University of Alberta

Literacy in ACTion: Using Theatre to Read the Word and the World Through Critical Pedagogy, Image Theatre and Comic Creation with Youth

by

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<u>ABSTRACT</u>

This thesis examines Literacy in ACTion, a drama-based participatory project developed and implemented by the author. The project took place in 2009 at an alternative high school in San Diego, California, that provides continued schooling to expelled students considered "at risk." The project embraced multiple theoretical influences from applied theatre and emancipatory education to create a cross-curricular learning experience connecting drama, English, media arts, literacy, comic creation and life skills. It incorporated Theatre of the Oppressed techniques such as Image Theatre into Literacy curriculum, providing youth with opportunities to engage in critical literacy and pedagogy by encouraging discourse on social issues and stigmas affecting youth. The culmination of the project, a controversial student-created comic book, acted as a stage for youth to document their understanding of the issues explored through the dramatic process.

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"Who do you think you are, a middle-class white girl thinking you can work with "at risk" youth?" One of my professors asked me this after a discussion of what my intended thesis research would be. I was taken aback by the question. What did she mean "middle-class white girl," and what did it matter? I was hit square in the face with my own subject position, and I didn't quite know how to respond. Her question made me realize that I was trying to suppress some of my past and in doing so hide the very reason why I'd chosen to do drama with this population, specifically "at risk" youth. There would be no hiding in this MA program. I had to be all in; I had to be prepared and willing to answer to anyone who might ask that same question. Just who did I think I was?

I am someone who probably shouldn't be where I am today. I grew up in a part of Detroit, Michigan, that because of its economic hardships was impacted significantly by the recent recession and all of the other economic challenges since the 1970s. For my immediate family, we hung in a type of suspended animation, barely above the poverty line and reaching up to the middle class. Following the divorce of my parents, I was sent out of Detroit to live with family in Canada. That didn't stop me from going back to the city every chance I could. It was what I knew, it was where I was comfortable, and as a teenager I spent most weekends with my best friend "K," testing our limits. Our freedom was a 1990 black cherry Dodge Caravan named "Rosie," and in looking back we both agree that we probably shouldn't still be alive. Alcohol and drug experimentation in Detroit's alleys, theft, and breaking the city's curfew for minors were just

some of our weekend activities. I was diagnosed with depression and fought

suicidal thoughts, while struggling with my father's alcoholism and his very

apparent absence and influence on my life. Today, K and I are acutely aware of

our risky behavior and how lucky we are to have never been arrested or worse.

By today's standards we were "youth at risk." Had it not been for the support of

key mentors and extended family along the way, I wouldn't have made it.

I was taught that education was my way out; regardless of the cost,

education made the difference between struggling on the streets and thriving. In

the Drama in Education and Community program at the University of Windsor, I

began to grow as a drama facilitator and informal educator. The Theatre for Social

Action course led me to begin working with youth "at risk." I was encouraged to

further my education with a graduate degree. Something I thought out of my

reach; again, I saw education as my ticket out.

Giving this explanation to my professor, I felt exposed. I was looking

forward to a future of possibilities, but now I became aware that any community

group I worked with would likely see me the same way she did. I had to be

willing and prepared to be open—to be me. While I am not the sum of my

youthful risky experiences, I recognize that they are part of the facilitator I have

become. It's these experiences that allow me some understanding of the youth

that I work with, as well as provide me with the confidence to own that I am more

than just the "middle class white girl" I may appear to be.

INTRODUCTION

The following study documents and reflects on the Literacy in ACTion project that I undertook for my MA Drama program, and my personal drama practice. This drama-based participatory project used Image Theatre (Boal, 1985) to inspire collaborative comic book development. The project took place over the course of five weeks[1] in 2009 at the Alternative Learning for Behavior and Attitude Community School (ALBA) in San Diego, California. Each of the twelve 70-minute sessions I facilitated were participatory in nature and sought to provide the youth with whom I worked an opportunity to voice their experiences and opinions in a safe space that promoted positive and honest expression of their thoughts, ideas and feelings. The project was designed to incorporate multiple modes of literacy as well as be cross-curricular in nature, connecting subjects such as drama, English, media arts, literacy, and life skills. The curriculum of the project was designed to evolve in response to student engagement and support the growth of its participants.

Throughout the development and facilitation of this project, my goals were, to reflect on my own practice as well as to define and test the possibilities of a dramatic project that embraced multiple theoretical influences from theatre and education within a state with little drama or theatre arts available in public schools.

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[1] For project overview see Appendix A.

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ALBA

       Established in 1997 and located within the city of San Diego, ALBA

provides continued schooling to expelled students who historically have a high

drop-out rate when in traditional schools (Alpert). Three ALBA sites in San

Diego serve elementary, middle, and high school students. Following an

expulsion, a student who is denied readmission to his or her regular classroom

may be assigned to an alternative education program such as ALBA for up to one

year. ALBA high school is comprised of students from San Diego Unified School

District, grades 9 through 12, who have violated the district's zero tolerance

policy for offenses such as weapons possession or drug use/possession/sales.

