

Effective Methods of TfD Practice: Understanding the conditions that provide autonomy
and empowerment for marginalized communities

by

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B.A., American University in Cairo, 1998

M.F.A., University of Victoria, 2006

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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This research began as a quest to better understand the relationships between marginalized communities, facilitators, and not-for-profit organizations, or NGO's, in a specific Theatre for Development (TfD) process. When a TfD project that engaged and positively impacted the lives of Egyptian young garbage pickers was discontinued by the funding NGO, the researcher, who was the group's theatre facilitator, set out to find solutions to this disempowering process. Initially, this research was created to explore how to pass on the skills of practicing theatre to marginalized communities, as a means for them to claim the process, practicing it independently of NGOs and facilitators. This initial inquiry then evolved to encompass exploring effective methods of TfD practice, where the question then became: *What are the conditions that provide empowerment and autonomy for marginalized communities in the TfD context?*

Using Narrative Inquiry the researcher recalls her experience working with the garbage pickers in one of the biggest slums in the world, Mokkatam City, in Cairo. The narrative is used to question the choices made by both the facilitators and NGOs which

ultimately compromised an otherwise life changing experience for the young community. The researcher then employs Action Research to outline a community-based participatory project carried out with a group of immigrant and refugee youth in Victoria, Canada. The study traced the progression of the three action research stages carried out to find ways of using TfD to empower this vulnerable community. The documentation of this project was completed using Reflective Practitioner Case Study which enabled the researcher to reflect on her practice with the aim of improving her approach through critical analysis.

The findings of this research do not support the researcher's initial hypothesis that *the development of theatre skills will enable the community to function independently of outside support*. Instead, through the careful examination of the experiences of the young participants in the slums of Cairo, and the immigrant and refugee communities in Canada, this research points to the importance of TfD integrating the celebration of life and the development of relationships as part of its process of enriching the experience of marginalized communities. This finding, together with an examination of the notion of sustainability redefines the place of the exit strategy through the ways in which the immigrant participants of the latter phases of the study, chose to integrate the benefits of TfD practice into their lives.

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Dedication

To Kyle, with love.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Youth Garbage Collectors (“El-Zabbaleen”) (2001-2003)

For more than two years, I worked in the slums of Cairo, Egypt, as a theatre facilitator in the outcast community of “garbage pickers.” The time that I spent with these young boys opened my eyes to the rewards and pitfalls of a practice that I later came to know as Theatre for Development (TfD). Through my involvement with the *El-Zabbaleen* project I saw how participation in theatre could become the catalyst for small but significant individual and societal changes. On and off stage, the boys blossomed once they realized that they could be seen as more than just worthless “garbage pickers.” I witnessed the silent exchange that took place between the upper middle-class audience and the young cast on the night of their first performance, and I recognized a seismic shift in both of these groups. Comments I heard after the performance confirmed that the audience, which numbered about 70, had been moved by the boys’ courage and skill in communicating the humour and irony of their lives in the slums. The stigma of “garbage picker” was forever changed. For the boys, the sense of importance that they felt on stage, and the audience’s appreciation of their newly acquired theatre skills, sparked an unfamiliar pride.

These positive memories stay with me, but my experience as the boys’ theatre facilitator also left me feeling challenged and frustrated. It was frustrating that what was clearly a rich experience for these neglected and stigmatized youth was terminated abruptly because of a lack of funds. I regret that I did not have the opportunity to tell the

boys that I could no longer continue to work with them and to provide some closure, both for them and myself. I was also deeply troubled by the fact that I could not find a way to sustain the process, nor teach the boys how to hold on to their newfound self-worth without external supports. These feelings compelled my decision to pursue graduate studies in Applied Theatre with a focus on Theatre for Development. I set out to better understand this method of practicing theatre, and more specifically, to develop an ethically conscious way of working with marginalized communities.

Immigrant Women in Victoria (2006-2008)

In Victoria, where I have lived since I left Cairo in 2003, I have continued to work with marginalized communities as a contractor, bringing aspects of theatre and performance to the clients of non-profit agencies. In 2006 and 2007, through the Inter-Cultural Association (ICA) of Greater Victoria, I worked with a diverse group of immigrant women, using theatre to help them share stories about their immigration and settlement processes. The 14-week project was intended to help the participants reflect on their experiences, and to build community amongst them.

Drawing on the “devising” facilitation method, which I was learning in my studies at the University of Victoria, I created drama plans that would facilitate the participants using fictional stories to explore the hardships of immigration and settlement. However, on the few occasions when I actually implemented my drama plans, the participants seemed removed from the process; it was clear they found fictional drama to be trivial alongside their actual experiences. In fact, the women told such powerful stories

of their struggles with cultural differences and misunderstandings, loneliness and power struggles with their children, that I often put my drama plan away in my backpack.

Respect for the immediacy of the process proved to be far more successful. I did away with my own agenda and became an attentive listener, which allowed me to relate drama exercises directly to issues that arose from the stories participants shared that morning. I learned to be a better facilitator by tuning in to the participants and allowing their agenda to move to the forefront. An unintended outcome of my contribution as drama facilitator was that the women's English language abilities improved, as noted by the coordinators of the group. This is in keeping with observations by Culham (2002), who references drama as "the language of the heart" and discusses its capacity to loosen ESL learners' inhibitions and to help them express themselves more creatively (p.2).

After 14 sessions, I proposed that the women perform a compilation of the scenes we had created. To my surprise, they refused to perform, even for their families and friends. I later learned from the coordinators that the women felt they would be too exposed because of the private and personal nature of the topics we had explored. In hindsight I realized that they had at times criticized their husbands, revealed their frustrations with their children, and even passed judgment on some of the family members and cultural traditions of their Canadian husbands. I finally understood that what I had envisioned as an empowering experience for the women would, in fact, have been disempowering.

Once again, I found myself reflecting on my own criteria for successful practice in a TfD context. The ICA project taught me to value the process rather than to measure the success of drama facilitation solely through performance. This lesson was a sharp contrast to the *El-Zabbaleen* project in Cairo, where the performance was the pivotal moment in creating the social transformation that impacted both the boys and the audience.

After this experience, I worked with another group of immigrant women, comprised of newcomers and others who had lived in Canada for some time, through the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society (VIRCS). Their issues were different (i.e. dealing with custody issues with their ex-husbands, not being able to find work, dealing with mental health issues) and although they were inclined to perform their work, I felt that the theatre process was not as fulfilling for them as it could have been. The group coordinators told me a few times that the women were more interested in *talking* about their settlement issues rather than engaging in *creating scenes* about them.

At the time I had not developed enough skills to help me facilitate group discussions with participants about their life experiences before engaging them in scene-creations. Later, when I worked with immigrant and refugee youth, I was able to learn how important it was for the participants to have several opportunities to engage in group-dialogue about their challenges, and to reflect on these experiences before turning them into drama scenes. I learned the importance of facilitating an environment where participants felt invested in the theatre process through discussions and reflections.

At-Risk Youth (2008)

My next project was with a group of “at-risk” youth. I worked with them as part of a larger program, “Skills by Design,” which was funded by Service Canada, and was a project to help at-risk youth develop skills that would enable them to find their way into the work force. The theatre workshop sessions were part of a larger plan to help the group deal with their issues (coping with dropping out of high-school; drug-abuse; living on the streets; mental health issues) and to channel their energy through creative outlets. My co-facilitator and I were asked to work with the youth for a period of two weeks. We did not know how the group would respond to us, nor did we know the issues that we were going to explore through drama. We discovered all that as we worked with the group. The experience proved successful enough that the coordinators asked us to come back again with the second group of youth, and this time for a longer period at the very start of their ten-week program, instead of at the tail end of it.

I noted that these adolescents were quite creative, and had no problems using the medium of theatre to express their thoughts and ideas of themselves and the world around them. They responded positively to the theatre process, and managed to tackle many issues that were haunting them as they moved from their “at-risk” lifestyles to becoming working members in their communities. Some of these issues were: not being able to find work, feeling tempted to return to abusing drugs or alcohol, not being able to make friends in their new lives, and maintaining a mentally and physically healthy lifestyle. By the end of the program, most of them pointed out that it was unfair of the organizers to let them go after they had finally found a safe place where they were able to combat some of their destructive lifestyle choices. They were asking for more time

with the program, to feel more settled in their new choices, and to get the support of the organization as they transitioned. They were clear that a ten-week period was not enough to achieve these goals. They also reflected on the theatre process, expressing that it was quite positive in bringing the group closer together, and in helping them see their potential as creative, productive individuals.

I learned from this experience the importance of factoring in a follow-up plan when organizing a project like this. Clearly the participants were calling out for help. They were saying that they needed more time to integrate these healthy lifestyle choices that they learned in the program into their personal lives, and there needed to be room in the project plan to facilitate this.

Immigrant & Refugee Youth (2009-2011)

The most recent work that I've been engaged in is with a group of immigrant and refugee youth. The non-government organization (NGO) that runs many programs for the youth- Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society (VIRCS) -asked me to facilitate a series of workshops to explore some of the challenges that these young people face when they first arrive in Canada. The funding proposal stipulated a performance at the end of the workshop period that would open up audience dialogue about the youth's struggles at school (language barriers; bullying), at home (communicating their need to 'fit in' in the Canadian society, thus abandoning their own culture), and adapting to a new society (cultural and social barriers). I facilitated the pilot of this project, which we called "Phase One," and the organization asked me to

facilitate the second phase, essentially with the same goals, but with a new group of immigrant and refugee youth.

The first group of youth posed a set of challenges that I discovered through the process. While their life experiences were very rich and clearly distinguished them from non-immigrant youth, the group members were shy and reluctant to share these life experiences. The use of fiction allowed them to explore other characters' experiences of immigration, with events that were inspired from their own journeys. Although some of the best material for the performance came from this fictional exploration, the youth remained private about their own life experiences, and opened up only occasionally with lots of prompting from the coordinator who had worked with them for several years. This led me to question the agenda of the project: was it imposed on the youth by the NGO, and did it speak to their immediate needs of exploring their challenges of immigration and settlement. I discuss this topic in more detail in Chapter 7.

The second group of immigrant and refugee youth was very different from the first. They were not shy at all, and in fact, were more open to sharing their life experiences than to exploring them through fiction. They responded to the fiction quite negatively, and found it trivial compared to their own life experiences (similar to the first group of immigrant women with whom I worked). This experience taught me not to generalize, nor to expect that because a group shared the same demographic as another, they would have the same disposition. There was a lot of learning that took place through these two experiences, and I was fortunate enough to be facilitating this work as

I was doing my PhD studies, so it was suitable to document these projects and to integrate them into my research.

The Question that Guides my Dissertation

Through my background of working with different marginalized communities, and the topics of interest that have emerged from my practice, I ask the question: “*What are the elements that facilitate effective practice of theatre for development that help pave the way for an understanding of the conditions that provide autonomy and empowerment for marginalized communities?*” I propose that implementing elements such as *impact assessment, follow-up plan, and an exit strategy(ies)* creates accountability towards the community by NGOs and facilitators. Throughout my research, I bring up the notion of “sustainability” as proposed by Prentki (1998, 2003) to question whether the expectations that NGOs and facilitators have of communities are reasonable, and if these expectations indeed address the latter’s criteria of effective use of TfD.

Research Considerations

Reflecting on the means of creating “effective” TfD, Tim Prentki (2003) notes that TfD alone cannot bring about social transformation, “it can only play an effective role in contexts where it forms part of a larger network of social and cultural organizations sharing the same goals” (p.52). In my research, I point to the importance of working in collaboration with the local NGO, which creates the “larger network” of social connections to make the TfD impactful; and I point to the necessity of making the

TfD project goals relevant to the community's needs, hence measuring its impact through the community's own criteria of success.

Using TfD as a learning and discovery process, as a sequence of social practices seen as interconnected, the aim is to create critical consciousness and to raise the participants' awareness of the possibility of taking action to solve their development problems. (Epskamp, 2006, p.5)

I further Epskamp's proposition of how to utilize TfD and add my own: to use TfD as a method for the community to rediscover its sense of self-worth through celebration of their culture and life experiences.

Locating My Work

Augusto Boal (1979) proposed a method of practicing theatre, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (TO), as a means for the audience to "train [themselves] for real action," calling this type of theatre "a rehearsal for revolution" (as cited in Prentki and Preston, 2009, p.131). Boal's theatre focused on identifying the ways in which a community was "oppressed" and in playing out this oppression in a performance that would then be used to instigate audience response and participation in the action of the play. This process was intended to help the community better understand the dynamics of oppression in their lives. The aim of this process is to ultimately fight the injustice by practicing ways of responding to it. In some cases, the process made an impact on those who exercised oppression in their own lives, as with the wife-beater who identified with the oppressor on stage and who was so moved by seeing this action he vowed never to beat his wife again (Ganguly, 2004).

There are strong parallels between the practice of TfD and Boal's TO in that the two are aimed at the empowerment of the community. The former does so by engaging the community in the creation of the drama about a particular topic as a means of making the process autonomous (to find solutions to community problems, to celebrate and revive a community's heritage), while the latter relies on involving the community in reshaping the drama with the purpose of finding solutions to the oppression.

I believe that the essential components of TfD accurately depict the approach that I have developed and refined over the past decade, both in Cairo and Victoria, two cities widely separated by both geography and culture. These components include: a) TfD is practiced with vulnerable communities; b) one of the main project goals is to empower participants through their involvement in agenda-setting and decision-making; c) the project is intended to be performed for the larger community to create social awareness; d) a local agency (NGO/non-profit) is mandated to provide services to the marginalized participants and funds the theatre project; e) the NGO either has a predetermined agenda for the TfD project or holds the power to approve and supervise the agenda, when it emerges through collaboration between the facilitator and the community participants.

Hypotheses

I draw on my practice to hypothesize four elements that facilitate effective practice of TfD. First, TfD can be used in ways that assist communities to celebrate their livelihoods and reclaim their heritage, build identities, and a renewed sense of self-worth

(self-efficacy). This use of Tfd will help practitioners see beyond the bounds of the practice to explore struggles and analyze solutions for these challenges.

Second, the community sets the criteria for the success of the project. As in the case of the immigrant women's group, performance was not a criterion for the success of the project, rather it emphasized the richness of the process. In the case of the youth garbage collectors, the benefits that came from the performance defined the success of the project.

Third, it is important to recognize the support of an NGO to provide many forms of aid for the project. NGOs can provide financial support to begin the project and help it come to fruition, as well as staff members who have a connection with the community and can act as the link between the facilitator and the community.

Finally, practicing ethically aware Tfd by creating an exit strategy and follow-up plan that ensures the community's needs continue to be realized and supported after the completion of the project. Ethically conscious practice distinguishes between long-term and short-term goals for the project, and invests in the long-term goals. It also means working in collaboration with other programs that can benefit the community and that can further the goals of the Tfd project to create social transformation.

In pursuing my research, I will also address a number of complementary issues that are significant to an effective Tfd process. To that end, I will discuss *sustainability* and *accountability* in the practice of Tfd. I will also define *empowerment*; what I mean

by *participation*; what I mean by *social change*; how *perceptions of success* might vary; the importance of a *follow-up plan*; and how the *impact* of a project differs between a *long-term* workshop period and a *short-term* workshop period.

Chapter 2

Definitions of Terms & Literature Review

I. Definition of Terms

Applied Theatre

The practice of Applied Theatre has under its umbrella a large number of terms that define its various types of practices. Somers (2006) defines Applied Theatre as “a conscious use of drama approaches to bring about positive change;” and notes that it is practiced with and for a known population where “the societal context is researched” and “the drama event is customized for that context” (p. 92). The practice of Applied Theatre can involve actors or non-actors and is “a participatory theatre created by people who would not usually make theatre” (Thompson, 2006, p. 15). It can engage marginalized communities in celebrations of their lives, or in acts of empowerment and reclamation of their rights: “In circumstances where fear is dominant, [applied theatre] can be a theatre of celebration. In circumstances where celebratory escapism is dominant, it can be the theatre of serious enquiry” (Thompson, 2006, p.16). Applied Theatre generally takes place in classroom settings, or other venues not usually associated with theatre performances, and can be used to stimulate thought, inspire ideas, and stir up emotions.

The term “Applied Theatre” includes many forms of theatre practice outside the context of mainstream theatre. Together with theatre for development (TFD), others include: theatre in education; popular theatre; theatre of the oppressed; prison theatre;

museum theatre; theatre in health education; community-based theatre and reminiscence theatre (Prendergast & Saxton, 2009).

Development

Kees Epskamp (2006) follows Inayatullah (1967) in formulating a concept that regards development “as a process that helps society to: 1) gain increasing control over the environment, 2) achieve increasing control over its own political fate, and 3) offer its members increasing control over themselves” (Epskamp, p.102). The impetus of development is the core purpose of the work: personal development, community development or development for social/economic change. I expand upon this definition in the opening of the literature review.

Donor agency

This phrase refers to an agency that provides funds to support the development of marginalized communities (e.g. *Save the Children*). In most cases, donor agencies provide funds through another party, such as a development agency, or non-government organization (NGO). Donor agencies can, at times be a government organization, and at times an independent organization.

Empowerment

The term “empowerment” means to make someone or a group of people stronger and more confident, especially in controlling their lives and claiming their rights: “Empowerment refers to people’s ability to gain understanding and control over personal, social, economic, and political forces in order to take action to improve their situations”

(Isreal, Checkoway, Schulz, & Zimmerman, 1994 as cited in Kirby, Greaves, and Reid, 2006, p. 45). In the practice of Tfd, empowerment is the ability of participants to experience a sense of strength from liberating themselves from negative patterns of thought and creating more positive ways of viewing themselves and their lives.

Evaluation

Evaluation is a method that is carried out either by the theatre practitioner or the NGO staff (or in many cases, by both) to gather information from the participants about how they perceived and responded to a given project. It is a way for those working with the participants to assess the success of the work. Evaluations can be carried out via questionnaires at the beginning and end of the project, or through interviews or focus groups. Evaluations can be circulated among the participants, the staff working on the project, and the audience members viewing a Tfd performance. Evaluation instruments will, of course, be tailored to the characteristics of whichever group is being asked to respond.

Impact Assessment

“Impact assessment” is a term created by donor agencies to measure the effectiveness of the intervention on the target community. Unlike evaluations, which capture the immediate feedback and reflections of the participants (and sometimes communities) on a given project, impact assessment is about measuring the short-term effects and long-term effects, the negative and the positive, the intended goals and the unintended outcomes. Impact Assessment includes the positing of criteria or guidelines for success against which results may be “measured”. These criteria may be seen by

some NGOs as attainable measures but two decades of practice suggest it is wiser to see them as “guides” only. An impact assessment report is sometimes used by NGOs to apply for more funds from donor agencies; thus it is used as supporting documentation to prove the impact and usefulness of the work.

Not for Profit Organization or (preferred) Non-Government Organization

A non-governmental organization (NGO) is one that receives its funds from donor agencies. It is comprised of several staff members who are responsible for overseeing the use of funds to develop and aid marginalized communities. Ahmed (2002) defines NGOs as “any group or institution that is independent from government, and that has humanitarian or co-operative, rather than commercial, objectives” (as cited in Ahmed, 2002, p.208). In the Middle East, Africa, and most of Asia, it is the NGO that decides on the agenda of the TfD process and recruits facilitators or practitioners to implement this agenda. Examples of NGOs: *Community & Institutional Development (CID)* in Cairo, Egypt; *Victoria Immigrant & Refugee Centre Society (VIRCS)* in Victoria, Canada.

I turn now to terms that are directly involved in the drama or theatre work of participant groups:

Playbuilding or Playmaking

I have chosen to use the term “playmaking” to define the process I used to create plays with the communities with whom I have worked. I borrowed the term from Bethany Nelson (2011) who defines it as:

The use of a variety of drama/theatre techniques to develop original performance work with [participants] which emphasizes the exploration of their ideas with the goal of developing their voices and visions of the world and bringing them to a broader audience. (p.159)

I now explain other definitions of terms similar to playmaking: “playbuilding” and “devising.” Tarlington and Michaels (1995) define playbuilding as “a collaborative venture that involves the entire group in the creative process” (p.7). While Tarlington and Michaels refer to the team members creating the play as “actors,” they use the term to loosely define school age students or participants in the drama.

Alison Oddey (1994) describes a similar process as “devising”: “a devised theatrical performance originates with [a] group [of people] while making the performance, rather than starting from a play text that someone else has written to be interpreted” (p.1). Oddey’s description of the process uses the term “performers” as creators of the play, which could mean that trained people in the craft of theatre are the ones creating the play. Oddey’s book is not tailored for novice community members as creators of these plays, so I assume that she is referring to a company of trained performers who collaborate on creating a piece of theatre. That said, Dobson & Neelands (2008) describe devising as a process that “emerges as a result of a collaborative process of exploration and experimentation arising from concerns and ideas collectively generated by a group of devisers” (p.162). The book, *Devising Theatre: a practical and theoretical handbook* (Oddey, 1994), is meant for young learners of theatre and drama, so the term “devising” in this case could also be used to describe the same process of “playbuilding” for amateur theatre participants.

Bray (1991) defines four types of playbuilding: the theme play, the story play, the character play, and the setting play. Of the projects included in this dissertation: the *El-Zabbaleen* project with the youth garbage collectors was a setting play, “[which is comprised of an] episodic structure with a variety of activities and people being linked by a single locality” (p.9). The other two projects, *Here I Stand*, and *Where is Home?* with immigrant and refugee youth were theme plays, where “a general topic [...] is the main structural thread of the play” (p.6).

Skills of Theatre

The skills of theatre are the set of skills and abilities that participants learn from the practice of theatre. For example: creating and presenting a story using dialogue and utilizing an acting space; using embodiment to relay particular emotions; learning to project and articulate while acting; learning to act in scenes; learning to direct scenes; using abstract forms of theatre to enhance and deepen dramatic moments; learning to sing or play musical instruments to complement the performance.

Theatre

When used in the context of TfD, “theatre” refers to a process-based use of the art form of theatre that requires those practicing it to use the skills of collaboration, embodiment, improvisation and communication. The art form can be utilized for self-expression, for the exploration of significant incidents in the participants’ lives, or as a means of celebration of life, of social and cultural traditions, or of personal values. A performance or performances is the expected outcome of the process work.

Social Change

“Social change is the process of altering the initial situation of a group, organization, or community in the direction of a more liberated state” (Greenwood & Levin, 1998, as cited in Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2006, p. 45). The ultimate goal of TfD is to bring a community together to change the way the society works, whether it is to impact individuals in how they see themselves or to impact individuals who are in a position of power to make a change in the society.

Theatre for Development (TfD)

TfD is the use of theatre to work with vulnerable, marginalized, or disempowered communities to bring about social change. Tim Prentki (1998) defines it as:

[T]heater used in the service of development aims; a tool available to development agencies which pursue the goals of self-development and an improved quality of life of all people whose material conditions leave them vulnerable to hostile, predatory forces, both natural and human (p.419).

Some TfD work is focused on creating dialogue amongst community members about a pressing issue, and other work is focused on creating self-awareness and the formation of a new identity.

Using TfD as a learning and discovery process, as a sequence of social practices seen as interconnected, the aim is to create critical consciousness and

to raise the participants' awareness of the possibility of taking action to solve their development problems (Epskamp, 2006, p. 5).

I further Epskamp's proposition of how to utilize TfD and add my own: to use TfD as a method for the community to discover and rediscover its sense of self-worth through a celebration of its culture and its life experiences. What distinguishes TfD from other community-based projects is that NGOs are involved in the process of the former:

"[TfD is] all forms of theatre that seek to engage in questions related to 'development'" (Ahmed, 2002, p.209). NGOs have the potential to play a vital role as advocates for the community, and supporters of the TfD process.

Theatre Facilitator

This term refers to the person who manages and leads a theatre workshop or series of workshops (project) with a group of participants. The facilitator is skilled at using different forms of theatre in the workshop or project and often may serve as the director for the performance/s at the end of the facilitation period. The role of the TfD facilitator is crucial to the process. The facilitator teaches theatre skills to participants, or simply uses these skills to explore topics or issues that are at play. Maribel Legarda (2002), the artistic director of the Philippine Educational Theatre Association (PETA), describes the skill required of the TfD facilitator: "the artist-teacher [must] step out of the artistic confines of a conventional theatre ensemble into the arena of development work, where one reinvents theatre not only as a means of self-expression but as a venue for imagining, proposing and actualizing change" (p. 340).

Workshop/Project:

In order to begin to understand the importance of the timeline of Tfd projects, it is necessary to differentiate between a *workshop* and a *project*. A workshop is a session given by a facilitator with the participation of the target community. This can take between a few hours and a few days. Sometimes facilitators expect the participants to achieve the workshop goals upon completion of the workshop (e.g. gain insight and awareness on a particular issue). A project, on the other hand, takes place over an extended period of time, and is usually comprised of a series of workshops. Sometimes a project is set to take place over a long period of time, such as one year or more. In most cases the project goals are set prior to the start of a project. Due to the extended nature of projects, it is ideal to revisit the project goals after a period of time, in order to assess the feasibility of achieving them, as well as to modify them, where necessary.

II. Literature Review

I have divided my review into three parts. First, I look at the books and articles that consider the changes and shifts in understanding the term “development.” Second, I consider the materials that provide an historical overview of theatre for development. Finally, I refer to resources that clarify the significance of the NGO to the process of Tfd. It is worth noting that the field of Tfd is relatively new, and there are not many books devoted to it.

Development

Understanding the meaning of the term “development” and how it came to be used in so-called “third world” countries is essential to understanding how Theatre for

Development began, as well as the political and social circumstances that gave it rise. In his book *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, Cornelius Castoriadis (1991) gives some insight into how the notion of development came to be used to describe the desirable economic and social progress of “developing” countries. Castoriadis examines the political climate of the mid-twentieth century, where he traces the evolution of the idea that less prosperous countries need to adapt to western values in order to become more “civilized.” In *Theatre for Development: An Introduction to Context, Application, and Training*, Kees Epskamp (2006) offers a similar summary of the formation of the concept of development but with awareness of the arts and theatre. Epskamp was a senior staff member for UNESCO, thus his book makes the connection between the concept of development and how it was used in applied theatre NGO projects. In Prentki and Selman’s (2003) *Popular Theatre in Political Culture: Britain and Canada in focus*, a chapter is dedicated to investigating where and when the concept of development arose. The authors note that it began with Harry Truman’s inaugural address in 1949, in which the US president first gave the title “under-developed” to less economically and industrially prosperous countries (p. 11). On a darker note Gustavo Esteva (1992) discusses the formation of the concept “underdeveloped”, pointing to the greedy intentions of capitalist nations that built their empires on the backs of poorer countries.

This idea is furthered in an editorial by Wendy Harcourt (2007), “Reflections on 50 years of Development,” where 19 theorists and activists reflect on the evolution of development and where it stands in the present day, pointing to areas where it has succeeded, but mostly referring to where it has failed. I will use Michael Edwards’ article, “The Irrelevance of Development Studies” (1989), to examine the work of

“development” experts in third world countries and to point to the absence of “humility” in the approach to development work, resulting in wasted efforts and funds.

Byam’s (1999) *Community in Motion: Theatre for Development in Africa* contains a chapter about the concept of development, and also cites several politicians, economists, and theorists on the topic. More is mentioned on development in Prentki’s article, “Save the Children? Change the World” (2003), as well as Nogueira’s “Viewpoints” (2002). The authors of these articles rely on their own theories and experiences on the topic of development, and offer their own summaries of the evolution of Tfd.

In my research, I have found the term “Theatre for Development” or “Tfd” to be used to describe theatre that has taken place in developing countries with disadvantaged communities. Some theorists take issue with the term “Tfd” because of its association with the term “development” (Nicholson, 2006) and the implications of the latter to mean that a particular community needed “fixing.”

There is some considerable discrepancy with the use of the terms “Popular Theatre” and “Tfd.” While some theorists (Mlama, 2002; Prentki, 2003) differentiate between the two practices, Abah (2002) uses the two terms quite loosely, almost as if they were interchangeable. Nogueira (2002) clearly outlines the evolution of the term “Popular Theatre” to “Tfd” to reflect the community’s involvement as active participants. Prentki (2003), on the other hand, writes about the history of Tfd practice and calls it Tfd from its emergence, which, according to Prentki, was in the 1970s.

Mlama (2002) looks at TfD as a more advanced stage of Popular Theatre, where the former is more in touch with the community's needs.

Popular Theatre pioneer Michael Etherton was only introduced to the term TfD in 1996, and noted that while he chose to utilize the term TfD, he was more comfortable using "Popular Theatre" to describe the practice (personal communication, March 2, 2009). From my reading I understand that the term "TfD" became more widely used to describe what was formerly called "Popular Theatre" because of the changing nature of the practice to involve communities as performers in the making of their dramas.

In their book, mentioned above, Prentki and Selman (2003) define *Popular Theatre* as a practice that is "of the people, belonging to the people" (p.9). The definitions used in their book are very similar to those describing the practice of TfD, only in this case Prentki and Selman make it clear that Popular Theatre exists in North America and Europe, while TfD exists in developing countries. It is interesting to wonder if, in reference to the above, TfD is "of" the people and "by" the people, while Popular Theatre was more "for" the people.

Byam (1999), Nogueira (2002), and Prentki (2003) include their own definitions of TfD in the above-mentioned sources. Nogueira agrees with Byam with regard to her definition of popular theatre, and how it differs from TfD. Nogueira goes on to rationalize why the two concepts were historically related. In Chapter 4 I will draw on all of these sources to develop my own theory of the differences and similarities between the two practices.

By defining the term “TfD” I narrow down the research to activities that fall under a particular set of criteria (theatre by and for marginalized communities, and one that is funded by donor agencies), and a particular time period (post-colonial Africa to present day). That said, in Chapter 4, I choose to shed light on two TfD projects that fall outside the parameters described above: *Jana Sanskriti* (2002) and *Sistren Theatre Collective* (2006). Both projects are excellent examples of TfD that emerged from the people and were able to create sustainability, an achievement not often witnessed by projects that have been funded and managed by NGOs.

History of Theatre for Development

Nogueira’s “Viewpoints” (2002) and Chapter 1 of Byam’s *Community in Motion* (1999) offer some insights into what they perceive to be the beginnings of development in Africa. Both these sources report on the decline of the process of development due to the community’s reliance on donor agency aid. While I do not claim that when money is provided the development process slows down or ceases, I do make inferences that sometimes development agencies overlook the community’s most immediate needs and circumstances that could then hinder the latter’s ability to make full use of the TfD process.

Nogueira gives a useful summary of the three stages of the evolution of TfD: theatre as development propaganda; the democratization of theatre; and participatory theatre (p.105). In “Save the Children? Change the World,” Prentki (2003) echoes some of what Nogueira has said, and also provides his own criticism of what he calls the “lost

decade of the eighties.” Prentki reports that in the 1980s, development and, in turn, TfD, was not able to find ways to have impact on communities. These three sources (Nogueira 2002; Byam 1999; Prentki 2003) taken together give a rounded view of what development means, how it came to be, its evolution, and its pitfalls.

In order to thoroughly understand what TfD is about, it is necessary to trace the beginnings of the practice, and the reasons why the desire to practice this method has proved to be so strong. L. Dale Byam’s (1999) *Community in Motion: Theatre for Development in Africa* gives an account of the first projects that were carried out in Botswana and Zambia. I have discovered, through my personal correspondence with Michael Etherton (2009), that Byam’s information is not accurate, and that her view on the reasons for some practitioners’ initial contact with the local communities through TfD is flawed. Byam claims that Etherton’s TfD goals were to portray some of the community’s hardships through theatrical presentations. Etherton explained that his goal was to bring “heavily rehearsed” text-based theatre to local communities as a way of democratizing the arts (personal communication, March 2, 2009). A more accurate account of the project that Etherton, along with John Reed, spearheaded in Zambia is available in a recently published book titled *Chikwakwa Remembered* (2011), which means *grass-cutter*, and is also the name that was given to the theatre group referred to by Byam.

