrum of the felt experiences associated with each LLAB event, from the first-time unfamiliarity of the new students, through the more experienced eyes of the upper-class cadets, to the officer cadre overseeing the program (who had once been new cadets themselves). This progression of felt experiences is a key aspect of the program. By understanding how these experiences are created and shaped, it is possible to see how similar techniques might be used to develop leadership skills in nonmilitary settings.

The following video excerpt shows the multiple perspectives associated with a LLAB event known as a group leadership problem (GLP): <https://vimeo.com/547223267>.

Study #2: Gender Integration at the United States Naval Academy

The long-term goal of the second example is to more fully understand the challenges (and successes) experienced firsthand by members of the first class of women admitted into the United States Naval Academy in 1976. To date, this study has conducted in-depth, on-camera interviews with 25% (n=14) of the women who graduated with that class. Each interview in the study lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and was conducted using a conversational approach (Patton, 2015) during which each

alumna related events and memories as they came to mind. The person conducting the interviews was a male member of the Naval Academy class of 1980 and has known many of the women interviewed since attending the academy over 40 years ago.

Analysis of the conversations revealed several common themes including isolation, sexual identity, and harassment, that went beyond the heightened pressure all first-year midshipmen were expected to endure. Another theme involved the Navy's lack of guidance about how to manage an apparent contradiction: the women were being trained as combat leaders in a service that, at the time, would not let them serve in combat.

In keeping with the digital nature of the data, analysis was done digitally using a coding feature of video-editing software. In a manner that was similar to the analysis done for the Air Force ROTC project discussed above, video clips were grouped and subsequently assembled according to themes that emerged during analysis of the interviews.

Also, like the AFROTC project, a key feature of this study is that no voices are heard other than those of the women being interviewed. Much of the truth contained in their experiences comes not only from listening to their words, but also from seeing their faces and hearing their voices. There is a raw purity in their stories when presented without comment, and the immediacy of their relived experiences demonstrates one of the benefits of presenting data in digital form without a narrator mediating the presentation. In the following video excerpt from this project, the theme of isolation is the focal point: <https://vimeo.com/514999777>.

Study #3: Gender Integration at the United States Naval Academy: Theoretical Perspectives

This follow-on study involved re-analyzing the data from the Naval Academy project described above by linking established theory to the real-world experiences of the women enrolled in the first Naval Academy class to include women. This study was conceived as a four-part video series in which three different organizational theories and three theories about organizational change related to gender integration were integrated ex post facto into the data collected.

This series was not intended to assess the validity of the theories referenced but, rather, was an attempt to make sense of the interview data by consciously employing specific theoretical lenses. The experiences of the Naval Academy alumna grounded the abstract theoretical discussions in concrete examples and added considerable nuance and variation to the theories employed. This form of analysis also adds the voice of the researcher to the project, a perspective that was intentionally withheld from the initial reporting of study results described above. The following clip shows the integration of established theory and the researcher's perspective with themes discovered in the original video interviews: <https://vimeo.com/514997206>.

Study #4: “Falling Out of the Lead”: A Video Critique

Study #4 switches gears. The first three studies were all qualitative research projects grounded in the experiences of those being studied. Study #4 is a video critique/analysis of a *quantitative* policy paper.

“Falling Out of the Lead: Following High Achievers through High School and Beyond” reports the results of a multiyear longitudinal study, begun in 2002, that followed a nationally representative sample of high-achieving students of color from low-socioeconomic-status homes through high school and into adulthood (Bomberg & Theokas, 2014). The study documented their success on key indicators associated with postsecondary readiness and, also, provided largely quantitative data about the reasons some students got “off track” on their way to and while participating in higher education.

The video critique of this policy report examined both how the report’s data were analyzed and how the results were graphically illustrated in the report. This clip demonstrates the value-added dimension video can contribute to communicating quantitative data and how video can be used to critique reports of complex quantitative data sets: <https://vimeo.com/514999214>.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Doing and Presenting Research Digitally

In this final section of the paper, the above video clips will be referenced in a discussion of some of the advantages and disadvantages of doing and reporting educational research digitally. We begin by discussing advantages.

Advantages

One obvious advantage of reporting results in video, rather than written form, is the potential such reporting strategies have for making research reports more engaging—and more accessible—for nonacademic audiences. We can imagine the second, and, possibly, also, the third video(s) discussed in the prior section being put on YouTube, and various types of people with various interests viewing the research “reports” there, even though it is not likely many of that audience would be interested in reading, or even trying to locate, a report of the same findings presented in an academic paper.

We also can imagine the “yawn factor” that would be produced by a detailed written account of the leadership labs explored in the first study discussed above. The video account, however, is likely to be interesting and engaging, even for nonacademic audiences. For example, we imagine teachers and curriculum developers, who are interested in adding an experiential component to a wide variety of programs that have nothing to do with military training, using the leadership lab video heuristically to conjure up what their experiential programs might look like and how they might be organized.

Another advantage of video is how quickly and efficiently it conveys information. It has been said a picture is worth a thousand words. If so, consider how many word equivalents are transmitted in a data stream composed of 30 pictures every second (a common frame rate for video). How many paragraphs

of description would be needed to capture the amount of detail present in a single shot of a person, location, or event?

Video also allows a researcher to present several images in sequence along with sound from interviews (as well as ambient sounds) to create an immersive experience for the viewer. Such a visceral experience can potentially lead to deeper understanding of the information presented. For example, in the second clip above, the researcher added period photographs and video from the Naval Academy to contextualize events described by the women being interviewed. Of course, images and verbal descriptions can also be presented in written works, but not in as integrated a way as they can be presented in videos in which a speaker's words are heard simultaneously with the presentation of contextual imagery.

Furthermore, videos, even of a documentary sort, can do what Langer (1957) suggested all artistic artifacts can do: give form to feeling. Years ago, Eisner (1985) argued for a more literary way of reporting research findings, a way that employed metaphor and other literary tools used by the poet, novelist, and short-story writer to re-reconstruct the phenomena a researcher observed in a way that provided a "you are there" moment of vicarious experience. Video can capture the nuances of facial expressions, gestures, and voices much more completely and more subtlety than can be captured even in an artistically rendered written account of the data a researcher collected.

Here is yet another advantage: Unlike the artistic written accounts Eisner (1985) touted, there is less concern that the researcher is writing fiction when findings are reported via video. To be sure, the researcher does edit the footage to focus viewers' attention and make the researcher's point. But the imagery and audio presented is of real people saying and doing real things. In short, the data may not be raw data, given that the researcher invariably edits the footage she or he presents for viewing, but they are much closer to medium-rare data than what one finds in Eisner's literary version of arts-based research.

Finally, we have all just lived through a pandemic during which many of us spent inordinate amounts of time viewing videos and even attending school and university classes via Zoom. Even if the pandemic finally ends, it is likely video is the wave (or at least a wave) of the future in Education. Consequently, it seems like a good idea to have at least some videos available for viewing in which the content reflects systematic research.

Disadvantages

Some of the disadvantages of reporting findings digitally are the flip sides of advantages. For example, although video makes research findings potentially more accessible and interesting to nonacademic audiences, it is important to ask: at what cost? A discussion of theory is one of the things left out of the first and second videos discussed above, and when data from the second video project were reanalyzed to insert discussions of theory in the third video, the effect is less than organic. Video excels at creating an immersive environment which allows the viewer to experience the data firsthand, but it is less elegant and engaging when talking heads or off-screen narrators espouse theory.

A related concern is the difficulty in imagining how detailed methods discussions could be comfortably fit into a research video. At best, researchers would have to attach written discussions of the methods employed and the rationale for methodological choices to the videos they create.

There is another pragmatic concern: Except when a scholar is using video to make sense of quantitative data (as was done in the fourth study described above), it is generally not possible to provide confidentiality to research participants. Members of some groups who have been greatly disadvantaged by society—persons of color, refugees, formerly incarcerated individuals, drug addicted individuals, undocumented immigrants, and the homeless come to mind—may not be willing to participate in a study if data are collected and, especially, reported via video. While the option of digitally obscuring faces or altering voices can be employed, such measures remove most of the nonverbal cues that make the use of video so valuable. Consequently, with certain people and under certain circumstances, the use of video may not be a viable option for conducting research.

Here is another obvious problem: Capturing high-quality video data requires careful attention to camera placement, lighting, and minimizing ambient noise in the environment. Often, additional equipment such as lights, tripods, and separate microphones with external recorders, may be needed to get optimal images and sound. Being able to use this equipment quickly and efficiently is an acquired skill, and, even with the best techniques, it can still be a struggle to collect quality visual data without being too obtrusive and generating a fair measure of participant reactivity.

Furthermore, even when a researcher is relatively unobtrusive, there will be people who are not necessarily from underrepresented groups, or who have not experienced exceedingly traumatic situations in their lives, who still are not comfortable in front of a camera, especially when they are informed that recordings will be shared publicly. In the second video clip above, for example, there is a woman who did not want to be photographed, although she did not mind having her voice recorded. Fortunately, all was not lost: The participant's no-photography request gave the researcher the opportunity to use historical still images of the context in which what was being discussed occurred, while still enabling the viewer to experience the emotions conveyed through the participant's voice as well as her words.