Maintaining a school such as ALBA allows the district to retain the student

attendance funds from the state. For some students, ALBA is the last chance, just

short of attending a Juvenile Court and Community School.

       ALBA offers a unique instructional program meant to accommodate

students with the low student/teacher ratio needed to provide individualized

instruction and counseling. Once students successfully complete a semester in the

ALBA program, they have the opportunity to be re-instated to a traditional,

comprehensive school in the district. Former principal Vernon Moore describes

the students of ALBA as: "typical teenagers who have made a mistake and are

working hard to get back on the right path," and the program is designed to "help

these students find their voices and realize success. Our motto is: Empowering

Students: Changing Lives" (Moor 2). The school's Accountability Report Card

issued in March of 2001, states that ALBA supports this motto by placing

emphasis on "powerful instructional opportunities focused on the core curriculum, [a] site discipline plan based upon positive reinforcement, high quality professional development focused on literacy and mathematics, counselors at each site for one-on-one counseling and instruction offered during and after school hours" (Pickett, 1). The teaching staff set high standards for students and work closely with them to successfully transition students back to their traditional school.

After failing to meet the testing goals under the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law, ALBA has recently been forced to restructure and expand its student base to include not only students who have been expelled, but any "at risk" student under age 16 (Alpert).

ALBA encourages its teachers to work closely together to coordinate major student assignments, projects, and activities. Their combined goal is to provide high-quality educational programs that build academic skills, and foster social and emotional growth (Pickett 5). Students are required to take classes that provide instruction in the following areas: "effective communication, counseling, and effective conflict resolution, 'Discipline with Dignity' skills,; *[sic]* drug, alcohol and tobacco abuse prevention/intervention, gang prevention/intervention strategies, peer development of social skills and effective parental, peer and authority-figure relations, and zero tolerance issues" (5). The Career and Life Management class is an elective that includes a focus on skills such as budgeting, career options and making healthy choices. The teacher for this class, Ms. J, uses non-traditional teaching methods, so students often select her elective when given

the choice. When I approached ALBA, specifically the Career and Life Management teacher, about bringing the Literacy in ACTion project to her classroom, Ms. J was quick to agree and offered to include students from ALBA's Literacy class as well. Ms. J recognized the value of incorporating the arts into her classroom and actively sought out opportunities to do so whenever possible. She encouraged her students to write ALBA raps and choreograph dances, and even hosted an ALBA cook-off.

The Students

My Literacy in ACTion project began with seven 10th grade students (three girls and four boys) in a combined Life Skills and Literacy class. The students were between the ages of 14-15, and self-identified mainly as Hispanic, with the exception of one Caucasian male and one African American male. Each of the students arrived at ALBA by way of expulsion, and two students were attending ALBA for the second time.

California Standards Requirements

To address the California standards[2] and objectives for the Literacy class curriculum, I designed my project to ensure that the students explored the required literacy terminology and content within a multifaceted dramatic process; this process allowed for the multiple meanings of literacy to be considered. Integration of multi-literacies is advocated by James Paul Gee who argues "against a perspective that sees literacy as a stand alone mental ability and argue[s] for one that sees it as inextricably connected to 'identity work'"

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[2] For applicable California Literacy and Arts Standards included in project see Appendix B.

("Teenagers" 412). Both participating classroom teachers felt confident that the

project would provide the necessary academic rigor to permit grading in each of

the class subject areas. We agreed that because of the possible sensitive nature of

the material, letter grades may not be fair to the students and could provoke

insincere participation on their part. Students who demonstrated sincere effort and

commitment to the project received a passing grade. As opposed to traditional

"teach-to-the-test" methods, many experiential and participatory methods such as

the drama[3] approach I employed are more suitable for many youth who may find

it difficult to focus in traditional teaching classrooms. Therefore, this alternative

method for instruction is especially appropriate for those in alternative schools.

In their work, *Homegrown: Engaged Cultural Criticism,* authors hooks

and Mesa-Bains discuss the current pressures that teachers face to "teach toward

the test" under the NCLB law passed and rolled out under George W. Bush:

> [T]his quantifying of education robs us of the quality of the
>
> experience of learning. This approach has been devastating
>
> to the arts since they are not testable disciplines—music
>
> and visual art have nearly dropped off the radar, and are
>
> virtually nonexistent in the high school curriculum. (53)

The most important design element of the Literacy in ACTion project was

that it challenged standard curricular and classroom practices by focusing on an

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[3] For the purpose of this study I will refer to the processes within the project in three distinct ways: "Drama" implies process, the in class activities. "Theatre" refers to mainstream theatre and rehearsal activities, such as stage work and scripts. When used, "Applied Theatre" indicates a form of hybridized drama in education activities, which exists outside mainstream theatre institutions, with specific intentions to have a social, educational or communitarian purposes. These terms are interrelated, but not precisely interchangeable.

entirely interdisciplinary educational model that engaged multiple literacies and disciplines. An interdisciplinary approach, however, is contested within an atmosphere in which teachers face numerous pressures from academic institutions and state legislation to cover material specifically for regurgitation on state mandated proficiency tests. In 2009, the state mandated the California Standards Tests (CSTs) to assess students in English language arts in grades 2 through 11. These CSTs are intended to measure how well students are mastering specific skills defined for each grade by the state of California. In my own experience, working in schools in San Diego County, I have observed and have been required to teach toward these mandates. The CST scores are intended to show whether or not a school is successful and should continue to receive state funding. The goal is for all students to score at or above proficient[4] on these tests (California Dept. of Education). One challenge with this type of testing for ALBA is that it does not take into account the transient population that comprises ALBA's student body. The number of students who actually take the tests in the spring does not reflect the number of students who were registered at ALBA in the fall and who have since returned to traditional schooling.