I will supplement the information found in Byam’s book with the history that is offered in Zakes Mda’s (1993) work, *When People Play People: Development communication through theatre*. Mda’s book offers a more detailed account of the

projects that took place in post-colonial Africa. Due to his African heritage, Mda's book gives the reader an insider's perspective on the early TfD projects, while Byam views the work through a Western lens. Mda also makes reference to Kamlongera (1989), who has documented the early projects of Ross Kidd in Botswana. Kamlongera, like Mda, gives an insider's perspective on the practice of TfD, which criticizes the imposition of Western theatre methods and techniques on communities that had established traditions of performance long before colonization.

To trace the evolution of TfD I will rely on sources provided by various TfD theorists and practitioners. I intend to use Salihu Bappa and Michael Etherton's "Popular Theatre: Voice of the Oppressed" (1983) to describe a new phase in the development of TfD during the late 1970s. The article describes the practitioners' realization of the needs of the "peasants," and their shift into using the TfD process in order to facilitate more community engagement. Prentki and Noguiera mention this stage in their summary of the evolution of TfD, but they do not reference this particular project of Etherton's. Their article describes the succession of events that led practitioners to change their approaches when working with disempowered communities.

I consider my research enquiry to be more diverse, and so I expand my scope to include Maribel Legarda's reflections on her projects in the Philippines in "Imagined Communities: *PETA's* community, culture, and development experiences" (2002); Sanjoy Ganguly's documentation of the work of his theatre group *Jana Sanskriti* in rural India in "Theatre-a space for empowerment: celebrating *Jana Sanskriti's* experience in India" (2002); and articles by Helen Drusine (2002), and Sharon Green (2006) on the

Jamaican group *Sistren Theatre Collective*. Drusine's article sheds light on the formation and success of the group with a focus on the women's collective creativity and empowerment, while Green's article focuses more on the group's progression and the mistakes they made along the way, as well as its current state.

As mentioned previously, Prentki labels development work in the 80s as "the lost decade of the eighties" (2003, p. 40). Although he is not directly pointing to TfD work in that period, there is little literature on TfD that highlights the success of the above-mentioned projects that took place in the 80s. In my research I will point to these pivotal examples that define a moment when the theatre process began to grow out of the community itself, without the presence of a facilitator or donor agency. I'm uncertain as to why these projects were left out of theorists' summaries and documentation of the growth of the practice of TfD; perhaps they fall outside the parameters defined as TfD projects by these theorists. What I find unique about these projects is the strong relevance of the performance content to the people's struggles and concerns, and their ability to find sustainability, an achievement not often experienced by projects that are funded and managed by NGOs.

Kees Epskamp attributes the formation of TfD to Augusto Boal (1979). Although some of Boal's methods have been used in TfD, I do not regard him as the founder of the practice. Augusto Boal used a form of Applied Theatre, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, to look at community concerns, to engage the community in dialogue as a means of empowering participants. But his methods do not take account of the presence of NGOs in the practice, which significantly impacts the dynamics of working with marginalized

communities. Boal's publications include *Legislative Theatre* (1995), which addressed community-building by pointing out the discrepancies within the political culture of the society, and *Rainbow of Desire* (1998), which describe a practice to help people better understand the kind of oppressions to which they were subjected, and to learn means of fighting them off on an individual level. Even though I will not use Boal's texts to support my argument, I refer to and credit him for being one of the initiators of theatre that attempts to combat oppressive forces.

Another project that most TfD theorists mention in their research is Michael Etherton's Child Rights project in rural Bangladesh. This project is cited in Nogueira's "Viewpoints", and Prentki's "Save the Children? Change the World" as a new departure in the evolution of TfD, where emphasis shifted from a 'needs-based' approach to a 'rights-based' approach. Etherton himself has written several articles about this work, the most detailed one being "South Asia's Child Rights Theatre for Development: the empowerment of children who are marginalized, disadvantaged and excluded" (2004). In this article, Etherton describes a workshop he ran to train the project coordinators on the methods of TfD and follow it with an account of several projects that took place with children from different rural communities. Etherton and Asif Munier later wrote "Child Rights Theatre for Development in rural Bangladesh: a case study" (2006). This article reflects the challenges associated with impact assessment, and the need to follow up on a TfD project after its completion. Information from this article will be used to give a more comprehensive understanding of Etherton's work.

Etherton's most recent reflections are to be found in a forthcoming book, *No Happy Endings*. Two chapters are devoted to the work in Bangladesh. They are titled "Bangladesh and Child Rights," and "Return to South Asia". Both are extended reflections on the impact that the work has had on him as a practitioner, as well as on the children. These chapters are very different from anything that Etherton has previously written, because they do not attempt to theorize about TfD. They are simple and heartfelt accounts of his experience with the children during and after the project. Etherton includes an account of his last visit to the group, and his conversations with some of the young participants about how their lives had unfolded since the workshop. These two chapters give valuable insight into the facilitator's experience and are extremely useful in understanding the evolution of the literature on the topic of TfD.

NGOs and their role in TfD

NGOs have been mentioned in almost all the recent publications on TfD, at a time when a concern for assessing impact became more evident. There are several authors who write on the subject of NGOs, and each of them has their own particular way of looking at the NGO's role within the practice of TfD. Helen Banos Smith's "International NGOs and Impact Assessment - Can we know we are making a difference?" (2006) elucidates the efforts behind NGO-led agendas in TfD. But the article fails to mention the power that NGOs hold, and the impact that this hold can have on the participating community. On the other hand, Kees Epskamp's *Theatre for Development: Introduction to Context, Applications, and Training* (2006) provides an in-depth perspective on NGOs and how these organizations view the use of arts and culture in the process of development. Epskamp's book gives insights into the way NGOs run

and how they try to benefit communities. It is a knowledgeable and informed analysis of how NGOs operate and what makes them value the arts in their efforts with marginalized communities.

For an opposite view of NGOs, Sayed Jamil Ahmed, and his articles “Fitting the bill for helping them. A response to ‘Integrated popular theatre approach in Africa’ and ‘Commissioned theatre projects on human rights in Pakistan’” (2007), and “Wishing for a world without ‘Theatre for Development’: demystifying the case of Bangladesh” (2002) are revealing. Both of Ahmed’s articles are very critical of the role of NGOs in developing countries. Ahmed describes in detail how money is supplied to NGOs in Pakistan and Bangladesh, and suggests that there is an over-riding agenda to “domesticate” marginalized communities, as though they were cattle (p.218). Ahmed makes little allowance for some of the benefits that accrue from having the support of an NGO. Some of the uses of donor funding can be noted in Jane Plastow’s account of a dance specialist forming a dance company with street youth of Addis Ababa in “Dance and Transformation: the Adugna Community Dance Theatre, Ethiopia” (2003).

Oga Abah also criticizes the role of NGOs in his article “The Dynamics of Intervention in Community Theatre for Development” (2002), and he does so by writing about different TfD projects that took place in Nigeria. Abah says that both facilitators and NGOs have to respect the agency of the community to decide for themselves, and discusses the ethical considerations in the dynamic between NGOs, facilitators, and communities. In her article, “Popular Theatre and Development-Challenges for the Future: The Tanzanian Experience,” Penina Mloma (2002) echoes what Abah is saying,

but with a focus on community agency, and a more thorough study of the concept and role of Tfd (which she calls “popular theatre”) in community-building. Using this research, I will formulate a critique of the role of NGOs in relation to Tfd, examining their positive and negative contributions. This will help me develop an understanding of the power dynamics between NGOs, the process of Tfd, and the participating communities. But first, I turn to the methodologies I used to conduct this research.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology

In this chapter I outline my use of three different methodologies to bring to fruition my research investigations and to validate my hypothesis. I use *Narrative Inquiry* to recall and reflect on my experience working with the young garbage pickers in Cairo. Upon completing this narrative, my investigation led me to a new experience, with immigrant and refugee youth in Victoria to design and implement the project plan, rehearsal process, and community performances. Initially I had selected *Reflective Practitioner Case Study* as the sole method of research that would help me investigate my research questions. Working with the immigrant and refugee community, and being able to incorporate in my process the goals of the NGO and the young participants, I was able to see that the project was in fact following the protocols of *Community-based Participatory Action Research*..

The improvisatory nature of doing applied theatre work - especially TfD - which involves working with communities that use their immediate life experiences to feed the process, imposes on the practitioner a need to be flexible about the methods of practice. The same flexibility is required of the applied theatre researcher, where one can plan on using a particular methodology that one sees fit for the research, and instead be presented with a process that requires the use of a different methodology to better complement the goals of the project. This has been my experience doing this research.

While I recognize the nature of the community-based collaborative work that was carried out with the immigrant and refugee community, I use *Reflective Practitioner Case Study*, “[which] involves the practitioner’s own construction of meaning, purpose and significance in his or her practice” (Taylor, 2006, p.57), to document and evaluate the findings of this research. While the purpose of the TfD work with the immigrant community (which was also pre-planned by the NGO) was to empower the young participants and to create social awareness of their struggles, my research questions were designed to explore methods of effective practice of TfD and to investigate possibilities of sustainability of TfD projects.

The Study’s Purpose & Research Questions

Cairo Garbage Pickers (El-Zabbaleen) 2002-2003

My work with the community of garbage pickers in Cairo for the duration of two years was a powerful learning experience for me. Years later during my graduate studies as I reflected on my experience, I learned that I was employing a method (TfD), which had been used since the 1960s as a tool for raising awareness, and eventually as a means for marginalized communities to reclaim their autonomy and voice. My inexperience with this method of practice meant that at the time I did not fully appreciate its impact on the lives of the young garbage pickers, and when the project was discontinued in vague circumstances I did not have the knowledge that I now possess to explain to the NGO the value of this kind of work both for the boys’ sense of self-worth and for giving them validation amongst a society that stigmatized them as “unworthy.”

When I embarked on this journey to do my PhD I wanted to investigate the ways that the practice of TfD could be passed on as part of the process of empowering and giving full autonomy to the community practicing it. My intention was to prove that a successful and ethically aware practice of TfD had to incorporate a process of passing on these skills to the community, in order to eliminate the latter's reliance on facilitators and NGOs. I discovered that the work of Michael Etherton (2004, 2006) and Tim Prentki (1998, 2003, 2004) addressed this very issue of what Prentki referred to as "sustainability:"

[...] TfD creates a space in which communities can form agendas of their own devising. At its most effective, therefore, it enables communities to take control of the development process on their own terms, transforming it into a process of self-development which might be sustainable beyond the input of the external facilitators and project workers (1998, p.427).

This initial research focus was further modified later on in my process to embrace and make room for the intricacies and unplanned events that are part of the practice of TfD, and to acknowledge that there are different areas of support that make up the success of this practice.

El-Zabbaleen Project (Using Narrative Inquiry)

As the starting point of my research I highlight my experience of working with the young garbage pickers to set the context for my investigations. I use Narrative Inquiry as a methodology that addresses my need to reflect on and fully give credit to what I have learned from this experience. Initially I thought that Reflective Practitioner

Case Study would be a suitable methodology, as it would allow me to reflect on my practice and at the same time showcase the *El-Zabbaleen* project as a case study.

O'Toole (2006) reiterates the definition given by Taylor (1996) on Reflective Practitioner Case Study:

[A methodology where] the teacher needs not just reflection **on** action, [...] but reflection **in** action in 'my' understanding of my own context (both explicit and tacit) and how I can use this to reshape my own and then others' behaviour (2006, p.57).

While this methodology would have allowed me to critique my choices as the facilitator of the *El-Zabbaleen* project, there would have been issues of credibility because I did not take notes during my practice, hence I was only recalling my experience based on memory. I realized that I did not only want to write about my own experience with the young garbage pickers, I also wanted to present their community and its history to the reader in a way that described their culture and way of life, as well as involve my process and important events of my life as part of the experience. Being a native of Egypt, and having interacted with the *El-Zabbaleen* community for the last two years of my life in Cairo, I needed to find a methodology that would allow me to infuse some of my culture, heritage, and life experiences into the story I tell.

I researched other methodologies and came upon Narrative Inquiry (Barone, 2001; Britzman, 2003; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Zatzman, 2006), which addressed these needs: “[Narrative Inquiry] provides a means of making sense of one’s own

experiences, particularly as the narrator [...] unpacks a story that is located within her or his culture, language, gender, and history” (Zatzman, 2006, p.111).

I write about the *El-Zabbaleen* project using Narrative Inquiry to make sense of and reconcile the feelings of confusion and guilt that I was left with after the discontinuation of the project in August 2003. Through this narrative I was able to write about a profoundly moving experience in a way that would honor my position as the narrator of the story:

These art forms [of writing narratives] express for me profound emotional truths.

If we are to embrace our humanity and validate the lived historical experiences of individuals then we must embrace this subjectivity as knowledge, as emotional, intuitive intelligences in the understanding and meaning-making of our lives.

There will never be an absolutely true representation of a life or an experience.

Thus the authenticity of meaning is what I strive for, that I have the essence of what has been shared and captured (Cutcher, 2004 as cited in O’Toole, 2006, p.60).

During the writing and rewriting of the narrative, I was better able to comprehend the benefits of the TfD experience on the lives of the young boys, and to reflect on my choices and actions as the group’s theatre facilitator. I was also better able to understand the relationship between the community, the facilitators, and the NGO involved in the project. The story I write is a product, but within that product are the implications of process; that is to say, the telling itself reflects the initiation of a research process, a

process that continues after the telling is laid down and generates my present work, concerns and research.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) define Narrative Inquiry as a metaphoric three-dimensional inquiry space that asks the researcher to think about three “essential elements”: a) Personal/social Issues; b) Temporal Issues; c) Issues of Location. As I tell my story, situating my own identity and background as part of the narrative, I describe the social surroundings of the community of *El-Zabbaleen* to give the reader an understanding of the social and economic pressures, which the participants and I were dealing with at the time of the project. As I recollect the memories of this narrative, I move between two different locations: Egypt, where the story is located, and Canada, where I begin to understand that story and draw from it the learning and questions the story itself generates. “The memory of place and issues of absence might also be constructed as constituents of a narrative inquiry” (Zatzman, 2006, p.120). Throughout the telling of the story I’m moving through time, often backwards and forwards, as I make sense of the experience and the implications of it for my future study. This kind of storytelling can be ambiguous (Barone, 2001) and its interpretations are personal and subject to different readings at different times (Britzman, 2003). It is, of course, “impossible to retell everything, given both the partiality of language and the instability of meaning” (Zatzman, 2006, p.113).

On using memory as a research tool Zatzman (2006) writes: “...memory and remembering are entirely implicated in narrative research...If memory is contextual and can be known only insofar as it is told, then narrative inquiry can be understood as a

construction of the past, mediated and incomplete” (p.115). Although the story of El-Zabbaleen is born out of memory, I have photographs of workshop sessions and performances, program notes, and copies of proposals for funding that I wrote and presented to the NGO. I also have documentation of conversations, responses, visits and communication with participants, audience members, and the newly formed NGO that is presently running the theatre program. Although these don’t count as “formal” data, they are considered “field texts” (Clandinin and Connelly) that enable me to validate or contest my own memories as I mediate “between the fictional and the actual” (Zatzman, 2006, p.117).

Immigrant & Refugee Youth Theatre Project (Using Action Research)

My investigation into the validity and practicality of passing on theatre skills to marginalized communities led me to rework my initial hypothesis. Through Narrative Inquiry I was able to come to an understanding of the importance of accountability of facilitators and NGOs when working with vulnerable communities. I began to point to the importance of *impact assessment*, *exit strategies*, and *follow-up plans* as means of supporting the community in their process of benefiting from the TfD experience. For my next project working with immigrant and refugee youth, I hypothesized that the above three factors (in italics) are essential for the effective practice of TfD in creating support and some form of sustainability for marginalized communities. In realizing that my ultimate goal in a given TfD project is to create sustainability and social transformation, I understood that to essentially mean “effective practice of TfD.” Thus my research question transformed into “*What are the elements that facilitate effective practice of*

theatre for development that help pave the way for an understanding of the conditions that provide autonomy and empowerment for marginalized communities?”

My work with the immigrant and refugee community of youth was intended as a pilot project, part of a three-phase plan. The local NGO (Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society) that sponsored the project wanted to engage the young community in a creative process to find their collective voice to recreate their immigration experiences and their challenges with settlement in Victoria. The project was to culminate in a performance that would raise community awareness and create social change.

After working on the project for two years (2009-2011), and being part of its second phase, I realized that I was involved in a collective experience of furthering the agenda of the community, the NGO, and myself as the facilitator/researcher. Since the process was about social action and advocacy for change through collective creation, I again found my initial methodology of Reflective Practitioner Case Study to be lacking in incorporating the input of the community in the research process. On the process of working towards a collective goal, Kirby, Greaves, and Reid (2006) write:

If knowledge represents power, and we are committed to developing knowledge that generates social change and actions that improve life for people, it makes sense to involve those people and others who are intimately acquainted with the issues (p.30).

Upon examining Action Research, which is “not about describing or interpreting what happens, [but] is about change and about using research to solve real problems” (O’Toole, 2006, p.50), I found a methodology that complemented the nature of my work with the immigrant and refugee community. This process involved the participants’ input throughout the workshops and rehearsals, where they chose to select issues from their personal encounters to form the material of the performances. The performance was meant to raise awareness of the challenges faced by immigrant and refugee youth who come to Canada. Adelman (1993) describes Action Research as “giv[ing] credence to the development of powers of reflective thought, discussion, decision and action by ordinary people participating in collective research on ‘private troubles’ that they have in common” (as cited in Mills, 2007, p.5). The following is a description of the research process with the immigrant and refugee community, about which I was able to gather substantial supportive evidence through rehearsal notes, participant questionnaires, and audience evaluations.

Research Process

According to O’Toole (2006), Action Research “is about change and intervention. Initially, the Research Question is usually conceptualized as a problem to be solved, or a vision to be achieved” (p.51). O’Toole describes the process as a spiral where the first stage is about careful planning of the action or intervention, followed by a stage of implementing the plan (the intervention), all the while carefully observing and documenting the results. The next step in the spiral is a re-planning, with the attempt to adjust the intervention based on the findings from the first intervention as the project

proceeds to a new phase of implementation. This process is repeated as many times as necessary to achieve the goals of the project (See *Figures 1 & 2* below) .

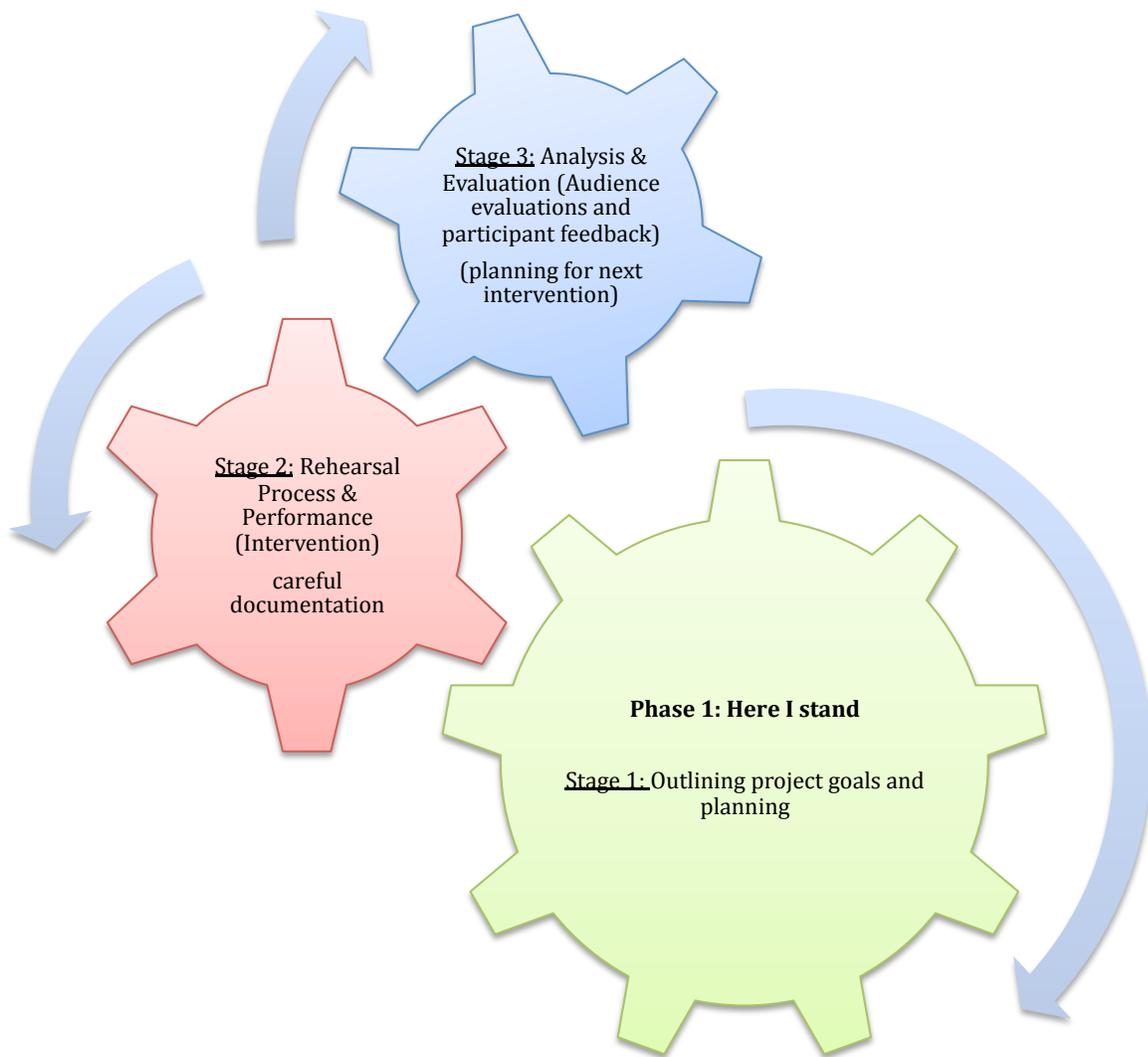
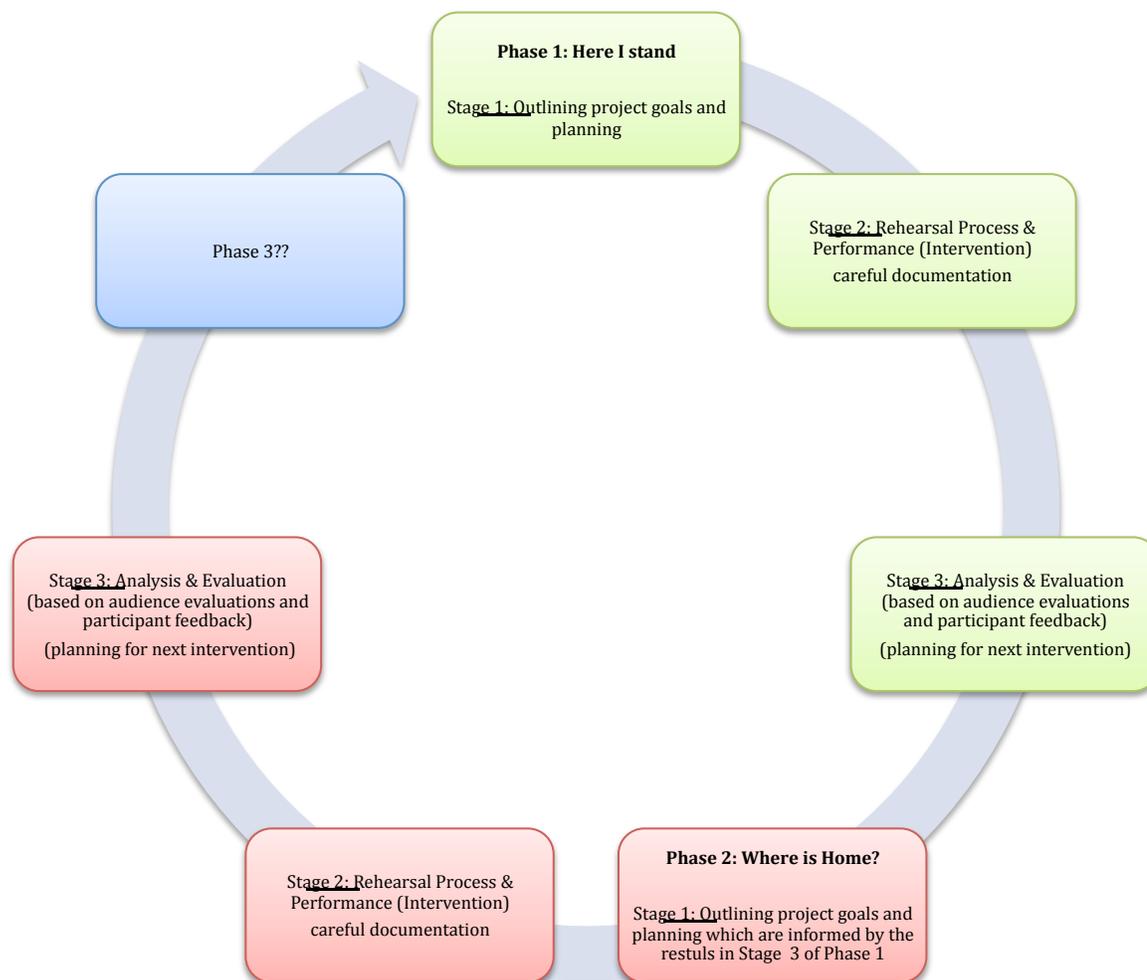


Figure 1: Spiral nature of Action Research Methodology

Figure 2: Phases 1 & 2 of Action Research Plan



The model described above was carried out through Phase 1 and Phase 2 of my work with the immigrant and refugee youth. *Figure 1* is a diagram to clarify the three initial stages that are always present in any of the phases. *Figure 2* is a diagram that illustrates the spiral nature of the methodology, where after the completion of Stage 3 of Phase 1, we move on to Phase 2, and start with Stage 1 again. This diagram makes room

for a possible Phase 3, which is scheduled to take place after completion of this dissertation.

In Phase 1 of the above-described plan, the NGO and I identified the goals of the project, but with the understanding that the young participants will play a significant part in helping us evaluate the impact of the project: “The community members are collaborators in the research project because effective interventions require the consideration and respect of the social and cultural constructions of the people involved” (Ozanne & Anderson, 2010, p.124). Between the NGO’s goals and my own, we were able to test the effectiveness of the process and performance on both the participants (immigrant & refugee youth), and the audience that saw the performance (comprised of various members from the Victoria community).

The most important feature of this research is that it was “guided by locally defined priorities” (Ozzane & Anderson, 2010, p.124): the NGO (based on its close relationship with the group through other programs) acted as the expert on the issues that were of most relevance and concern to the youth. The young people were able to provide the content of the performances based on their life experiences and what they felt they wanted/needed to share with the community. The team, comprised of the NGO and myself, intended to use this project to improve the lives of the participants, who as a marginalized community did not have a place to share their stories and find validation for their experiences.

Research Focus

In attempting to answer my research question, I have examined several areas of research:

a) The role of the NGO in securing funding:

- to provide moral and material support to the community
- to act as an 'insider' to the community where the NGO identifies the community's needs and most pressing issues
- to act as a visionary in thinking of ways to give the community a voice
- to act as a bridge between the facilitator and the community.

b) The role of the facilitator:

- to act as the driving force behind the project
- to instill in the participants a sense of appreciation for the art of practicing theatre for social change
- to create a facilitation plan that respects and honors the participants' journeys and life experiences
- to create a performance that generates community response and awareness of the issues the participants are tackling
- to negotiate between the NGO's agenda, the facilitator's agenda, and the community's agenda.

c) The role of the participants:

- to act as active participants in the theatrical project
- to decide on the topics to explore
- to evolve with the project and understand how it impacts their lives.

d) The importance of time:

- to allow the participants to learn about theatre and its uses before being asked to decide what to do with this tool.

e) The importance of a follow-up plan and an exit strategy:

- to ensure that participants are not left feeling abandoned after what might be a life-changing experience of being engaged and embraced by the organization, the facilitator, and the rest of the adults working on the project.

Type of Research

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2008), it is best to begin the methodology section by identifying whether the research is qualitative or quantitative, and to give a rationale for why I chose this kind of research. In consulting O'Toole's *Doing Drama Research: Stepping into inquiry in drama, theatre, and education* (2006), I decided that it was more beneficial to my research process to put aside the question of whether it is qualitative or quantitative until I have identified the evidence I needed to investigate my research question. "There may be," writes O'Toole, "aspects of the [Research] Question that can be measured [through qualitative research], and others where evidence has to be interpreted and judged for relevance or importance [through quantitative research]" (p.31).

Description of the Project & the Research Sample

Step 1: Youth Garbage Collectors' Project as a Stepping Stone (2002-2003)

Using *Narrative Inquiry* I wrote a historical narrative of the project I carried out with the youth garbage collectors. The narrative is a stand-alone chapter (see Chapter 5) that describes the events and circumstances that gave birth to a significant and impactful

project that took place in the slums of Cairo's *Mansheyet Nasser*. In the narrative, I document my observation of the young participants, the impact that the practice of theatre had on their lives and on their community. I describe how the project evolved from an arts program that had no clear parameters or goals into one that gained momentum and importance in the lives of the young garbage pickers. I provide an account of the events that led to the discontinuation of the project, which had significant ramifications for the participants. I reflect on my actions and choices as a practitioner, and what could have been done differently to perhaps salvage the situation. In the narrative, I ask myself these questions:

- What impact did TfD have on the youth garbage collectors?
- What social impact did the performance have on the audience?
- How was the social stigma attached to being a “garbage picker” challenged through this performance?
- What role did the NGO play in this process?
- What agreements had to be put in place in order to create transparency and a positive working relationship between facilitators and NGOs?
- What impact did the discontinuation of the project have on the young participants?
- What could have been done differently to salvage the situation?
- What were the long-term effects of the project on the participants?
- How can TfD be used as a method of empowerment for disadvantaged communities?

The *El-Zabbaleen* narrative poses some important questions about accountability of facilitators and NGOs when working with marginalized communities. It points to the need to create transparency between all three entities in order to honour the community's process and their investment in the project. Testimonials and interviews with participants are not part of this research as I only came to understand the significance of the experience a few years after the project's termination. While immersed in the project I did not foresee that it would eventually be part of my research, hence no effort was made to document the participants' experiences and testimonials. I did, however, use the advantage of the internet to communicate with audience members made up of former colleagues and acquaintances to collect two responses to my questionnaire (Appendix G).

Step 2:

Phase 1: Immigrant & Refugee Theatre Project "Here I Stand"

(September 2009-July 2010).

In accepting my role as the theatre facilitator and director of a performance that I would help create with the young immigrants and refugees, I aspired to examine closely what I now perceived to be important factors in the TfD process: 1) the role of facilitators and NGOs. I hoped to explore the importance of factors such as *impact assessment*, *follow-up plan*, and *exit strategy* in the development of effective practice of TfD; 2) I wanted to understand what impact TfD might have on young participants who had entered a "developed" society (I had confidence that they would become theatre enthusiasts and that they would eventually be able to practice TfD independently of outside help); and 3) I wanted to carefully study the prospect of sustainability of the TfD process for the community, and to examine the ingredients necessary to ensure that this

could be made possible. But as any facilitator who is contracted to deliver a certain project, I was bound to the NGO's project proposal and the outcomes I promised to deliver. My research questions would have to be shaped around the goals of the project as set by the NGO.