Yet another concern for researchers looking to use video is the amount of additional time, money, and effort, working with digital video requires. Learning to use video equipment, for example, has a substantial learning curve, and the constant evolution of digital technology means the available tools are constantly changing, which requires the ongoing updating of technical knowledge. One good piece of news is that those tools are not as prohibitively expensive as they once were. However, keeping up with changing hardware and software requirements does still require time, effort, and a modest amount of funding. And once the video has been captured, digesting the footage and distilling it into a polished, final product is exceedingly time consuming.

It's also important to remember the process of video editing is different from the process of writing. A researcher/editor is immersed in the images and sound of raw video data in a tactile way. As described by Rehder (2017), "Video editing is a powerful, phenomenologically embedded, deeply embodied, and self-referential way of seeing and looking" (conclusion, para. 2). It is vitally important to recognize the

influence of the researcher on the process (and of the process on the researcher) in any qualitative video study. Additionally, research posted online in video formats has the potential to access wider (and possibly global) audiences. However, producing research that could be relevant (or even understandable) across the myriad of different cultures (both academic and otherwise) where the finished work might be viewed online, brings with it a unique set of challenges. As Markham (2009) points out, rigorous reflexive analysis on the part of the researcher is key to producing qualitative work that is meaningful in this wider public forum.

Beyond the additional requirements video places on the researcher, video also creates additional requirements for the consumers of visual research products. First, a working display device (computer, tablet, smartphone) with broadband access is required. Second, viewers must set aside the time to watch the video in an environment where they will not be disturbed and where watching will not disturb others (headphones may be required). Third, watching video demands a certain amount of time and concentration. While video can be an extremely efficient form of communication, it generally must be experienced sequentially. It usually is not possible to quickly skim through or scan video for key points like a consumer of research can do with printed material.

The final disadvantage of using video to conduct and report research is the absence of a robust academic infrastructure to support the dissemination of research videos. Within the educational research field, at least, there is no universal repository for housing research videos, no generally accepted procedures for peer review, and no real analogs to research journals for easy consumer access.

Conclusion: The Road Ahead

Fortunately, the situation alluded to in the last paragraph is changing, albeit slowly. Other fields, for example, provide models of what needs to be done. The previously mentioned *Journal of Video Ethnography*, which publishes peer reviewed videos that the journal's website indicates "address a social scientific research question or subject whose study is best undertaken by the collection and exhibition of video-graphic data," can serve as a model for the sort of academic infrastructure required to support and disseminate video research in the educational research field (Journal of Video Ethnography, n.d.). Even more traditional journals, especially those that utilize an online publication outlet, can allow for the relatively seamless integration of video content with written text, as we have tried to do in one of the sections of this article. The only requirement is that editors and reviewers must be open to this option.

There also are new websites such as *ipostersession.com* where authors can create interactive displays that permit the incorporation of high-resolution images, videos & animations, voice-over narrations, and written content (*Online Interactive, Multimedia Oral & Poster Sessions*, n.d.). While, as its name suggests, this site currently specializes in creating interactive poster sessions for academic conferences, the ability to easily create, store, and present hybrid multimedia content, also opens the door to more compelling, immersive reporting of academic research in other contexts.

Perhaps the best indication that the potential for conducting and presenting video research has never been greater, comes from the commercial sector. Within the entertainment industry, it is widely acknowledged that we are now in the golden age of documentaries (*What's Up, Documentary? An "Undeniable Golden Age" For Filmmakers*: NPR, n.d.). Public acceptance of and desire for content which deals with substantive issues in a serious and well-researched manner has never been greater. For researchers hoping to make a difference with their work, there is a receptive audience waiting. All researchers need do is present rigorous research in an engaging visual manner.

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A Spotlight on Research-Based Theatre

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Abstract

“Tell me about your research.” How does one begin to convey the importance of our life’s work—our research? Enter stage right, Research-based Theatre, an innovative, arts-based methodology that takes research data and brings it to life, by showing, rather than telling. In this article, we tell the story of how Research-based Theatre first came to be, and why it is especially well suited to the contemporary challenge of showcasing diverse and marginalized voices. We also share a short scene that illustrates the methodology in practice. We conclude by offering ways Research-based Theatre can be a meaningful approach for pedagogy and community-engaged initiatives.

USHER: Welcome to the show. Tonight’s performance is a crash course in Research-based Theatre. But first, a sneak peek backstage. Watch your step, please. The reason why I’m holding this flashlight is because this exclusive behind-the-scenes tour has a few hazardous transitions. We don’t want you to trip and fall into confusion. So, let’s begin at the beginning, shall we? This following passage contains a fascinating origin story of how this methodology came to be.

The Origins of Research-Based Theatre: A Commentary

Since the early 2000s, we (George, 4th author, and Graham, 2nd author) have explored possibilities for integrating our theatrical backgrounds into academic work. As our work progressed, and we began to articulate our approach to Research-based Theatre (RbT) (Belliveau & Lea, 2016), we often found ourselves struggling to express our understandings to colleagues in academia who had little experience in theatre, and, conversely, those in theatre who had little experience in academia. A script, shared later in this article, draws upon almost 20 years of exploration, to help communicate this unique approach to research. To fully contextualize the script, we first share a brief retrospective on the development of RbT to explore how we arrived at a place where such a script needed to be written.

We come from an extensive theatre background both in and out of academia. George is a professionally trained actor who studied in Canada, and with the Jacques Lecoq school in France. He later taught theatre and English in secondary schools before earning an MA and PhD in theatre. During his first academic appointment in the Faculty of Education at the University of Prince Edward Island, he met Graham, a student in one of his classes. Graham came to his education degree from an eclectic background having studied computer science and math, while taking theatre literature and performance courses as electives. Graham had more than 15 years of experience in theatre through classes, and community and professional performances with local theatre companies as an actor, musician, playwright, director, stage manager, and technician.

Both of us, George as an early career academic, and Graham, as a preservice teacher and later graduate student, began to shift our focus from theatre performance to drama education, in particular approaches such as process drama (Bowell & Heap, 2001) and role drama (Fels & Belliveau, 2008). George also began to develop a research program including projects exploring bullying (Belliveau, 2006b) and teacher workload (Belliveau et al., 2002). Yet, he retained a desire to integrate his identity as an artist into his developing researcher identity (Springgay et al., 2008): how could he draw on the skills and aesthetic of his theatre training into his academic work?

In the early phases of this integration, George worked with groups of preservice teachers (including Graham) to devise short theatrical productions relating to issues of bullying in schools: *Wasn't Me* (Belliveau, 2003) and *You Didn't DO Anything* (Belliveau, 2005, 2008), which toured local schools, accompanied by post-performance workshops with students by the preservice teachers. To develop these performances, George led the preservice teachers through a devising process that included reflecting on academic literature, music, and theatrical scripts including Joan MacLeod's (2002) *Shape of a Girl*. These resources, as well as the preservice teachers' own experiences, were used to generate the devised plays. There was no formal research component to these pieces; there was no systematic data generation or analysis. However, these productions laid some of the seeds for a continued exploration of the possibilities of incorporating theatre and academic research. In particular, these projects were designed with an explicitly pedagogical intent: to advocate for positive approaches to dealing with bullying in a way that the audience can relate and connect to.

As we progressed through our careers, George joined the faculty at the University of British Columbia, and Graham joined him as a graduate student, where we continued to look for ways to integrate our artistic and academic identities. We engaged with the work of international scholars following similar paths, including Johnny Saldaña (2005, 2011), Jim Mienzachowski (2003), Charles Vanover (2005), Judith Ackroyd and John O'Toole (2010), Gail Mitchell et al. (2006), Ross Gray (2003), Tara Goldstein (2001), Joe Norris (2009), among others. These scholars intermixed with George and Graham's interests and experience in theatre through such works as *The Laramie Project* (Kaufman, 2001), *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (Pirandello, 1954/1921), *The Farm Show* (Theatre Passe Muraille, 1976), as well as individual and organizations such as Shakespeare (1994), Sharron Pollock (1984), and The Joint Stock Theatre Company (Ritchie, 1987).

With a rich and world-leading group of artist-researchers, the University of British Columbia proved to be a fertile ground for this exploration. With other artists, researchers, and graduate students, we began exploring how our work intersected with other methodologies including autoethnography (Irwin, 2004) and Narrative Inquiry (Leggo, 2008) and theoretical perspectives such as Bakhtin's (1986) notions of dialogism, chains of utterances, and genre.

Playwright Sharon Pollock uses a metaphorical diamond to describe her challenge of trying to write from another's perspective.