Statement of the Problem

The often inaccurate data generated by the CTSs results in funds being lost and programs such as the arts, specifically theatre studies, the first to be cut. This leaves some students without ever experiencing the benefits of dramatic arts education.

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[4] The California academic levels in high school are: Advanced, Proficient, Basic, Below Basic, and Far Below Basic.

<u>Purpose of the Project</u>

The Literacy in ACTion project was designed to address this lack of arts and connect multiple subjects and their associated standards, in addition to multiple literacies, through the use of drama. The basis for the research project and development of Literacy in ACTion was a number of recurring themes that emerged from prior dramatic work with youth at ALBA and in other San Diego City Schools. This study sought to explore and question: How can the process of using Image Theatre (Boal) as a basis for collective comic book development be an effective way in which to encourage and stimulate dialogue with youth about how they relate to the world and how they perceive that society relates to them?

After engaging participants in this drama-based research, this study also investigates and questions:

1. How did this project succeed in promoting "critical pedagogy" (Freire, *Pedagogy*) with the youth?

2. How do the images/stories the youth chose to represent reflect their relationship with society?

3. How does what they shared reflect their responsiveness to the dramatic process?

4. How useful can this type of project be for future approaches to work in similar settings?

<u>Conditions of the Project</u>

The following conditions were noted during the project development and affected the project throughout the process:

1. The often-transient youth population that moved into and out of the ALBA classroom, sometimes within short periods of time, affected the ability for consistent thematic development in the student-centered and drama-based participatory project.

2. This project could have benefited from an increased number of workshop sessions to allow youth the time and space for the depth necessary for the drama-based participatory project.

Further conditions that emerged throughout the process are presented in the project summary and process analysis in Chapter Three.

Significance of the Study

This project can provide future (drama) educators with a case study of an interdisciplinary curricula design that uses Image Theatre as a method for engaging youth in exploring multiple literacies. Additionally, the findings from this project will continue to inform the researcher's teaching methodology and facilitation practices.

Chapter Summary

An exploration and analysis of selected Literacy in ACTion project components are documented throughout this thesis. Chapter One highlights some of the theoretical backgrounds that influenced the development and facilitation of the project as well as provides a framework in which to reflect on some of my experiences, assumptions and beliefs regarding this project. Chapter Two describes the day-to-day method[ology] of the project and focuses on key moments that show movement of process, participant success, challenges, and

facilitator insights. Chapter Three explores components of the dramatic process

that evoked the most curiosity on my part, in relation to the responses by both

students and staff to the Literacy in ACTion process and final comic product. I

also explore future implications and directions of study for this research.

CHAPTER ONE

Influential Theories & Theorists

The interdisciplinary approach of this project intersects with several theoretical areas of study in education and theatre. The theories discussed below were consulted throughout the development, implementation and reflection of the Literacy in ACTion process. The project design and the researcher's facilitation were primarily informed by the following ideas: the notion of youth "at risk", Critical Literacy, Critical Pedagogy, Boal's Image Theatre, and comic studies. While it is necessary to refer to the aforementioned theories and acknowledge their breadth, this cannot be an exhaustive analysis. Specific aspects of each field will be discussed in relation to project development and their fundamental influence on the researcher as both drama practitioner and emancipatory educator.

Youth "At Risk"

The possible future uses of the Literacy in ACTion project are not delegated to any one specific age or demographic within schools. However, for the purpose of this research project, and based on my previous experiences teaching in alternative schools, I decided that this drama-based participatory project might be best explored with the youth "at risk" population. To use one overarching label, "at risk," is problematic due to the variety of ways in which it is used by different public agencies. In 1988 The National Center for Education Statistics[5] (NCES) developed the National Education Longitudinal Study that

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[5] The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is the primary federal entity for collecting, analyzing, and reporting data related to education in the United States and other nations. It fulfills a congressional mandate to collect, collate, analyze, and report full and complete statistics on the condition of education in the United States.

tracked 25,000 eighth-grade students across the United States, in both public and private schools, in an attempt to identify and further examine the characteristics of students considered at risk of failure. This study, known today as the NELS:88, defines the characteristics within an educational framework and has served as the foundation for later policy making and procedures where youth "at risk" are concerned (Owings). This however does not take into account the other common usages of the term. In the health care field it refers to certain lifestyle choices, such as drug and alcohol abuse that are regarded as "detrimental to their mental or physical health." Within the criminal justice system "at risk" identifies an involvement with criminal acts (Conrad 1).