The first phase of the project (*Here I Stand*) was created to give immigrant and refugee youth an arena in which to tell their stories of immigration and settlement, and to share their struggles to fit into a new culture. The goals of the project were:

- 1) To help newcomer young immigrants and refugees in their settlement process through creating a safe space for them to express the challenges they meet in that process
- 2) To introduce participants to the method of practicing theatre as a connection with the arts and as a means to express themselves
- 3) To create social awareness and community dialogue on topics of settlement and immigration. The purpose was to create change in individuals and in areas that are directly related to the immigrant and refugee youth (educational systems; public health; domestic environment)
- 4) To develop in the young participants a pride for their native cultures, which could possibly help them develop a sense of identity when blending into Canadian society. (*See Appendix H*)

Research Goals for "Here I Stand"

My initial task was to create exercises and workshop plans that would facilitate an environment of trust and sharing amongst the participants; to create scenes that depicted

their experiences of immigration and challenges of settlement; and to see the kind of impact the process would have on the participants and if it could achieve the goals set out by the NGO. While the lens of my own main research question was focused on different aspects, I was still able to set out to explore the ways in which participants and marginalized communities can make use of the process of TfD and if there were possibilities for them to take over the process and practice it independently. I consciously left myself open to the possibilities of new discoveries on the issue of participant empowerment. During Phase 1, other research questions arose, which then became the catalyst for Phase 2 of the Action Research Plan:

- 1) How can the process ensure that the participants are exploring topics that are the most immediate for them, and not those imposed by the NGO?
- 2) What needs to be set in place for participants to learn how to use TfD as a means of self-expression and social change?
- 3) What is the importance of negotiating the NGO agenda with the facilitator's agenda?
- 4) How can the process make room for the participants to create their own agenda for what they want to glean from practicing TfD?
- 5) *How can the role of the facilitator become identified as a pivotal ingredient in the development and success of the work?*

I wrote about *Here I Stand* a few months after the completion of the project (September 2010). I used participant questionnaires from the youth (*Appendix I*); NGO staff and project coordinators (*Appendix K*); and parents of the youth (*Appendix J*). The youth questionnaires were designed to examine the following:

- a) The impact the theatre project had on their lives and the struggles they were facing
- b) The relevance of the topics explored to their actual experiences (this question was created based on my observation of the youth's silence during the group discussions about their struggles. I wanted to know if these topics were imposed on the youth by the NGO staff).
- c) Which techniques and methods of creating drama they enjoyed the most.

The questionnaires I created for the project staff were designed to gather evidence on the impact the project had on the participants (through the staff's personal observations of the youth throughout the process), their analysis of the youth's silence during the group discussions, and the kind of community awareness and social change this project promoted.

I was not in direct contact with the youth's parents, hence I was not able to give all of them questionnaires, but I managed to ask four parents to participate in my research. Only one parent returned the questionnaire with her answers. I was able to collect information on one parent's observation of the impact of the theatre project on her daughter. I learned from this experience that I had to plan ahead and to include in my contract with the NGO an item that would describe their support of my research, and their commitment to acting as neutral third parties to communicate with participants (parents) and to follow up on the questionnaires the latter filled out.

The reality of Applied Theatre work is that it is constantly evolving and changing, and I found the slowness and rigidity of the process of obtaining approval from the university's Human Research Ethics Board to be inhibiting. When the process was complete, my initial questionnaire had to be updated to address additional or more relevant issues that came up during the process. The updating process and approval from the Human Research Ethics Board took 3 to 4 weeks, which at times became complicated to arrange with the NGO staff, and with parents who were or were not accessible after the project's completion.

Through the NGO, I was able to collect other documentation to support my research, such as:

- a) Audience evaluations of the performances: many audiences wrote how impacted they were by the performance. There were a total of 7 performances for which audiences filled out evaluations. There was an average of 50 evaluations collected from each performance (*Appendix L* provides a sample of these evaluations).
- b) Youth Combating Intolerance Camp evaluations: came from the group who were participating in workshops that addressed ways of combating intolerance in the community and at their schools. The camp coordinators collected their own evaluations of their participants' response to the performance, and the NGO was able to obtain a copy for me.
- c) Letters of support for the theatre project written by the youth for funding bodies.
- d) Parts of email correspondences with NGO staff, in which the youth reflected on their experiences working on this project. The NGO staff passed this

correspondence to me and I obtained permission from the youth to use it for my dissertation (I have permission from the NGO to use this data. See *Appendix F*).

Step 3:

Phase 2: “Where is Home?” (September 2010-June 2011).

The results of *Here I Stand* demonstrated successful outcomes, hence the organization was ready to fund Phase 2, which was titled “*Where is Home?*” By now I had formulated my hypothesis on how TfD could be used by communities as a method of empowerment and I began to develop this hypothesis to include the importance of the role of the NGO in supporting the youth community on their journey towards self-realization and empowerment.

Because most of my research questions were answered through my experience in Phase 1, I used Phase 2 to test out new facilitation methods that would, I hoped, deal with ingredients that I felt were lacking in Phase 1:

- a) Time for the participants to become familiar with each other, and to build trusting relations as a way to address the issue of the first group’s silence during the discussions
- b) A process that would make room for the participants’ agenda to be incorporated in the overall objectives of the project
- c) Additional rehearsal time to allow for more material to emerge and be compiled for the show
- d) More training to enable the group to share their thoughts and ideas during the post performance discussions

Essentially, Phase 2 was a way for me to solidify my understanding of the role of the NGOs in the process of TfD, the role of the facilitator, and the many ways that TfD can be perceived as “empowering” in the lives of marginalized communities. In this phase I introduced a facilitation approach that had good results.

Ethical Considerations

This research has received approval from the University of Victoria’s Human Ethics Research Board. Initially my data collection was to be done through tape-recorded interviews, however upon interviewing my first interviewee was quite shy and had trouble finding words to express herself, which may have limited her reflection on the process and her ability to articulate these reflections. Following that interview I modified my method, providing questionnaires to all involved participants. For most of them English was their second language and many required time to reflect before they expressed their thoughts. This worked very well; the questionnaires that were filled out by the majority of the participants were thorough and accurately represented a reflection of the group members’ experiences in the project.

Since the project was never designated as a “research project” by the NGO, I did not stipulate to the participants that their participation in the theatre project would entail consent to use their photographs and questionnaires in my research. I felt that their participation in the theatre project, and their participation in my research analysis as interviewees were two separate things, and I postponed approaching them for consents until the project was complete (I did, however, inform participants that I would be writing

about my experience in this project for my dissertation). When I was ready to obtain consents to use photographs and participants' testimonials (*Appendix C*), and to ask them to respond to questionnaires, I approached one of the NGO staff to speak to the youth on my behalf, to explain my research, how I would use their material, and who would have access to it. By doing this, I hoped that the youth wouldn't feel obliged or pressured to participate in the research; that it would be based on their own personal choices. Although 4 youth did not attend the session where the rest of the group completed the questionnaires, all 11 youth signed consents for me to use their photographs and video footage for my research. I have used pseudo-names, selected by the youth themselves, to represent them.

Issues of Trustworthiness

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2008), many qualitative researchers are no longer borrowing the terms *validity* and *reliability* from quantitative researchers, preferring to create their own terms: *credibility* and *dependability* (p.77).

Credibility

It is important to note that I bring my own personal bias into my observations and reflections on the process of working with marginalized communities. Naturally, my analyses are based on my own personal experiences as a TfD practitioner and my interpretations of the published literature and research in the field. I have had 10 years of experience in TfD, which gives me a measure of credibility in my analyses of the research findings. I have also spent over four years working with immigrants and refugees in Victoria: two years with immigrant women's groups as well as these last two years focusing specifically on work with immigrant and refugee youth.

With regard to the immigrant and refugee youth projects, I have collected multiple sources of data to support my analyses of the impact of the project on the youth and on the audience, which was sufficient to warrant triangulation of data for this project. The impact of the project on the NGO's support became evident through their advocacy for the continuation of this work, and their funding for the project from one year to the next. Through my interaction with the NGO I was able to learn from them new protocols for impact assessment, exit strategies, and follow-up plans, their clear belief in elements such as impact assessment, exit-strategies, and follow-up plans, all of which demonstrated their commitment to honouring the participants' experiences in the theatre work. These are signs that show a responsibility and accountability by the NGO. In my conclusion I refer to these elements as essential components for the success of any TfD project.

My experience in applied theatre has taught me to be open to the outcomes of the work. I approached this research with the intention of proving that communities can and should be able to practice the TfD method independently of NGOs and facilitators. I had to confront the reality of what I was witnessing during this project with the immigrant and refugee youth, and to acknowledge that the empowerment of the community happens through their own means of identifying with TfD, as well as through NGO support and facilitator commitment. I believe the fact that I was able to accept this new understanding of the collaboration between communities and NGOs, and that I was able to reflect this in my research findings, gives this research substantial credibility.

Dependability

This dissertation includes the youth's reflections from their questionnaires, letters of support for the project, and email correspondence. The appendices also include staff and parent reflections. The audience evaluations constitute a large part of the documentation and are available for readers upon request.

Limitations of the Study

The study is limited in two areas: a) documentation of the youth garbage pickers' project, and b) the long-term documentation of the immigrant and refugee youth's project:

a) Documentation of the youth garbage pickers' project: the historical narrative I wrote on this project is limited because it relies on my own account of the events that took place at that time.

b) Long-term documentation of the immigrant and refugee youth project: the research of this project is limited because I'm only able to document the immediate effects of the project on the participants and audiences, and not the long-term ones. The timeline of this dissertation does not permit data collection some 3 or 4 years after the completion of one of these projects. However, if this data were collected, it would provide very important material to assess the long-term effects of theatre on marginalized communities. It might be effective to return to participants who were youth at the time of the project, and to ask them to reflect on how the process impacted them as adults. While we could say that tracking down participants some 5 years after the project's completion would be a very difficult task, I think that with Facebook, the popular social networking site, this might no longer be such a problem.

Summary

This chapter includes a thorough description of my research methodology, tracing my initial approach from using *Reflective Practitioner Case Study*, to my decision to use *Narrative Inquiry* and *Community-based Participatory Action Research* as more suitable methodologies. Based on the kind of research questions I was asking, and the 3 different methods I applied to collect and interpret my data, it becomes apparent that I was engaging in *qualitative research*: “[Research] is qualitative when [researchers] need to collect, interpret and make judgments about data that cannot be measured, such as what people say and do, and why” (O’Toole, 2006, p.31).

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which theatre for development could be utilized in order to create social transformation for the participants and the community. I explored the possibilities of sustainability for communities to practice Tfd independently, and I outlined the benefits of such a strategy as well as the challenges that go with it. Through questionnaires, participant letters, and audience evaluations, I was able to create a new hypothesis that reflected the findings of my research, that effective practice of Tfd (social transformation, and community empowerment) can be achieved through the collaborative work of NGOs, facilitators, and community members. I now begin this research journey in this next chapter, which is a historical overview of the origins and evolution of Tfd.

Chapter 4 Origins & Evolution of Theatre for Development

The practice of Theatre for Development has been the target of some harsh criticism over the past decade, not only from outsiders, but also from its practitioners. In December 2002, the theatre journal *Research in Drama Education (RIDE)* published an article by Sayed Jamil Ahmed, in which the author asserted that NGOs have used TfD to control target groups instead of working to liberate them. The article, “Wishing for a World without Theatre for Development: demystifying the case of Bangladesh,” aptly reflects Ahmed’s bleak view of development work being “monopolized by economists”(p. 208) with corrupt agendas that serve the interests of donor agencies; in particular, those NGOs that march to the drum of corporate funders. Ahmed is concerned that TfD has become a tool of disempowerment because poverty makes communities vulnerable to the imposition of western values on how people ought to live their lives (p. 208).

This chapter traces the history and origins of TfD, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the practice through research-based analysis of pivotal projects from around the world. My purpose is twofold: first, to explore the validity of Ahmed’s critique (2002); and second, to propose ways in which TfD practitioners could have arrived at more positive developmental goals by taking a different approach.

Bertolt Brecht (1964) and Augusto Boal (1979) are named by many practitioners as having seminal influences on their approach to TfD. Brecht created theatre that aspired to instigate “an awakening of critical consciousness” in contrast to Aristotle’s poetics, which advocated for a process of “catharsis” (Boal, 1979, p. 120). In essence, Brecht’s “epic spectatorship” challenged the traditional relationship between the audience and characters in a drama, “thus provoking audience awareness that character and action is always embedded in, and in large measure produced by, causal economic structures” (Crow, 2009, p. 191). Paulo Freire (1970) introduced “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” to propose a solution for oppressed people to own their process of empowerment through education.

Inspired by the works of Freire (1970), Augusto Boal (1979) created theatre that prompted the spectator to act in place of the protagonist, changing the choices made in the drama, as a means of “train[ing] himself for the real action” (p. 120). Both Boal and Brecht challenged the notion that people should passively receive the drama, but Boal went a step further: While Brecht focused on fostering the spectator’s critical understanding, Boal wanted spectators to take action. Brecht meant to awaken audiences from their stupor, whereas Boal meant for the audience to engage with theatre as a rehearsal for what to do in the real world. Both methods aspired to empower the audience in some way, so that what happened in the performance space would transcend the walls of the theatre and impact people’s real lives. Similarly, TfD was created to provide a space for oppressed communities to feel heard, validated and celebrated.

Development in Context

The practice of Tfd is situated in the larger context of the term *development*, which World Bank economist Nat Coletta has succinctly defined as “a socio-economic process of change aimed at raising the standard of living, quality of life and human dignity” of a community (Coletta in Byam, 1999, p.13). In *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, Cornelius Castoriadis (1991) traces a genealogy of development since the late 19th century that has measured “progress” in terms of economic growth and periods of disruption. His analysis highlights, for example, “the crisis of progress” in the 1930s when the Great Depression and the rise of Fascism and Nazism in Europe made the world “ungovernable”; the resumption of “progress” through massive economic reconstruction projects and the transfer of wealth in the aftermath of the Second World War; the chilling effect of tensions between the superpowers, Russia and the United States; and finally, the post-colonial development initiatives launched in the 1960s, which saw economic growth as the solution to virtually all human problems (p. 176).

Because economic growth, the mantra of western models of development, was all about continued expansion of the gross national product (GNP) per capita, countries failing to achieve this measure of progress were considered *underdeveloped*; hence, in need of external aid to create a better standard of living for their people (Byam 1999; Castoriadis 1991; Nogueira 2002). The inherent assumption was that countries whose GNP was lower than that of the western world’s needed “fixing” and that economic development would produce communities that were not only better managed in financial terms, but also more civilized and more respectful of human dignity. However, this top-down approach to development has too often “accelerated the rate of displacement and

environmental degradation, as powerful groups scrambled to seize more land to expand export production” (Fantu Chero cited in Byam, 1999, p. 13). In the world’s poorest and most densely populated nations, the unintended legacy of decades of development has been a steady migration of peasant farmers to city slums as the poorest families are forced off the land by irrigation projects, agricultural mechanization, and a host of initiatives that prioritize economic efficiency.

It is now a fundamental tenet of development theory, if not practice, to take into account a community’s indigenous culture (Byam 1999; Nogueira 2002). But in the 1960s, the development community was only beginning to rethink strategies and to slowly move away from the idea that imposing a single worldview was the most effective path toward progress. In 1965, for example, UNESCO and UNDP (United Nations Development Programs) launched the Experimental World Literacy Program to guide development agencies toward methods of education that paid close attention to culture (Byam, 1999, p. 15).

In many ways, Tfd practice went through a parallel process of maturation: Tfd has progressed from an initial top-down approach, in which NGOs and facilitators assumed that they knew what was important for communities, to widespread awareness and acceptance of inclusivity where more attention was paid to the communities because they most likely knew what might be best for them. In the 1970s, Tfd practitioners like Michael Etherton and Salihu Bappa saw that the practice could be more effective if the actual community around which the work revolved was invited to participate in the creation of the dramas, presenting topics with relevance to peoples’ daily struggles.

However, it was not until the 1990s that TfD practitioners began in earnest to acknowledge target groups as the experts on their own lives, the collective creators and performers in dramas intended to promote dialogue and resolve problems. Through a maturing process, the community has finally acquired agency in a bottom-up TfD process that enables, at its best, open and equitable partnerships between target groups and facilitators, as well as between facilitators and NGOs.

The post-colonial practice of bringing theatre to rural communities was widely known as *Popular Theatre*, and there is still limited use of the term. For example, Penina Mlama (2002) uses both Popular Theatre and TfD, but distinguishes them by the level of community participation, with TfD being more closely linked to the target group's active involvement in the dramas (p. 47). Some theorists embraced the term TfD (and abandoned Popular Theatre) as far back as the 1960s (Byam, 1999; Mda, 1993), but it would take some 30 years before TfD became the vernacular of most theorists and practitioners.

Michael Etherton (1999) defines TfD as “a participatory process of analysis and improvisation, followed by performance and further analysis. It is a collective remaking of the drama in order to reflect a deeper awareness of the inter-relatedness of social, economic and political forces in people's lives” (as cited in Prentki, 2003, p. 41). Similarly, Mlama (2002) defines Popular Theatre as “a process of theatre creation emerging from the community's active involvement in identifying development problems, analyzing and communicating them through theatre with a view to solving them” (p. 47). The subjectivity embedded in these two definitions arises from different

perceptions of which approach is more or less participatory. Marcia Pompeo Nogueira (2002) suggests “Theatre for Development is often presented in the literature as a kind of counterpoint to Popular Theatre” (p. 104).

I choose to define Tfd as the practice of taking theatre to local communities for the explicit purpose of involving the target community in the creation of a drama, which can be a retelling of their life stories or a work of fiction. The critical component is that the drama is not imposed on the community by NGOs or facilitators.

In reading the many definitions of popular theatre and Tfd, I have come to see that Tfd can embrace multiple goals. A Tfd project can be a way for the community to: a) explore challenges that it faces; b) find a voice to express its feelings and concerns; c) discover hidden or misunderstood community dynamics; d) celebrate its culture and build a sense of identity and self-worth; and e) learn theatre skills and the positive potential of collectively creating drama to raise awareness or to celebrate their lives. Even though a performance may be the catalyst for community-wide dialogue, a Tfd project can also achieve its goals through drama exploration within the target group, without the element of performance.

Stages in the Evolution of Tfd

Nogueira (2002) has articulated three stages in the evolution of Tfd: The first stage was the rural development campaigns in which theatre acted as development propaganda; the second stage brought theatre to the people as a means of working against post-colonial elitist ideologies (the democratization of theatre); and the third stage

involved creating theatre with the people (participatory theatre) (p. 105). My research supports a similar framework and I will trace the evolution of Tfd by showcasing projects that are representatives of these three evolutionary stages: The theatre in post-colonial Africa in the 1960s and 1970s; the immediacy of theatre as the outcome of increased community involvement in dramas in the 1980s and 1990s; and the contemporary *active* community agency engendered today through Tfd practice that works toward local ownership, autonomy and sustainability.

Stage 1: Tfd in post-colonial Africa

Tfd in post-colonial Africa could be divided into two categories: a) Bringing theatre to local villages by university students as a means of “democratization” (p.105) and b) As a means of transmitting messages to communities by development agencies. By imposing European drama as an art form in the 1960s, Kamlongera (1989) asserts that “the missionaries did not take into account traditional African forms [of drama], for they decided [...] to accept only those ‘native’ practices that suited their civilizing mission” (cited in Mda, 1993, p. 7). Theatre long existed as a propaganda tool for colonial government development policies. Nogueira (2002), in her comments on research by Ross Kidd on the theatre created by development workers in the 1950s, notes that its purpose was “to disseminate ideas such as immunization, sanitation, and cash crop production” (p. 104).

The Democratization of Theatre

The first stage of Tfd emerged in the 1960s through the efforts of adult educators at African universities, who began to bring theatre to local communities as a post-colonial

reaction against theatre being viewed as an art form exclusively for the elite (Byam, 1999). Michael Etherton, Ross Kidd, and Martin Byram were active in promoting a “cultural democratization” movement by taking plays to rural villages (Nogueira, 2002, p. 104). According to Owen Kelly’s article “In Search for Cultural Democracy” published in 1985 in *Arts Express*, cultural democracy is the idea of ‘arts for all,’ which argues that the arts can be practiced by everyone. The article by Crow and Etherton (1980), “Popular Drama and Popular Analysis in Africa,” describes this early stage of TfD as the ‘well-made play’ and the introduction of popular theatre in East Africa (cited in Nogueira, 2002, p. 105).

Not everyone agrees. Kamlongera (1989) argues that TfD had existed from “time immemorial” in African villages and decries this form of cultural democratization, with more than a little disdain: The “[...] theatre artists in these shows were coming down from some ivory tower to show the poor illiterate rural masses something they were missing in their lives” (cited in Mda, 1993, p. 70). Mda (1993) provides another critical voice. With respect to the content, he notes: “Initially they took European plays to bemused audiences, and later embarked on presenting African adaptations of established plays or locally written plays” (p. 8). Furthermore, the approach lacked any reciprocal interaction: “Rarely did they address themselves to the question of their audiences’ reaction to this whole exercise. No attempt was made to incorporate or learn from the people’s own performance modes” (p. 9).

In the following section, I examine two projects that are representative of the methods created by adult educators to promote democratization of theatre or forms of

political activism that Nogueira (2002) has named “development propaganda.” The process and outcomes of these projects are featured in L. Dale Byam’s *Community in Motion: Theatre for Development in Africa* (1999), while Zakes Mda (1993) offers a critical analysis of the projects in *When People Play People*.

“Chikwakwa” in Zambia

One of the first TfD projects that emerged in Africa was a project launched in 1966 under the leadership of Michael Etherton, and created with students and faculty of the University of Zambia. The group was called *UNZADRAM* (University of Zambia Dramatic Society) and was created to ensure local arts had a place in the theatre movement in Zambia, which was dominated at the time by European whites who remained after the country gained independence in 1964 (Byam, 1999, p. 48). Mda (1993) notes that the European plays performed had no connection to daily life in Zambia, and alleges that “these touring groups considered the audiences to be devoid of theatre experience” (p. 9). This initial drama group disbanded in 1971, and Etherton subsequently started the *Chikwakwa* theatre group.

Etherton recalls his work with *Chikwakwa* as an important part of his journey into “popular theatre” and explains that the name translates as “grass-slasher” a reference to “grass-roots theatre, as opposed to the imported Western theatre traditions of the settlers, whose dominance we fought against” (personal communication, March 2, 2009). In response to my query about what *Chikwakwa* knew about the community’s own performance traditions, and whether they attempted to incorporate local traditions in their theatrical presentations, Etherton replied that “there were rich performance traditions all

over Africa, but these were ostracized, and in some cases actually suppressed, in Southern Africa by the white settler culture” (personal communication, March 2nd, 2009). Elements of African music, masks, dance, and storytelling were used by *Chikwakwa* in staging plays written by students at the University of Zambia.

Byam (1999) describes *Chikwakwa* as “a traveling theatre that aimed to express the needs of the Zambian community through an innovative theatre form” (p. 49). She clearly perceives the group as political activists, and credits *Chikwakwa* with having “organized [a] protest against the construction of French bomber planes that were being used in South Africa” (p. 50). According to Byam, this led to Etherton’s expulsion from the country. Etherton denies that his deportation had anything to do with bomber planes or politics, but points to “the enthusiastic support [he] received, unsolicited, by the Vice President Kawepwe, whom President Kaunda’s faction perceived as a threat” (personal communication, March 2nd, 2009).

Indeed, Etherton’s description of *Chikwakwa* clearly locates the group within the democratization stage of TFD. His mandate was to take quality theatre by university students to the people in rural communities through performances of plays that were heavily rehearsed and tightly directed (personal communication, March 2nd, 2009). This can be seen as a first step towards creating dialogue between privileged and disadvantaged groups in Zambian society. Faye Chung, the artistic director who succeeded Etherton, continued to prioritize the aesthetic component of the company’s work and limited local participation in *Chikwakwa* productions, due to the “quality of the performances being low” (Byam, 1999, p. 51).

Attempts were made to reach out to the community through theatre workshops, but as the country's political situation became more volatile, funding decreased for arts projects and by the late 1970s the *Chikwakwa* group had disbanded (Byam, 1999, p. 53).

Theatre as a Propaganda Tool: "Laedza Batanani" in Botswana

The TfD project known as *Laedza Batanani*, which means *community awakening*, emerged in the 1970s from collaboration between a community counselor and two adult educators, Ross Kidd and Martin Byram, both of whom worked at the University of Botswana. According to Mda (1999), the project used theatre as a tool to "motivate people to participate in development, hence overcome the problem of indifference to government development efforts in the area" (p. 13). Members of the theatre group identified community challenges and created performances to tackle local issues. *Laedza Batanani* also tried to raise awareness by involving the audience in post-performance discussions and workshops.

Criticism of the approach taken by *Laedza Batanani* has addressed both performance content and concerns about methodology. Mda (1993) faults the company for its reliance "more on technical solutions than on the examination of historical, economic and political factors to explain rural problems" (p. 15). For example, the group performed plays about the "symptoms, causes, cures and prevention" of sexually transmitted diseases, "but nothing was said about how the diseases were socially produced. Thus, only a partial solution to the problem was presented" (p. 15).

Critics have identified a number of problems associated with the project's top-down approach. The social issues presented in performances did not elicit the views of community members (Byam, 1999; Mda, 1993; Nogueira, 2002). In fact, theatre facilitators had so little faith in the community's ability or willingness to participate in post-performance discussions that they put their own people in the audience to spark conversation, thus hindering an honest dialogue on the success or failure of the process (Byam, 1999). There was also no opportunity for the community to criticize the government because government agents controlled the project (Abah, cited in Byam, 1999). Nor was there an exit strategy or any follow-up process to support the community in solving the problems depicted in performances (Mda, 1993; Byam, 1999).

A case study of the Botswana project by facilitators Kidd and Byram (1981) also concluded that taking theatre to the people, in the absence of a process that engaged the community as active participants in identifying their immediate concerns, was not an effective approach to social change. In hindsight, it became clear that the top-down methods employed in the first stage of TfD practice were themselves a barrier to creating meaningful dramas. In the next section, the second stage in the evolution of TfD sees a shift in methodology as facilitators attempt to involve communities in the process of creating theatre.

Stage 2: Community Involvement in the Creation of Dramas (1970s-1990s)

The first wave of TfD practitioners to acknowledge the need for communities to become more involved in creating dramas began to appear in the late 1970s. Salihu Bappa (1983) points to a series of workshops with villagers from Lasanawa, a small

village in Kudana State, Nigeria, as a turning point. Bappa and Etherton had co-facilitated workshops about social problems in the village, which generated criticism from the villagers for inaccurate depictions of characters and events. As the facilitators listened to these concerns, it became clear that the stories not only needed to come from the villagers, but the villagers themselves needed to enact the roles that represented them.

It would take many more years, however, before community participation became an integral part of TfD practice. Prentki (2003) notes that throughout the 1970s governments and development agencies had increasingly recognized the value of theatre as the medium for their messages yet they continued to hire professional actors to work with the staff of NGOs to create performances. Therefore, the messages being delivered to those who attended were still steeped in “the colonial assumption that ‘we know what’s best for you’” (p. 40). As a result, the target communities were not adopting the changes that NGOs intended for them. “Culminating in the so-called ‘lost decade for development’- the 1980s - development agencies, from grassroots community-based organizations to the World Bank, perceived that a change in strategy was necessary” (p. 40).

In the evolutionary frameworks developed by both Prentki (2003) and Nogueira (2002), it was not until the 1990s that a new shift in TfD methods took hold. “[P]icking up on notions of active learning, development agencies perceived that people were learning better by doing than they had been by listening” (Prentki, 2003, p. 40). The projects these two theorists showcase as illustrative of a more participatory TfD practice take place in Africa and South East Asia. For the most part, a power imbalance

characterizes the relationship dynamics in these Tfd projects, with one entity (donor agencies, project facilitators, or Tfd practitioners) allowing another entity (the community or a specific target group) somewhat more access to the development process.

The *Sistren Theatre Collective* and *Jana Sanskriti* projects presented in the next section are not discussed by Prentki or Nogueira, who have written extensively on Tfd projects in post-colonial Africa. Perhaps it is because these two projects are not representative of the modified community involvement that emerged in Tfd practice in the 1990s. Rather, they are unique examples of successful community-based Tfd without external facilitators. Each project embodies a participatory process where local villagers share their knowledge and use collective decision-making processes. It is worth noting that these ongoing projects have been successfully sustained for longer than any of the Tfd projects that meet the criteria developed by Nogueira (2002) and Prentki (2003).

“Sistren Theatre Collective” in Jamaica (since 1977)

The 25th anniversary of the *Sistren Theatre Collective* was commemorated in an article by Helen Drusine (2002), which reflected on past successes and announced new projects the group planned to undertake with funding from UNESCO. Drusine (2002) described the origins of the group in 1977, when 13 women from the poorest parts of Kingston, the capital city of Jamaica, met at a government Emergency Employment Program. The women, who had worked as street sweepers and teaching aides, met all day and told each other about their lives and experiences. Eventually one of the women suggested they turn their stories into dramas. Though none of the women had any experience in theatre techniques, they nevertheless began to create scenes from their

lives, based on stories of teenage pregnancy, domestic violence, incest, child abuse, and rape. The founding members of the *Sistren Theatre Collective* hoped to bring about social change in the community by performing stories of the oppression and struggles of Jamaican women (Drusine, 2002). Their success with local audiences built momentum that gained *Sistren* international attention, leading to guest directors being invited to work with the women on theatre performances (Green, 2006).

The fundamental difference between the *Sistren Theatre Collective* and other projects that emerged during the second stage of Tfd practice is that both the process and the content of performances came from the women themselves, and not from outside facilitators. *Sistren* eventually received financial support from the Jamaican government, but when the country fell on hard times and cutbacks were imposed, the women turned to international funders to continue their work. The women performed in Europe, Canada and the United States.

Green (2006) traces the group's declining influence in Jamaica to the rise of their international work, since this removed the women from their own community's struggles. According to Green, by the late 1990s, Jamaican audiences had come to view *Sistren's* performances as "cultural nostalgia" rather than authentic grassroots theatre (p. 121). Nonetheless the group continues to create theatre pieces on violence against women, and according to internet posts of their activities seems to be thriving.

“Jana Sanskriti” in Western Bengal (since the 1980s)

Another exception to the “lost decade” of development work, and especially theatre in development contexts, is *Jana Sanskriti*, which involved a political activist turned writer and performer, Sanjoy Ganguly, and a group of local farmers. In the 1980s, *Jana Sanskriti* collectively created plays about the struggles of common people and performed in front of appreciative audiences in rural villages in Western Bengal. One of their popular plays, *Gayer Panchali*, “raises questions about the one-sided relationship between the Panchayat [committee of local government] and the ordinary people, about corruption around the poverty alleviation programme, about the absence of healthcare, about the unavailability of year-round employment” (Ganguly, 2004, p. 228).

In the 1990s, group members realized that their plays empowered the protagonist in the story, but not the people themselves, so *Jana Sanskriti* adjusted its approach to incorporate techniques that involve the audience (Ganguly, 2004, p. 235). Ganguly (2004) credits this shift in methodology to the following post-performance comments by a woman in the audience:

Babu, in your play the woman is strong, very strong. People say you are doing good work. But tell me Babu, what are we to do when the contractor pays us less than our due and asks us to visit him alone? If we don't go to him, he will take away our job. You tell us, shall we give up our work from tomorrow? Tell us Babu, why are you silent? (p. 232).

At the time, Ganguly had just discovered Augusto Boal's *Forum Theatre*, one of the approaches employed in the Theatre of the Oppressed, in which spectators re-enact

the dramatic action of the protagonist with the goal of changing the drama. The context for Theatre of the Oppressed performances was to present dramas that were intentionally linked to problems that audience members were experiencing in their own lives. Re-enactment techniques gave viewers an opportunity to rise above their oppression by proposing solutions to the problems presented in the drama. Ganguly (2004) was clearly impressed by Boal's methods, writing that:

In Boal's philosophy of theatre, it was the questions of distance and intimacy, the different levels of location between the players and the audience, which seemed to me the most revolutionary. Not only the performers, but the audience was also liberated, because now everybody jointly shared the responsibility of finding answers (p.237).