I am standing in one place, and I am the result of a certain time and place and experience, and I have a flashlight. If I never try to expand those boundaries I can only hold my flashlight one way, shine it on one part of the diamond. ... But I can't go all the way around that diamond. I suppose when you have many writers attacking the same story, you get the entire diamond lit up. (quoted in Jansen, 1991, p. 100)

This suggestion that having multiple perspectives can reflect a more fulsome understanding of a character reflects Barone and Eisner's (2012) call for "methodological pluralism" (p. 4) in educational research: that each methodology provides unique insights into what is being studied. As RbT continued to evolve, we considered ways of incorporating this into our approach. Inspired by Bakhtin's notion that the choice of genre creates borders and "all understanding is constrained by borders" (Holquist, 1986, p. xix), they proposed that RbT projects include a critical commentary (Belliveau & Lea, 2016) in which academic prose, theatrical text, theatrical performance, and possibly other genres function together in a form of methodological pluralism. Rather than repeat the understandings of one genre in another, a form of exegesis (O'Toole, 2006), the understandings expressed in each genre should draw on its own affordances, using the strengths of each genre to light up more facets of Pollock's diamond.

Similarly, we sought ways to position RbT as a methodology that would be inviting to people with various levels of theatrical experience or exposure, from the professionally trained actor to the person who sees potential in the approach but hasn't seen a play since grade school. Furthermore, RbT is a call to adventure for the academically minded to go beyond their comfort zone.

This led to the development of the Spectrum of Research-based Theatre (Beck et al., 2011), a way of positioning each RbT piece both artistically and academically to help clarify the intents of the research project. Building on this work, we have sought ways of conceptualizing the assessment and evaluation of RbT that honour the intents of the research, rather than the expectations of a reviewer. To do so, we draw on evaluative thinking (Buckley et al., 2015) and Liz Lerman's (2003) Critical Response Process to develop a conceptualization of assessment and evaluation that honours the multiplicity of ways of engaging in RbT. We have found Lerman's flexible process to be an effective approach to providing feedback. The four principal phases of the work (Statements of Meaning From Responders, Artist as Questioner, Neutral Questions From Responders, and Permissioned Opinions) generate a dialogic space of assessment and feedback focused on the intents of the work, rather than externally imposed, and culturally bound (Bochner, 2000), criteria. Not only does it provide the phases and strategies to protect the feelings of everyone involved, but it also restores agency to anyone on the receiving end of critiques. Evaluative thinking reminds us as practitioners that assessment and evaluation process is a continual "questioning, reflecting, learning, and modifying It is a constant state-of-mind" (Bennett & Jessani, 2011, p. 24) that should be considered throughout the entire life of each project.

Another significant challenge we encountered was balancing the expectations of research grants, scholarships, and fellowships with the realities of integrating elements of theatre and research. How could we engage in a methodological approach that would honour our theatrical backgrounds, the demands of academia and granting agencies, as well as participants and audiences? A key element of addressing this challenge was finding ways to communicate the understandings of RbT we had developed over 20 years that would help others who may not be familiar with arts-based or, even qualitative

methodologies, understand this approach. How could we explain RbT in a way that would speak to academics, theatre artists, research participants, and the general public?

Following a presentation of our early work, *Drama as an Additional Language* (Wager et al., 2009), an academic in the audience stood up and said, “This isn’t research.” During a subsequent sharing of this work, another colleague said, “I don’t understand what you are doing!” Rather than discourage us, such comments and questions encouraged us to be more clear in articulating and developing RbT as a methodology. While deliberately drawing upon both academic and artistic genres, such discussions have relied heavily on academic prose, with little use of theatrical approaches to help enliven the articulation of the methodology.

Since that initial reception, RbT has come a long way. Now that it is better known, this methodology has reached an inflection point. Rather than having to let people know the “good news” of RbT, there is now sufficient awareness in our methodology that expressions of interest have exceeded our capacity to engage in discussions with all those interested. When we meet potential partners who are keenly interested in collaborating, it is often because they heard a colleague talking enthusiastically about one of our performances. Still, they have no idea how such a thing came to be. All they know is that they want their own version of “that.”

This begs the question, “How can we explain what we do?” Explaining a novel, embodied methodology to the uninitiated is never easy, but because we self-identify as artist/scholars who specialize in scholarly storytelling, we feel it behooves us to do so in a way that is vivid, compelling, and memorable. The answer of course was right in front of us. Why not create a short play? In other words, what if we used the methodology to explain the methodology?

This challenge led George to invite playwright/academics Tetsuro Shigematsu (1st author), Christina Cook (3rd author), and Scott Button to a weekend retreat where collectively they were tasked to write a short play to help communicate this unique approach to research.

USHER: Thanks to George and Graham for so eloquently setting our stage. Now, the wonderful thing about a backstage tour is bumping into other members of the cast. Oh, look. Here’s Tetsuro, warming up.

Real Playwrights of Vancouver

Unlike the *Real Housewives of Orange County*, no one would ever want to watch a reality show about playwrights, not even playwrights! It’s because what we do behind the scenes lacks drama. But if there was ever a moment in my (Tetsuro’s) career as a playwright that could possibly merit the presence of a documentary film crew, it was RbT’s writing retreat during the Winter of 2019. A small group of RbT practitioners spent a weekend at a villa to tackle this challenge: how to explain Research-based Theatre theatrically?

Like a consummate reality television host, George stood before us in the cacti garden, and threw down the gauntlet. We had one afternoon to write a 10-minute play that could explain RbT to the world. How exciting is that? Admittedly, perhaps not the most thrilling challenge by reality TV standards, but consider

this, the caliber of playwrighting talent that had assembled was formidable. Playwrights are not exactly competitive by nature. We were the drama nerds in high school who avoided sports because we wanted to avoid the ignominy of defeat, as well as the spotlight of victory. But now here we were, solitary writers pitted head-to-head. Playwright versus playwright. Who will win?

Picture three playwrights, each ensconced in different parts of the villa, tapping away on their MacBooks, murmuring dialogue, as the sun made its way across the sky. After the time was up, we read our respective plays aloud, with each playwright voicing their parade of newly birthed characters. Everyone was up to the task. After all, no one is ever just a playwright. We are all playwright/actor/professional hams. With all the pomp and solemnity of a skit having its world premiere next to a campfire, we debuted our freshly minted 10-minute plays. We covered our nervousness at the prospect of being judged by our peers with stifled giggling, and broad acting.

Like a kind version of *American Idol's* Simon Cowell, George expertly reflected upon the strengths and challenges of each offering, but in the end, he was unequivocal. The collective ethos of RbT prevents me from divulging the chosen winner, but suffice it to say, that given the exceptional caliber of Canadian playwrighting talent at the retreat—Canada is a theatre superpower after all—said winner couldn't help but appear more than a little proud. And why not? Dramaturgically, the stakes were high. It was such a privilege to be invited to write in this beautiful place, and each one of us wanted the others to feel that our occupation of a coveted bedroom was warranted. Maybe we weren't that different from all those high school jocks after all, because we all wanted to win.

USHER: Thank you, Tetsuro. Please, take your seats, everyone. The show's about to begin. One of our main characters is already on stage: LEE, androgynous, energetic, goes to the theatre weekly and usually skips over the statistical analysis sections in research articles. And ROMAN is just about to enter from stage left—imagine someone masculine, middle-aged, who gets excited by a well-crafted null hypothesis.

Now for a bit of a spoiler alert. Far be it from me to be a theatre critic, but after this next act, you may be inclined to conclude, "Wait, that was it? That was the winning script? How unspectacular were the also-rans?" Fortunately for the authors, the publication of this script isn't taking place on social media, where they would have to deal with such comments. So, without any further ado, here is the world premiere publication of the rather prosaically titled, *The RbT Opener*.

The RbT Opener

LEE is rehearsing an RbT monologue in an empty theatre space.

LEE:

"My brother... my brother's name was Don –" (checks script). "My brother... my brother's name was Don. Short for Donald. Don dreamed of being a fighter pilot in the Canadian Air Force."

LEE checks the script again, and re-starts, trying to memorize the line.

LEE: "My brother... my brother's name was Don. Short for Donald. Don dreamed of being a fighter pilot in the Canadian Air Force."

ROMAN ENTERS, interrupting LEE.

ROMAN:

Hey, I – oh sorry, am I interrupting?

LEE:

No, no – come on in.

ROMAN:

You're Lee? I wanted to introduce myself. I heard you did some kind of a play at the research symposium last week, is that right?

LEE:

Oh, what did you hear?

ROMAN:

Well, everyone was raving about Dr. Yamazaki's research, how important, and relevant, and vital it is. Must have been quite a show you put on.

LEE:

Yes, well, I'm glad that Dr. Yamazaki's work is finally getting the attention it deserves.

ROMAN:

I bet you must have gotten some serious funding to mount a whole show for her. It must have been impressive. Whenever my partner and I are in New York, we love catching a Broadway show, *Hamilton*, *Phantom of the Opera* –

LEE:

Oh yeah, what we put on wasn't really a big theatre play like that. We didn't have a stage, lighting, or costumes, and no big musical numbers.

ROMAN:

Oh, okay, so more of a campfire skit then? I used to do some improv back in high school. Is that what you did?