Since this project takes place within the United States school system, I recognize here the seven nationally accepted factors and characteristics (as identified by the NELS:88) that contribute to a student's overall risk of failure or dropping out: 1) basic demographic (socio-economic status); 2) family and personal background (single-parent homes); 3) amount of parental involvement in the student's education; 4) academic history (absenteeism, unprepared for class); 5) student behavioral factors; 6) teacher perceptions of student (passive, disruptive, inattentive); and 7) the characteristics of the student's school (urban, large minority populations) (Owings v-vi). These seven characteristics are linked; however, they were not acknowledged as such by NCES until years later. Reports of the NELS study in 2006 on these students as adults sought to further distinguish between the aforementioned characteristics by establishing and defining three categories of risk. These categories take into account the

individual, yet further complicate the label. A student's socio-economic status and race/ethnicity are categorized as "status risk factors," while factors that affect one's academic performance such as grades, test scores and graduation from high school are considered "academic risk factors." Lastly, one's attitudes related to learning, school, and attendance are listed as "behavioral risk factors" (Finn iii).

Schools, courts and mental health agencies each have slightly varied definitions of what constitutes "risk" for youth. One commonality is that by using the term "youth at risk," there is an implication that the concern is with the youth alone; whereas, when you look closer at the NELS:88 factors, you notice that a majority of factors are external conditions that youth cannot immediately change or control themselves as they are more closely connected to socioeconomic class. This wider viewpoint destabilizes the term "at risk," and makes it subject to further exploration. Like the term "at risk" imposed on youth by society, social factors, too, are imposed on youth who have little to say about the conditions of their economic surroundings. Bessant, Hil, and Watts suggest the use of alternative terms that reflect these socioeconomic conditions, such as "youth put 'at risk'" or "marginalized youth," which acknowledges that youth are placed at the fringe. Through participation in the Literacy in ACTion project, students and teachers alike were provided with an opportunity to explore what that label meant to them and how they could challenge it.

Critical Literacy

Literacy can no longer be thought of as simply the process by which we read and interpret texts; assessing literacy must include a socio-cultural

perspective that acknowledges complex fields of information as informed by the

reader's attitudes, values and beliefs. All of which contribute to not only the

reading of the literary word, but the reading of one's world (Freire, *Hope*). Freire

famously identified this linkage, "Reading does not consist merely of decoding

the written word or language; rather, it is preceded by and intertwined with

knowledge of the world. Language and reality are dynamically interconnected.

The understanding attained by critical reading of a text implies perceiving the

relationship between text and context" (Freire and Macedo 29). This relationship

can be viewed as symbiotic; our interpretation and processing of the texts we are

exposed to influence how we view our world and our experiences. This can

happen also in the reverse, where our experiences shape our understanding and

interpretation of texts and particularly for youth the interpretation of school-based

texts. Students negotiate and apply what they already know of the world to

understand the new information and the construction of meaning. This exchange

and fusion of the two produce our hybridized understanding of the wor(l)d.

The reading of the wor(l)d has changed as access to information has

increased and become, for most, instant. For adolescents, the widespread use of

social media to connect with peers and online gaming has necessitated a

development of an 'intermedial' literacy (the interconnectedness of multiple

forms of mass media and Internet technologies). The rate at which this technology

changes and the necessity to continue to be able to negotiate these tech-texts can

be overwhelming, yet imperative given daily responsibilities. These 'intermedial'

forms of new literacy have moved reading away from printed texts and currently

focus on the use of technological devices. Students research information on the computer or from their phones, not from a library or books. Information is interpreted as a whole picture, as on websites, incorporating links to other sources or embedded videos to further the intake of information. These alternative sites of literacy are not designed to read from left to right as with traditional literary texts. They are to be interpreted as a whole picture, and the reader is now a consumer of the image and all it contains within it. Comic books as an alternative text have resonated with youth partially because of the ease with which the reader can receive the story depicted. The eye naturally looks at the whole, before it focuses on the specific. In recent years comic book publishers have combined these two modalities of literacy, and popular comic series can be accessed instantaneously from any mobile device.

I have witnessed in classrooms the uncanny ability of youth as young as four to negotiate and 'read' these tech-based texts. Middle and high schools are removing chalk and white boards as a teaching tool and transitioning to the use of Promethium Boards or 'Smart Boards,' types of digital chalkboards that use computers and touch screens to operate. Students receive their academic instruction and information mediated through technological devices. This transition to the heavy use of media devices in almost every aspect of our lives is creating, by necessity, a more multi-literate society.

Multiliteracy emphasizes the making of meaning through the interaction of different communicative modes, or, as Cope and Kalantzis define it, "the multimodal relations between different meaning-making processes that are now

so critical in media texts and the texts of electronic multimedia" (24). This lens drastically increases the scope of what it means currently to be literate, and a renewed importance is placed on locations where meaning can be produced. Modes of meaning, and I argue sites of literacy other than pure linguistic modes, include: "Visual Meanings (images, page layouts, screen formats); Audio Meanings (music sound effects); Gestural Meanings (body language, sensuality); Spatial Meanings (the meanings of environmental spaces, architectural spaces); and Multimodal Meanings" (Cope and Kalantzis 28). This definition does not discount other important literacies (emotional literacy, cultural literacy, visual literacy, computer literacy, gaming literacy, and so forth) that we negotiate daily which influence our ability to search and interpret critically the information we are exposed to in the world. Helen Nicholson believes the embodied nature of drama can also apply as "meanings are created and read through the body, aurally, visually, and kinesthetically. As such, drama is a multi-modal form of literacy— you can think, feel and represent ideas and experiences with your body as well as with your mind" (*Applied Drama* 53).