Forum Theatre methods enabled *Jana Sanskriti* to foster real-life changes because their audiences began to think critically about situations and to examine their roles as oppressor or oppressed. For example Ganguly (2004) discusses the response to a play that depicted domestic abuse. One audience member wanted to change the situation for the abused woman by having her react differently to her abusive husband, but none of his suggestions were successful. The group facilitator noticed that the young man sat silently for the rest of the re-enactment discussion. When the performance ended, he ran forward, crying and bowing at the feet of the person who had played the part of the abused woman; he promised he would never again beat his wife. The group later learned from people in the village that this young man was known to be a wife-beater (p. 235).

It is ironic that as the theatre process itself became more inclusive and participatory, the performers began to feel alienated from their fellow villagers. Ganguly (2004) refers to “an unarticulated but inherent assumption of self-importance” among *Jana Sanskriti* members: “We were artists who were thinking of the masses rather than about ourselves, and our mission was to give direction to their lives” (p. 235). Or as one group member said simply, “I’m not a mere daily wage labourer, I’m not only a farm hand, I’m an actor” (p. 235). The more confident the farmers became in their persona as “artists” the more removed they were from the daily struggles of their fellow villagers; this distancing is also mentioned by Etherton (1982) in *The Development of African Drama*.

This is similar to what happened to the women of the *Sistren Theatre Collective*, although it can be argued that the performers only moved away from their roots and the issues of poor women in Jamaica after local funding dried up, and that the women were forced to turn to international funders and spend much of their time outside their homeland. But the question remains: Is a weakening in the connection between TfD participants and their audiences an inevitable pitfall of this kind of practice? Certainly, the experiences of these two community-driven projects underline the need for vigilance about the impact of successful TfD practice.

The next section showcases two projects in which TfD facilitators attempted, with varying degrees of success, to pass on the skills of the practice in ways that would extend full ownership and autonomy to the participants.

Stage 3: Active Community Agency in Contemporary TfD

By the 1990s, educators and theatre practitioners working with disadvantaged communities in the developing world had adopted the term *Theatre for Development* (Ahmed 2002; Byam 1999; Darlymple 2007; Etherton 2004; Mda 1993; Prentki 2003). Ross Kidd and Martin Byram were among the first, referencing TfD in their 1984 case study on the work of *Laedza Batanani*. In more current TfD practice, there has been a shift in motivation and process. The earlier focus on taking theatre to the people has been displaced by a commitment to “engaging the community itself in research and discussion on what they think is the problem, its root cause and its possible solutions” (Mlama, 2002, p. 46).

Mlama (2002) contends that TfD projects achieved greater success once communities started to identify their own problems and suggest solutions that took into account local circumstances (p. 46). Prentki (2003) is more reserved in his assessment, noting that the 1990s brought more focus on community involvement and participation in TfD practice, yet donor agencies still preferred their own agendas. He writes, “The participation was all well and good *provided that* the communities in question were participating according to the terms set by the agency” (p. 40).

“Ratones” Theatre Group in Brazil (since 1991)

In 1991, a group of university students worked with village children to create a theatre group in Ratones, a small community in the interior of Santa Catarina state in Brazil (Nogueira, 2006, p. 220). The facilitators used theatrical methods developed by

Ilo Krugli, a Brazilian practitioner, and Catherine Daste, based in France, that emphasized exploring the inner potential of children to be creative and expressive. This process, while extremely rich in enhancing collective creation, resulted in dramas that featured mostly fictitious characters and stories, and not community issues (Nogueira, 2006, p. 223).

While Nogueira (2006) was in the UK working on her PhD, she stumbled upon TfD practice and returned to Ratonés in the summer of 1998 with new ideas about how to re-design the theatre group and strengthen its connection to the community. As a first step toward passing ownership of the project to the participants, two adult participants in the group became “coordinators” with responsibility for training newcomers. Nogueira also attempted to facilitate a direct link between the theatre group and the community’s concerns, proposing that the group create plays that did not simply look at problems, but instead looked for “codifications” that would build connections among community members:

Codification represents a dimension of reality as it is lived by the people, which is then analysed [sic] in a different context from the one that is lived. In this sense, codification transforms what was a way of living in a real context into an “objectum” in the theoretical context (Freire cited in Nogueira, 2006, p. 224).

This new approach not only generated more interest in the group’s theatre performances, but there soon emerged “a growing number of people who also want to *do* theatre” (p. 228). Participatory TfD in Ratonés built dynamic relationships and got people in the small community to invest in the benefits of working together to improve

their lives. Eventually, the work of the theatre group was fully taken over by the local community.

The experience of the *Ratones Theatre Group* resonates with the advocacy of Mda (1993), who stresses that developing the skills needed to create and perform dramas is a prerequisite for community agency. He considers true TfD practice to be:

. . . one where people initiate and develop theatrical explorations of their problems and so engage in a continuous process of self-education. Catalysts should increasingly involve the spectators both in creating and performing the play, until such time as the catalyst is no longer necessary, since the spectators have themselves become actors (p.20).

Whenever outside facilitators or adult educators are involved in TfD practice, Mda (1993) recommends that they actually live for an extended period of time within the communities where they are working, in order to learn about the influence of local social and economic factors on people's lives (p. 20).

The *Ratones* project is illustrative of what I consider the natural progression in TfD practice towards community autonomy. The strength of contemporary TfD practice rests with the strength of the commitment to enable people who start out as *participants* to become theatre *facilitators*, equipped with the skills needed to sustain the work over the long term. In essence, the process is one of liberating communities from dependency on donor agencies and outside practitioners. In the case of the *Ratones Theatre Group*, the two young men who took on the role of coordinators were provided with several

years of theatre training before they took over the process. It is very important to be mindful of the time required for sustainability, especially since many sponsoring agencies have the unrealistic expectation that even a single theatre workshop can create significant impact (Mlama, 2002; Munier & Etherton, 2007; Prentki, 2003).

Promoting Children's Rights in Southeast Asia

The evolution of the third stage of Tfd practice paralleled the emergence of what was known as the Global Movement for Children, that advocated for “children and young people co-opting adults around their agenda, rather than adults getting children to participate in adult agendas” (Etherton, 2004, p. 192). It embodied the fundamental rights of children to express themselves and to be heard, as articulated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Moreover, the movement marked a re-thinking of development work, as Etherton (2004) noted:

Children, women and poor people constitute the disadvantaged and powerless in society. Donors believe that their first concern is to fulfill their material needs. However, it has been my experience [...] that when poor and powerless young people can be heard, they usually want to decide for themselves what they want changed (p. 192).

In the 1990s, Etherton worked with *Save the Children, UK*, the funding agency for several Tfd projects in Southeast Asia, setting up workshops designed to empower children and youth by inviting them to set the workshop agenda. This process was seen as a way of prioritizing the childrens' *rights* over their *needs*, and was based on a belief in “children's collective creativity” as a way to “challenge the power of adults in decisions

that affect their [the latter's] lives” (Etherton & Prentki, unpublished paper written for the Interventionist Theatre Conference in Leeds in July 2004; received as personal communication with Michael Etherton, March 2005).

Training was first provided to adults to explore their own creativity, and then in turn learn to facilitate training children and young people in TfD projects. This rights-based approach to working with children was a radical departure from the usual methods, in which facilitators and adult group leaders set the agenda and tell children what to do. The young participants not only chose the topics that would be depicted in their plays, but also selected the audience for their performances.

It was a liberating period for many children and resulted in increased self-esteem and confidence among the participants, especially the girls, who often started with little or none. According to Etherton (2004), the TfD work done under the umbrella of the children's rights movement also led children and youth to create lobbying and advocacy strategies to support the changes they wanted to see, provided platforms for endorsement and wider representation of the rights of children, and increased awareness of the need for children themselves to be able to sustain the process (p. 195).

Across Bangladesh and Nepal, for example, NGO program officers undertook TfD training and used what they had learned to empower children to make their voices heard. Children expressed themselves through dramas performed in small villages, as well as on the international stage through a performance in May 2002 before the UN

General Assembly Special Session on Children (Etherton, 2004, p. 198). It was not long, however, before things began to go downhill.

In 2005, Etherton and Asif Munier, another collaborator in the child rights program, revisited one of the villages in Bangladesh. They were surprised to see how discouraged the group had become and how little TfD had been practiced in the community over the intervening years (Munier & Etherton, 2006, p. 176). It turned out that the donor agencies had inserted an age limit into their funding policy, and they withdrew financial support when the children reached the age of 18. The TfD participants had come to rely on these funds to create small, income-generating businesses, hence they were left feeling helpless and abandoned.

This outcome highlights an ethical dilemma that arises in many TfD projects where there is neither an exit strategy nor a follow-up plan. From the outset, practitioners need to be attentive to the agenda of the donor agency and to facilitate dialogue and action to work towards creating an autonomous and self-sufficient community. Mda (1993), for example, is a strong advocate of skills development, both through the transfer of theatre techniques and “an understanding of the relation between drama and problem-exploration” (p. 20).

Reflecting, once again, on the bleak perspective of Ahmed (2002), which opened this chapter, I find it easy to empathize with his frustration with contemporary TfD practice. I personally embrace the potential of TfD to create significant and sustainable change at the community level, yet there is no question that the goals and actions (or

inaction) of project facilitators and funders can undermine the development process. The continued and long-term success of the *Sistern Theatre Collective*, *Jana Sanskriti* and the *Ratones Theatre Group*, as described, provides a compelling rationale for making it a priority of Tfd practice to build community agency. Despite the challenges that accompanied these community-led groups when they found ‘fame’ at home or abroad, their positive impacts and longevity stand in sharp contrast to Ahmed’s despair.

Unfortunately, however, most Tfd work is dependent on the financial support of external agencies, such as NGOs, UNESCO, UNDP and - closer to home - the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Not surprisingly, these agencies require evidence of “success” to justify the continuation or withdrawal of funding. But there is often a difference between what external donors see as the goals of Tfd work, and what participants hope to achieve for themselves and their community. In the next chapter, I showcase a project that had tremendous potential to bring relief to a hugely impoverished community, the garbage pickers who live in the slums of Cairo. The narrative of this project points to the consequences that result from a lack of appropriate planning, as well as the need for accountability of facilitators and NGOs when doing Tfd work with marginalized communities.

Chapter 5 El-Zabbaleen Theatre Project

This chapter is a historical narrative of a theatre project I facilitated with a group of young male garbage pickers between the ages of 10 and 17 years old in the slums of Cairo, Egypt. It marks the beginning of an important and inspirational journey in my career as an applied theatre practitioner, which became the impetus for my research into finding methods for sustainability in Theatre for Development (TfD) projects. The result of this project points to the need for all parties engaged in TfD to examine their roles carefully and to take responsibility for their visible and invisible impact on work with marginalized communities.

“El-Gonya”

It was a warm evening in October 2002 in *Mokattam* town in *Mansheyet Nasser*, a district in the heart of Cairo. A group of 12 young garbage pickers were busy preparing themselves for their first official performance, entitled *El-Gonya*. Among the audience members, who were mostly made up of the facilitators’ community of friends and acquaintances, was the NGO manager, someone who was highly regarded in the community of *El-Zabbaleen* (Arabic for “garbage collectors/pickers”). The boys were dressed in their finest clean and ironed clothing that were saved only for special occasions. They had taken great care to shower, scrub their hands and feet, and comb down their hair. Some had used grease to tame their unruly curls. Some of the boys stood at the entry of the recycling school, a cement building with several rooms, some without doors. It contained a large metal recycling machine that the boys used to break

down the material they collected and sort from the garbage. There were several rooms without doors in that cement structure, which was originally created to sort and store the recycling material. On that evening the entire building was cleared of any material, and the only thing that was left was the recycling machine and the stage that had been built a month before in preparation for this performance.

I stood on the porch of the building and observed as several cars pulled into the lot of the school grounds. Some of the boys stood around me, and I could hear them whispering to each other “They’re here!” One of them asked: “Yasmine, will it all be ok?” Some of them scurried inside the building, while others went to the beverage stand and proceeded to offer the audience something to drink. I watched as a few familiar faces arrived in cars or taxis. Some audience members were aware that they were coming to the slums of Cairo, and seemed mentally prepared for the mounds of garbage that surrounded the sides of the narrow streets leading into the school grounds. They got out of their cars, talking with their friends, spotting some of the facilitators who were also involved in this project, and making small talk with the garbage pickers who offered them drinks. Others arrived and seemed shocked. One young woman in particular seemed to be quite traumatized by not only the garbage, but likely the stench of the garbage that infiltrated the entire *Zabbaleen* area of *Mansheyet Nasser*. It was the smell that we had all been so shocked by when we first started working with the boys, but had gotten used to eventually. It was the smell that clung to my clothes and hair every time I left *El-Zabbaleen*, and the only way to get rid of it was to shower and change my clothes. This young woman remained close to her car until we announced the start of the performance, at which point she entered the building with the rest of the crowd.

Inside the building the young performers were patiently waiting in the wings, keeping their excitement contained. The recycling machine was cleaned for this event, and several posters created by the boys in their literacy classes were hung on the walls next to it. On the other side of the building two young boys from the town of *El-Menya* in the south of Egypt were testing their lighting equipment. They were part of the *Jesuit School*, where I taught theatre and lighting design and I had invited them to design lighting for the music part of the garbage pickers' performance. Ahmad El-Sawi, the music facilitator, used the theme of 'recycling' on which the performances were based to teach the participants to play music made from instruments collected from the garbage. The youth created several short pieces of music to be included as part of the performance.

The rest of the rooms in the building were adorned with the children's artwork from that year. Maria Pastore, the art facilitator, worked with the boys, mounting dozens of their creations on the walls of the rooms. Over the months of planning for this event the youth had picked items from the garbage that they felt would be useful in creating installation pieces. Among the many pieces they were able to create, was an image of a man sitting on a chair, watching television with a bottle of Coca-Cola in his hand. Everything in that installation was found in the garbage, including the figure's clothes, stuffed with newspapers to make the figure three-dimensional.

Despite there being a total of 4 facilitators and 2 group coordinators (involved in the arts, literacy, and recycling programs at the school) present on site, we wanted the event to be entirely led by the garbage pickers so the ushering and organizing of audience

members was their sole responsibility. At 8:00 pm two of the older members of the group announced to the audience that we could only let in 25 people at a time (which was also made clear in the invitation) so people could choose to attend either the 8:00 pm or 9:00 pm performance. As it turned out the boys had to have a third performance to accommodate the number of people who had arrived.

The audience entered the building, and even though we had dimmed the lights on the artwork in rooms leading to the stage area, the audience still looked curiously at the dimmed rooms, trying to make out what was there. The young adult ushers were very careful to keep the audience moving, and to get them seated in the chairs in front of the small stage. I stood on the side observing the audience. A lot of them were smiling as they waited for something exciting to take place.

The performance began with a short scene that was created by Mena, one of the younger boys from the group. Two boys stood against each other pulling as hard as they could on an imagined thread. Mena walked on the stage, looked at the two boys and scratched his head, as he tried to figure out what exactly they were doing. His face lit up, and he produced an imaginary pair of scissors. He cut the imaginary thread and both young boys fell to the ground. At this the audience laughed and I could see that this response alleviated some of the boys' initial anxiety.

The following scene featured Adham, one of the very charismatic and charming young boys from the group. His scene was about a man sitting at the coffee shop, trying to sip his tea. It is clear from his body language that he has come to the

coffee shop to have some peace and quiet after a hard day's work. His tea arrives. In the next few moments as he attempts to drink it, he is interrupted by the street noises of merchants selling their goods, donkeys and goats neighing and bleating, all simulated by the rest of the performers from the wings. At first there is one sound at a time, but the sounds intensify and he is soon surrounded by a cacophony of noise that disrupts his attempt to have some quiet time. Finally he kicks the side table and walks off in frustration.

These are just a couple of scenes that depicted ordinary life in the slums as seen through the eyes of the young boys. There was innocence, playfulness, and humor, which reflected their true joyous nature. The boys completed the theatre performance, and came up on the stage for the "curtain call." They looked elated! The audience didn't stop clapping until we turned on the lights as one of the older boys proceeded to talk about the process of using the recycling machine. The rest of the young boys walked quietly to the other end of the building and took their places in preparation for the musical part of the presentation.

With each performance the young garbage pickers took greater risks and had more fun with their scenes. Clearly, they were relieved by the audience applause after the first show and began to relax and enjoy their performances. When all three performances were finished and the boys walked out of the school they were surprised to find that the majority of the audiences remained on site to congratulate them on their achievement. Some people just wanted to talk to the boys and connect with them. There was a sense of joy and peace in the air. That night the audience saw something in the

garbage pickers they thought they would never find in the slums: pride and joy in who they were. And for the first time in their lives the garbage pickers felt respected and appreciated by people who belonged to a class that for decades regarded them as unworthy.

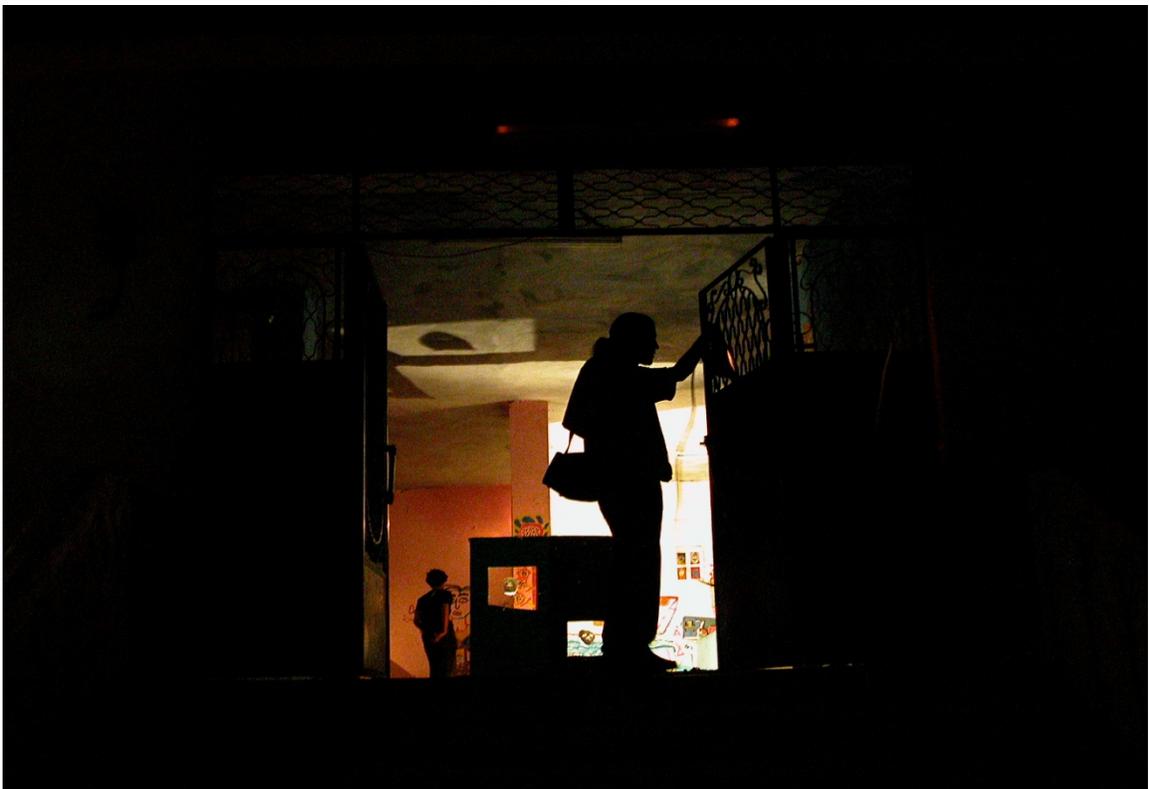


Figure 3: On the night of the performance, one of the facilitators is standing at the entrance to the cement building where the shows and displays took place.



Figure 4: A selection of drawings made by the young garbage pickers in their arts classes. These were part of the display at the performance.

History of “El-Zabbaleen”

In 2003 the UN produced a report titled “The Challenge of Slums” identifying 30 mega-slums in the world, three of which are located in Cairo (United Nations Global Report on Human Settlement); *Mansheyet Nasser*, where *El-Zabbaleen* is located, is one of them and is where the garbage of a third of Cairo (population 18 million) is collected for sorting and recycling. In the 1940s, Coptic Christian farmers from the south of Egypt came to Cairo trying to escape “drought and poor harvests” (Boyd, 2008, *Trash Traders*, ¶1). Unable to make use of their agricultural skills in the city, they found other means of livelihood: collecting, sorting, recycling, and selling the waste of the city. Facing numerous evictions by the city “that never regarded their work as valuable,” in 1974 the garbage pickers made the decision to settle “deep in the ‘belly’” of *Mokattam* (Iskandar, 2008, ¶2).

The area is located on the fringe of the city of Cairo, where carved into the rocks of *Mokattam* hills lays *El-Zabbaleen*. Jessica Boyd (2008) gives an accurate depiction of the area:

It's a jumble of narrow dirt tracks, barely wide enough for the trucks and donkey carts that rumble through at every hour of the day and night. Raw sewage seeps from broken pipes. Rats, flies and mangy cats abound, not to mention the occasional goat, sheep or cow. And there is garbage everywhere, carpeting the streets, drifting in the breeze, lining the roads in waist-high piles. It clings to your feet; assaults your nostrils; sticks in the back of your throat. And it dictates the rhythms of daily life. (Trash Traders, ¶4)

There are about 40 thousand garbage collectors who live in *El-Zabbaleen*. The hierarchy in this trade is complex, but for the sake of this narrative I identify two types of garbage pickers: the ones who are designated a particular route to collect garbage from businesses and homes, and others who are called “scavengers”, these being at the lower end of the pecking order.

[Scavengers] collect the waste by picking through dumps, vacant lots, landfills, and street bins. These are accessible to many of Cairo's urban poor as no territorial rights can be claimed over any of these sites and lax enforcement of cleanliness laws means that mountains of materials are available for the urban poor to use as a livelihood base (CID-Final Report, 2009, p.26).

In this narrative I will refer to the young participants in the Recycling School as

“garbage pickers” or *El-Zabbaleen* with the knowledge that some of them followed an assigned route while others were scavengers.

Traditionally, young garbage pickers go with their fathers on designated routes, inherited once they reached a mature age. The garbage is collected in large cloth sacks, *gonya*, that once filled could weigh 100kg each. The young garbage pickers go off on their donkeys and carts, which are rented from the *ma'alem* or “big boss,” to fill up as many as two *gonyas* to bring back to their homes for sorting. The mothers and daughters are responsible for the sorting of garbage, which takes place in their own homes. Once the sorting is done, the children then take each group of products to another *ma'alem*, who owns a recycling machine. The children are charged a fee for using the machine. The recycled product, now in the form of powder, is then taken to another local business owner, who pays the children L.E 25 for each 100kg of product (the equivalent of \$5). The powder is used to make plastic tubes for construction or clothes hangers. All the above-mentioned people: children, families, big bosses, and businessmen live in *El-Zabbaleen*. There is no need for the children to venture outside of the town except to collect the garbage, which they do at dawn each day. The title of the first performance (*El-Gonya*) was selected by the participants to signify the importance of these cloth sacks representing their livelihoods for their existence.

The area of *El-Zabbaleen* is neglected by the city; its inhabitants regarded as the lowest of the low by the rest of the society. The inhabitants of *El-Zabbaleen* do not have access to education, health care, or proper living conditions. Dr. Laila Iskandar, chairperson of *Community and Institutional Development* (CID), a local

NGO, started an informal school in the community of *El-Zabbaleen* in 1982 to teach the children about health and hygiene; “the curriculum was designed to help the children deal with their challenging surroundings” (The Goldman Environment Prize).

In the 1990s, CID established *Mokattam Recycling School for Non-Formal Education*, where young garbage pickers could attend literacy classes, learn computer skills, and use the school-owned machine to recycle their products. The project was funded by UNESCO and Procter & Gamble (P&G); the latter wanting to prevent counterfeiters from collecting used P&G shampoo bottles, filling them with cheaper products and reselling them as if they were new. The youth used the recycling machine at the school to break down the plastic P&G shampoo bottles. The plastic powder was resold to business-owners who would then sell them to factories to make plastic tubes for construction or clothing hangers. In the school, the boys learned how to complete Excel spreadsheets and use mathematics to calculate their proceeds. This process gave the youth a feeling of independence and autonomy. The literacy program also included an arts program, which required the attendees to take drawing and crafts-making workshops, sing and play music, and participate in some drama workshops.

Theatre Project Plan

In the spring of 2001 the manager of the arts program at the recycling school approached me to facilitate theatre workshops for the young male garbage pickers. The young participants had already been working with this manager, doing basic theatre exercises, so the youth were familiar with the concept of participatory work.

There were also two other facilitators of music and arts and crafts who had been involved with the participants for a few months before I joined the program. There was a total of 60 youth who attended the school; their attendance was based on their availability during/after their working hours. I was to teach between one and two 3-hour sessions a week to an average of 20 youth per session. There was no project time-line given, so it felt as though it was an indefinite experience.

In my initial discussions with Dr. Iskandar, chairperson of CID, I was asked about my plan for the boys. I explained my intention to bring some relief to their otherwise harsh lives. I understood that they operated in the world like small businessmen, and wanted to offer them a place where they could just be boys again. At that time, I wasn't aware that the boys would be paid to attend the arts and literacy classes, as compensation for their loss of wages for the time they would spend at the school. It was the only way to get the parents' support for their children's participation in this program.

The only agenda I was given was to engage the boys in "theatre games." There was no expectation for me to produce a performance, or even to assess the group's progress from time to time. My meetings with Dr. Iskandar continued to take place once every few months over the course of the two and a half years I worked at the recycling school.

Challenges

By accepting to work with *El-Zabbaleen* boys I knew I would be challenged. My first challenge was for the boys and me to reconcile our differences. Egyptian society is

comprised of different class systems: the elite, the middle class, and the lower class.

People relate to one another according to their class, which is ultimately determined by their educational background and economic affluence. It is common for people from the more affluent classes to treat people from the lower class with disrespect, disregarding their dignity. The garbage collectors are dismissed and yelled at often by those whose garbage they pick.

Growing up in Cairo I often heard stories of how the *Zabbal* (singular for garbage picker) didn't pick up garbage on the day he was supposed to, or asked for more money than he was due. It is common to hear that tenants fight with the *Zabbal* of their particular building and make it difficult for him to be paid his monthly fee. Often the authorities harass the young garbage pickers and scavengers. It is common for them to be arrested while making their early morning rounds and put in jail for months at a time, which happened to one of our young participants.

It was no hidden fact for the young boys that I belonged to a more affluent class, since I arrived at the workshops in my own vehicle and not in a taxi, for example. Not only that, I was a woman who wore my hair short, and dressed mostly in pants and t-shirts; this put me in a category all by myself! The boys were very resistant to working with me. Many times they made fun of me and teased me. For many weeks I believed they were only attending the drama sessions for the snacks they got during their break, the chance to socialize with each other, and the payment they received.

My second challenge was to build rapport with the project coordinator, Mr. Tala'at, whose job was to take the attendance of the youth, make sure that the sessions started on time, and to provide the snacks during the break. I don't believe that Mr. Tala'at was ever a garbage collector himself, but he came from the area of *El-Zabbaleen*. He was someone very important to the young boys because he supervised their use of the recycling machine, one of the sources of their livelihoods. At first I couldn't understand why Mr. Tala'at was unfriendly to any of the facilitators. Perhaps he was sceptical about the "expert" interference from outsiders; the locals are very protective of their community and are quite aware of how judgmental people can be when they visit. . Later, I began to witness the dynamics between the people involved in the project, and got a sense of why Mr. Tala'at was resistant to trusting the facilitators.

Some of my facilitator colleagues didn't seem to take the process very seriously. The facilitators would arrive at the session, mingle and talk with the boys for the first half hour, and then begin to engage with them in their designated activity, which I felt they didn't take very seriously (the sessions didn't seem to have much direction). As a newcomer, it was difficult to bring a fresh way of working with the young boys in an environment that seemed oblivious to the impact of arts-based work. This was my third challenge: to create a condition where the boys, the project coordinator, and even my own colleagues could take the theatre process seriously.

The Theatre Process

At first I engaged the boys in various theatre games and exercises as a way of having fun. It was at this point that I began to see how much this environment of fun and

games was foreign to their adult lives of earning a living by collecting garbage. In my workshop I was asking them to act like teenagers, a contrast to the very adult way in which they carried themselves in the world and dealt with one another as small businessmen.

After a few months, I began to teach the young participants basic drama skills to enable them to create scenes to express themselves. I left the choice of stories entirely up to them as I was eager to learn what it was that they wanted to say. Most of their scenes depicted their abusive relationship with their *ma'alem*. The boys didn't focus on their own disempowerment; instead the focus was on the power of the *ma'alem*, who would always end up beating the boys for being disobedient. Of course, the older and most popular boy in the group got to play the *ma'alem* every time. When each group took turns performing their scenes, the observing group would laugh when the boys were getting beaten up, and that was followed by laughter from those performing the scene. As a way of teaching them about the theatre aesthetic, I gave the performing group "notes" about how to improve a certain beat or intention. Eventually the observing participants began to give those performing similar notes.

There was no attempt on my part to dig into the abusive situations depicted in the youth's scenes, or to guide or counsel them to find solutions for their oppression. Later I learned of the work of Augusto Boal (1979), and *Theatre of the Oppressed*, which would have the practitioner deal with this type of situation by exploring the youth's oppression as a means of finding solutions to the situation. I'm grateful now that I didn't attempt to explore the boys' lives in this manner. The boys already felt sensitive to my being an

outsider, privy now to their lives. I didn't want to draw attention to how shocked I was by their realities. At the time I felt that if I had explored this area I would have been crossing a boundary. Any attempt on my part to turn the boys against their employers would have been perceived as me interfering with their way of life, something I was certain would not go down well with their parents or the NGO. It was easier and safer for me to turn a blind eye to what I was witnessing, and instead focus on creating a safe space for them to express themselves freely.

A Proposal to Perform

During my first year working at *El-Zabbaleen* the local NGO put on their annual celebration of the boys. This celebration was a festival-like event, where people wearing large puppets were hired to dance around to very loud music. The boys sang and danced with the puppets. The families and the rest of the community attended as well. The NGO gave out prizes and congratulated the boys for progressing in their literacy classes. The only performance the boys engaged in was to sing their songs, which, as a performance, was disorganized and lacking in aesthetic awareness. The boys walked on and off the temporary wooden stage, yelling things across to their families and friends. It seemed to me that the NGO and project organizers had very low expectations of the boys. They didn't seem to trust in their abilities to learn the discipline necessary to put on a better quality performance.

After almost a year of working with the boys I established a good relationship with a group of them who consistently attended all the sessions. Together we created a few scenes that depicted their life in *El-Zabbaleen*. I saw potential for them to present

these scenes as part of a theatrical performance that would be performed to regular theatre-goers, people from outside the community of *El-Zabbaleen*. Meanwhile they were making progress in the art classes, and having completed a collection of drawings and paintings. In the summer of 2002 I wrote a proposal to Dr. Iskandar asking for funds to build a small stage inside the recycling school where the young boys could perform the culmination of their year's work. I proposed the performance as a means to attract future donors, as I guaranteed it would be a very presentable piece of work that would make the NGO and the community proud.

Dr. Iskandar, who shared the same scepticism as my colleagues, was doubtful that the boys could discipline themselves enough to perform anything, let alone carry on the entire show independently of facilitators' assistance. I argued that the boys were capable of such a challenge, and that the performance would be a great success. There was also resistance to the idea that the audience would come all the way to the slums, where it was "filthy and smelly." The project coordinator felt it was embarrassing to show the reality of where the boys lived. I insisted that the authenticity was the whole point, and that it would be validating for the boys to have the audience see them in their own environment. The proposal was approved and we received the funding for mounting the show.