LEE:

Not quite, it was a little more than a skit.

ROMAN:

So if it's less than a play, but more than skit, what exactly did you do?

LEE:

It's called research-based theatre.

ROMAN:

What's that?

LEE:

Do you really want to know?

ROMAN:

Actually, I'm not sure.

LEE:

You probably don't.

ROMAN:

But if I was curious, could you tell me?

LEE:

How much time do you have?

ROMAN:

5 minutes.

LEE:

You have to be somewhere in 5 minutes?

ROMAN:

No that's the length of my attention span.

LEE:

Okay, your area of research must be really interesting right?

ROMAN:

You bet it is. I-

LEE:

I'm sure it is, but my question to you is, can you explain it to other people? Non-specialists, who aren't in your field?

ROMAN:

Hmm, now that you mention it, at parties, my partner always gives me the yawning signal whenever I start to tell someone about my research. It isn't that my research isn't interesting, but unless you're aware of ...

LEE:

Well, RbT is a way to bring your research to life in a way that can capture people's attention, enable them to better understand what you do, why it matters ... in a way they won't forget.

ROMAN:
Research-based Theatre can do all that?

LEE:
Yes.

ROMAN:
Where do I sign up?

LEE:
Whoa, not so fast. RbT is not for everyone.

ROMAN:
But you just sold it to me as this panacea for making important research seem interesting to other people. Doesn't everyone want that? Couldn't all researchers benefit from that?

LEE:
Likely, but here's the thing. I'll try to explain it to you from the RbT perspective. As a group of researchers from various disciplines, working alongside community members and theatre artists, we work collectively. For instance, our team might come up with a rough sketch of a scene, and it gets passed to everyone, who edit and change it, collectively re-working things. Creative contributions in RbT don't belong to any one person.

ROMAN:
Okay, but how does that apply to me?

LEE:
Well as a researcher, you have to be willing to take this research you've been nurturing and growing for however long, and be willing to hand it off. Imagine putting your research in the hands of other people, who are not experts in your field.

ROMAN:
I don't know if I like the sounds of that.

LEE:
Exactly, so RbT might not be for you.

ROMAN:
But what if I could get over that, what if I was willing to take the leap, and trust, what could happen?

LEE:
Let's start from the top and find out.

LEE pretends to re-start their conversation.

Lee:
Hey, you're ROMAN, right? I heard you did some kind of a play at the research symposium last week, is that right?

ROMAN:
What did you hear?

LEE:
Well, everyone was raving about your research, how important, and relevant, and vital it is. Must have been quite a show you put on.

ROMAN:
Ooooooh.

LEE:
Now are you starting to understand what RbT is?

ROMAN:
No.

LEE:
Right. How about I just show you? I was rehearsing a monologue when you came in – it's from a research-based theatre play about an actor asking his veteran friend to help him prepare to audition for the role of a soldier, and they embark on a soul-searching journey to address difficult memories.

ROMAN:
Sure.

LEE steps forward and starts the monologue they were rehearsing at the start of the play from the top.

LEE (speaking as GEORGE from *Unload*):
My brother... my brother's name was Don. Short for Donald.
Don dreamed of being a fighter pilot in the Canadian Air Force.
Eighteen years old and he aced his aptitude test, the fitness component... but he didn't have 20/20 vision, so they wouldn't take him.
He found other ways of chasing that... rush, the adventure.
He started rock climbing, ice climbing, mountain climbing.
At 27, he was the First Canadian to peak Mt. Tilicho, one of the most challenging mountains in the Himalayas.
A few months after that trip, he came to visit in Toronto, where Sue and I were living at the time. It was his birthday, and we bought him a... headlamp. For his climbs.
That night, he told us this story of a solo overnight climb he did a year or so ago.
He said he never shared this story with anyone, cause it felt too real.
He was nearing the peak of Mt. Columbia in the Rockies.
It was almost nightfall, and he was ready to put his pack down and settle for the night.
Then it's as if the floor dropped under him.
He started sliding, holding on to his backpack for dear life.
He had no idea if he slid 10 feet or 100 feet?
10 seconds or 100 seconds.
All he knew was that when he regained consciousness it was morning.

LEE steps out of the role of GEORGE and looks at ROMAN.

ROMAN:
Okay, okay – so we hear the participant's voice. It's like an interview transcript on stage.

LEE:

Sometimes research-based theatre sticks to the words of the participants really closely. And sometimes, the collaborators – researchers, artists, community members – work together to transform those words into a new form, one that gets right to the heart. Another example is from a research-based theatre play about the experiences of water operators. This character is a university researcher who goes to a community that's been facing a drinking water advisory for years. It starts like – well, actually, do you want to try reading this one?

ROMAN:

Me? Oh, um, sure.

LEE hands ROMAN a script, and encourages ROMAN to read of the RESEARCHER.

ROMAN (speaking as the character RESEARCHER, from *Treading Water*):

I'm taking questions at the community meeting and this one lady sticks up her hand and I can tell – this won't go well.

This woman, she says, "Those fancy degrees and you people got it all wrong."

This lady, she's angry. And that seems natural. When you've had a boil water advisory for 12 years, you're gonna be angry.

"The Operators, the Researchers, all of us: we have been doing the best we can, with the resources that we have –" She waves her hand, she cuts me off.

"I'm not as mad as I used to be about the water – that's nothing new. I'm mad because there's no dialogue between the government and the community. You build a treatment system – big whoop – but you don't speak a word to us, and you don't hear us. You refuse to hear what we really need."

Hmm. She makes a good point. "Look, I understand you're upset, but ... What this community needs is clean water."

The room goes quiet for a sec. I think, maybe, I got through to her. To all of them.

But then comes a smaller voice, from the back of the room – one of the community elders. Her voice cuts through the room like ice: "We just need you to listen."

Then I realize – this whole time, I've been trying to listen. I've been really trying. I just didn't know how. But I have to try to start. I have to...

"I'm sorry. I'm... I'm sorry."

ROMAN hands the script back to LEE.

LEE:

That was great. You know, ROMAN, I think you've got a performer in you.

ROMAN:

This is ... really different. Really new for me. But you know what? I think I get it. You're not a company trying to sell a product. You're more like an ad agency.

LEE:

Come again?

ROMAN:

Sorry, I just finished binge watching *Mad Men* on Netflix. Have you seen it?

[LEE signals "no".]

Never mind. Well, the university or the community at large is like the marketplace. You got all these companies who have something to sell, something worth sharing. And you're the solution. You're the midwife who helps these groups get their message out there to a wider audience. Because all these business executives, these researchers, they're good at what they do, but they don't necessarily have creative ways to share it publicly. Am I right?

LEE:

Actually that's pretty close, but I'd like to add that we're more of a boutique storytelling agency for research – whether we're doing the research ourselves or working with others to tell the story of their data. Either way we're not interested in mass production. So we have to pick and choose who we work with carefully.

ROMAN:

Which is your way of saying, you're still not sure if you want to work with me.

LEE:

No, it's me saying, you should really consider if RbT is right for you. Because, as I said before, it's not for everyone.

ROMAN:

You know what I think? Up until now, I thought, maybe this is your selling tactic. You're using reverse psychology to play coy, and make me want to work with you. But I think the real reason you're so evasive is because you look at someone like me, and you have no idea where to begin. Right? You're trying to see if I'm prepared to wander through the wilderness with you, without either of us fully knowing where or when or how we'll arrive.

LEE:

And would you be okay with that?

ROMAN:

Tell you the truth, it sounds kinda scary. Maybe?

LEE:

We can work with that. Let's meet again, and you can tell me all about your research.

ROMAN:

Okay, but no yawning.

LEE:

No promises.

USHER: No applause necessary. They can't hear you. Finally, please join me in welcoming Christina, who will ground this methodology within a wider tradition.

Since our writing retreat, we have performed this script numerous times, in a variety of contexts which I, (Christina), will unpack for you. This isn't "great theatre," but it works, and that's the point. RbT was never meant to be theatre for the ages, or masterpieces, and for those of us who moonlight in professional theatre, that is actually a relief. Much like the way film auteurs might shoot commercials, or industrial

films, creating RbT plays is a way for playwrights to use our chops and not have to fret about vicious critics on opening night.

That being said, it makes a big difference having a professional playwright. One of the affordances of RbT is that you can cut corners, and it will still work. You don't necessarily need a director, a dramaturg, a stage manager, a lighting designer, or even professional actors, but starting off with a solid script penned by a professional, or devised by someone experienced, is a must.

RbT is to theatre what a ukulele is to classical guitar, or a fiddle to Stradivarius. Aesthetically, we usually don't take ourselves too seriously, but it works. Maybe it's more pure this way, more elemental. I dare say, Peter Brook (1968) himself would approve. Two erstwhile actors performing a brief script before an audience seated in stackable chairs. What could be more simple? Yet, every time, RbT will grab your attention and not let go. By the time it's over, your view of the world has changed.

Can I Play Too? A Rehearsal

"How do I do this?"