As multi-literate citizens, our identities are closely tied to our use of language and the social practices of our communities. This enculturation is present when we interpret and make sense of the texts we encounter in the world. The accumulation of experiences (actual and mediated) and exposure to new 'texts' eventually become a part of who we are as individuals and in our formation of personal identity. Youth, who have been exposed to social media sites for most of their lives, use them as identity sites.

One of the prominent theorists who most informed my educational practice, James Paul Gee, situates literacy beyond one's individual ability to "write and read," and extends it to one's embedded relations as a member of society. Social institutions, as sites of apprenticeship, include churches, schools, government offices, families, and social groups, all of which share common interests and are sites for literacy development. In belonging to these social groups, ways of talking, interacting, thinking, valuing, and believing are interwoven into one's experience, making it almost impossible to separate who we are from how we engage in the overall social practice ("Reading as Situated Language" 715). Gee refers to this "social apprenticeship" as the formation of "identity kits" (719). These 'kits' are tied to the experience of situated action in the material and social world. As individuals face new experiences or texts, they apply old experiences to the new experience and they then become a part of the developing 'identity kit' of that person. Our 'kits' essentially represent the collection of multiple identities within each individual, called Discourse. A Discourse, according to Gee, is "a socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and 'artifacts,' of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network,' or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful 'role'" (*Social Linguistics* 131). These Discourses are complete with the costume and blueprint of how to "act, talk, and often write" in a role so as to be recognizable within each social situation. "Discourses are ways of being in the world, or forms of life that integrate words, acts, values, beliefs,

attitudes, and social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes" (Landry 114). It is as though our negotiation of Discourses informs our reading of our environment and ourselves, creating a new type of literacy, a 'personal literacy,' an internalized literacy that we all carry with us as 'kits' which inform how we read the wor(l)d.

What is important to note here, especially in relation to working with youth who are still in the process of negotiating and developing their 'kits,' is that there are two very distinct types of social Discourse identified by Gee: Primary Discourse and Secondary Discourse.[6] An individual's primary Discourse serves as a "framework or base for their acquisition and learning of other Discourses later in life. It also shapes, in part, the form this acquisition and learning will take and the final result" (*Social Linguistics* 141). The primary Discourses are those that we are apprenticed to early in life during primary socialization as members of families. These values, beliefs, attitudes, language, etc., comprise the first social identity formed and become the basis for all further Discourses. Secondary Discourses are those which people are apprenticed to "as part of their socialization within various local, state, and national groups and institutions outside early home and peer-group socialization—for example, churches, gangs, schools, offices" (137). These secondary Discourses are often 'formal' interactions with individuals we do not know on a personal level. Gee further distinguishes between the word Discourse by referencing socio-cultural Discourses (with an uppercase 'D') as beliefs, values, attitudes, and cultures as

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[6] While there are an endless number of Discourses in existence, they most often (but not always) fall within two classifications of Discourses.

well as the words, actions, and roles that contribute to our "ways of being in the world" (142), in contrast to discourse (written with a lowercase 'd'), which refers to any written or oral language that carries meaning.

Gee acknowledges that the line between primary and secondary Discourse is problematic. These porous borders can be negotiated based on numerous social contexts. However, between these two Discourses lies a gap where possibility waits. He suggests that it is possible to travel between multiple Discourses and collect items for one's 'identity kit.' This potential for social mobility through D/discourse[7] acquisition and rehearsal is particularly important for youth "at risk," who may lack the role models for apprenticeship into additional Discourses. Gee describes the use of literacy as being liberating or powerful if it can be used as a "meta-Discourse for critique of other literacies" in addition to the way in which literacy already situates individuals in society (144). He also notes, "In turn, how people act tells us something about how they construe the Discourse and setting they take themselves to be in" (168). The Literacy in ACTion project sought to play within these notions of Discourse through the use of Image Theatre. In using drama-based participatory methods, youth were given the opportunity to explore how their primary Discourse and secondary Discourse interacted with one another. Throughout the dramatic process illustrated in Chapter Two, there are examples of how and when the youth participants negotiated with and between these D/discourses in an attempt to situate themselves in society.

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[7] The use of D/d in discourses denotes both the meaning of Discourse (the social context) and discourse (the language).

The critical educator and drama practitioner I have become, and strive to be, is influenced by the work of Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and other practitioners. I came to the work of Freire through theatre practitioner Augusto Boal, who cites Freire as the inspiration for his work, *Theatre of the Oppressed*. While the work of Freire is vast, discussion of it in this study will correlate with aspects that directly influence my approach as an educator and/or the Literacy in ACTion project.