During the months that followed, we had a small wooden stage built inside the school, with black curtains hanging off narrow metal plumbing pipes and two 500watt floodlights above the stage. We began to rehearse the scenes that were going to be included in the performance. The other facilitators began to take an interest in the project when they saw how dedicated the boys were to the process. The music facilitator

proposed that the boys collect instruments from the garbage that they could use to play music. Using these instruments the group put together a few musical pieces for the show. Mr. Attef got excited as well and proposed that the boys talk about the recycling machine as part of the presentation. The theme “recycling” ran through the entire performance, which gave us the inspiration to call the performance *El-Gonya*. Even the program was made from recycled paper that was bought from the girls’ school next door. The excitement of a performance seemed to change the atmosphere around the school; it united the facilitators, the boys, and the project coordinator.

Post-Performance Euphoria

On the night of the performance, and as the youth stood outside the school building chatting with the audience, Dr. Iskandar walked up to me and thanked me. She called me a “maestro” for orchestrating the evening and for having the vision for showcasing the boys’ potential and hidden talent. After that success I could ask anything of the NGO and often times Dr. Iskandar would personally sign off on it. The NGO and the facilitators seemed to have a mutually respectful working relationship and the boys started to act differently too. They would arrive at rehearsals showered and dressed in clean clothes, ready to start working right away, and would ask to engage in complex theatre exercises to challenge themselves. I had never seen them so focused and interested in the theatre process. It was refreshing to witness.

The excitement of the facilitators was obvious, and they quickly started to plan for the next performance, “now that the boys are capable of so much!” This time everyone was involved from the start. The NGO gave us more money to cover the costs

of creating a poster and a program. There was talk of taking the show to other locations in Cairo in order to avoid having the audience travel to the slums. I didn't quite agree with this idea, as I felt it was important for the audience to get a sense of where the boys lived and worked, but the rest of the group was excited to be taking the performance to the city. Suddenly, the attendance rate began to increase, and we found ourselves with a total of 18 youth who would be part of the second performance. This was a large number considering the very small rehearsal space, but everyone made it work because now the boys looked forward to being able to perform again, and this made a lot of difference.

As for the performance itself, it became one cohesive piece of work that included theatre, music and songs while the arts classes were focused on creating props and costume pieces. The show's theme again featured events and situations from the slums, but this time the *Zabbaleen* culture was heavily integrated in the work. Music familiar to the boys was integrated in the show, and this time instead of playing on instruments made from the garbage, they played on real drums. The piece opened with a *moolid*, a traditional event that takes place in rural areas where people gather to celebrate the birth of a prophet. Traditionally the *moolid* could last for several days and would feature tricksters, dancers, and merchants of all sorts. This is what this performance seemed like, a mixture of lots of songs and scenes that made up the life of the *Zabbaleen*. The theme was similar to the *El-Gonya* performance, but this one had a lot more substance. While comedic in nature, the scenes contained controversial issues such as prostitution, gambling, drug abuse, and loss. Every participant in this show seemed to be involved and engaged in the process. Several years later, my colleague Dahlia Sabbour, a

Cairo-based Theatre of the Oppressed practitioner, was able to recall her experience of watching that show:

I was deeply moved by the sublime nature of the performance and very touched by the thoughtful and heartfelt expression of these boys, by their dedication, their gracefulness and their passion. My assumptions and expectations were completely shattered and replaced by awe, admiration and respect: I was amazed with the artistry, focus, structure and joy expressed throughout the performance. I was actually flabbergasted. I was thoroughly riveted the entire time, and was entertained endlessly by their deep level of emotion as expressed through a mixture of music and acting. I thought the show was excellent. I immediately realized how biased I had been and how I had unfairly judged the youth by their appearance. It was a humbling moment for me, as well as a hopeful one, to see how art and theatre can bring out the best in human beings, no matter what the setting or background. I especially loved how the integration of music in the performance was so representative of the boys' own aspirations and reflected the values of their community. It was an extremely powerful performance (Audience Questionnaire, Appendix G, June 16 2010).

The dress rehearsal was performed for some of the boys' families (mostly mothers and siblings) and for Dr. Iskandar. While the families thoroughly enjoyed the show, and likely related to it more than the first one since it featured several aspects of their culture, Dr. Iskandar was quite upset with its content and spoke candidly to the whole group about how she felt. She urged us not to perform the piece, warning the

parents that it would bring the community shame. The boys' mothers spoke in favor of the show, advocating that the show depicted their real life experiences, and that it contained nothing to be ashamed of. The boys explained that even though the show presented many social ills, the group's final song says, "Don't steal, and don't do drugs". They made perfect sense, but that didn't change Dr. Iskandar's mind. And although she did not prevent the boys from performing their play, her disapproval lingered in our hearts.

Phasing Out

The night of the first performance coincided with demonstrations and protests in Cairo against the U.S decision to invade Iraq. I was stuck in the city traffic for hours trying to get to the location of the performance, but ended up having to turn back and go home. I was scheduled to leave the country the following day for a week to do a lighting design job and then to Canada to explore the prospects of going to graduate school. As a result of these travel plans, I ended up missing the second performance as well.

I heard from the facilitators that the performances were very successful, and that the boys once again impressed everyone who attended. It seemed that the project was growing and playing a new role in the boys' lives, so much that on one of the performance nights, one of the boys didn't show up. His father had beaten him and forced him to stay home to make up for missing so much work because of rehearsals. However his father let him perform the second night, and I was told that the boy shone more than any other child in that performance! This was a reality that we had to face: theatre had started to play an important role in the lives of these boys. Sadly, we were

not equipped for the kind of responsibility to fully support the young garbage pickers on their journey.

In the meantime, I felt myself getting distracted by the events that were taking place in my personal life. On some level I felt that I was abandoning the boys and everyone else I knew, because I was not just travelling to get a degree and then return, I was leaving the country in hopes of finally living in a more accepting and liberal society. At the time, the regime of Hosny Mubarak was exercising brutal power to instil fear in the minds of people, and to repress liberal society and freedom of expression by carrying out arrests and persecutions of many Egyptians, some of them my friends and colleagues. The arrests of some of my classmates from university with accusations of being “Satan worshippers”, and subsequent arrests of other close friends (the Incident of the Queen Boat 52) and their persecution for being homosexual, were indications to me that I lived under the power of a regime that was unpredictable and volatile. I felt it was time for me to leave.

In August 2003, my father lost his battle against lung cancer. I spent the months leading up to that tragic event looking after him in the hospital and trying to hold my family together during this emotionally difficult time. During this period I did not visit the boys, and I heard from my colleagues that CID had reduced all the facilitators’ wages by half due to funding cuts from UNESCO as a result of the events of 9/11. I was too busy with my family affairs to think about what Dr. Iskandar was implying with these cuts, but heard about the discontent of my fellow facilitators towards this decision.

At the end of July 2003, CID decided to “temporarily” discontinue the whole arts program “until more funds could be secured.” To my knowledge there was no official meeting with the facilitators to discuss the ramifications of this decision on the community, or what the future plan would be. I wasn’t sure if this decision had something to do with the content of the show, and if this was Dr. Iskandar’s way of creating some distance from the facilitators until a more transparent relationship could be established, or if this was truly the end of the arts program for the young garbage pickers. It seemed like such a radical decision at a time when the arts program was flourishing and beginning to benefit the community so much.

I left the country at the end of August to attend graduate school, dealing with a terrible loss, but having a lot of hope for a new beginning. I was aware that I had not gone to visit the boys to say goodbye, nor had I tried to speak with the manager of CID about her decision to end the arts program. The guilt of not having created proper closure with the boys would haunt me for years after that.

A Visit to El-Zabbaleen

After a year of graduate school, I returned in the summer of 2004 to visit the boys. I went with my former colleague, Maria Pastore, and were met with a lot of greetings and smiles. The boys were happy to see us again after a whole year of absence. The arts program had not been reinstated but the boys were attempting to perform the last show we worked on together at the Zabbaleen. They were busy preparing themselves for the show. We were rushed inside the school building where we sat on chairs in front of

the small wooden stage. There were a few audience members from the *Zabbaleen* community. The stage lights were turned on, and the show began.

A few minutes into the performance, I began to feel very sad for the boys. They had attempted to mount a demanding show all by themselves, and were clearly struggling to make it happen. Although it was clear that one or two members were trying to keep the rest of the group engaged, the majority of the performers were disorganized, unfocused, and scattered. They lacked the discipline they had so skilfully acquired in the years we worked with them. I could see that this was a desperate attempt to recreate the same pleasure they once felt at doing theatre. They could see it wasn't working. Halfway through the performance, a few of the more keen boys began shouting at their teammates to commit to their lines and cues, but to no avail. The performance ended and we congratulated them on their efforts, but everyone could tell it wasn't the same as before. Outside we sat and chatted. The boys told me they felt we had all abandoned them. It was a difficult moment, and the other facilitator and I didn't know what to say. We knew that they still had a strong connection with Dr. Iskandar and CID, so we were uncomfortable disclosing information about lack of funding in case that was not what Dr. Iskandar had told them. The most we could do was acknowledge their feelings and promise to return again for another visit.

The Current State of El-Zabbaleen Boys

For many years when I returned to Cairo for brief visits, I avoided getting in touch with the boys and CID. I was still unable to reconcile with the guilt of having abandoned the youth and feeling responsible for the reaction of Dr. Iskandar towards the

performance. Writing about this project as part of my dissertation was a way for me to find healing. Recently (August 2011), I researched CID and saw that Dr. Iskandar has continued her role as chairperson of the organization. I wrote to the organization, which was now comprised of staff I was no longer familiar with, identifying who I was and my relationship with the *Zabbaleen* boys. I asked about the boys' progress and if they were presently involved in any theatre work. To my surprise I heard back from Dr. Iskandar, as well as the executive director of a recently established small NGO based in *El-Zabbaleen* called "Spirit of Youth". Part of the responsibilities of this small NGO is to supervise a theatre program for the youth.

Since 2007 the older youth, who have now graduated from the school, have been involved in several performances that have taken place in over seven different locations in Cairo and Alexandria. They have continued to be engaged in theatre work, and the organization is looking into training newcomers to do similar theatre work. The most recent performance depicts the journey of the *Zabbaleen* people from the south of Egypt to Cairo in the 1940s (E. N. Guindy, personal communication, July 5, 2011).

Securing the Process

The organization and the facilitators of this project (myself included) had their hands full with work whose impact definitely surpassed the confines of the *Mokattam Recycling School*. At the time, we were blind to the recognition and validation that this project provided the young boys, which, in hindsight, I realized had directly addressed their needs. At the time, we were unable to see that we were planting in the garbage pickers the seed of a sense of self-worth and hope. This experience alerted me to the

value of Tfd work with marginalized and impoverished people, but, even more so, this project made me consider the importance of accountability of facilitators and NGO staff towards the work they initiate with such communities. Each entity is responsible for making one portion of the project function, and in the end all entities come together to bring the work to fruition. Each party has to recognize the importance of its role and responsibilities in the work, as well as staying aware of the repercussions on the community of abandoning these responsibilities. As we've witnessed in the projects I've showcased so far, the NGO can exercise significant power in a given Tfd project, because they hold the funds. They hold that which keeps the facilitators working, and the communities thriving.

When I completed this experience I thought the solution to this unfairness in hierarchy could be redeemed if the community were to learn the skill of practicing Tfd independently of NGOs and facilitators, hence aiming to eliminate their reliance on external help. Later on in my inquiry, this hypothesis would lead me unto further investigations on what communities really want to glean from the process of Tfd, and whether learning Tfd skills is really part of their agenda.

What follows is an important topic in applied theatre practice, that of impact assessment, which stems from the need to understand if the community has in fact benefited from the experience. I showcase the work of *Adugna Community Dance Theatre* (Plastow, 2003), and Etherton and Munier's Bangladesh project (2006), to highlight the rewards and pitfalls of the Tfd practice attempting to pass on "skills" to impoverished communities. The next chapter discusses why impact assessment holds

significant weight in the dialogue amongst the organizers and facilitators of a given TfD project, and points to why it is important to understand the actual needs and capabilities of communities when attempting to pass on these skills.

Chapter 6

Impact Assessment: Whose needs are being served?

In Tfd work, *impact assessment* is a form of financial management practice in which the cost-benefit ratio is as unique and complex as each participating community. Clearly, donor agencies have not only the right to request evidence of the impacts of the development work they sponsor, but also a responsibility to make sound decisions about where to distribute limited funds. Lynn Dalrymple (2007) offers a common sense rationale for impact assessment, which she calls “the effect an activity or experience has had on its target audience” (p. 201). Similarly, Helen Banos Smith (2007), a learning and impact assessment adviser with *Save the Children UK*, which promotes child rights in developing countries, writes: “[W]e believe it is important to examine our impact so that we are accountable for what we do to those with and for whom we work, especially children themselves, and to our donors (both institutional and individual)” (p. 158).

It is also common practice for Tfd practitioners to conduct at least an informal needs assessment before working with a target group. This may involve a pre-meeting with the participant group and with members of the community about how to recruit project participants and what they could learn that would benefit the larger community. Also, facilitators and NGOs usually (but not always) work together to establish a set of “goals” for the project. These discussions create expectations of how the Tfd process will impact the community. In turn, these expectations shape the approach that will be used to target identified needs. Dalrymple (2007) cautions against top-down control,

noting that “genuine partnership allows for a strategy and intervention to develop that is not imposed but built on shared values and meets the needs of the target group” (p. 203).

Many of the problems associated with impact assessment can be traced back to the absence of community participation, or even community representation, in both the design and evaluation of the TfD project. First, the target group’s agenda is seldom factored into the planning stage of community development work. Second, the people who take control of setting the project goals tend not to make room for shifts that occur during the TfD process, including changes in the expectations of the participants themselves. Third, the expectations are often unrealistic because donor agencies are typically removed from the social and economic challenges of the communities where TfD takes place. And finally, members of the target group often face insurmountable barriers when attempting to make use of what they learned because the TfD process fails to incorporate exit strategies and follow-up plans.

Munier and Etherton (2006) explored the relationship between “impact” and “follow-up” in their case study on how TfD was brought to Bangladesh as part of the Global Movement for Children. As discussed in Chapter 4, on return visits to communities that hosted the TfD workshops, the facilitators found that poverty had displaced the TfD focus on empowering participants. Ultimately, the sponsoring agency’s decision to end its financial support when the children turned 18, derailed local efforts to make use of what had been learned during the TfD process, leaving participants with fond memories but little else. An exception was noted by community members and facilitators alike, although it was not a defined outcome: the project had raised

consciousness about the value of education, and the number of girls and boys attending school had increased.

With the benefit of hindsight, Munier and Etherton (2006) stress the need to incorporate follow-up strategies in the TfD process. Their analysis points to a fundamental problem that arises from the inherently transitory nature of development work: At some point, the donor agencies and practitioners who facilitate TfD work will pack their bags and move on to another community, perhaps another country. Munier and Etherton (2006) recount being struck by the “uncomfortable reality” in the accusation made by one of the participants whom they met on a return visit: “‘*Tomra to palan*’ (*You run away*)” (p. 181).

The facilitators of the Bangladesh project also acknowledge that TfD is not a panacea for all people who are struggling to survive. Their reflections provide a useful reminder that expectations must be geared to a community’s material circumstances because “it is too great a burden for a poor, marginalized community to follow up on their own, even when an initial TfD workshop has been very successful, and however great the enthusiasm immediately afterwards to go it alone” (p. 179). There is considerable skepticism, however, implied in their observation that for TfD practitioners, the notion of follow-up in TfD work is “both a headache and a forgotten issue” (p. 178).

In this chapter, I seek to add to the reflections contained in Etherton and Munier’s Bangladesh case study by drawing on the lessons contained in the *Zabbaleen* project, as well as in *Adugna*, a project that succeeded in transforming the lives of 18 street youth in

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Both projects are similar in their focus working with impoverished children and youth, yet remain very different in their approaches and sustainability plans.

“The Adugna Community Dance Project” in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

This inspiring project illustrates the impacts that can be achieved through a combination of generous time and funding allocations, along with a carefully considered follow-up plan that supports participants in learning how to make use of their skills after TfD training has ended. Working with 18 female and male street youth (both Muslims and non-Muslims), the *Adugna Community Dance Theatre* project is a singular example of the transformative potential of development work with a focus on the arts. Participants acquired the skills they needed to earn a decent living and they were motivated to give back to the community by sharing their experiences and knowledge through dance classes and educational workshops on issues of urgency in the community.

The impact of this project, which is the subject of an essay by Jane Plastow (2004), is visible and concrete: The youth moved out of dire circumstances and into new lives armed with the dual identities of professional dancers/community facilitators. Plastow, a theatre teacher and practitioner, was brought in towards the end of the project to teach the participants ways in which they could use methods of Theatre of the Oppressed to integrate their knowledge of dance with the community.

The *Adugna Community Dance Theatre* was not without controversy, however. Dance is not only an “unusual form in the area of development projects” (Plastow, 2004,

p. 134), but ethical considerations were raised by the decision to train the street youth in dance forms and methods that were foreign to the artistic culture of Ethiopia. The lead facilitator Royston Muldoom, a dance practitioner from Scotland, prioritizes the benefits of dance as a means of helping oppressed populations discover their right to take space and move freely. He believes that changing the way people move can change how they think and behave:

When you work with others with low self-esteem they only take the space they think they are worth. They can't stretch or raise their heads. Through controlled pleasurable experience they can extend and take space. They are unlikely to go back. Dance affects their idea of self and place in their world. Passing that on is paramount. (Muldoom, cited in Plastow, 2004, p. 134)

Muldoom was initially recruited to Ethiopia to create a collaborative project with street dwellers in Addis Ababa, resulting in a successful performance that incorporated dance and film. He was then invited to facilitate a series of workshops, beginning in 1997, scheduled for 18 months and involving 18 street youth as participants. This marked the first stage of the *Adugna* project.

A unique aspect of the project is that participants were paid pocket money and their families received a small monthly income as compensation for the loss of income that resulted from the participants being engaged in the dance program. No doubt, this contributed to the support that participants received from their families over time. The least welcoming were families of Muslim origin who “rejected dance as a respectable way to earn a living” (Plastow, 2004, p. 137). Perhaps this could have been different if

the project sponsors and facilitators had approached Muslim families directly and shown respect for their cultural values.

The founder of the donor agency, The Gemini Trust, was the catalyst for the long-term vision that ultimately shaped the design and delivery of the *Aduigna* project. He came to see that it was essential to teach the poorest children the skills to earn a livelihood and broke with the tradition of simply offering a handout that provided temporary relief to families. Plastow notes that this marked a significant shift for the agency, which had a 20-year history of offering support to the poorest of the poor in Addis Ababa. She explains: “[...] initiatives such as *Aduigna* [...] offered the possibility not just of amelioration of appalling living conditions, but of transformation, firstly for the trainees, and potentially, through outreach work, for enormous numbers of people” (p.132).

The *Aduigna Community Dance Theatre* project stands apart from the typical ‘one-off’ TfD initiative. From the outset, with the support of the founder of the sponsoring agency, Muldoom and his team understood that the participants needed time to develop the skills they would be taught and to integrate the experience of taking part in rigorous training. Only then, the facilitators and funders agreed, would it be possible for the youth to make use of what they had learned, both to improve their own lives and to reach out to the community.

Not everyone involved with Gemini bought into this vision. Some people objected to the small scale of the project, in that it provided training for only 18 youth;

others feared that the focus on professional-level dance training would cause the youth to reject their own artistic culture. Presumably, concerns about Western culture being imposed were eased somewhat when Muldoom and Mags Byrne, his collaborator, devised a tight training plan to give participants “the best possible training in contemporary Western and traditional Ethiopian dance” (Plastow, 2004, p. 133). The irony is that because the youth were also granted considerable freedom of choice within the training plan, many of the dancers chose to pursue contemporary dance.

It was money and not culture, however, that generated the strongest criticism; and indeed, it’s hard to refute allegations that Gemini Trust spent too much on too few:

The argument most often made against the *Adugna* project has not been to question its worth to the eighteen trainees involved, but to argue that the investment has been too big for just eighteen out of an estimated 60,000 street dwellers in Addis Ababa (Plastow, 2004, p. 144).

The *Adugna* Dance project was extended far beyond the original 18 months, running for a full five years at an annual cost of some £50,000 (approximately \$80,000). The facilitators and donor agency paid close attention to the kinds of support the youth would need after the training ended, and drew up a follow-up plan that would be put in place to support the participants’ transition into becoming community facilitators themselves. During the last two years of training, participants led dance classes for disadvantaged community groups, sometimes involving hundreds of members, and the group gave dance performances to audiences of street dwellers and drug users in an

attempt to serve as an inspiration to others. This, in some measure, answered the criticism that too much money was invested in too few participants.

To help the youth move toward becoming community facilitators themselves, the project included theatre training. According to Plastow (2004), this signaled that:

[...] there has been a recognition that not only would theatre training add to aspects of the group's expressive skills, but in running issue-led workshops and projects the use of drama might allow closer scrutiny of complex issues than is possible in dance alone (p. 140).

The timeframe and money allocated to this TfD project, along with criteria for a comprehensive impact assessment featuring both an exit strategy and a follow-up plan, brought together all the ingredients for genuine transformation. In the words of one of the participants, Minyahil, the impact was “a big, big change. As if I were not there before” (Plastow, 2004, p. 125).

Three years after the *Adugna* project had ended, Plastow (2004) provided the following summary, which underlines the success enjoyed by the participants: 10 were under contract to Gemini Trust, working on projects in southern Ethiopia, using dance and forum theatre to educate school children about HIV/AIDS, or working as “dance development officers” in a training program to bring another 12 youth into the community cohort of dancers/facilitators; four had recently joined the Paris company of their former trainer for four months; and two were attending a summer course on African dance (p. 151).

The collaborative partnership approach adopted by the donor agency and *Adugna* facilitators, coupled with their shared long-term vision, provide an instructive example of what can be achieved when the criteria for impact assessment are addressed in the planning stage, and then revisited and revised to accommodate changes in the participants and their place in the larger community. Of course, without adequate resources – funding and facilitation – even the most carefully planned and participatory Tfd process has little chance of resulting in sustainable positive changes for individuals or their communities. But there are still lessons that can be learned from Tfd projects that have neither the input nor the output measures of *Adugna*.

Integrating Impact Assessment in the Tfd Process

The nature of the dialogue among the Tfd triad of donor agencies, facilitators and disadvantaged communities may be the single most important predictor of project outcomes. Certainly, the exclusive right held by the donor agency over when and how to limit, expand, renew or withdraw the financial resources that support Tfd work sets the broad parameters of a project. The prospects for change, whatever the specific agenda, must be realistic. O'Connor and Welsh-Morris (2007) maintain that it is therefore critical to establish “a close alignment of purpose between funder and client” during the initial negotiations, “[a]n agreement at this stage on the limitations of what applied theatre projects can add to wider government social change programmes [sic] is vital for establishing evaluation processes” (p. 135).

In most cases, NGOs assume that the inherent participatory nature of Tfd creates the collaborative partnership needed to involve the communities in the project, when in fact creating a partnership means taking the community's understanding of its own needs into account early on in the planning stages, and throughout the process. Non-native facilitators who have spent enough time in a community to become familiar with local issues and cultural traditions may be able to draw on local connections, but many Tfd practitioners are themselves outsiders. How can funders alone, even in discussion with facilitators, set the goals and structure of a project with only very limited knowledge of the community?

Criteria for impact assessment must integrate problems and issues that have been identified by the community and that must be done with respect for the indigenous culture. The fluid and changeable qualities of participant-developed work is also a matter that must be considered in setting criteria and assessing impact. Although Tfd has moved closer toward participatory processes since the 1990s, there is still too much reliance on top-down agenda setting. As Abah (2002) observed:

It is [...] commonplace to hear that Theatre for Development practitioners declare that they always go into the communities with an open mind and without prejudging anything. Yet behind this declaration of innocence there is always the belief that something is wrong and the corresponding assumption that we have the solution, even if only in part (p. 59).

It is in the planning stages of a project that facilitators and donor agencies need to articulate their commitment to finding ways for the community to have a say in the Tfd

process. Impact assessment is most meaningful when the goals and anticipated outcomes of Tfd work reflect the project in action, or what has been described as an “agenda-less agenda” that invites “local champions to take the issues forward” (Jain, cited in Prentki, 2003, p. 52). To this end, the initial negotiations between the NGO and facilitators can build a framework for post-project evaluation by focusing on key areas. These may include: acknowledging the visible daily struggles that are faced by community members; projecting a realistic timeline that allows for the discovery of community-driven issues and continuous refinement of goals and training techniques that will empower the participants to effect change; and providing for an exit strategy and follow-up plans.

The community’s interest in the project can play an important role in sustaining it, but it has to be supported by the NGO and facilitators when possible. It is also important to understand that it takes not only money, time and dedicated people to turn good intentions into practice, but there must also be a willingness to persevere, even when problems seem insurmountable. The alternative seems to be a downward spiral into doubt and skepticism. For example:

Including a series of follow-up activities as part of a project’s planning rarely guarantees that these follow-up events will ever take place, no matter how successful the initial Tfd training has been. Even where the donor agency allows this to happen, the facilitators and the community team often find it difficult to take the process to the next level of bringing about positive changes in the lives and communities, no matter how strong the impact in the community of the initial Tfd workshop (Munier & Etherton, 2006, p.178).

The value of seeking alternatives to traditional top-down approaches is put forward in more positive terms by Marcia Pompeo Nogueira (2002), who references the influence of the principles advanced by Paulo Freire (1972). Nogueira writes:

Some people call it the bottom-up perspective, others ‘development from within’.

In all of them there is the certainty that you need to respect people’s knowledge, that development cannot be made without an honest dialogue involving different subjects learning from each other, respecting each other’s knowledge, and working together to understand and solve their problems. (p. 107)

It is a particular challenge for NGOs involved in development work to relinquish their hold over TfD projects because the transfer of skills related to theatre techniques, dance or other forms of self-expression are difficult to quantify. As Plastow (2004) notes, “The methodology of arts within a development context is almost wholly unexamined by NGOs, which predominantly use the arts simply as an entertaining means of transmitting their messages” (p. 133). Yet impact assessment has moved to the forefront of contemporary TfD work as practitioners and theorists strive to develop criteria that better reflect what communities say they need, and how they see themselves being able to collaborate in raising awareness of local issues and perhaps finding solutions. During the planning stages of a project a set of “checking-in” points can be scheduled at different intervals during a process to touch base with the community about their progress, how they wish to utilize the skills they are using, and the kind of support they are seeking.

Regardless of the specific goals and evaluation tools that guide impact assessment in a project, the first steps are taken in the initial planning phase. Thinking carefully about my own experiences in Cairo, as well as the reflections of the facilitators involved with Tfd work in rural Bangladesh and Ethiopia, has convinced me that impact assessment should not be viewed exclusively as a post-project activity. Effective evaluation of the impact of Tfd work demands constant monitoring at all stages of a project, in order to ensure that communities are fully engaged in the process, and that the people who are being served are always being heard.

In the next chapter, we move from the world of developing countries to Victoria, a city in the province of British Columbia in Canada. Of particular interest to my research is a community of immigrant and refugee youth that I have been working with for a few years where I have tried to apply what I had learned in my work with *El-Zabbaleen*. The chapter focuses on my process with that community and the new obstacles I encountered in a project that attempted to apply the above recommendations to seek a more democratic way of practicing Tfd.

Chapter 7

Here I Stand: Theatre with immigrant & refugee youth

James Thompson (2003) refers to “success in gaining theatre work” as “a break”; “a ‘lucky-break’, a ‘well-earned break’ -but a break all the same” (p.25). For this theatre artist, it would take almost 6 years after my work with *El-Zabbaleen* before I got my “break.” In between, I worked with various communities in Cairo and in Victoria on short-term projects. My “break” was the opportunity to work on a plan for a three-phase pilot project to explore, through TfD, the struggles of immigrant and refugee youth living in Victoria. I didn’t have to try and convince the organization of the benefits of this work; the organization approached me because they believed in the potential for theatre to create social change. As described in Chapter 3 (*Research Methodology*), my practice with this project ultimately adhered to the goals set by the NGO, all the while following a method of facilitation that I felt aligned with my own personal philosophy for empowering marginalized communities through the TfD process. As a researcher, I continued to investigate effective methods of TfD practice, seeking opportunities to develop the skills of theatre that could be passed on to the community, and probed further the idea of “sustainability” (Prentki, 1998). I revisit this research topic in order to provide a broad overview that will serve as the context in which I may draw my conclusions.

Part 1: Project Background & Planning Stages

The NGO for this project provides resettlement services for newly-arrived immigrants and refugees, including programs for children and youth, ranging in focus from teaching life skills and leadership skills to helping with homework. While some

agency programs incorporate the arts as a means for self-expression, using theatre was a new undertaking, made possible by a successful application to the City of Victoria for project-specific funding. I was contacted in the summer of 2003 by the project coordinator to facilitate a series of ten 3-hour workshop sessions that would culminate in a performance to raise community awareness of the struggles of young immigrants and refugees. The coordinator was in close contact with a range of immigrant and refugee youth, hence she was privy to the issues that they encountered at home and at school.

The workshop agenda was created based on information provided by the organization. The young participants already knew one another and were quite close, and would benefit greatly from finding a space to articulate the daily challenges they encounter as immigrants and refugees. I later realized that what the NGO perceived as “closeness” amongst the youth was, in fact, just a familiarity and therefore, the theatre workshops would still have to engage the participants in trust-building exercises, and provide ample time for them to open up to one another. The participants came from Uzbekistan, China, Ethiopia, and Mexico. One participant was born in Canada but had lived in Egypt for many years as a child, so she identified herself as “Egyptian.” The majority of the group members had been in Canada for an average of 5 years (*Appendix D*).

Revising Project Goals

One of the goals was for the young participants to create a forum theatre piece that would engage the audience in active participation and dialogue (*see all project goals in Chapter 3*). This goal posed serious challenges, but there was room for negotiation. In

my experience, this was not an appropriate choice for novice participants. To be successful, forum theatre requires experienced actors with the necessary improvisational skills to integrate audience feedback into their re-enactments. Moreover, the practice of TfD is heavily reliant on participants sharing their life experiences through performance, a process that initially may cause them to feel vulnerable and exposed. While TfD aspires to slowly strengthen participants' voices and self-confidence, I felt that it was very important for the coordinator to understand and accept the need to tread gently and to honour the precious nature of these stories, as well as to provide the time necessary for participants to be able to practice forum theatre. If we were to adopt forum theatre as the methodology for creating dialogue, there was a real risk that participants would feel unsafe since the process involved deconstructing, then replaying, their stories. Instead, I proposed that participants perform their stories then enter into a post-performance workshop with the audience. The goal of interactive dialogue, however, would still be achieved at less risk to the participants.

I envisioned a process in which the participants would lead discussions with the audience and create tableaux (still images) based on the audience's own experiences or reactions to the stories the participants had performed. The success of the tableaux would depend on the skills that participants had developed in workshops prior to their performance, as well as their willingness to take the lead in a post-performance workshop. It was still something of a high-wire act, but at least there would be a safety net in place.

My other concern arose from the fact that performance was a condition of funding, in that a pre-determined agenda had stipulated that the youth would create public theatre. I worried that the project participants would feel inhibited about opening up and sharing personal stories, knowing that some of what they said was destined for public performance. I knew that I had to carefully balance the need to protect the youth at all stages of the project with the need to facilitate an accurate and realistic depiction of the struggles they faced as new immigrants or refugees. In the following account, I focus on how I addressed these concerns.