Tetsuro and I (Christina) have just finished performing the RbT Opener over Zoom, and an audience member has turned on their microphone and is asking, "Can I do what you are doing?"

This audience member's question gets at the heart of the pedagogical intent of this scene.

"No, let me start again."

Stories change in the telling, and stories change between tellings. Yet, second productions and remounts are a rarity in Canadian professional theatre. So often, the artistic team—the playwright, the director, the designers, the actors—only gets one shot, and the play's potential for change and growth is never realized.

One of the privileges of working on an RbT piece is the learning opportunities created by mounting a piece over again in diverse contexts, which allows the piece to evolve. As Tetsuro describes above, this script was written on a sunny retreat in late 2019. By the time we were scheduled to share it for the first time, in the midst of COVID-19, in-person theatre was impossible. Already the piece changed, and we were learning: What possibilities exist for sharing RbT online? We have performed the scene on Zoom for workshops, as part of conference sessions and colloquia, with diverse audiences, including researchers, graduate students, theatre artists, and community members. After we share the scene, we engage in talkback or open dialogue with the audience. In some way, these dialogues are an extension of the scene itself and center relationship-building—

"No, let me take that back. I want another go at this."

Drawing on Bertolt Brecht's writings on theatre, Baer and colleagues (2019) define "startling empathy" (p. 418) as an empathy that moves audiences from a passive form of witnessing to a witnessing of protest, where feelings remain present in the audience after the play and inspire action. Of course, for an

audience who is not theatre-going, and not actually in a theatre, rehearsal hall, or studio class, for those attending a conference or a seminar, seeing a scene performed may just be startling.

If our RbT scene startles, what might this startling allow? Permission to slow down. Maggie Berg and Barbara Karolina Seeber (2016) write that slow scholarship

gives meaning ... to thinking about scholarship as a community, not a competition. It gives meaning to periods of rest, an understanding that research does not run like a mechanism; there are rhythms, which include pauses and periods that may seem unproductive. (p. 57).

Slowing leaves space for starting again—not to fix mistakes, but because starting again supports discovery in rehearsal and creation processes—in research.

In these slow rhythms and pauses, relationships can be built in new ways. Pedagogically, we intend our RbT scene to offer an invitation to play or to act as if. ‘As if’ is a powerful phrase. For Carl Rogers (1957), a 20th-century pioneer on empathy, reaching out to someone *as if* you can see from their perspective is integral to relationships. This empathic *as if* is also integral to acting and playwrighting. Offering the tools of RbT, the opportunity to create scripts from the perspectives of research participants and collaborators, the opportunity to play *as if*, supports the creation of research and scholarship rooted in empathic exchanges and understandings. As LEE suggests to ROMAN at the end of the scene, this is just the beginning. But why not start by building space for relationships?

“How do I do this? Can I do what you are doing?”

If Tetsuro and I can turn on our videos and microphones and perform a short play, possibilities hang in the air: possibilities for new ways of relating to participants, collaborators, colleagues, graduate students, and community members, and telling the stories of our research.

So, can you do this? As a chorus of RbT practitioners, we answer, “Yes, you can” (Beck et al., 2011; Belliveau, 2006a, 2014; Goldstein, 2011).

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Tetsuro Shigematsu became the first person-of-colour to host a daily national radio program in Canada, when he became host of *The Roundup* on CBC Radio. Tetsuro's theatrical solo-work *Empire of the Son* was named the best show of 2015 by the Vancouver Sun, and has been touring continuously throughout Canada, and beyond. It has played in 18 cities to over 20,000 people. His other solo-work, *1 Hour Photo* garnered five Jessie nominations, winning for Significant Artistic Achievement, and was named as a finalist for the 2019 *Governor General's Award for Drama*. He is also a former writer for *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*.



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Christina Cook is a PhD student in Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia. She is a registered clinical counsellor and a playwright, and her work explores mental health through inquiry and art. Christina's play *Quick Bright Things* was a finalist for the 2020 *Governor General's Literary Award for Drama*.



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Integrating Arts in a Collaborative Research Process: An Arts-Informed Inquiry

Inci Yilmazli Trout, Shaniek Tose, Caitlin Caswell, and M. Candace Christensen

Abstract

The rich learning that accompanies collaborative research practices can go unappreciated without systematic reflection and examination, which is an under-researched area. In this arts-informed inquiry, grounded in the experiences of four scholars, we show how artmaking was integrated into a qualitative research process to represent findings. In the qualitative phase, we analyzed researcher reflections kept throughout the research process to identify themes. Then, we created different art forms to represent the themes. Engaging in artmaking allowed us to be reflexive, strengthened our understanding of collaboration, and how using arts expanded the qualitative findings.

Introduction

We are a group of four scholars at different stages of our careers, from different backgrounds, and fields. Inci is a PhD candidate in education and has experience with using arts-based approaches in her qualitative and participatory research practices. Shaniek is an active-duty social worker with experience in integrating arts in community practice. Caitlin is a practicing social worker with minimal experience in arts-based approaches in her work as a program evaluator and therapist, but has a long-time interest in creative writing. Candace is an Associate Professor of Social Work focused on emancipatory research methodologies, which includes using ABR approaches. This paper is grounded in our experiences with interdisciplinary collaborative research for the past three years. Although our initial intention was to work on publications as a group, the positive experiences led us to continue this interdisciplinary collaboration which, over time, expanded into a learning community.

Collaborative research is highly encouraged among scholars for various purposes including publishing, teaching/learning, and enriching the research process by integrating different perspectives and backgrounds (Burroughs, 2017; Johnston et al., 2020; Kosmützky, 2018; Leibowicz, 2014). While collaborations are emphasized in higher education settings, the “how” of collaborative processes through the lens of collaborators is under-researched, particularly in social sciences (Gast et al., 2017; Kosmützky, 2018). This gap motivated us to evaluate our research collaboration through our personal reflections about the process. Additionally, we concluded that it would be beneficial to integrate an ABR component to work with the data and tap into the emotional aspects of collaboration. Integrating artmaking into the research process creates data that is holistic and transformative (Gerstenblatt, 2013). Artmaking also often includes the body. Creating and witnessing art often moves us into our emotions, by asking, “how does this make you feel?” (Heenan, 2006). Transformation occurs through artmaking, because we are creating something that didn’t

previously exist, which transforms earlier understandings (Leavy, 2017). We situate this study within our research collaboration of three years and explore our experiences using an arts-informed inquiry.

However, creating and sustaining a collaborative environment that respects and cares for individuals, and fosters their growth, can be challenging and require time, which is why it is worth examining the process closely. Reflection and evaluation are critical components of collaborative processes to identify strengths and weaknesses, and to learn from the process (Dusdal & Powell, 2021; Mortari, 2015). In this article, our focus is on integrating an arts-informed inquiry approach within a qualitative study exploring our collaborative research and writing processes. Our research process involved multiple phases that started with writing reflections after each research meeting. Next, we analyzed the reflections and generated themes. In the last phase, we integrated arts to generate artifacts representing the themes we identified. Using our own experiences as a case, we illustrate the benefits of exploring research collaborations through the experiences of members by using different art forms.

Background

Collaborative Research

Research collaborations are defined as “working closely with others to produce new scientific knowledge” (Bozeman & Corley, 2004, p. 609). Collaborative research practices provide opportunities for sharing diverse and collective expertise by bringing researchers together. The purpose and nature of research collaborations vary depending on the goals, collaborators, and research agendas. These collaborations can also serve as a mentoring space between experienced scholars and novice scholars in academic settings to build community while advancing scholarly productivity (Lee & Bozeman, 2005). Collaborative research focuses on learning new skills, which guide considerations when working with diverse groups, strategies, and activities (Flicker & Nixon, 2018; Lingard, 2021; Oliver et al., 2018). Given the diverse goals and agendas, it is not unusual to experience challenges or tensions. Successful research collaborations require more than just diverse skills, knowledge, methodological and personal perspectives (Katz & Martin, 1997). Social presence, trust, and social connections are among the factors that contribute to the effectiveness of collaborations (Schieffer, 2016; Siemens et al., 2014; Woolley et al., 2015).

Arts-Based Research

Art is an imaginative and corporeal way to convey lived experiences, perspectives, and to create meaning. It can stimulate emotional, social, physical, and spiritual engagement with the artifact, between people, or across communities and time (Kaimal et al., 2016; Martin et al., 2018). While art and artmaking are valuable generative processes, they can also act as a portal to enriching scientific research. Scholars have made the argument for using tools that can approach study topics from new viewpoints. The arts provide a mechanism for expanding questions, findings, and research processes we use to understand phenomena at a deeper level (Leavy, 2017). Arts-based research (ABR) has emerged as an increasingly recognized approach to scientific inquiry. Artistic and scientific processes

share similar goals; they seek to understand, illuminate, and express new insights toward advancing human understanding (Leavy, 2020).