In the 1950s and early 1960s, Freire established literacy teams or "cultural circles" in Northeast Brazil as part of an adult literacy program with peasants and workers. The facilitators situated their instruction in the words and experiences of the students. These programs did not follow the standard top down educational model used by governments to dictate curriculum. The Freirean literacy model sought to use thematic material devised by the students, as opposed to teacher directed and delivered materials. The curricula for these projects emerged from students' culture, by researching the local issues and languages of the students' communities. One aspect of Freire's work that I find most interesting is the use of photography to capture images from the lives of members of each group (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 114; *Pedagogy of Hope* 44-45). From that research, educators gained insight into the lives of their students and selected key concerns to explore with them. As Shor explains, "Freire's program aimed to develop critical thought and action around themes identified in everyday life, so that by learning to read and write, the students would also be gaining the power to

critique and act on their conditions" (47).

Freire's use of photographs (like images), allows for multiple interpretations/meanings to be attributed to the same image. The rich varieties of meanings from participant photos were derived from, just as Gee explains, each individual's different lived experiences—their 'personal literacy.' Because an image represents nothing until value is placed upon it, the impressions of a group, when interpreting an image, are important, valuable, and indicative of their individual or shared experience. Groups, just as individuals, each carry with them an innate understanding of their place in the world. It is for this reason that the educators "need to use [and acknowledge] their students' cultural universe as a point of departure, enabling students to recognize themselves as possessing a specific and important cultural identity" (Freire and Macedo 127).

In Freire's view, one of the most important elements specific to critical pedagogy is the act of reflection on the part of students. Freire says, "A critical pedagogy would have to stimulate students to reflect. Since this reflection by its very nature should be critical, learners will begin to comprehend the relationship among many different discourses" (51). This reflexivity empowers students to become active questioners of the social context in which they find themselves. Freire states that the role of critical pedagogy "[is] not to extinguish tensions. The prime role of critical pedagogy is to lead students to recognize various tensions and enable them to deal effectively with them. Trying to deny these tensions ends up negating the very role of subjectivity" (49). The Literacy in ACTion project, through the use of Image Theatre and reflection, sought to explore and examine

such tensions with a problem-posing and evolving curriculum.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Freire identified the "banking model" of education as the process by which information is transferred from the teacher, and deposited to the students where they "receive, memorize, and repeat" on test day (58). While banking education has once again become common practice in the United States, as a result of the No Child Left Behind policies, this is not an effective method of teaching for most students. It is a hierarchical model where the teacher is placed, by society, in a position of power and authority over their students' learning so as to control the output as dictated by state standards and the accompanying standardized testing. However, according to Freire, with problem-posing education, "no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. Men teach each other, mediated by the world, by the cognizable objects which in banking education are 'owned' by the teacher" (67). When working with youth "at risk," and I would argue with *any* student population, the opportunity for deeper and more meaningful dialogue has more potential when a top-down approach to teaching is avoided. Critical pedagogue Ira Shor also argues for a problem-posing model of educational instruction:

> As a pedagogy and social philosophy, problem-posing
> focuses on power relations in the classroom, in the
> institution, in the formation of standard canons of
> knowledge, and in society at large. It considers the social
> and cultural context of education, asking how student
> subjectivity and economic conditions affect the learning

process. (31)

In this model, which I attempted to use in both the creation and implementation of the project, the lived experiences of the community as a whole and the insights of the individual were the foundation of the evolving curriculum. This type of empowering pedagogy enables a classroom discourse based on students' own primary Discourses (Gee, *Social Linguistics*), which can later be incorporated into a school-based (secondary) D/discourse.

Shor discusses three types of themes that can be incorporated into problem-posing curricula: Generative, Topical, and Academic. I chose to introduce a topical theme, which, according to Shor, can be "a social question of key importance locally, nationally, or globally that is not generated directly from the students' conversation. It is raised in class by the teacher [and] can exist as unexamined student experience, not yet reflected on in conversation or grasped critically in relation to the larger society" (55-56). While the teacher may introduce the topical theme, it still must be introduced as a problem for cooperative study in class and be "consistent with the student centered discourse and the democratic process" (55). As part of a democratic process, according to Shor, the students have the right to reject or amend any part of the syllabus as the project develops. While the Literacy in ACTion project theme may have been introduced as part of my research, how the students responded signaled what structure and material exploration was needed. Shor explains, "By using multiple formats—group work, whole-class dialogue, individual writing or exhibits, project presentation—teachers can avoid a one-dimensional structure to critical

learning" (185). This goal is important in not only the exploration of the topical theme but also in the success of encouraging a critical pedagogy with youth. As discussed in Chapter Two, rituals such as opening and closing circles were put in place to ensure a safe space for open dialogue and democratic processes to take place.