Part 2: Playmaking Process

As much as possible, I prefer to have the method of practicing theatre develop organically from the needs identified by participants. We began by using collective creation to build a play that did not focus on one storyline, but unfolded as a series of vignettes to present the various experiences of immigrant youth. The performance agenda set by the NGO meant that the theatre content had to incorporate realistic depictions of settlement problems and issues that would evoke responses from the audience. In this, we adhered to the process of “playmaking” as described in Chapter 2 (*Terms and Definitions*). The *Here I Stand* project involved novice participants with no prior performance experience; nonetheless, they were undoubtedly the experts on the topic we explored through theatre, making them the living researchers of their own lives. There were two NGO coordinators present during all the workshop sessions. Because I do not believe in “observers” I stipulated that any coordinators or adult volunteers present during the workshop sessions would engage as participants in the process. Two

coordinators and one adult volunteer were consistent in all the sessions, and ended up participating in the final show as performers.

The Workshop Sessions

The project timeline allowed for 10 rehearsals, each lasting three hours, with the understanding that we might require a few extra sessions during the final stages of the process for run-throughs and dress rehearsals. The participants were connected by a sense of social solidarity as members of an immigrant/refugee group, and the youth clearly demonstrated loyalty, compassion, and thoughtfulness towards one another. They created a safe space by being non-judgmental and accepting of their varied experiences as individuals.

Language barriers posed some of the biggest challenges, inhibiting the participants' capacity to articulate their deepest thoughts and feelings. In general, when the workshop sessions began, I found the youth to be shy and reserved. Despite knowing each other, they were, to some extent, very private and reluctant to voice what it was that they wanted to explore. I don't know how much of this hesitancy to attribute to language, and how much was due to the fact that they simply couldn't imagine how the process would unfold, having no experience with theatre. Certainly, there was some initial resistance to the goal of performance, based on their fears of sharing intimate stories in a public setting, for which they might not have been ready.

During the first few workshop sessions, I offered simple examples of short scenes and tried to find out if the youth wanted to create a play with a narrative thread, or if they

liked the idea of a series of scenes about different topics relating to immigration and settlement. They didn't know what they wanted to create. I realized that I had to adjust my initial plan: I no longer saw my first task as introducing the youth to theatre methods of self-expression and collective creation; my priority had to become building trust and developing a group dynamic, so that the youth would open up and share their experiences. Although these two tasks are addressed within the practice of theatre exercises, my approach shifted slightly, moving away from the technical aspects of practicing theatre skills and toward greater focus on creating safety and comfort within the group.

I began each session with a checking-in circle; everyone shared something about the past week and how they felt that morning. Not only did this help the youth get to know each other better, it allowed me some insight into their day-to-day experiences. After the circle, we warmed up with an hour of theatre games and exercises designed to build trust, introduce collective creation, and began to use the language of theatre. I found the participants slow to invest themselves in the warm-ups, being quite shy and reserved, but after having performed the show a few times, and almost after 8 months from the start of this project the intended goals of these drama exercises were achieved effortlessly. In other words, I learned to never underestimate the value of patience and persistence. I was also aware that the performance element gradually boosted their confidence and helped them overcome the awkwardness of some of these exercises. Every session ended with the group once again sitting in a circle, this time to reflect on what they had just experienced. This ritual seemed to ground the group, and they became witness to one another's most treasured memories.

Building Trust: Creating Memories from Home

During the third workshop session the youth engaged in the creation of images to depict their memories of their home countries. The participants seemed to enjoy this process because they had time to connect slowly with each other, telling each other their stories. The person who listened to the story created an image of the storyteller's memory. This process seemed to bring the group members closer to each other, and it was as if they engaged in an honouring ritual of each other's memories of home. The care and attention to detail that was clearly given to the creation of each memory was an indication of the participants' investment in these experiences. As the facilitator, I was surprised by the change in attitude, and level of creativity that the group members showed when creating these images, as opposed to how reserved and inhibited they seemed when attempting to work on other exercises. The tableau of one participant's memory from Israel depicted a young girl peacefully sitting atop a small mountain, observing the busy city below; another from Egypt depicted a girl surrounded by a huge circle of family members, all talking to each other, eating, and visibly enjoying each other's company; the memory from Uzbekistan showed two young children playing in their backyard with the dog and other friends, while their grandmother sat in the background knitting; the image from Ethiopia showed a young boy sitting peacefully under a tree, enjoying the birds and butterflies around him. He called that feeling "heavenly."

Their reflections at the end of this session seemed to bring the group together. It was as though they shared something dear and special, and became witness to their

fellow participants' stories. Jorgina, one of the most thoughtful of the group members, said that she hadn't realized that immigrants could have such different experiences, even if what linked them to each other is the experience of immigration.

Learning Theatre Tools

At a later workshop session, we revisited the images from home in order to refine them to be used as performance material. In this process the participants were asked to choose words that described their experiences of these memories. Most of the images created depicted lively and engaged families, rich with a sense of the participants' tradition and culture. Our skilled musicians played background music that blended well with the words and the images. Through this process the participants were able to discover what they could do by adding words and music to their images; they were able to create stories.

My method of teaching the participants the different options at their fingertips to enhance a beat, or highlight some content in a scene, was to assign them the task of either creating an image or a scene. As we sat as a group to view their creations, I would give them detailed notes, either to turn a certain way so they were more visible to the audience, or to take a beat before a line, or even just to do something different with their body or facial expression to accentuate a feeling they were trying to communicate. The participants eventually began to give each other similar notes when we replayed their images or when they worked individually on their own scenes. While some might consider this method 'didactic', it was an attempt on my part to help them to observe more critically the aesthetic components of performance.

The rest of the workshop sessions became about investigating what the group members wanted to showcase in the performance. At first it seemed many of the topics were prompted by the coordinator, who would suggest exploring issues of identity formation, peer-pressure, and bullying, all of which she confirmed, were challenges encountered by the majority of immigrants and refugees. At times, I worried that we were following a fairly rigid NGO-planned agenda, and that the process didn't quite allow for other agendas to emerge based on the issues identified by participants in rehearsals. Towards the end of the rehearsal period, when we finally had compiled all the performance material, I asked participants if any of the content we had thus far explored was no longer pertinent for them. I received confirmation from everyone that the performance spoke of their actual life experiences. [I discuss the matter of a pre-planned agenda in more detail in the section on "Challenges".]

The Performance

Our first performance venue was a small box-style theatre space, where we invited 50 audience members on two separate nights. *Here I Stand* was a collage of images, words, and scenes created by the youth to depict topics that they felt showed their struggles as immigrants. The play, which was accompanied by live music, opened with the youth walking on stage, one by one, each calling out a word, until the entire stage was filled with the whole company and the two musicians. The youth chose words that were representative of the positive contribution that immigrants bring to Canadian society: "joy, diversity, syncopation, multiculturalism, hard work, respect, friendship, love, spirituality."

The first scene depicted still images from home countries, as the performers whose images were being presented moved around the stage, narrating their memories. The still images and words created a picture in the minds of the audience of the young performers' experiences of immigration. The images showed their sadness at leaving home and their hopefulness about building a new life in Canada.

A scene we called "Day One" showed the confusion and culture shock often experienced by immigrant youth. The image focused on a young girl being overcome with despair as she fails at speaking the new language, refuses unfamiliar food, gets lost trying to follow the street signs, and can't afford to buy presents for Christmas. She is left huddled on stage as all these 'new' ways of living exit the stage, shrugging their shoulders at her inability to adapt. Other scenes addressed the legacy of pain endured by newcomers who have fled war-torn countries, language and cultural barriers that impact communication between teachers and the youth, the struggle to retain cultural values, and bullying. After the bullying scene, Chelsea walked on stage and read one of her journal entries about not being accepted at school for wearing a headscarf. This was followed by parent/youth vignettes, and then a replay of the images from home; only this time the images were transformed to depict the participants' current lives.

The image of a young girl, Anna, having fun with her friends in Mexico transformed into a scene of her playing basketball in Canada. The contrast made it clear that her life was now less about friends and more about keeping busy. The image from Israel transformed to show two parents in different parts of the stage, and the kids in yet

another part, everyone holding cellular phones. The Egypt scene transformed family dynamics, with the young girl suddenly becoming her mother's caregiver and babysitter to her siblings because their father left them. The Uzbekistan image transformed into one where the two children were left at home alone as both parents worked hard. And finally, the Ethiopia scene transformed into a young boy studying for his exams, while his parents worked and his siblings watched TV.

The youth wanted to end the performance on a positive note, so they created a final scene of images that showed the strengths and contributions of immigrants to Canada. The images were accompanied by spoken sentences: "Immigrants bring diversity to Canada," "Immigrants are hard working," "We bring new perspective to Canadian Society," "We are all part of the spirit of Canada."

Post-Performance Interactive Workshop

The format I developed worked to promote dialogue without exposing the youth to the discomfort of participatory improvisational theatre. Audience members were asked to take part in interactive discussions with the project participants about selected scenes from the performance. This provided an opportunity for the audience to suggest solutions to the problems presented in the scenes. After safely replaying their scenes, the youth were able to engage in constructive dialogue about what could be done to help them resolve a particular situation. While this method might seem similar to Boal's Forum Theatre, it is different in that the participants were protected from having to re-enact their scenes and to change their actions based on audience recommendations.

Although the participants were initially reluctant to open up to the audience by engaging in dialogue about the content of the play, with each performance the youth felt more validated, and this helped with their confidence and ability to speak about their experiences. The audience members were quite moved by the courage and honesty of the participants, but what was even more validating was how keen they were to dialogue to solve problems encountered by young immigrants and refugees in Canada.



Figure 5: Image from *Here I Stand* performance of a family on their way out of their country. The young girl is excited, but her older sister is sad.



Figure 6: Johnny's scene where he sees visions of the war and turmoil in his native country.



Figure 7: Charlie, reflecting on her values and traditions, and in the background are Chelsea and Johnny representing religion and respect for elders.



Figure 8: The “cool kids” in Charlie’s scene. The skaters, the rich kids, the hippies, the ones who are kind, and the ones who are reserved. They eventually question all of Charlie’s values and traditions, which prompts her to discard them one by one.



Figure 9: Chelsea’s family after coming to Canada. Her mother had health issues, and Chelsea became the caregiver for her younger siblings.



Figure 10: Johnny describing his life in Ethiopia, where he sat under the tree, enjoying the butterflies and birds. He says “it felt like heaven”.

Part 3: Analysis & Evaluation

After the ‘intervention’ stage of the workshop sessions and performances, I now reflect on the project outcomes, noting the benefits of the work on the participants and audience members. As part of any evaluative process, the positive outcomes are noted, as well as the challenges. To elucidate a point, at times I injected some reflections on work carried out with the new group of immigrants and refugees (from *Phase 2*), since

this is a section that is essentially a reflection on the practice of TfD with this demographic.

Positive Project Outcomes

This case study documents the first phase of the project, which had a budget of \$10,000. The *Here I Stand* project surpassed all expectations, and the agency subsequently received \$32,000 from EmbraceBC to carry out the second phase.

In the words of the youth themselves, here are some of the benefits they attribute to their participation: (*Youth Interviews, Appendix I*):

- *“Here I Stand” helped me express all the weight that was on my shoulders mostly about being bullied or teased.*
- *[...] It helped me be more comfortable with being an immigrant and with my personal experience.*
- *It made my heart stronger. I felt happy to share my stories with all the other youth. I became more open now [sic].*

In practicing theatre that expressed their life stories, the participants found a place to feel heard, and this gave them a sense of their strength. One of the most powerful performances they gave was at Camp Thunderbird, just outside the city of Victoria, for an audience of their peers. About 80 teenagers, many from schools that the project participants also attended, were taking part in an event that focused on learning how to combat intolerance in the community. Our youth were both excited and very anxious about sharing their stories with their peers.

I suddenly realized that this was the ideal audience for a performance that depicts immigrant youth as being ‘other’ in relation to Canadian youth, who are shown to be hard to connect with and to befriend. This audience could actually have an impact on how the project participants were treated at school. I reassured them that their stories would connect with their classmates, and then held my breath as I stood at the very back of the auditorium. There were a few snickers from some audience members during the performance, but the applause was loud and long after the final scene. The post-performance discussion was equally impassioned and respectful, and the participants were clearly elated. At the close of the evening, one of the camp leaders called out the names of the individual schools represented at the camp, and everyone from that school raised their hands and shouted out in solidarity including the performance participants. For that moment, at least, our youth finally belonged! (*Performance Notes, April 22, 2010*)

1) Building Community

Looking back on the group dynamics throughout the project, what struck me the most was how much the participants accepted and supported one another. As the rehearsals progressed they were able to contribute some of their most intimate experiences. When Chelsea first read her journal entry in a workshop session, she broke down and cried. The rest of the group huddled around her, hugging and comforting her, reassuring her that she had a community of friends who accept her just as she is. During our final performance, Chelsea was again overcome with emotion and couldn’t continue reading her journal, but she remained on stage. All of the participants moved quickly

from the wings and stood silently around her until she was able to continue reading her entry. This was one of the most moving and unforgettable moments of the project.

2) *Healing Past Wounds*

The *Here I Stand* group benefited from exploring the hardships they faced by being ‘different,’ even though it was difficult for them to do this at first. I believe that when they acknowledged the hardships, they had the opportunity to reconcile with these memories, which in turn helped them feel pride in their experiences. Betty Jane Wagner (1976) writes: “We also use drama to learn to live with and accept an experience that has been disturbing. As we relive the shock, going over and over the details, we digest the event, and it finally becomes a truth we can bear” (p.16). I saw validation of Wagner’s comment when Samantha, one of the young participants in Phase 2, first confided to me in rehearsals about the killing of her mother, and the targeting of the rest of her family by the Filipino regime. As she heard her fellow participants talk in their small group about government injustices they’d witnessed, she began to cry and stepped away from the group. We talked privately, at which point she told me the story. When she returned to her small group she began to create images that depicted her country’s regime. I saw that there were stages to her healing process through her depiction of these events through drama. First, she created an image about the oppression of activists by the government, never mentioning to the group that the image represented her own family. She then selected the date her mother was murdered as one of her opening lines for the play’s prologue, again never pointing to the rest of the group the significance of the date. Finally, during the post-performance discussions she was able to tell a whole crowd of people about this experience, and she continued to share this story with every audience until the end of

the show's run. In a reflection, she mentioned she was able to reconcile with this experience through expressing it in theatre, and being able to talk about it as many times as she did with the audience, where finally she was able to retell the story without crying or feeling like she was reliving the experience all over again.

3) Re-affirming the Youth's Identities

Another important aspect of this performance for the young participants was the integration of a section that celebrated their native cultures (memories from home). A study conducted by the Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC (AMSSA) (2001) notes: "Not enough time is given to the exploration of newcomers' origins. In order for a healthy identity to emerge, newcomers must be provided the opportunity to integrate their identity of origin with the evolving identity of their adopted country" (p.6).

This newly acquired pride in their personal experiences is what enabled the immigrant youth to overcome their negative feelings about being different, and instead embrace that difference and find celebration in their diversity. A review of the letters in Appendix Q confirms that the project was an important contributor in reaffirming the young participants' history as part of their identity, by enabling them to acknowledge and see their difficult journeys as something to be proud of:

I came into [the theatre program] with a lot on my shoulders but each day since I joined [the group] my stress was relieved. This project helped me relax and overcome my bad memories. I made friends, something I was never able to do. I don't have many friends because no one really likes me because of my religion. But when I'm at the theatre project I feel like I belong, that there

isn't any judgment towards me, that we are family. All of us [are] repairing the other's hearts, caring, and loving. (Youth's Letters. Appendix N)

When I be [sic] with all the friends that I made from this group I feel nothing but happiness. Sometimes when I [talk to] myself I'll think "hey, I'm going to show all the people how hard me and my friends had been working on this before." This is what keeps me going all the time. I'm proud of it. The dream finally came true. I stand right here and I did show people what we got. I'm [sure] they got the message from us. At the end everyone is sad. I said "Its ok. This [is] just the beginning [of] our show". I'm [al]right now. I hope the group will go on forever. (Youth's Letters. Appendix N)

4) Skills Development

When I do TfD work with vulnerable communities, I try to keep in mind that the act of practicing theatre embodies skills that generate a sense of liberation and empowerment. But skills development tends to be pushed into the background when a project is focused on presenting participants' stories through performance. The attention of both facilitator and participants is mainly occupied by tasks related to teasing out their stories and then reflecting on these experiences. My own observations and assumptions led me to believe that the youth were neither aware of the theatre skills they were learning nor very interested in various theatre techniques. However, references to the acquisition of theatre skills emerged in some of the participants' comments, for example:

- *[Here I Stand] gave me experience in theatre and I got to see how it all worked (how people created scripts, rehearsals and perform).*

- *I learned how to present my and other people's emotions/stories through theatre.*

- *I became very excited about acting. It was actually not bad to be an actor. (Appendix I)*

From observing the participants engage with one another, and seeing the difference in their level of self-confidence between the start of the program until its end, I saw that the members were building other skills I did not account for: skills of building community, support of each other, self-expression, and reflective skills that enabled them to share and analyze their stories with the goal of reconciling past wounds.

4) Raising Awareness

In all, there were seven performances of *Here I Stand*. Our first performance was for an audience comprised mainly of the immigrant community (the participants' parents and friends) and NGO staff, and the post-performance discussion shed light on the experiences of members of the audience. Some parents stood up and spoke about how they had learned new things about their children; others gave advice about being strong and staying true to themselves. Other performances for selected groups and the general public also reinforced the power of theatre to communicate ideas and inspired dialogue that raised awareness of issues experienced by immigrants.

Before the final performance, Red expressed her feelings in a group email: *"It is sad to know that this is our last performance. But oh well we did do something for the community, I'm impressed. My mom always tells me that each one of us have [sic] a job to do before the end of their lives. Now I feel like I did something so is good [sic]. Good idea Negin, thank you so much for your time and your energy. I don't know how I can*

possibly thank you enough. You, Yasmine and this whole group changed me from a shy girl into me, myself. I couldn't done [sic] this with out you guys. Thank you all."

(Appendix M)

Similarly, evaluations by audience members touched on the emotional and transformative aspects of both the performance and subsequent discussion. Comments included:

- *"I was moved to tears multiple times throughout the shows. The commitment of the youth was so obvious and the scenes were so powerful. Thank you all so much."*
- *"This performance was so moving, insightful, authentic and beautifully carried out. A huge Thank you to the bravery, strength and passion of all the youth who shared their wisdom and stories. You are all inspiring educators."* (Audience Evaluations, Appendix L)

As discussed earlier, the audience that I believe was most significant for the youth was the community of peers who attended our performance at Camp Thunderbird. This performance not only raised awareness among the participants' classmates about cultural values that are different from their own, but may have opened the door to greater acceptance of the project participants specifically and immigrant youth in general.

Here's a sampling of what the Camp Thunderbird audience felt they had learned:

- *"About the social, educational, and cultural issues and conflicts that immigrants face so often. As I have lived in Victoria all my life, I cannot even imagine the challenges they tackle every day."*

- *“It gave me so much more insight on how hard it would be to be in a new country and a new school. I could relate so much to the scene with the boy tuning out in class and thinking about traumatic experiences in his past.”*

- *“I did not know that other immigrants felt like I did.”*

- *“That these incredible and wonderful programs/groups exist to the extent that they do. That they use all these creative tools.”*

- *“Just how left out and alone people not from here feel when they come here.”*

(Audience Evaluations, Appendix L)

Comments relating to how the performance might lead to changes in their attitudes and future interactions with immigrant youth, included:

- *“Made me think a lot about trying to include other students.”*

- *“I have more respect for immigrants.”*

- *“I no longer feel that immigrants are second-class citizens.”*

- *“Has made me more aware of the struggles kids go through. I will be more sensitive and try to be more welcoming to new students.”*

- *“To never be a bystander; always include people in activities; be understanding and sensitive towards people when asking about their country.”*

- *“The presentation gave me both an emotional and intellectual reaction and I definitely have a lot to think about and bring back to my school.”* (Audience Evaluations, Appendix

L)

Every group presents unique learning experiences for a facilitator. As is my practice, I reviewed my notes and kept track of challenges as they arose during this

project. The following section discusses these challenges encountered in the process of facilitating the theatre workshops and of putting together the scenes that made up the final performance. The order in which I present these items reflects that chronology, and is not weighted in terms of importance or difficulty. I find this chronological approach to be helpful in keeping me alert, whenever I start a project, to what may occur at various steps in the TfD process. The ultimate goal of identifying and reflecting on these topics is to avoid repeating past mistakes or omissions, in order to reduce negative impacts as much as possible. My solutions to some of these challenges come in a subsequent section titled *Action Plan*.

Challenge 1: Changing my Approach

The *Here I Stand* group members were quite introspective and reluctant to share their personal stories at the beginning of the process. Unlike most youth groups I worked with in past years, this group did not engage fully in the ‘fun’ theatre games. Instead, they seemed to enjoy reflecting and discussing issues in small groups before engaging in an exercise or creating an image or a scene. At first I thought I was going to work with a group of youth who already had a connection with one another, so I was expecting their stories to emerge fairly early into the workshop sessions. When this didn’t happen I began to observe the kinds of exercises where they opened up (such as the creation of *Memories from Home*) and I started to use this strategy to gently guide them into a process of sharing and reflecting to tease out the topics that would end up as performance material. At one point, I used fictional stories to engage them in difficult discussions on domestic struggles. The following is my account of this process:

During our discussions on family dynamics in relation to immigration, participants again were quite reserved, so I decided to create a fictional exploration of a young immigrant, with the hope that through this exploration they would find an outlet to share some of their own experiences around the topic. The young participants lit up and began contributing to the discussion with enthusiasm as soon as they were given the task to create the events of the fictional character *Romina*. Romina's war-torn country was the place where the drama started out, where the participants created clear depictions of the famine and poverty that hit the country after the war. The youth carefully created important aspects of Romina's life in her hometown. Her friends and the village members were a huge component of the life she would miss when she arrived to Canada. The family was faced with a difficult decision when the brother was drafted into the army to fight against the enemy. Only two of the family members could immigrate to Canada: would the choice be to send Romina with her father or her mother? It was decided that the mother would stay to look after Romina's brother, and that Romina would immigrate with her father. The participants chose to kill the brother in the war, first creating a most dramatic scene of the brother turning on Romina's close friends as he goes on a killing rampage one day, and then by killing him just before he is about to embrace his mother upon his return home. The family is struck with grief, loss, and confusion as Romina and her father try to cope with the news of her brother's death. The father plummets into alcoholism as Romina struggles to make good choices at her school. The drama comes to an end with a confrontation between Romina and her father that does not find peace and resolve for the family.

It was refreshing to see the group come to life in their creations of images and scenes that made up the life of this young immigrant girl. I enjoyed seeing the participants invest themselves in the details of Romina's life, and in the debriefing of the day they all expressed how much they enjoyed this process. I wasn't sure if any of them had encountered circumstances like the ones they created for Romina's life, but later in the process, when we used some of the war images that the group created for the

performance, one of the members pointed out that the performance only discussed challenges, and that the war images don't really reflect their life experiences; to that our participant from Ethiopia briefly replied "but this is my story." This unexpected testimony seemed to quiet any suspicion about the validity of any of the 'fictional' material that was created in the workshop sessions.

As we continued to meet, the participants became comfortable enough to explore topics such as bullying, conflicts with parents, and even reconciling with their culture by drawing on their own life experiences. When I asked them about whether they preferred working with fictional stories or drawing on their own experiences, some were in favor of the fictional stories:

I preferred it when we created fiction stories. I preferred this way because we could then act or change parts of the stories to our liking, sometimes based on our experiences with the topic we are addressing. (Appendix I).

Others said they enjoyed creating fictional stories, but that they eventually benefited from infusing the performance with stories from their life experiences:

In the beginning it was better and easier to open up myself with the fictional stories, because they were more general, but as we grew together, the whole group became like a family, I liked sharing my own experiences to make the experience and performance more personal. I wanted my experiences to be there as well at some times, like that's how I felt and thought. (Appendix I)

Challenge 2: Presence of NGO staff

The organization stipulated that two project coordinators be present with the youth at all times. I opted to have them involved as active participants instead of ending up as “observers.” This proved to be useful at times because the adults worked in the small groups helping the participants reach deeper levels of understanding and of explorations of the various topics. But there were instances where I felt the participants were inhibited to venture outside their comfort zones because they seemed to be conscious of the presence of adults who knew them in other settings, outside of the rehearsal space. When the adults fully took on the role of participants, sharing their own life experiences, feeling vulnerable, and stepping outside their own comfort zones, the youth began to follow in their footsteps.

Due to the familiarity that was already present between the NGO staff and the participants, I was confronted with my outsider status. The participants readily shared stories of their daily struggles with the coordinators, who would then selectively share some of these experiences with me. Also, the participants spoke with the coordinators whenever they felt challenged by certain scenes or moments in the rehearsals, and the coordinators acted as “liaisons” between the participants and myself. I knew that I could never truly shed my outsider status, but I trusted that in time I would gain some insider privileges. Alternatively, sometimes the NGO staff’s insider status positively reinforced my own outsider status. Being an outsider meant that I would need more time to get to know the participants better, and to build trusting relations that would make me privy to their lives. The circumstances of this project, and many other projects, are that we are given a limited amount of time to reach ambitious goals. Having insider allies, like the NGO staff in this case, who know the participants, means that these goals could be

achieved more effectively in the limited time available. Towards the end of the short workshop period (10 weeks), I could see that the participants began to trust me more, and the result was the rare occasion when I was made privy to their personal experiences, which helped me steer the workshop sessions in more important directions.

About four weeks into the project, we welcomed a new participant into the group. Anna and her family had only immigrated to Canada three months earlier, and her mother was beside herself with worry: Anna had withdrawn from her family, hardly talking and staying in her room most of the time; she hadn't made any friends at school, even though her academic performance was fine. The theatre project quickly brought her out of her shell. She was eager to engage in any drama exercises, and although she shared very little in the group debriefing, she was always open to exploring new ideas and being attentive to other youth's stories that were created in the form of scenes.

It wasn't until much later that Anna opened up to me, in casual conversation, about her fights with her mother and her frustrations with being brought to Canada against her will. Anna's parents were afraid for her well-being when they lived in Mexico, and had promised she would have more freedom in Canada. However, her mother seemed apprehensive about the dangers in this new and unfamiliar culture and continued to be very protective, not allowing Anna to go to concerts or parties. I asked Anna to create a scene about her experience, with other participants playing the mother and daughter roles, which we included in our final performance.

Challenge 3: Defining the Role of the "Facilitator"

In an environment that is created to improve the lives of impoverished people, it seems that the role of the theatre facilitator is somewhat under-valued or not given the space to become part of the journey; the truth is that we often create this false notion of

invisibility of ourselves for the sake of making the community more visible. Salverson (2003) discusses the negative implications of practitioners making themselves invisible “from the very participatory process we invoke so urgently” (p.120), advocating for a more honest examination of the role of the “artist”:

[...] when artists or educators avoid attention to ourselves as individuals for the sake of the greater good, the good of the oppressed, we not only deny our privilege and refuse our skills and generousities, we collapse our losses into “the greater loss.” This can distort our relationships with people and events in which loss plays a key role. Such collapsing of ourselves is all the more distressing when it occurs within the ideal of community, of solidarity, or when we take on unreflexively the enthusiasm of the helper. (p.121)

Salverson proposes a process where the artist engages with oneself in self-reflection as part of the dialogue that is necessary when bringing community issues to the forefront of the TfD experience. I will take this a step further to advocate for not only self-reflection on the part of the artist, but self-realization of the importance of the role of the artist, and being able to communicate this with the organizers, and at times with the community.

I found my role at times ambiguous, not to myself, but to one of the coordinators of the project. I was challenged with some of the reactions to what I felt were standard requests that could be made by any facilitator in rehearsals. During one of the rehearsals for a fourth performance we were to present at the University of Victoria, I became impatient with the participants for continuing to talk as I was giving notes to Anna, who wanted to change her scene to reflect more accurate events in her present life. To my

surprise, the coordinator stepped out of the wings and told me that I was doing this work for different reasons than the rest of the group, and that they weren't there to produce "good art." At that moment I understood that I had to include the NGO staff more regularly by explaining my process and the reasons I choose to encourage participants to learn the theatre discipline: "the discipline of theatre must be respected in order to really create deep change in the participants. To be part of a creative theatrical event should be a privilege, not a right" (Lina de Guevara, personal communication, July 31 2011).

One of the key lessons I tried to teach participants is the importance of challenging the assumptions associated with "immigrant" and "youth" that their audience might hold; that the performance would be lacking in aesthetic quality and artistic integrity. I found it useful to communicate this to the NGO staff, so that they understood that my method of teaching the participants about theatre doesn't just come from a place of appreciating the art of theatre, but from a place of ultimately caring to present the participants in the best light possible. De Guevara continues:

There are rules that must be obeyed in order for the [theatrical] product to be truly artistic. Many times I have observed condescension on the part of the audience, when seeing a show put on by young people who, because of lack of discipline, have not achieved the artistic quality that was within their reach. But [the participants'] half-hearted efforts are applauded and their lack of polish[ed product] excused. (personal communication, July 31 2011)

De Guevara explains the ramifications of the participants' "half-hearted" efforts, where the experience becomes "devalued" and "meaningless." When the participants put a

valiant effort into the performance and commit to delivering a performance of high aesthetic quality “the result is extraordinary and can change the direction of a life” (personal communication, July 31 2011).

Challenge 4: Reconciling Theory and Practice

The gap between theory and practice means that a facilitator is sometimes faced with conflicting needs and must shift the process that was put in place in the early stages of the project. For example, we were close to the last few workshops sessions before the performance. The group had become used to slowly processing their ideas around a particular topic before I took those ideas and proposed a scene, usually inspired by an earlier exploration. During the creation of the *Day One* scene, the participants expressed their frustration at being directed by me to say certain lines and to follow my lead in the creation of the scene. But the performance was fast approaching, and I found myself working within a timeframe that meant I had no choice but to cut corners and shorten the process. It was a reciprocal learning experience: the youth gained a better understanding of the project deadlines; and I gained insights into how much they valued being able to work from a place where they had more autonomy over the process.

Another example of the gap between theory and practice is with regards to casting, where during the workshop process it was easy to explore the various topics and ideas put forward by the project coordinator and the youth, without regard to whether the right person is playing the right role. Casting issues inevitably arise, however, when making decisions that impact the quality of the performance. Not all participants were adept or comfortable with expressing the emotions needed for a particular scene, yet it

was never easy to choose one over another. There was a risk that not being chosen could undermine an already fragile self-confidence, and I sometimes found it difficult to wear the director's hat while also staying true to my role as project facilitator. Whenever I work on a TfD project that incorporates public performance, there are challenges to my overall approach, which prioritizes inclusion, equality and building trust.

Challenge 5: Working with a Pre-arranged Agenda

Thompson (2003) reminds us: “[...T]here will be pre-arranged agendas that are determined by different government and non-government agencies. This is recognized, but still the process should insist that issues [identified by the community] are made concrete through the embodied action of participants” (p.161). When I began my work with the young participants I found no reason to question the validity of the NGO's pre-arranged agenda. I trusted that the “embodied action of the participants” would speak to the truthfulness of this agenda. When I saw how reluctant the participants were about sharing their stories of struggles, I started to question the pre-arranged agenda.

The Canadian Council on Social Development (2000) conducted a survey with 49 immigrant youth between the ages of 15-24 living in Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal. The participants of this study came from Africa, the Middle East, Europe, Asia, the United States, and South America. The purpose of the study was to find out how this demographic, which made up 37% of immigrants that arrived in Canada between the years 1996-1998, was adapting, what their needs were, and if they found adequate support from local organizations. The study revealed the following:

- a. [The participants'] key challenges were learning the language and overcoming social isolation.
- b. [The participants] were aware of their parents' struggles of finding gainful employment.
- c. School was the centre of their lives.
- d. [The participants] experienced ostracism, bullying, and difficulties with schoolwork.
- e. The schoolteachers and staff constituted part of the problem.
- f. [The participants expressed an] inability to be totally accepted as Canadians due to their accents and physical features.
- g. They felt overwhelmed and alienated by society's rampant consumerism and superficiality. This caused them to feel isolated at high school. (p.v, 2000)

The CCSD study (2000) includes articles written by second-generation immigrants that further confirm the complexity of this population's experience in the process of settlement. "Don't ever forget where you're from" (p.1) was common advice given to immigrant children by their parents, even when they were born in Canada. "[...T]rapped, impelled to choose between embracing Canadian mainstream culture and my parents' values and traditions" (Biswas, 2000, p.1) was the expression of an adult immigrant's reflection in the study. The study also touched on the issue of intergenerational conflict: "[P]arents are 99% responsible for intergenerational conflict" (p.2), and relays the participants' needs for parents to be more understanding and trusting of the children's choices and abilities and "learn to listen before giving into the impulse to say "NO"" (p.2).