The similarities between art and science led to different perspectives on how to situate the arts in research. While ABR is situated under qualitative research by some (Wang et al., 2017), others consider ABR as a separate methodological genre (Leavy, 2020). Building on the work of Barone and Eisner (2011), Leavy (2017) has defined ABR as a distinct research methodology that transcends the art and science binary. ABR involves a vast range of artmaking activities (e.g., visual, performance, literary) and can be introduced at any point in the research process from generating research questions, data collection, to analysis, and presenting findings (Kay, 2013; Leavy, 2017; Yilmazli Trout, 2018; Yilmazli Trout et al., 2019). Researchers (and often participants) engage in artmaking with the purpose of generating knowledge. The philosophical tenets of ABR include a) art can portray truths about the self and others, b) the arts are a powerful tool for self-awareness, c) emphasizes nonverbal ways of knowing, d) involves embodied, holistic, and visionary ways of knowing (Gerber et al., 2020).

Arts-based research (ABR) methods are formed at the intersection of creative arts and traditional qualitative methods, offering a unique blend of attributes that contextualize and unravel complex phenomena (Given et al., 2013). ABR methods including painting, photography, dance, and collage, provide an expansive glimpse into the inner lives and experiences of participants. Further, these methods allow the participants' meaning and perspective to evolve by encouraging reflexivity during the creation and dissemination processes (Rydzik et al., 2013). Reflexivity is a meaning-making process in which researchers examine their personal values, perspectives, and backgrounds in relation to the research process (Finlay, 2002). Through reflexive processes, researchers develop awareness and consistency in their interpersonal engagements and decision making in their research, and find new ways of seeing, thinking, and knowing. Throughout these processes, participants encounter opportunities for self-discovery, self-development, and personal growth (Faulkner et al., 2016; Skukauskaitė et al., 2021). By extension, researchers and audiences are similarly able to evolve through reflexivity and investigation of created works.

Methodology

In this study, we used an arts-informed inquiry approach to explore our collaborative research process. With a growing interest in using arts-based practices in research, the definition, terminology, and classification of ABR approaches can be challenging. One of the classifications is by Savin-Baden and Major (2013), which consists of arts-based inquiry, arts-informed inquiry, and arts-informing inquiry. In arts-informed inquiry practices, art is not central to the process; instead, it is used to represent the data. Various forms of art are created by researchers and/or participants to represent findings of a study by taking an insider position. We chose this approach because it is aligned with our personal goals of engaging in ABR practices more; it allowed for a personal and deeper engagement with the process as well as making our findings more accessible. In this section of the article, we provide background on our collaboration, data generation and analysis, and artmaking processes to represent the findings.

Research Team and Setting

Our collaboration started three years ago based on our shared research interests. As each of us were in different geographic locations, we held our meetings virtually on a bimonthly basis. In the beginning, we started working on the analysis of data, which Candace had already collected and we wrote two papers together. During this initial work, we established relationships, learned about each other's work styles and the skills we bring to the collaboration. As we became more familiar and comfortable with our process and working together, we expanded our focus by adding new projects to our agenda that continued concurrently. We each took the lead on a different project and the rest of us provided support in analyzing data, writing a paper, or preparing conference presentations. The lead of the project was responsible for planning and organizing the project and convening conversations on the progress in our meetings. This does not mean that each person was only responsible for one aspect of the project. We all contributed to the whole process from start to end. Since we had multiple projects at hand, we found it beneficial to use the meetings to discuss the projects and progress while working on tasks between meetings. The conversations we had in the meetings allowed us to identify areas for professional development to support our work. By dedicating time for learning/teaching in the collaboration in addition to writing, we expanded our definition of the process from collaboration to learning community. The learning community aspect is what made our collaboration unique and important as it supported our growth as scholars, which was why we wanted to investigate our experiences closely with the purpose of sharing our lessons with a broader audience.

Data Sources and Analysis

Our process in this arts-informed inquiry consisted of multiple phases (Figure 1). We used personal written reflections to evaluate our own experiences in the collaboration as the main data sources. In analyzing the journal entries using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), we completed the initial coding independently from each other, and then created a Padlet board to post the codes we identified with brief descriptions. Using this board helped us visualize the codes, make connections, and collaborate both synchronously and asynchronously. We reviewed and refined the codes to define categories and engaged in an iterative process to identify the themes. Then, each one of us created an art piece to represent one of the themes. Using arts allowed us to experiment with different arts methods in exploring our subjective and intersubjective experiences in the collaboration at a personal level.

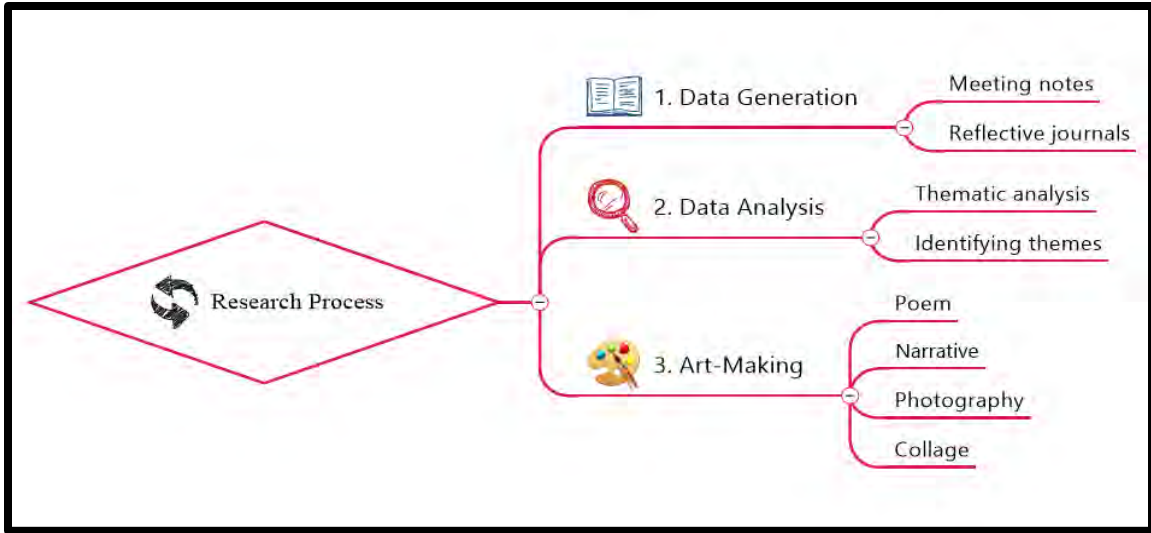


Fig. 1: An overview of our research process.

Integrating Art Into the Process: Working With Findings as a Starting Point

The analysis of personal reflections resulted in four themes that are: i) research process, ii) mentorship, iii) personal growth, and iv) essence of collaboration (Figure 2). We do not focus on discussing the themes and subthemes as it is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, we want to show how we integrated arts into our research process and how this approach allowed us to engage with the data in a deeper way. In this section, we first introduce the theme followed by a brief background on the art form used, then present the artifact, and lastly provide the researcher reflections and interpretations on the artifact and artmaking process.

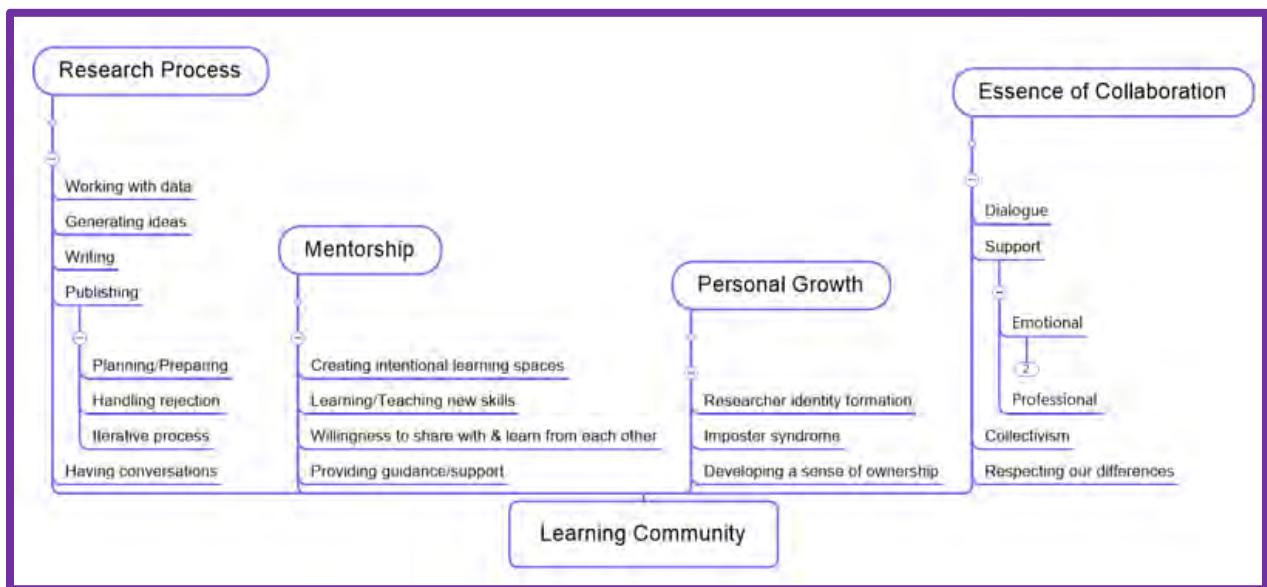


Fig. 2: Themes identified.