As a problem-posing educator, I had to acknowledge my own subject position and personal literacy, recognizing how it impacted the Literacy in ACTion project. Due to my previous two years at ALBA, I had some idea of the social issues consistent with the population and felt that I could initiate a theme for exploration based on that knowledge. I was acutely aware that each individual participant had their own innate knowledge and the capacity to explore their place in society within the classroom project. As was my aim in the Literacy in ACTion project, the creation of a classroom environment where 14-year olds can speak freely about their thoughts, feelings, and experiences in their own ways is an empowering achievement for teacher and student. With this freedom comes the potential for the youth to take on a certain amount of authority over their lives, which in itself is an empowering act. This approach is consistent with Freire and Macedo's suggestion, "In this sense, the students' language is the only means by which they can develop their own voice, a prerequisite to the development of a positive sense of self-worth" (151). Through the performance aspect of Image Theatre, and the non-authoritative persona of the problem-posing educator, students, in the case of the Literacy in ACTion project, were free to share their stories. When one's personal experience is validated through the active listening

of peers, performance opportunities and the constructive criticism of facilitators, one will be more inclined to share and consequently behave in a more self-assured way. It is by the validation of those experiences and one's existence that personal agency can be fostered. As Vine notes, "It was not coincidence that a crucial stage in the development of Boal's work occurred while he was working in Peru on a literacy project inspired by the methods of Paulo Freire. Freire believed education should be an active process in the service of social change" (111).

<u>Image Theatre</u>

The work and legacy of Augusto Boal is as deep as it is vast. Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1974) encompasses various methods of theatre, including Invisible Theatre, Forum Theatre, Image Theatre, and the later developed Rainbow of Desire (1995), and Legislative Theatre (1998). In the now famous story of the birth of Forum Theatre, a woman from the audience—frustrated with the actors—came onto the stage and demonstrated for herself the change she wished to see from the actors (Boal, *Oppressed* 134). In Forum Theatre, audience members interact by replacing characters in replayed scenes and improvising new solutions to the problems presented.

Boal discovered that audience members became empowered to not only imagine change but to actually test and practice possible strategies for change. This live experimentation gives the audience the opportunity to reflect collectively on the suggestions, and thereby become empowered to generate social change in their own lives where they see fit. As Boal describes this, "Theatre of the Oppressed creates spaces of liberty where people can free their

memories, emotions, imaginations, thinking of their past, in the present, and where they can invent their future instead of waiting for it" (Boal, *Games* 5). The malleable nature of Theatre of the Oppressed, which includes Image Theatre techniques, lends itself to working with youth because of the way it empowers participants to be active agents in the exploration of their world.

In Image Theatre, the emphasis is on the use of frozen images, or tableaux, rather than on spoken words. Boal describes this process as "making thought *visible*" (Boal, *Oppressed* 137). Workshop participants use their and other participants' bodies as though they were sculpting a living photograph, which creates the basis for thematic exploration. The objective is to develop an image that represents a common interest of the group, and, beginning with an *actual image,* create additional images that move the group toward an *ideal image*. In describing Image Theatre Boal says, "Image Theatre is based on the multiple mirror of the gaze of others—a number of people looking at the same image, and offering their feelings, what is evoked for them, [and] what their imaginations throw up around that image" (Boal, *Games* 175). Headlines Theatre's Artistic Director, David Diamond, suggests that these photos are of "a moment of struggle in the participant's life." (Diamond, *Dialogue* 93). I argue that these living photos need not be moments of struggle, but instead 'moments of life,' where participants can share any story or moment they choose to explore. Image Theatre is a language unto itself, and for students who may be unable or hesitant to find the words to express themselves, the images act as a surface on which to reflect the emotions, ideas, memories, imagination and desires of themselves and the

observers.

I chose to use Image Theatre as the method for theatre creation because of the ability of the image to contain multiple meanings and interpretations, recognizing that each participant would interpret these images based on their personal literacy and/or their individual D/discourses (Gee, *Social Linguistics*). In speaking of the interpretation of images, Diamond suggests, "They may see and feel the image differently, but what they experience will very often be linked by emotional content to the central experience of the original image creator" (*Dialogue* 98). One image can generate as many different responses as there are participants. This type of image/meaning multiplicity is reminiscent of the photography element in Freire's work in Brazil. The dialogue that the Image Theatre process elicits, promotes the type of participatory methodology that critical educators, according to Shor, should strive to achieve: "[T]o become grounded in student language, cognitive skills, and affective levels … the teacher needs a participatory approach with relatively short-term exercises, to get the students expressing themselves as soon as possible and as much as possible" (172). This way of reading the world through image illustrates some ways in which drama practices can initiate literacy exploration and later be a springboard for thematic scene development.

Students naturally attribute drama or more specifically, theatre, to the staging of plays and the memorization of lines. However, with a population that is both transient and sometimes challenging to engage, I chose to use the non-intimidating style of Image Theatre as a match for this population rather than the

traditional staging of script. Image Theatre not only uses frozen images, but is also democratic and incorporates improvised dramatic role-play known as "Dynamisation." This process is the activation of Images through physical and vocal means. Multiple ways in which to dynamise images can be found in Boal's *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. Further exploration of this project's dynamisation process occurs in Chapter Two and Three.

The dynamisation process activates still images and allows for the improvisation of roles, a type of characterization on your feet—laying the groundwork for the comic book creation. Students participating in role-play engage in an "apparent authenticity, flexibility and immediacy over the artificiality and staginess sometimes associated with acting and performance" (Nicholson, *Applied Drama* 80). For youth who often distance themselves from activities that look difficult, this physicalization of image creation engages each participant in active and embodied learning. This situated learning (Lave and Wenger) allows students to own their experiences through multiple literacies, specifically the language of the body.