In the case of *Here I Stand*, the NGO's agenda to explore the struggles of participants was not removed from their actual experiences of integration and settlement. That said, the participants on more than one occasion asked to explore topics that would showcase the positive aspects of immigration. We were almost nearing the end of our workshop sessions, and the majority of the content had been created around the struggles of immigrants and refugees. The objection by some of the youth to our focus on the *negative* aspects of immigration and their recommendation to instead examine the positive aspects was a wake-up call for me. As I explained to them: "but this is not what this performance is about." I understood that I was not allowing enough room in this work for their agenda to be fully realized. Later, I realized that a performance can be about the struggles encountered by immigrants and still involve moments of joy, happiness, and pride in their immigrant experiences, and that this contrast would allow for a richer experience for our audience. I rectified my initial response from that day by dedicating some time in one of our last workshop sessions to explore the positive aspects of immigration, and to make it a point to include some of these explorations in the final performance.

I thought long and hard after our project concluded, wondering if this particular group would have benefited from creating TFD that only celebrated their immigrant experiences. I'm uncertain as to how different this experience would have been for them had that been the case; my instinct tells me that they would have embraced the essence of celebrating their journeys, but that they would have eventually opened up about their struggles, especially as they began to build community with one other. Nagel (2007)

discusses similar resistance she met by community members to indulge in negative memories:

Many wanted to ignore the pain of the past and look boldly towards reconciliation with the past or the future of their family. Most interviewees were happy to relate intimate details of their personal and family history, but were reluctant to discuss the conflict [that was the impetus behind this project]. (P.155)

Through my own experience as an immigrant, and by observing these young participants, I have come to understand that immigrants arrive in a new country with a positive attitude to create a new life and to make the best of their experiences; “[...] in the settlement process so much of the emphasis is on the newcomer looking forward, moving and settling, that they are not given permission to engage in another important aspect of settlement: looking back” (Regional Consultations Summary, p.6).

Lee and De Finney (2004) advocate for facilitators to take time to uncover the topics that are shared, and not take them at face value:

[...] when dealing with sensitive and invisible topics such as racism and sexism, facilitators must be prepared to dig deeper and assess what the stories, whether silenced, untold, contested, or enthusiastically taken up, say and reflect about the participants’ lived experiences. (p.111)

The issue of a pre-arranged agenda is not one to be taken lightly because, as facilitators and project organizers, we could be leading the community into a process that

would potentially create significant ramifications for their lives. The following speaks to this concern:

I was approached by a Cairo-based NGO in 2006 to facilitate theatre workshops that address the issue of child labor. The agenda was to use theatre to advocate for children to attend schools instead of seek employment doing labor work. The NGO staff acknowledged that it would be a difficult task because the children saw no purpose in education since the city's kids who attended schools were out of work, while those who started work early had a trade and earned a living. The irony is that the NGO did not see the validity of these children's arguments, to provide for themselves and the families they support, and that education would not facilitate this but, in fact, it would hold them back. I gracefully declined the offer to do TfD work on this project, but sadly a lot of funds were poured into it by the government, since the former president's wife was spearheading this campaign.

Action Plan for Phase 2

For my preparation to work on Phase 2 with a new group of immigrant and refugee youth, I addressed the following issues with the NGO:

- a) I asked for time to spend with the participants outside of the workshop process, that was not about creating a performance, but something like going out for a picnic or going bowling, etc. I felt that this would give the participants and me time to get to know one another better and to relate to one another outside the environment of the rehearsals.
- b) I had discussions with the program manager and the project coordinator about clarifying my role as the theatre facilitator. I advocated for the necessity of creating

a space where participants learn to respect the art of creating theatre, and that in turn the NGO staff would give me the authority to require the necessary commitment from the participants.

- c) I proposed that the process should dedicate some time to integrate the participants' agenda, to see how it might be different from exploring their struggles. This was met with some resistance by the NGO staff because the final report submitted to funders on the performance and rehearsals needed to reflect the deliverables that were promised in the funding proposal. We came to a compromise: Participants would know that this project would focus on the hardships of immigration, and that they should only sign up if that is what they felt they wanted to do. Also, more time was given to workshop sessions (15 in total) to allow for explorations on issues other than those proposed by the NGO.

Summary

My theatre “break” would turn out to be a long-term project that the funders and organization would continue to support, past its second phase. There was no way for me to know that when I first got involved, because at that time I couldn't predict the outcomes of the project. But from the very beginning I invested in it as though it were going to be “a big break.” There were many variables that came together to allow this experience to turn out as it did. First, the participants were able to connect with the project even though at the beginning the process couldn't be further away from their quiet and shy dispositions. Second, the NGO showed its support not only of the participants, but of the process itself through several means: a) by creating guidelines that enabled

both the participants and me to know the parameters of the project (i.e when it would begin and when it would end); b) by assisting with rehearsals and performances; c) by securing rehearsal and performance space; d) by creating proper closure for the participants at the end of the process; e) by creating a follow-up plan for the participants (*discussed more in Chapter 8: "Conclusion"*). Finally, through varying my theatre approach, I was able to use the appropriate method of practice to draw the participants into the process, and to have the experience address their needs for belonging and reconciliation as an "immigrant."

My work with the group in Phase 2 would prove to be quite fruitful, but it would also present me with new obstacles. These tensions, difficulties, and new lessons are what make this process so enriching for facilitators, and we are able to then discover how the communities we work with move us and in what way these experiences help us self-reflect and come to terms with our own vulnerabilities. The biggest reward for me through this process was to comprehend the benefit of getting to know the participants better, which eventually occurred in Phase 2. This knowledge and insight into their lives not only enriched my facilitation approach, it also allowed me to appreciate my importance in this process, and I was able to glean from it elements that help me grow as an individual.

This trust in my ability to be moved and affected by the participants' life experiences taught me to relinquish my attachment to judging the impact of the process based on my perception of what they should do with their newly-acquired skills. Participants don't have to become enamored by theatre in order for the experience to be

meaningful. The *Here I Stand* group used theatre to create community amongst each other, and to find strength in dealing with their challenges. Some of them moved on to engage in other creative outlets offered by the organization, and reaped the benefits of self-confidence and self-expression, excelling at school and in their social lives. The skills they learned through theatre were applied in other media, hence the process was successful in achieving the individual goals the participants had set for themselves.

I conclude this dissertation in the following chapter in which I revisit my initial hypothesis of passing on a skill as an essential component of a TfD process, and I question its validity based on all the projects that have been discussed and showcased thus far. I elaborate on the role of the NGO in relation to the *Here I Stand* experience and I bring to light some of the lessons I learned about how to overcome the power imbalance inherent in working with an NGO and instead turn the relationship into a collaborative partnership.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

“We are the primary instruments, but we are not cool, automatized instruments. As human beings with warmth and feeling, our pulses resonate with the heartbeat of our research participants. While we try to maintain distance and perspective, we, too, have personal responses to what we see and hear” (Friedman, 1991, p.108).

Six years ago I embarked on this research journey to find answers for questions that troubled me about a most compelling and moving experience with young garbage pickers. As I searched into the depths of the practice of TfD, understanding its history, its practitioners, and how it shifted and changed from one experience to the next, I began to understand its intricacies and potential to create real social change in the lives of disempowered people. My journey would lead me to working with immigrant and refugee young people again, using what I know best-theatre-to enable them to claim their place in the Canadian society. As I witnessed the growth and newfound strength that the young participants were experiencing as a result of their ability to reconcile with past traumas, carving out a space for themselves in the Canadian society, I realized that I was going through a similar process.

I too had been dealing with a sense of dislocation most of my childhood and part of my adult life, up until my arrival to Canada in 2003. Living in the Arabian Gulf at the time, I felt a deep sense of loneliness and isolation, and a profound feeling of not belonging. It was no surprise to me that I gravitated towards marginalized people to seek

some comfort, albeit not overt, by being with people who might be feeling as disempowered and invisible as myself.

When I saw the way that the young immigrants and refugees dealt with their past trauma's through practicing theatre, I began to see the importance of my own life experiences in shaping who I am as a practitioner and an individual. I no longer saw my past as something that held me back, in fact I started to see it as something that propelled me forward, giving me insight into the lives of people who felt like I did. I started to access my personal wisdom and strength, using these qualities to revisit my past and to reconcile with it, just as the young participants were doing through their theatre experiences.

The result was an intrinsic transformation, from within, and a blossoming of my essence as an individual and a practitioner. After documenting and writing about the theatre process with the immigrant and refugee youth, I returned to my narrative about *El-Zabbaleen*, and re-wrote it, consciously inserting my personal experience as part of the process. When I placed myself as part of the story, I saw my circumstances as they impacted my choices and actions as a facilitator, and I was able to forgive myself. I made peace with having left the young boys and turning my back on them when I could have fought for the project to continue. Witnessing these young boys reclaim their place in their society (through only a few performances) compelled me to do the same but instead, reclaim my space in a new community, as an immigrant woman. And so my journey would have me working with immigrants and refugees, as a means to understand

my position as an immigrant, but this time I had more than one community to support me, and that made the experience enriching.

These experiences have fed my approach as a practitioner, and have enlightened my practice in many ways. Ironically, as much as I have been able to successfully help the people I've worked with using Tfd, in truth, all this time, the participants have been helping me find myself again. It is this privilege in being able to find my "truth" that has facilitated me discovering the true essence of Tfd and how, when practiced with awareness and care, it can create the social change needed to bring relief to the lives of marginalized people. To this effect, the following section of this concluding chapter will highlight the important components discussed thus far, and will focus on the learning that has developed as a result of this research.

I begin with a recap of the most significant topics brought forward in this dissertation. Much of the recent research on Tfd has pointed to the necessity of ensuring communities are able to sustain the process after the completion of workshop sessions, essentially "sustainability" (Abah 2002; Etherton & Munier 2006; Mda 1993; Mlana 2002; Prentki 1998, 2003). There are valid reasons why communities should be left with the means to continue with the process once external assistance is no longer available (community autonomy; community agency; participant empowerment; limited resources and funds). On sustainability Wolfgang Sachs (2007) writes, "...[it] is the art of living gracefully within the limits of nature" (p.29). The effects of colonization on developing nations has created much controversy regarding the efforts of colonizers to eradicate a community's wisdom, culture, and tradition, only to attempt to replace it by ways of life

that do not enable “living gracefully within the limits of [*that community's*] nature” (Sacks, 2007, p.29).

In Chapter 4, I discuss the term “development” and present literature that describe the term’s inception from the idea that some countries needed “fixing” according to standards established by Western nations (Castoriadis 1991; Edwards 1989; Esteva 1992; Kamlongera 1989; Nogueira 2002; Prentki & Selman 2002). The same literature elucidates the impact of a “top-down” approach to development, explaining that the result is an imposition on communities and their way of life, exploitation of their natural resources, and repression of their traditional knowledge. Gustavo Esteva (1992) writes, “For those who make up two-thirds of the world’s population today, to think of development - of any kind of development - requires first the perception of themselves as underdeveloped, with the whole burden of connotations that this carries” (p.7). On the destructive effects of people taking on the notion of being “underdeveloped,” Esteva continues, referencing Nyerere (1964) “...it undermines confidence in oneself and one’s own culture,” Stavenhagen (1990) “...it clamours [sic] for management from the top down,” and Jimoh (1973) “...it converts participation into a manipulative trick to involve people in struggles for getting what the powerful want to impose on them” (p.8).

TfD was not created to counter the adverse impact of development; in fact it was initially used to further the agenda of development campaigns (Mda 1993; Byam 1999; Nogueira 2002; Prentki 2003). However, if we examine closely the parallels between development and the evolution of TfD, we notice that much of the efforts of recent TfD projects allude to undoing the damage caused by methods very similar to those adopted in

the name of development. Tanzanian journalist and social movement activist Fatma Alloo (2007) writes:

Our development ‘partners’ who are in the development agencies claim to come here to make things better. Yet when one really analyzes what is going on, one finds that it is the same slicing up of Africa that is happening and that has happened since 1884. Back then it was with gun and bible. Now it is with dollars and euros. (p.5)

The contentious history of development has made practitioners of TfD hyper-vigilant about their methods of practice to ensure that the work carried out with marginalized communities does not further the “top-down” approach. As facilitators, we go out of our way to insist that the process makes room for the community’s voice to emerge and be heard; and we do so by ensuring that NGOs take into account what the community identifies to be its own needs from the TfD process. Alloo continues:

Civil society needs to engage in movements to build a viable course of justice and the tax payers in the North who are part of civil society need to be vigilant of how their moneys are being used to engage in what I can only call a second colonialism of the Continent. (p.5)

It is this vigilance that has prompted practitioners and theorists (Etherton & Munier 2006; Manyozo 2002; Mda 1993; Prentki 2003) to advocate for communities to learn a skill as a result of the TfD process. The intention is for communities to reach a stage of “self-development” to bring an end to their reliance on external help, hence the concept of

“sustainability” to find ways to further their self-development within the means available to them in their environment.

Although the broad topics of development and sustainability have already been discussed in chapters 2, 3, 4 and 6, I believe it is important to reiterate the research question I formulated: “*What are the elements that facilitate effective practice of theatre for development that help pave the way for an understanding of the conditions that provide autonomy and empowerment for marginalized communities?*”

1) In Relation to Sustainability

I acknowledge *Sistren Theatre Collective* (Green 2006) and *Jana Sanskriti* (Ganguly 2004) (both discussed in Chapter 4) as ideal models for self-sustaining Tfd projects created exclusively by the people, for the people. The brilliance of this grass-roots model of work is its affirmation of the people’s ability to conceive of and make use of different skills of theatre to discuss pertinent issues in their communities, and I emphasize *without any initial reliance on external ‘expertise.’* I also understand that, despite these projects’ success at achieving sustainability, this model cannot count as an accessible method of effective practice of Tfd by the majority of marginalized communities. There are some projects, such as *Adugna Community Dance Project* (Plastow 2004), and *Ratones Theatre Project* (Nogueira 2006) that would have never reached their self-sustaining goals if it weren’t for the ‘external’ assistance (i.e monetary support; organizational support; training in theatre skills) they received.

Adugna represents a perfect model for work that identified the community's reliance on outside assistance to further the project's goal of helping the young street dwellers overcome their dire circumstances. Fortunately, the organizers and funders recognized the futility of the project if it could not provide its participants with a skill to aid them in establishing themselves as breadwinners in the real world, hence opting for long-term investment in the project. The interesting factor to take into consideration when creating a project around long-term investment in TfD work is that the funders, facilitators, and participants of *Adugna* never devised the project with the intention that it would take five years to adequately teach participants the skills of dance in order for them to use it as a means of survival. It was a gradual process of taking small steps to achieve small goals, first by engaging the youth in a dance performance, then facilitating a space for them to continue dancing, seeing the potential of the process on their lives, and finally by extending the date of completion to five years, when the participants were competent practitioners of dance. Prentki (1998) writes:

The severest constraint upon the effective use of TfD is that of time. Especially when working with groups who have long social and cultural histories of oppression and silence, it is unreasonable to expect the TfD process to be implemented rapidly. (p.421)

While in some cases participants need time to integrate their newly learned skills into a practice that can be carried out independently, in other cases participants will continue to rely on the NGO's presence (for extended periods of time) in order to facilitate TfD projects.

When following up on the theatre work that was carried out with *El-Zabbaleen* youth, I saw that the NGO continued to fund the project and manage it, even though they were no longer directly involved with the arts program. A smaller NGO was established right in the centre of *El-Zabbaleen* to manage the theatre workshops and performances of the young boys, all under the supervision of the CID, the larger NGO that had always worked with this community. Even though there was enthusiasm from the young garbage pickers to continue their work with theatre after the project was discontinued, they were unable to handle the difficult task of putting on performances independently. As a result of this research, I advocate for a re-examination of the idea of sustainability in order to include situations when the community does not have the means to take over the process of Tfd (i.e where their livelihoods take up much of their focus). Rather, we need to regard sustainability as a means for NGOs to continue facilitating the Tfd process until it is no longer needed, or until the community decides to move on to other means of self-expression and dialogue.

2) In Relation to Skills Development

I used to believe that a project should ensure passing on the skills of theatre to marginalized communities as part of its goals. I based this hypothesis on the dedication I witnessed with the Cairo garbage pickers, where their belief in the power of theatre to impact their lives blossomed after their first performance. This enthusiasm was met with little appreciation from the NGO, who terminated the project without any kind of an exit strategy or follow-up plan. Previously I was operating from the mindset that learning the skill to practice theatre independently provided power, agency, and autonomy to the participants.

Zakes Mda (1993) writes about the process of TfD when it used to be performed *for* communities and not yet *by* them: “A catalyst group should not only be able to raise the consciousness of its target audience, [it should] impart theatre skills, and an understanding of the relation between drama and problem-exploration” (p.20). After my work with the young immigrants and refugees I started to see that skills development is more than just passing on the skills of practicing TfD: It is a concept that encompasses life skills, such as negotiation skills (Munier & Etherton 2006), self-confidence, and self-efficacy (Mimick 1999; Nelson 2011). These skills cannot always be predicted or pre-planned because every community is unique in their needs and potential to glean from the process what they are missing.

If we regard TfD work as a ‘work in progress’ where we trust that the communities will learn the skills they need from the process, we will stop pitching our expectations too high, and inevitably perceive our work as unsuccessful when communities don’t meet our pre-planned goals. I witnessed this in my work with the young immigrants and refugees: I had placed so much weight on the importance of practicing good quality theatre as a means to empower the young participants, to create theatre that would challenge the stigma attached to “immigrant youth,” that I failed to see what they were truly learning from the process. The empowerment for the young participants was not about learning the skills of theatre; rather it was learning these skills that made it possible to make new friends, share common experiences, as well as make public and validate the issues that had been, until then, suppressed: “...the goal is to create communities in which individuals have enough power to satisfy their needs and

work in concert with others to advance collective goals” (Prilleltensky, Nelson, and Peirson, 2001, as referenced in Nelson, 2011, p.166).

When the *Here I Stand* group was given the option in Phase 2 to return to the theatre process or to learn about making documentary films (a program established by the NGO as a follow-up plan to Phase 1), they all opted to join the documentary film group. They took from the theatre process what they needed at the time and were ready to move on to learn other things. This enabled me to re-examine my perception of the project’s benefits on the lives of the young participants: a renewed sense of pride in their heritage; a renewed sense of dignity and acceptance of their identities as immigrants or refugees; an ability to articulate their feelings; confidence; and an ability to feel content with who they were.

That said, almost one year after the completion of the project I was approached by one of the participants from *Here I Stand*, who wanted to tell me that she was writing and staging a play about homophobia with one of her school friends. Not only that, but she managed to recruit 4 other youth who had participated in *Here I Stand* to perform in the play. The group applied for a grant and received \$300 from a local funding organization, and they independently staged two sold-out performances of their show, entitled *My Forbidden Disorder*, at a local theatre. They received peripheral support from the NGO staff who signed off on the grant proposal as supervisors of the project. While they admitted that the experience of doing it alone was incredibly difficult, the quality of the performance I saw was a testament to their ability to use theatre as a means of self-expression and community awareness.

During this research I have been able to evolve my initial hypothesis from one that insisted on TfD projects including the immediate passing on of skills for communities to practice theatre independently of NGOs and facilitators, to one that regards this skill development as work in progress, including new abilities participants could be learning, which we, facilitators and practitioners, may not be able to predict ahead of time. I use Richard Deasy's (2001) *Habits of Mind and Personal Dispositions* to define some of the skills and abilities participants can utilize as a result of their TfD practice. Some of these include:

Habits of Mind

- The ability to imagine new possibilities
- The ability to explore relationships from multiple perspectives
- The ability to explore ideas, meaning and emotion through multiple forms
- The ability to reflect upon, assess and adjust behavior

Personal Dispositions

- Persistence and resilience
- Risk-taking
- Focus and discipline
- Respect for authentic achievement; "junk" is not easily accepted
- A great sense of joy in the challenges; a delicious sense of achievement in the effective completion of a task

What my research points to is the value of applied theatre as a means of participants developing or acquiring the cognitive, affective, social skills that promote the habits of mind and personal dispositions that offer a sense of “place” from which they may both observe and affect their worlds. Marginalized communities are often presented with life struggles that pose challenges to their livelihoods, where practicing theatre may not become the priority if it does not put food on the table. This is a reality with which facilitators must contend: that the theatre process, as powerful as it can be to bring relief to the lives of impoverished people, may be shelved when the community’s livelihood is threatened and other interests intervene. But what we can be sure of is that the theatre process has already planted a seed, and that the change is indeed taking place, possibly outside of the rehearsal space, and even after the experience has taken place.

3) In Relation to Utilizing NGOs’ Strengths & Accountability

One of the most controversial topics in TfD is the role of the NGO (Ahmed 2002, 2007). How much control an NGO has over the process, and how they exercise their power can either make or break the experience for the community. Working with the *El-Zabbeen* community enabled me to observe the power that the NGO has over supporting or discontinuing a project. This loss of control can be disconcerting for the facilitator, who wholeheartedly has become invested and attached to seeing the project achieve its full potential. Fortunately I was able to work with other NGOs, where I witnessed a different kind of exercising of power: in the form of accountability. Here I’m not only referring to the NGO’s respect for what they are accountable for in delivering the various components of the project with awareness of the ethical implications of their

actions, but also their implementation of agreements and protocols that hold both the theatre facilitator and the participants accountable.

I begin first by discussing how an NGO can demonstrate accountability. The organization that was responsible for the immigrant and refugee youth theatre project oversaw many deliverables (“deliverables” is a word used by NGOs to refer to items in the proposal that they promised the funders to deliver upon completion of the project; the NGO is bound by this proposal in order to secure further funding) that ultimately secured the process for the participants and facilitator. First, it was able to assess the needs of participants and to create a project plan that addressed these needs. Second, it assigned its staff (project coordinators) to oversee that the steps of the project come to fruition and to offer support where needed. Third, the organization made sure to check in with the participants throughout the process in order to assess their needs and to ensure that the project goals continue to complement and meet these needs (ongoing impact assessment). Fourth, it secured financial support for the workshop sessions and performances as agreed upon. Fifth, it ensured that the project timeline was clearly communicated to participants, and that when the experience came to its end, it provided proper closure. It included the necessary procedures for an exit-strategy by creating group debriefings, evaluation sessions, and celebration events to acknowledge the group’s accomplishments. Sixth, the NGO secured a follow-up plan to enable the young participants to channel their energy into a new project (documentary filmmaking) upon completing their experience in the theatre project. Finally, the organization implemented various methods of measuring the impact of the performance on the audience and on the participants through evaluations and debriefings. All these steps demonstrate a sense of responsibility on the

part of the NGO, and above all show the participants that their process is valued and respected; this component in the process is just as powerful as the skills of self-efficacy and empowerment that they obtain from the workshop sessions and performances.

I now discuss the importance of facilitators to demonstrate accountability towards the process. Although TfD has been used in the context of development since the 1960s (Etherton's *Chikwakwa* project), NGOs have yet to fully understand the potential, impact, and intricacies of this type of work, which make it as complex and as life changing as it has proved to be (*Adugna, El-Zabbaleen, Ratonos, Jana Sanskriti, Sistren Theatre Collective*); “[t]he major obstacle to an increased role for TfD within the policy-making of [...] the NGO sector is the perception that it belongs among the arts and is not, therefore, considered in any list of development priorities” (Prentki, 1998, p.420). For this reason, it is the facilitator's responsibility to communicate with the organizations we work with not only about the benefits of the theatre work on the community, but also more importantly regarding the process of our work. It is of prime importance that we, as facilitators, articulate to NGO staff how we make our ‘magic’ happen because it elucidates our methodology and enables the organization to appreciate what we do, and in turn are able to provide the necessary support to further our agenda.

Finally, there is the accountability of participants to the process. Participants must learn through their experiences about their own importance in the process, and with that importance come certain responsibilities. I'm speaking of the rigour of the work, where the Habits of Mind and Personal Dispositions only come about when the discipline is seen and experienced by the participants. When the process is seen as hard work,

challenging and something that matters, then there is a great sense of self-efficacy when they manage to complete it to their satisfaction. This goes hand-in-hand with Neelands' "drama contract" (1984, p. 27).

When we examine the importance of accountability of each of the three entities involved in the Tfd process, we will begin to see that there is room to accommodate each party's agenda. Since the beginning of my research journey, I have grappled with the dilemma of placing the participants' agenda at the forefront of any Tfd project, and negotiating this agenda with that of the NGO's, assuming that if I gave in to the latter's I would be adopting a "top-down" approach to Tfd. Through my research I have begun to realize that inherent in the process of accountability is respect for each entity's value and contribution to the process. With this appreciation of one another's strengths comes a willingness to make room for each other's agendas to emerge. In the process of respecting the NGO's role, I was able to make room for their plans, and in the process of identifying the importance of my contributions, I was able to acknowledge and propose my own outlines for the work. Likewise, the participants' agenda was able to come to life, even though it was not the same as mine or the NGO's. The important factor here is that each of the different foci complemented each other. This is one of the most crucial and liberating discoveries I made in this research: Various agendas can be at play simultaneously without posing a threat to the community's autonomy. This delicate balance of keeping everyone's interests in play was a skill I learned as a result of this work.

Summary

There are a variety of inspirational models of TfD being practiced in the developing and developed worlds, ones created by communities themselves, and others with the assistance of outside support (organizations and facilitators). This research implies an acceptance of projects that require the full assistance and support of the organization to aid the community in continuing their TfD work. This should not be seen as a failure of “sustainability,” rather it should be seen as a way of making possible an experience that would otherwise come to a halt if it weren’t for this support. This research advocates trusting participants to learn from the process things they may not envision ahead of time, and to see that the community’s ability to absorb what they need is what makes each project unique and special. This work does not discredit short-term projects, because again, we can never predict how participants may be impacted by their experiences, and how they may go about seeking other ways to revisit TfD or initiate different creative processes.

This research encourages facilitators to recognize their own contribution to the process as one that is vital and crucial to the concept of “sustainability.” It is the ongoing commitment of facilitators that brings importance to our practice and enables organizations to trust in the methodology for which we advocate. We cannot aspire to make ourselves as obsolete as possible, as fast as possible, because in this rush to move things quickly we may ignore the participants’ own pace for learning and processing new information and skills. This research further points to the importance of the accountability of all parties working on a TfD project, and the necessity of creating exit-strategies, follow-up plans, and methods of measuring the impact of the work, in order to

ensure an effective approach to TfD practice that facilitates empowerment and autonomy of marginalized communities.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Script for Participants of El-Zabbaleen Project

Dear (*name of participant*),

My name is [REDACTED], and I'm contacting you regarding Yasmine Kandil's dissertation practical project, titled "Effective Theatre for Development with Immigrant & Refugee Youth: A Reflective Practitioner Case Study".

Part of Yasmine's research is to interview audience members who attended the Youth Garbage Collectors' project, which took place in the 2002-2003 in Cairo. If you remember, Yasmine was the group theatre facilitator, and she worked with some youth garbage collectors on the show that you attended.

Would you be willing to be interviewed via the internet? If you accept you would have to read and sign the attached consent form, and then proceed to answer the attached 4 questions about your experience.

Although you and Yasmine know each other on a personal level, I'm here to make sure that you understand that she does not expect you to accept this request because of your personal connection to her. Please be assured that your choice to participate or not participate will have no impact on your relationship with the researcher. If you accept to participate in this interview by answering the questions, and you later on decide that you wish to withdraw, you can write to either me, Connie at [REDACTED], or Yasmine's supervisor, [REDACTED] at [REDACTED] or directly to Yasmine to let her know. You can withdraw from this research at any point before March 2011. After this date it will not be possible for the researcher to remove your contribution from the project as it will have been submitted to the supervisory committee.

Your contribution in this project will help the researcher create a more rounded experience of what the audience may have felt after watching the youth's performance.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
Department Secretary
Theatre Department-University of Victoria
[REDACTED]

Appendix B

Participant Consent Form. Audience Members. El-Zabaleen

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *Effective Theatre for Development with Immigrant & Refugee Youth. A Reflective Practitioner Case Study* that is being conducted by Yasmine Kandil.

Yasmine Kandil is a graduate student in the department of Theatre at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by calling [REDACTED], or emailing [REDACTED]

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Doctor of Philosophy. It is being conducted under the supervision of [REDACTED]. You may contact my supervisor at [REDACTED]

You may also contact the Human Research Ethics Board at [REDACTED]

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this research project is to document the experiences of the youth and coordinators who participated in the theatre project that took place in January 2010, as well as some of the youth's parents who watched the performance. As a way of describing the impetus behind starting this work I will write about my experience with the Youth Garbage Collectors in Cairo.

Importance of this Research

Research of this type is important because there is very little literature written about the experiences of immigrant youth in Victoria. By documenting my experience of working with the youth garbage collectors I'm going to compare and contrast between the two projects in order to cull the models of best practice in Theatre for Development. By interviewing you I will be able to support some of the hypotheses that I'm making about Theatre for Development work with marginalized communities.

What is involved

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include being interviewed by the researcher via email correspondence. I will attach to this consent a copy of the questions I will ask you. I will refer to you by your full name. If you wish for your name to be omitted from this research please indicate that by checking the box below.

Inconvenience

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including the time that it will take to be interviewed via email.

Risks

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

Benefits

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include an opportunity to share your perspective on the experience, and to know that your point of view is documented and will be taken into consideration when analyzing the process. The community of theatre researchers, and possibly those who are in direct contact with immigrant and refugee youth will benefit from understanding the impact of using theatre with the youth. The study may also shed light on the struggles and challenges that facilitators and project donors face.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will not be used. This means that the interview that you give to me will not be used. You can withdraw at any point between now and March 2011, which is when I will be submitting my research to my supervisory committee. After March 2011 I will not be able to remove the information you provide for the research from the documents.

You can withdraw by emailing or calling me directly, or by contacting my supervisor, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] (contact information above). If you choose to withdraw from the study this will not have any impact on my relationship with you.

Confidentiality

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by storing it in a safe place in my home office. Also, any computer data is protected with a password.

Dissemination of Results

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: an article in a journal, and a conference presentation.

Disposal of Data

Data from this study will not be disposed. It will continue to be stored in my office, and on my desktop.

Contacts

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include Yasmine Kandil (the principal researcher), and [REDACTED] (supervisor). Contact information available at top of this consent form.

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of your participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

[WAIVING CONFIDENTIALITY] *PLEASE SELECT STATEMENT*

[] I agree for me to be identified by name / credited in the results of the study.

[] I agree to have my responses attributed to me by name in the results.

_____ (Participant to provide initials)

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher

Appendix C

Participant Consent Form. Youth. Immigrant & Refugee Project

You are invited to be part of my research project, which is called 'Drama with immigrant and refugee youth'. We have been working on this project together for a few months now. I have decided to write about it for my graduate studies. My aim will be to help other people doing the same kind of theatre work that I do to understand its benefits for immigrant communities.

I'm asking you to participate as an expert on your experience as an immigrant or refugee youth. In our theatre work you have shared some of your own experiences and stories of immigration. You have also witnessed the way that we did theatre together to bring out these stories and put them into a performance. VIRCS has documented this process by taking pictures of the workshops, and the performance, and video-taping the performance, and interviews with you. I want to use this material in my research because I think it is very important to share with other people who want to use drama with youth.