Research Process

The “research process” theme speaks to the multi-faceted and iterative nature of our collaboration from generating data to publishing. A prominent aspect of the process is the iterations that occurred in every stage of the research. Caitlin wrote a poem to represent the iterative nature of the research process. Poetry is an art form that is used to integrate poetry writing skills and interpretation into social science research (Butler-Kisber, 2002). One of the most common approaches is researcher-voiced poems grounded in field notes, journal entries, and reflections of the researcher as data (Prendergast, 2009). Wu (2021) discusses the characterization of poetic inquiry that are: the celebration of individuality, poetic truth-seeking in research, and poetical examination of inner and outer experience. Individuality is emphasized through looking closely at individual researchers’ emotions and experiences. The truth-seeking aspect describes how researchers show their thought processes and ruminations through poetry. Using poetry as a tool to explore the inner dialogues of researchers or how they understand the outer world is another aspect of poetic inquiry.

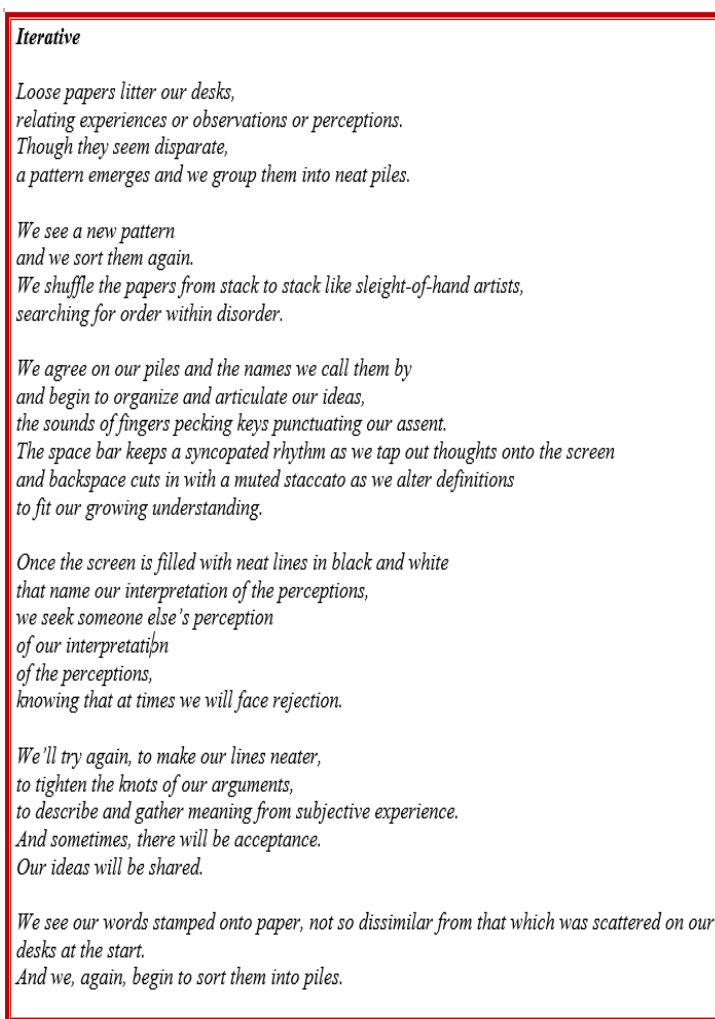


Fig. 3: Poem titled *Iterative*.

Caitlin's Reflections

Throughout my youth I wrote creative essays and short stories, but was especially drawn to poetry. The act of trying to winnow a thought or experience to as few words as possible, to fully capture a moment or idea in succinct, precise language continues to captivate me. This process feels similar to that of qualitative research and academic writing; ideas and subjective experience are examined and expressed in tangible, actionable, specific ways. To draft the poem, I organized the codes to reflect our research process and then began to identify sensory imagery that could accompany and reflect the ideas shared in the codes. It was a challenge to connect the abstract ideas expressed in the “research process” category into experiences that could be touched or felt, and I think the struggle comes through in the final product. The language and imagery in the poem are not as “tight” as I would prefer, and I have consistently felt the desire to go back and edit certain phrases. Interestingly enough, this also reflects how I experience the research process; the process affects the product, which has an impact on the process in such an iterative nature.

A common theme throughout the codes was the iterative nature of the group’s work and the ways we challenge and guide each other to grow, thus continually evolving both our understanding of the data and the papers we cocreate. To express the simultaneously cyclical and scaffolded conceptions of the group research process, the poem describes coding, collaborative categorization, writing, editing, submission, rejection, acceptance, and once again data analysis. The language in the final stanza of the poem echoes and references the first stanza, to illustrate the iterative process described in the codes. Many ideas expressed in the Research Process category were abstractions, such as “learning from our experiences” and “handling rejection.” In this poem, I attempted to describe these abstract concepts through a tactile and tangible lens using visual and auditory imagery and extended metaphor.

Mentorship

Mentorship is another defining aspect of our collaborative research efforts. Participating in this collaboration created spaces for each of us to take on a mentor role when needed. The role of mentorship was not solely on one member, but instead, it was shared among all of us based on our skills, knowledge, and experiences when needed. Sharing this role fostered the sense of collaboration in our research efforts. Candace used photography (Figure 4) to represent the mentorship aspect of our work. Photography consists of using a camera to create lasting images captured through an image sensor that harnesses light and concrete subjects (Hirsch, 2017). Photography is used as both an art form and a mechanism to examine society. The art emerges from the image composition and development process, which involves design and technical skills. Examining society comes from using photographs to document common and extraordinary lived experiences. Photography as an ABR method aims to use the process of composing, taking, and interpreting the photos as an empirical way to “capture essences that can be ‘metaphorically generalizable’” (Langmann & Pick, 2018, p. 34; Szto et al., 2005, p. 138). Images exist as visual data, providing light, color, texture, standpoints, and compositions not possible with words (Holm et al., 2018). Images are socially and culturally constructed, thus “both the producer of an image and the viewer co-produce” new knowledge each time an image is produced and viewed (p. 313).



Fig. 4: Photo by Candace.

Candace's Reflections

As a research method, photography is accessible, engaging, and illuminates phenomena in a way that goes beyond words. Many people have access to cameras and multiple ways to share images, which makes data collection timely and easy. People respond to images through their emotions, lived experiences, and worldviews. Interacting with images as a meaning-making activity brings the whole self to that process. We have the photographer's standpoint and the viewer's worldview, and together, they create something new. For this photograph, I spent time thinking about what symbols or aspects of my life represented the theme of mentorship. I wanted to include items from the natural world, because my daily walks mentored me to be more present, relaxed, and appreciative. Also, mentoring is part of my natural landscape, a relationship I value and a skill I want to develop. Last year, I was walking my dog in the Wasatch Mountain foothills; it was relaxing, immersive, a connective tissue with nature. The foothills were covered with sagebrush; it was fragrant, evergreen, and nourishing. So, one evening, I picked a flourishing bush on the mountainside and located stones of different shapes, sizes, and textures, and placed them in a circle around the plant. I noted a well-trodden pathway to the right of the stone circle. I pressed the camera shutter several times and ended up with a photograph that placed the sagebrush and stone circle in the foreground of the Wasatch mountains, and to the right, was a pathway. The pathway represents the journeys that we have taken with each project. The mountains portray the constant climbing, summiting, and descending we have happily endured.

Personal Growth

The theme of personal growth captures our personal lived experiences in the collaboration. The challenges we experienced at times and the emotional responses we had to challenges and successes shaped us in different ways and at different levels. Shaniek's approach to representing personal growth included a narrative complemented by a drawing (Figure 5).

Drawings are among visual elements that are frequently used in ABR practices to study human experiences. Images are effective tools for communication, which encourage new ways of seeing or doing, help synthesize knowledge, and foster empathic understanding (Holm et al., 2018). Drawings can be used as tools for data collection or representation of findings in research. The process of drawing can facilitate constructing thoughts clearly and expressing understandings in a different and effective way (Mitchell et al., 2017). Drawings can be tools for exploring and synthesizing experiences to deepen interpersonal understandings or conceptualizing them through reflection (Fish, 2018).

Elliot (2005) described narrative analysis as a method by which participants capture and present a particularly meaningful part of their subjective experience in story form. This method may be employed alone or in combination with other arts to externalize and open a participant's autobiographical knowledge for meaning and discussion. Narrative analysis aligns with the notion that the subjective experience is the wellspring from which all other modes of inquiry are generated (Elliott, 2005). Further, this method aligns with the basic principles of participatory action research, as it allows participants to take charge of their particular narrative and perhaps reclaim elements that were lost to the dominant culture or other oppressive forces. Beyond its use in the realm of arts-based research, narrative analysis may have implications for developing introspective and affective skills, aiding participants in reconciling, and making meaning from significant emotional events or experiences (Schwartz & Abbott, 2007).

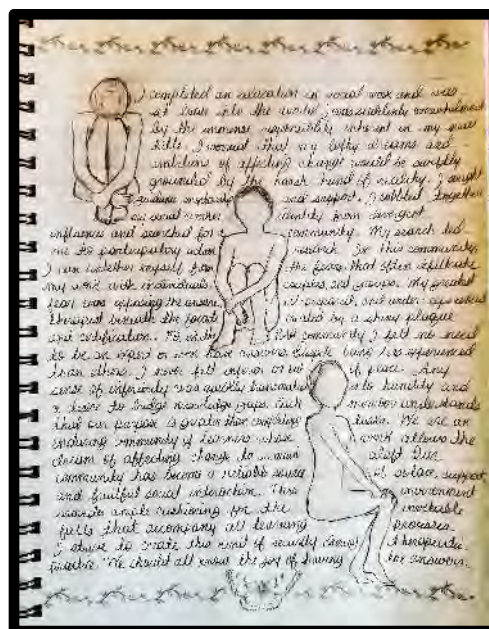


Fig. 5: Drawing by Shaniek.

Shaniek's Reflections

The drawing and writing were done using graphite on paper. I used the simplicity of this medium to counterbalance the complexity of my internal and external experiences. The interplay between the drawing and text symbolizes my changing phenomenological state within the context of a developing PAR community. This artifact portrays my emerging identity within the context of a participatory action research (PAR) community. Many newly minted social workers struggle to quell the inner voice of self-doubt that, if left unchecked, can fuel "imposter syndrome." This phenomenon can occur at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels of social work practice and skew the practitioner's perception of their ability to effectively deliver services. While this phenomenon is not unique to the social work profession, its presence can undermine the values and ethics we seek to uphold. Specifically, imposter syndrome causes the practitioner to lose touch with the authentic self, altering the nature of client interactions and potentially hindering the establishment of rapport. PAR communities support the emerging practitioner and scholar, while softening voices of self-doubt. These communities accomplish the latter by recognizing the intrinsic value of each member's level of experience, encouraging exploration and reflexivity, and building an understanding of the world outside of the self. Often, the preoccupation with the self fuels the self-consciousness and doubt that underlies imposter syndrome. PAR communities encourage members to step into the lives of others—an act which builds trust in the stability and strength of the self.

Essence of Collaboration

Although we worked as colleagues in this collaboration, our approach went beyond focusing only on the outcome, and involved offering support to each other both emotionally and professionally. Built on a solid foundation of understanding and respecting each other, the underpinning aspect is engaging in dialogue and making efforts to connect with each other at a personal level first. Inci created a digital collage (Figure 6) to represent the essence of this collaboration.

Collage is an example of visual arts that can be used for many aspects of research. In collages, disparate elements are brought together to transform into something new, which prompts the audience to see new perspectives and thinking, making new connections, enhancing meanings (Chilton & Scotti, 2014). Collage making "challenges objectivity and a singular reality through fragmenting spaces and repurposing objects to contextualize multiple realities" (Gerstenblatt, 2013, p. 295). Butler-Kisber and Poldma (2010) identified attributes of collage in qualitative research and described it as a "reflexive process, a form of elicitation, and as a way of conceptualizing ideas" (p. 3). Collage-making provides a space for embodied discoveries, and the integration of layers of theoretical, artistic, and intersubjective knowledge (Chilton & Scotti, 2014).



Fig. 6: Digital collage by Inci

inci's Reflections

As four scholars from different fields and parts of the country, we are on the same journey of scholarship. Our collaboration is a safety net providing support when the journey presents its downs. It provides a space for celebration of our accomplishments. The images of four trees represent each one of us and the branches connecting the trees represent the safety net we built together. We're physically distant but intellectually connected. We bring different skill sets, perspectives, and understanding to the collaboration and we find ways to complement each other and work in harmony, which reminds me of the four elements of nature placed in the center of the collage. This is the anchor of our collaboration. In the guilt-free space we created, we value and encourage each other to be balanced, to self-care, and to grow and transform both personally and professionally. Open communication and critical conversations play a key role in developing the level of trust and care we have for each other, and in shaping our work. This collage presents the recipe for the essence of this collaboration.

My initial attempt to create a collage to illustrate the collaboration theme started with reviewing the subthemes identified, thinking of how I could present them visually, and searching for images that would illustrate the ideas as they are. Finding images for each concept was not challenging, which is a reason why I chose collage. But the challenge was how to connect these different images in a way that tells a story in a coherent way. The more I reflected and searched for images, I started thinking more symbolically rather than the literal illustration of ideas. Then, I reflected on our collaboration again, but this time by paying more attention to the emotions, how I felt in our collaboration, how my participation and interactions shaped me and how I contributed to the process. With this approach, I was able to refocus and tell our story through symbols representing what we found in our process. I think what is important in artmaking as part of research is to go through the process despite challenges and not worry so much about the quality of the final art piece created. This is not to say that the quality is not important

because I don't claim to be an artist and I don't have a background in arts. In my case, the process of collage making was a tool to examine and understand deeply the concept I was exploring. I had to learn to let go of my perfectionism tendencies and be more attentive to the emotions involved in the process. It's a meaning-making process and it is important to acknowledge that it is not only the quality of the art piece created that is important, but also the meaning we attribute to it.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper, we demonstrate how integration of artmaking can strengthen research processes while opening new areas for further inquiry. As in our case, using art forms to explore personal experiences allows the participant to be reflexive and learn about themselves. In this study, although our intention was to represent the findings through art, the artmaking process moved us beyond the initial intentions and allowed us to discover new ways of thinking, making connections between our personal and professional identities, and provided new insights regarding research processes. For example, Shaniek revealed how she positioned herself as an emerging PAR researcher and developing clinical social worker connected it to social work practices. She used her art to describe how engagement within and support from the research group fostered self-trust, competence, and the affective skills needed to break free from self-doubt. This creative exploration illuminated parallel processes between the self-knowledge that can come from artmaking and developing a new identity as a researcher and clinician. Inci, on the other hand, focused more on the process of artmaking and revealed how she had to work through the discomfort around engaging in a new art form. She challenged herself to let go of her perfectionist tendencies and in doing so, she realized how her thinking shifted from a linear to a nonlinear mode. With this shift, she was able to see the foundational aspects behind this collaboration, which are as important as the skills needed in a collaboration. Caitlin's focus was on the process of artmaking, but more on the similarities between poem writing and research processes. This strengthened her understanding of the benefits and challenges of qualitative research processes as an emerging researcher. Candace revealed their desire to pursue ABR practices after completing their PhD and the lack of support they experienced. However, through the photograph they composed, they conveyed how they took on the "art" of mentorship role to creative, knowledge generating community. This creativity supported the rest of us in our ABR ventures while experimenting with creative forms of inquiry.

Through this process, we each developed a unique aesthetic identity. These identities formed organically through self-exploration, discussions, and experimentation. They were informed by our subjective personal and professional experiences, artistic strengths, and preferences for self-expression. Finally, our aesthetic identities supplemented our established identities within the research group, unveiling new dimensions of ourselves to each other. This process was extended during conversations in which we sought clarifying information from each other to better understand the art. Our conversations uncovered the interwoven nature of the art pieces and produced new questions about our collaboration. The use of art deepened our connection and showed us new ways of understanding our collaborative processes.

Paying close attention to internal dynamics of and people's experiences in a collaboration is important for sustaining a successful research collaboration. In doing so, adding an ABR component strengthens and benefits both the research process and participants. The process of illustrating the key components through arts created opportunities to engage with the data in a deeper way, encouraged us to leave our comfort zones and be reflexive, and expanded our understanding of what collaboration means. In the process, we revealed unknown sides of ourselves to each other by welcoming vulnerability, which strengthened our group relationship. At the same time, our sense of ownership of the study we undertook increased. We used art forms that were familiar to us, that we felt comfortable with. Although we have varying levels of experience with ABR in our research/teaching practices, we never were the participants using arts to generate data. This flipping of roles provided us with a participant perspective and insights on what we should consider when implementing ABR practices, which included how to approach the process, how to create safe spaces that encourage participants to leave their comfort zones, and actively engage in the process.

This project revealed several implications for our collaborative research processes, goals, and future opportunities. We plan to continue exploring the use of different art forms and evaluating the types of knowledge these art forms generate within specific research topics. Specifically, we are working on a book chapter that elucidates how we coped with the uncertainty and isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic by integrating art making into our research. We are also developing a paper describing how the arts-inquiry experiences have influenced our work beyond the research collaborative. Each of us have incorporated arts-based methods into social work practice, teaching, and other research projects.

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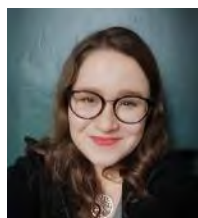
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