You can choose not to participate and this will not make me sad or upset because I respect your freedom. If you wish to participate I will not use your real name when I write my paper. I will give you a different name so that anyone else reading my research will not identify who you are. This is to protect your privacy.

My research will be submitted to my teachers by March 2011. After this date I will not be able to remove the information that you shared with me from my paper.

As a way of wrapping up the experience of working with you for 9 months, I would like you to fill out a questionnaire to explain your experience in the project. The purpose of this questionnaire will be to understand how the experience has been over the past 9 months, and if it has had an effect on your experience as an immigrant or refugee youth.

For writing my paper, I will be using the interviews that were recorded with you by VIRCS volunteers after the first show, and the answers you wrote in the questionnaire. I want to include some of these answers in my paper. What you write in the questionnaire will be used in my paper, but your name does not have to be mentioned as I will use a different name for you. I will also use in my paper photographs that were taken of you during the rehearsals and the performance.

I will however be showing a video of the performance to my committee members, who are like my teachers. I have to show them some of the performance when I talk about my work. I will also show some parts of the performance when I present my work at other meetings in other places around the country, and maybe around the world.

By signing this consent you confirm that you understand that I will be using the information that you shared with VIRCS, and in your questionnaire answers in my paper. You will also sign to say you are ok with me using the video of the performance in my presentations.

If you feel that you do not want me to use your photographs, or the parts of you in the performance video, or the questionnaire answers, you can decide to withdraw from the study, as

long as you let me know before March 2011, which is when I will be submitting my research to my teachers. Please let me know by email, or call me, or speak to me in person if you wish to withdraw. If you are uncomfortable with approaching me personally, you can approach [REDACTED] the Enable Youth Project coordinator at VIRCS to let her know. [REDACTED] has accepted acting as a neutral third party that you can talk to if you wish to withdraw.

If you withdraw from the project this will not affect your future participation with me in other theatre works, and will not impact my relationship with you at all.

If you have any questions please feel free to call me or email me. This is my information:

Tel: [REDACTED] email: [REDACTED]

You can also contact the Human Research Ethics Board, who approved this application, to ask them for further details about this kind of research. This is their contact information: Tel: [REDACTED], or email them at: [REDACTED]

You can also contact my supervisor for my research, [REDACTED] at: [REDACTED], or email him at [REDACTED]

This consent is for material that has been obtained by VIRCS for the Here I Stand Theatre project until August 2010. If VIRCS collects any further data after August 2010, which I wish to use for my research, I will ask you for consent for any other material before using it.

I accept for my photographs and video recordings, and tape recordings of my discussions with the group to be used for Yasmine Kandil's research.

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you so you can share it with your parent, and a copy will be taken by me.

Thank you for reading this consent, and for giving me your time.

Yasmine

Appendix D

Participant Consent Form. Parent. Immigrant & Refugee Project

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *Effective Theatre for Development with Immigrant & Refugee Youth. A Reflective Practitioner Case Study* that is being conducted by Yasmine Kandil, the facilitator of the theatre workshops and director of the final project.

Yasmine Kandil is a graduate student in the department of Theatre at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by calling [REDACTED] or emailing [REDACTED].

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Doctor of Philosophy. It is being conducted under the supervision of [REDACTED]. You may contact my supervisor at [REDACTED].

For nine months now I have been working with your children, first to create a play that describes their experiences as immigrant and refugee youth to Canada, and then to perform this play to the community of Victoria.

You have been to a performance of the show “Here I Stand”, and you have also had discussions with your child about their experience doing this show. I want to ask you a few questions, as a parent of the participants in this play, to understand what your experience has been observing your child do this work.

The purpose of this research project is to document the experiences of the youth, coordinators, and the parents of youth who participated in the theatre project that started back in October of 2009.

Research of this type is important because there is very little written about the experiences of immigrant youth in Victoria. By documenting my observations of the sessions, and asking you and your child questions at the end of the process, I will be able to analyze the benefit of this kind of work for the immigrant and refugee youth, and for the people who are in direct contact with immigrant and refugee youth. This will help me understand if theatre is useful as a way for youth to express themselves, and whether it can be used to create some dialogue between the youth and the rest of the community who live in Victoria.

You are being asked to participate in this study because your experience and insight into your child’s experience is valuable to this research.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include filling out a questionnaire.

What you write in this questionnaire will be in my research document, which is called my ‘dissertation’. This document will be available to my professors, and other scholars at the university. One day I hope to present this work at a conference, where people who are interested in my work can benefit from this experience. After this I will use parts of what you wrote in my

research. Your name will not be used at all. This will protect your identity so that anyone reading my research will not know that these statements belong to you.

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including the time that it will take to fill out the questionnaire. There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include an opportunity to share your perspective on the experience, and to know that your point of view is documented and will be taken into consideration when analyzing the process. The community of theatre researchers, and possibly those who are in direct contact with immigrant and refugee youth will benefit from understanding the impact of using theatre with the youth. The study may also shed light on the struggles and challenges that immigrant and refugee youth experience when coming to Victoria.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will not be used. This means that the questionnaire that you have filled out will not be used.

In terms of protecting your anonymity I will use names other than your name in my research. This will protect your identity, and what you have contributed to the interviews.

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by storing it in a safe place in my home office. Also, any computer data is protected with a password.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: an article in a journal; a conference presentation. Data from this study will not be disposed. It will continue to be stored in my office, and on my desktop.

Contacts

After I do the interview with you, you can decide to withdraw from the study, as long as you let me know before March 2011, which is when I will be submitting my research to my supervisory committee. Please let me know by email, or call me, or speak to me in person if you wish to withdraw. If you are uncomfortable with approaching me personally, you can approach [REDACTED], the Enable Youth Project coordinator at VIRCS to let her know. [REDACTED] has accepted acting as a neutral third party that you can talk to if you wish to withdraw.

If you withdraw from the project this will not affect your future participation with me in other theatre works, and will not impact my relationship with you at all.

If you have any questions please feel free to call me or email me. This is my information:

Tel: [REDACTED] email: [REDACTED]

You can also contact the Human Research Ethics Board, who approved this application, to ask them for further details about this kind of research. This is their contact information: Tel: [REDACTED], or email them at: [REDACTED]

You can also contact my supervisor for my research, [REDACTED] at: [REDACTED], or email him at [REDACTED]

This consent is for material that has been obtained by VIRCS for the Here I Stand Theatre project until August 2010. If VIRCS collects any further data after August 2010, which I wish to use for my research, I will ask you for consent for any other material before using it.

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of your participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

_____ (Participant to provide initials)

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix E

Participant Consent Form. Coordinators, Staff & Volunteers.

Immigrant & Refugee Project

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *Drama with Immigrant and Refugee Youth* that is being conducted by Yasmine Kandil.

Yasmine Kandil is a graduate student in the department of Theatre at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by calling [REDACTED], or emailing [REDACTED].

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Doctor of Philosophy. It is being conducted under the supervision of [REDACTED]. You may contact my supervisor at [REDACTED].

The purpose of this research project is to document the experiences of the youth and coordinators who participated in the theatre project that took place from October 2009, until June 2010, as well as some of the youth's parents who watched the performance.

Research of this type is important because there is very little literature written about the experiences of immigrant youth in Victoria. By documenting my observations of the sessions, and interviewing you at the end of the process, I will be able to analyze the benefit of this kind of work for the immigrant and refugee youth, and for the people who are in direct contact with this group of the society. This will help me understand if theatre is useful as a way for youth to express themselves, and whether it can be used to create some dialogue between the youth and the rest of the community who live in Victoria.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include answering an email questionnaire that will then be used by the researcher. You will answer questions about your experience as an immigrant, your relationship with the youth, and about your involvement in the theatre experience. You will be able to share how you felt about the theatre sessions, your perception of the youth's experiences, the performance, and the workshop that took place after the performance.

I will use some of the photographs that were taken by the photographer during the rehearsals. These photos will be in my research document, which is called my 'dissertation'. This document will be available to my professors, and other scholars at the university. One day I hope to present this work at a conference, where people who are interested in my work can benefit from this experience. I will document our rehearsals. I will not use your actual names in my documents, to protect your privacy. Instead I will give you different names. You can choose the name that you wish to be called in my research documents.

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including the time that it will take to answer the questionnaire.

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include an opportunity to share your perspective on the experience, and to know that your point of view is documented and will be taken into consideration when analyzing the process. The community of theatre researchers, and possibly those who are in direct contact with immigrant and refugee youth will benefit from understanding the impact of using theatre with the youth. The study may also shed light on the struggles and challenges that immigrant and refugee youth experience when coming to Victoria.

You can withdraw at any point between now and March 2011, which is when I will be submitting my research to my supervisory committee. After March 2011 I will not be able to remove the information you provide for the research from the documents.

You can withdraw by emailing or calling me directly, or by contacting my supervisor, [REDACTED] (contact information above). If you choose to withdraw from the study this will not have any impact on my relationship with you.

In terms of protecting your anonymity I will use names other than your name in my research. This will protect your identity, and what you have contributed to the sessions. This however cannot be the case with the photographs and videos, as these will clearly identify you in the process.

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by storing it in a safe place in my home office. Also, any computer data is protected with a password.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: an article in a journal, and a conference presentation.

Data from this study will not be disposed. It will continue to be stored in my office, and on my desktop.

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include Yasmine Kandil (the principal researcher), and [REDACTED] (supervisor). Contact information available at top of this consent form.

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria [REDACTED].

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of your participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

Visually Recorded Images/Data [IF APPLICABLE] Participant or parent/guardian to provide initials:

- Photos may be taken of me for: Analysis _____ Dissemination* _____
- Videos may be taken of me for: Analysis _____ Dissemination* _____

*Even if no names are used, you may be recognizable if visual images are shown in the results.

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix F

NGO Letter of Approval to use photographs and dvd documentation

Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society

February 8th, 2010

To Whom It May Concern:

It is with pleasure that I write this letter for Yasmine Kandil, a long time volunteer of the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre (VIRCS) and the recent facilitator of our Enable Theatre Project titled "Here I Stand".

In March of 2009, the Enable Program for children and youth at VIRCS was allotted funds by the City of Victoria to run a series of theatre based workshops for immigrant and refugee youth. The goal was twofold: provide a safe and supportive environment for newcomer youth to explore challenging issues related to immigration and diversity and create a performance piece so as to share the learning with the greater community.

In October of 2009, Yasmine was hired by VIRCS to facilitate these workshops and work with the youth to create a performance that would be followed by an interactive discussion with the audience. Her responsibilities included: designing weekly 3 hour workshops that explored issues such as: culture shock, self-identity development, transition into new school system, changes in the home, cultural re-negotiation, and discrimination, to name a few. The project began in mid October, and in mid January the group performed twice to a total of 120 audience members. Yasmine ran full day rehearsals with the youth and facilitated the discussion with audience members.

Currently, we are in the midst of organizing future performances with the hope of sharing this piece with such groups as: teachers in the school system, education and/or social work students at UVIC, youth serving agencies and/or select youth groups. We are also creating a DVD out of the project so as to showcase the learning that took place both on and off stage.

Yasmine will be running a debrief with all participants of the "Here I Stand" project and will be working to assist us in securing future performances. I would like to confirm that VIRCS has given Yasmine permission to have access to all evaluation forms, questionnaires and/or feedback from youth participants during debrief sessions and discussions. In addition, Yasmine will be obtaining further consent from all youth and parents who were involved in this project.

The Enable staff, volunteers and youth are extremely grateful for the time and energy that Yasmine has contributed to the success of this program and look forward to working with her in the future.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Appendix G
Sample Questions for Audience Members
El-Zabbaleen Project

- 1) What was your idea of the youth garbage collectors before you saw the 'El Gonya' performance in (2002, 2003)?
- 2) What did you think you were about to see in terms of the performance?
- 3) What did you think of the performance when you saw it?
- 4) What was your impression of the youth garbage collectors after you saw the performance?

Appendix H VIRCS Funding Proposal for Theatre Project

The City Of Victoria

View Project Information

Update Feedbacks

Organization Info

Applicant Organization Name	Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Center Society
Street Address	637 Bay Street
Apt/Unit Number	3rd Floor
City	Victoria
Province	bc
Postal Code	V8T 5L2
Phone	250-361-9433
Fax	250-361-1914

Contacts

	First Contact	Second Contact
First Name	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Last Name	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Email	[REDACTED]	

BC Incorporated Society? Yes

Society name	Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Center Society
Registration Number	S2428
Registration Date	11/18/1988

Project Info

Project Title	Enable Theatre Project for Immigrant and Refugee Youth
Project Description	The Enable Theatre Project will utilize Forum Theatre as a tool for newcomer youth to explore issues of diversity and multiculturalism while increasing social awareness and

Specific Project Location(s) involvement through a series of interactive community performances.
Participant registration, information sessions and organizational meetings will take place at the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Center Society office (637 Bay Street). Workshops, as well as our initial performance, will take place in a rented hall at North Park Manor (875 North Park Street). Subsequent Community performances will take place in a variety of locations within the city of Victoria, including community centers, cultural centers, schools and other youth serving agencies.

Funding Information

Category	Demonstration Funding (1 to 3 years)
Have you received a Special Project Grant in the past?	YES
Have you received other city funds related to this project?	YES

Special Project Grant?

Month(s) and year(s) received	June, 2008
Project Name	Multicultural Environmental Project for Newcomers
Amount received	7,898
Difference	Unlike previous applications, the Enable Theatre Project specifically focuses on empowering and supporting immigrant and refugee youth. Its use of theatre both encourages the arts while opening up a platform for community dialogue on difficult issues surrounding immigration, transition and diversity

Other City Funds?

Type of funding	Festival Investment
Years	2000-2006
Project Name	Victoria Latin Caribbean Festival
Amount received	31,500 (over the course of 6 years)

Focus Area

Focus	Social & Cultural Development
How does your project meet this focus area	The Enable Theatre Project encourages social development and strengthens community capacity through its use of Forum Theatre, an approach that engages performers and audience members in a collaborative effort to find positive solutions to challenging issues. It promotes diversity through the arts while providing creative and healthy outlets for youth to share their experiences and views.

Project Goals

What are the goals of your project	<p>1) Assist in the settlement process of newcomer youth by providing a safe space for them to express challenges on issues of diversity, transition and identity formation (including racism, discrimination, bullying, family pressure, culture shock etc.) while establishing connections of trust</p> <p>2) Utilize theatre to equip participants with a creative, non-language bound tool for self-expression while practicing healthy responses to discrimination and inspiring a connection to the arts</p> <p>3) Increase visibility of newcomer youth in the community, generate dialogue on immigration and diversity and promote non-judgmental attitudes through a series of interactive performances (created by youth) that will require audience participation and input</p> <p>4) Empower youth as peer educators by performing for youth serving agencies and empower audience members facing similar challenges</p> <p>5) Encourage both feelings of pride in newcomer youth as young Canadians and cultural pride of native countries/ethnicities</p>
---	--

Organization Purpose

How does this project relate to or advance your organization's purpose	<p>The mission of the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Center Society is to assist in the settlement and adjustment of immigrants and refugees in Canada and to provide services designed to increase their participation in Canadian society by assisting them to overcome barriers. The Enable Theatre Project advances this mission in two ways: First, it supports newcomer youth in their process of settlement through a series of 8 theatre workshops which will provide a safe space to share experiences, challenges and world views while engaging in non-language bound forms of self-expression. Secondly, the use of theatre builds confidence, the lack of which can be a major barrier to community involvement among newcomer youth. The experience of standing in front of a crowd, becoming peer educators, and feeling heard is empowering as they develop their self-identity and sense of place within their new</p>
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community.

Main Activities

What main activities will you carry out to support your project's objectives?

1)Collaborate with other community professionals and volunteers to design a series of Forum Theatre workshops for a group of 15-20 newcomer youth ages 14-20. 2)Recruit participants through outreach in schools, media and cultural centers 3)Deliver 5 hour workshops once a week for 8 weeks, combining trust building and confidence building exercises, image work, and group discussion 4)Facilitate the creation of 3-4 scenes by the youth on challenges to do with diversity, transition and identity formation as inspired by real life experiences 5)Perform scenes to other youth groups, schools, community organizations and interested community members (the use of Forum Theatre will require audiences to get involved in the scene, exploring different ways of overcoming challenges) 6)Create a youth advisory committee for feedback and improvement 7)In years 2-3: increase number of workshops and performances, instil an in-school version of program and open group to other minority groups.

Deliverables/Outcomes

What are the main deliverables/outcomes for your project?

1)Formation of an immigrant and refugee youth group composed of at least 15-20 participants 2)Delivery of 8 week program that will result in at least 5-10 community performances, reaching at least 300 community members 3)Video documentation of group process and performance highlights as a means of maximizing community education, awareness and learning 4)Formation of a youth advisory committee to promote youth leadership 5)Increased community connections between newcomer youth and other youth serving agencies 6)Empowerment and increased sense of support among newcomer youth resulting in increased community participation 7)Increased capacity among participants to combat racism, hate and discrimination in healthy ways 9)Increased awareness, sensitivity and understanding within the community on challenges faced by newcomer youth and ways in which to build community's capacity to celebrate diversity and support newcomers 10)Increased delivery of program to 2/year in subsequent years

Project Success

The success of the Enable Theatre Project will be measured through a combination of written and oral evaluations including: intake from participants both before and after the duration of the project; evaluation forms given to community members attending performances, as well as monthly reflection meetings between the Project Coordinator, Theatre facilitator, on-call Counsellor and volunteers. The project's success will be based on the impact it has on participant youth (i.e. confidence, sense of community, etc.) as well as the impact reported by audiences (i.e. reported increases in awareness and sensitivity on issues of cultural diversity). The project impact will also be measured specifically by tracking: number of participant youth, community performances, estimated audience members as well as proposed action or direct action taken as a result of workshops. Targeted numbers include a minimum of: 15-20 participants, 5 performances and at least 300 audience members.

Assessment Criteria

How does your project meet the Assessment Criteria?

The Enable Theatre Project promotes healthier communities through education and positive self expression. By encouraging newcomer voices, it will enhance communication; providing opportunities for citizens to engage in dialogue on relevant current issues. It is currently the only theatre project in Victoria that focuses on immigrant and refugee youth and has a clear goal (8 workshops) and an immediate outcome (community performances). Years of experience serve as a foundation for the success of this project while secured partners, interested participants and community connections will strengthen its delivery. It will assist both newcomer youth to overcome barriers to community involvement and invite community members to become involved with the newcomer population through volunteering, audience participation and opportunities for future collaboration. With demonstrated financial partners, our project is ensured realization should the City of Victoria generously decide to assist.

Organization Experience

What is your organization's experience in carrying out this type of project?

VIRCS has been supporting Victoria's immigrant community for the last 20 years. We have a number of projects that have been running for 18 years including: Employment Transitions and Coaching, Settlement Services, English as a Second Language Classes and Volunteer programs. Enable, the children and youth services at VIRCS has been supporting immigrant and refugee children, youth and families for the last ten years with programs that include: 1-1 tutoring matches, homework clubs, youth activity nights

and in-school adjustment support groups. Enable's two most related projects include the Youth Strides summer camp and Youth Break Your Own Barriers (Youth BYOB). Since 2006 Enable has delivered an annual one week camp to groups of 20 newcomer youth, promoting multiculturalism and anti-racism through cross cultural learning experiences. In 2007-2008, Enable collaborated with over 25 community agencies to deliver a series of 10 seminars on issues of diversity, reaching a total of 89 youth.

Timelines

Milestone	Date
Organizing committee begins (composed of Project Coordinator, Theatre Facilitator and volunteers)	07/01/2009
Committee designs structure and schedule of program	07/31/2009
Community Promotion and Recruitment (i.e. community and cultural centers, newspaper and radio)	08/01/2009
Promotion of project within schools	09/14/2009
Participant registration closed	09/26/2009
Sequence of 8 week workshops begins	10/03/2009
Sequence of 8 week workshops ends	11/21/2009
Delivery of performances begins	12/05/2009
Delivery of performances ends	02/06/2010
Youth Advisory Committee is formed	03/01/2010
Production of project video	03/01/2010
Evaluation of program and action planning for subsequent years	03/01/2010

Alternate Plan

How will the project proceed if you do not receive full funding?

The Enable Theatre Project recognizes that it is one of many organizations that are requesting funds and has left room for changes to the proposed project if it receives partial funding. While we will continue to develop and implement the program, we will do so in a slimmed down version. Adjustments might include: reducing the number of theatre workshops from 8 to 5; performing in one location rather than travelling on-site; lowering number of performances, filming one or two performances rather than stages of the entire project; and accepting only

10-15 participants. Any and all contributions would be graciously accepted and would be a valuable step in the realization of this worthwhile endeavour.

Documents

File [2007-yearendFinacailreport-1.pdf](#)

File [BC Gaming.pdf](#)

File [fromtelus-1.pdf](#)

File [Youth Letters.pdf](#)

File [Mosaic.doc](#)

File [Volunteer Support Letters.doc](#)

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Appendix I

“Here I Stand” Sample Interview Questions. Youth

Please take a few moments to answer the following questions:

1) What is your name?

2) Where are you from originally?

3) How long have you lived in Canada?

4) Did you live anywhere else in Canada before coming to Victoria?

5) How old were you when you immigrated?

6) How did you feel when you first moved to Canada/Victoria?

7) What are some of the challenges that you and your family faced when you immigrated?

8) How did you deal with them?

9) The “Here I Stand” performance explored many issues relating to the immigrant youth experiences. What of these issues that we explored are relevant to the issues you’ve faced in your process of immigration and settlement?

10) What other topics would you have wanted to explore in the rehearsal process?

11) Which did you prefer in the rehearsals: when we worked on fiction stories and you created the story as we went along (the Romina story about the immigrant girl), or when we created stories of your own life experiences? Why did you prefer that?

12) What was the most important aspect of this process for you?

13) How do you feel this experience has influenced you?

14) Do you want to share anything else with me?

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. This will be very helpful for my research and for documenting this important experience.

Sincerely,

Yasmine Kandil

Appendix J
“Here I Stand” Sample Interview Questions. Parents

Appendix J
“Here I Stand” Sample Interview Questions. Parents

Please take a few minutes to answer these questions:

1) What is your name? What is your child’s name?

2) When did you and your family immigrate to Canada?

3) Did you live anywhere else in Canada before coming to Victoria?

4) What was the experience of immigrating like for you and your family?

5) Where there any issues that you struggled with?

6) How did you deal with these issues?

7) How do you feel about your son/daughter’s participation in the project “Here I Stand”?

8) Do you think this performance touched on some of the issues your son/daughter faced in their lives as immigrant youth?

9) Was there anything new that you learned about your son/daughter when you saw this performance? If so, what was it?

10) How do you feel this experience impacted your son/daughter?

11) Do you want to share anything else with me?

*Thank you so much for the time you took to complete this questionnaire. Your comments will be very helpful for my documentation of this project.
Sincerely,
Yasmine Kandil*

Appendix K

“Here I Stand” Sample Questions for Project Coordinator, Staff & Volunteers

Please take a few moments to answer the following questions:

- 1) **What is your name, and what was your role in the project?**

- 2) **Are you an immigrant yourself? If so, when did you immigrate to Canada?**

- 3) **What was your experience of immigration?**

- 4) **What is your relationship to the youth who performed “Here I Stand”? (i.e how long have you known them? Do you know them on a personal level? Are you involved in other aspects of their lives besides this theatre project?)**

- 5) **In what ways do you think the project supported the youth in their communication and creation of their immigrant experiences?**

- 6) **In what way did participating in Here I Stand impact you personally?**

7) In this particular project the agenda of issues that were explored was pre-determined (it was planned ahead of time, before the project commenced with the youth). How relevant were these issues to the youth who created the performance?

8) During the rehearsal discussions with the youth, it was difficult to get their feedback on the issues that they wanted to explore. Why do you think that was?

9) If the rehearsal process was longer, and the youth could have had more time to explore more issues, what do you think would have been relevant issues to explore for this particular group?

10) What did you think of the final product? Do you feel it accurately represented the lives of immigrant and refugee youth?

11) What were some of the most important topics explored in this performance?

12) What did you think were some of the important discussions and discoveries that took place during the post-performance workshop?

13) Do you want to share anything else with me?

Thank you so much for taking the time to answer these questions. This will be very helpful for my research, and for documenting this important experience.

Yasmine Kandil

Appendix L

Sample Audience Evaluations for Here I Stand Performance



"Here I Stand"
Enable Youth Theatre Project
Audience Evaluation



Instructions: Please indicate your level of agreement by **circling** one rating for each statement.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My awareness and understanding of the challenges faced by newcomer youth has increased after tonight	①	2	3	4	5
I liked the evening's format: play then workshop	①	2	3	4	5
I enjoyed the play itself and found it was an effective way of sharing experiences	①	2	3	4	4
The workshop phase of the evening helped me process and share ideas with people	①	2	3	4	5
I feel further inspired to find ways of creating a more inclusive and welcoming community for newcomers	①	2	3	4	5
I felt comfortable sharing ideas, thoughts and opinions	1	②	3	4	5

Additional Feedback/Suggestions:

This was a wonderful work. Thank you so much for putting this together. I really enjoyed the play and all the performers were fantastic.

Do you know of an audience group that could benefit from this performance? If so, please provide some information on who they are and how we can contact them:

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!!



"Here I Stand"
Enable Youth Theatre Project
Audience Evaluation



Instructions: Please indicate your level of agreement by **circling** one rating for each statement.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My awareness and understanding of the challenges faced by newcomer youth has increased after tonight	1	2	3	4	5
I liked the evening's format: play then workshop	1	2	3	4	5
I enjoyed the play itself and found it was an effective way of sharing experiences	1	2	3	4	4
The workshop phase of the evening helped me process and share ideas with people	1	2	3	4	5
I feel further inspired to find ways of creating a more inclusive and welcoming community for newcomers	1	2	3	4	5
I felt comfortable sharing ideas, thoughts and opinions	1	2	3	4	5

Additional Feedback/Suggestions:

Wow, what a powerful experience! It was wonderful and I'm amazed at the calibre of performance, at the honesty you showed. You are all amazing!

Do you know of an audience group that could benefit from this performance? If so, please provide some information on who they are and how we can contact them:

Yes! All teachers! (I'm so sad that so many had bad experiences with teachers) All schools! Everyone!

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!!



"Here I Stand"
Enable Youth Theatre Project
Audience Evaluation



Instructions: Please indicate your level of agreement by **circling** one rating for each statement.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My awareness and understanding of the challenges faced by newcomer youth has increased after tonight	①	2	3	4	5
I liked the evening's format: play then workshop	①	2	3	4	5
I enjoyed the play itself and found it was an effective way of sharing experiences	①	2	3	4	4
The workshop phase of the evening helped me process and share ideas with people	①	2	3	4	5
I feel further inspired to find ways of creating a more inclusive and welcoming community for newcomers	①	2	3	4	5
I felt comfortable sharing ideas, thoughts and opinions	1	②	3	4	5

Additional Feedback/Suggestions:

Congratulations !! You should be very proud of yourselves for voicing out the needs of so many immigrant youth!

Do you know of an audience group that could benefit from this performance? If so, please provide some information on who they are and how we can contact them:

*All schools / teachers / students of Victoria should see this performance.
Contact SWIS of SDO.*

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!!



"Here I Stand"
 Enable Youth Theatre Project
 Audience Evaluation



Instructions: Please indicate your level of agreement by **circling** one rating for each statement.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My awareness and understanding of the challenges faced by newcomer youth has increased after tonight	①	2	3	4	5
I liked the evening's format: play then workshop	①	2	3	4	5
I enjoyed the play itself and found it was an effective way of sharing experiences	①	2	3	4	4
The workshop phase of the evening helped me process and share ideas with people	①	2	3	4	5
I feel further inspired to find ways of creating a more inclusive and welcoming community for newcomers	①	2	3	4	5
I felt comfortable sharing ideas, thoughts and opinions	①	2	3	4	5

Additional Feedback/Suggestions:

It was especially effective how each of the
youth represented a feeling, culture, religion, etc.
It made it so real

Do you know of an audience group that could benefit from this performance? If so, please provide some information on who they are and how we can contact them:

I would suggest the local schools - but don't
have their contact information

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!!

Appendix M Red's email

University of Victoria

Type here to search This Folder [search icon] [refresh icon] [address book icon] [options icon] [log off icon]

Mail [Reply] [Reply to All] [Forward] [Move] [Delete] [Junk] [Close]

[redacted]
[redacted]

Sent: Friday, May 21, 2010 2:16 PM
To: [redacted]

Hi all!

I started a thread on facebook with the youth, asking them about the best times for next month. [redacted] wrote back with this reply and I wanted to share it with all of you:

"It is sad to know that this is our last performance. But oh well we did do something for this community, I'm impressed. My mom always tells me that each one of us have a job to do before the end of their lives. Now I feel like I did something so is good. Good idea Negin, thank you so much for your time and your energy. I don't know how I can possibly thank you enough. You , Yasmine and this whole group changed me from a shy girl into me, myself. I couldn't done this with out you guys. Thank you all."

I hope you find it as inspiring as I did.

Have a wonderful long weekend!

[redacted]

Media Program Coordinator
Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society
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(250) 361-9433 x.203
enable@vircs.bc.ca
www.vircs.bc.ca/youth_services.php

VIRCS Works for YOU

Did you know?...

VIRCS is the only immigrant employment organization in Greater Victoria serving employers and immigrants for last 20 years. We assist employers by placing pre-screened, qualified & experienced newcomers for free. At VIRCS we speak 14 languages. Clients feel at home here.

Connected to Microsoft Exchange

Appendix N Youth's letters to funders

To whom it may concern:

My name is [redacted].
I am 16 and a part of the enable theater group. I ~~started~~ came into it with alot on my shoulders but each day ~~after~~ since I join the enable theater my stress was relaxed this project help me relax and over come my bad memories. I made friends. Something I was never able to do. I don't have many friends because no one really likes me because of my religion. ~~But~~ when I am at the lead project I feel like I belong that there isn't any ~~difference~~ judgement towards me. That we are all family. ~~being~~ All of us repairing the other hearts caring and loving.

I think this project should continue. Because to me ~~this~~ the enable theater project is my getaway. it is a place I go to to forget all the ~~stress~~ stress and just relax. To me this project is the world to me.

Sincerely,

To whom it may concern:

Hello, I'm _____ I'm 14 years old today. I'm a part of the VICS Here I stand theater group. This group is such a cool group. I enjoy it alot. When I be with all the friends that I made from this group, I feel nothing but happiness. Sometimes when I let my self, I'll think "Hey, I'm going to show all the people that how hard me and my friends had been work on this before." This is what keep me going all the time, I'm proud of it. The dream finally came true. I stand right here and I did show people what we got. I'm such they got the message from us. At the end, every every one is sad. I said: "Is ok, this just the beginning all our show!" I'm right now. I hope the group will go on forever.

Here I stand! ~~✍~~

Sincerely,

To whom It may concern:

My name is _____, I'm 16 years old. I'm from China.

It was really a great experience to work with all the members in the Enable Theatre Group. We all shared our own experiences — sadness, difficulties and of course, happiness. I enjoyed all the works we did — games, images, scenes...

I learned lots of things as well. I know how to treat others better, I know how to understand other people's culture and it helps me a lot in my school life as well. The Theatre Group helps me grow up and become a more open person. And our performance was awesome! We created ^{shared} people's experience from school and home, between parents, teachers and youths. It was an amazed work! Everyone should see it!

This project should definitely ^{be} continue because it brings us so many happiness and it teaches us a lot that we can't learn them from school even from our parents and friends! I will remember this precious experience forever — and everyone will, too. We put a lot of time in it and we found that it's worth for us. In addition, it is a good chance for any immigrant youth to communicate with others and make friends!

We all love this wonderful "Theatre Group" and it has to be continue!!

Sincerely,