Particularly influential on my development as a drama practitioner was *Blagg! A Drama Workshop for Anger Management and Offending Behaviour*, developed by James Thompson and the Theatre in Prisons and Probation Research and Development Centre (TiPP). *Blagg!* is a drama-based, offending-behavior workshop for groups that examines consequences, decision-making and the victim perspective. The program uses large oversized props, Theatre of the Oppressed techniques, and a collectively created character, "Joe Blagg," to

engage youth "at risk" and/or young offenders to explore the events leading up to a fictional offense that they devise. Subsequently, they explore how those actions affect not only the individual, but also the victims. The component of *Blagg!* that was most influential for me was the idea that the collective creates the character and the offending behavior to be explored. TiPP director Simon Ruding refers to this creative distance as the "one-step-removed approach" (qtd. in Jackson 156). In this approach the participants are connected to the circumstances of the improvised situation, but not so closely as to feel that their actions specifically are being examined. This reflective distance enables young people to "more freely and critically evaluate their responses and actions through the experience of an imagined other" (Hughes and Ruding 221). In the case of the Literacy in ACTion project, the intention was for students to attain a similar reflective distance while exploring a fictionalized situation devised within the process. Drama techniques such as "Viewfinder"[8] connect a series of images together to form a story. Later, through development of the final comic book pages, the images—photographs taken from our Image Theatre work—were transformed into a series of panels to serve as a type of two-dimensional performance space illustrating the story as devised and performed by the youth. The imperative to maintain an aesthetic distance or "one-step-removed approach" compensated individuals whose stories were not featured in the comic book. Story-tellers became the directors and/or sculptors of their story, and the others became the 'intelligent clay' from which to shape images for their peers. As actors/clay, participants had an opportunity to

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[8] See Appendix C for a comprehensive list of drama games and activities referenced.

play a variety of characters by participating in multiple image sequences, thereby allowing for the physicalization of multiple roles and experiences as the images that were to become comics were staged.

Image Theatre was a natural method for thematic exploration due to the ease with which transference of images into comic panels could occur. The comic provided the group with a tangible artifact that showcased in a two-dimensional way what they achieved through a three-dimensional dramatic process.

Comic Book Theory

In my efforts to secure a research site, it became necessary to justify components of the project to ALBA's principal. While the use of drama as method raised no questions, the use of comics and comic creation did. Initially the term graphic novel was used to describe what I intended for the group's final product; however, the word "graphic"[9] raised concerns with administration. To appease the administration, I changed the terminology to "comic book" or "comics" as they found these less threatening and more acceptable terms.

This choice of terminology is rather ironic, considering that the history of comics is fraught with conflict as comics were at one point thought to be a contributing factor to juvenile delinquency. In 1947, when juvenile delinquency seemed to be on the rise in the United States and the number of crime comic books on the market had multiplied, the Fraternal Order of Police criticized those

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[9] The term 'graphic novel' can be interchangeable with comic book, but in some circles indicates a full-length story told in pictures. The final product resembles a magazine or bound novel. Today the graphic novel can be almost anything ranging from a novel or memoir to an episode from a much larger work. "The plasticity of the medium complicates its evolution from what at first was deemed a distinct genre to an all purpose label for a new, hybrid form of literature" (Hatfield 151).

comics that "glorified criminals." They "urged citizens to fight for the abolition of this 'unrestrained, bold, vicious, salacious, and immoral' literature that was 'detrimental to the youth of this nation'" (Wright 89-90). While no statistics supported the claims, community groups, the press, and so-called 'experts' focused their attention on this correlation, urging the public to take action against this subversive medium.

With such a tumultuous history it should be considered a victory that comics and graphic novels can now be found in schools and libraries. This development suggests that the notion of multiple literacies is starting to gain ground in formal school curricula and materials. In classrooms around San Diego County, I notice books such as the *No Fear Shakespeare Graphic Novels* series, published by SparkNotes, on bookshelves and desks. They have proven to be an effective way to introduce teens to the plays of William Shakespeare and have been incorporated into some English classrooms. As Perret notes, these "comic book versions of Shakespeare's plays are not just illustrated digests of plots and sketches of character: inescapably, they interpret as well as inform" (73). The comic medium combines the visual and the verbal as do films, TV, the Internet and advertisements that must be 'read' using the same critical media literacy skills youth use each day. Educator Gretchen Schwarz promotes the use of graphic novels in classrooms as "an engaging medium for asking students to analyze information and persuasion in different ways" (62). The interpretation of comics involves, for students, more than just the usual literary elements of character, plot, and dialogue; they must take into consideration visual literacy elements such as

color, shading, panel layout, perspective, and even the choice of the text and style of speech balloons. Each of these choices by the author, illustrator and colorist affects the interpretation of a work. Comics offer to the reader "many different levels of meaning one can give to or take from any text, many different ways in which any text can be read" (Gee, *Social Linguistics* 40). As also seen in Image Theatre, the comic panels are singular images and can stand alone, or when linked tell a story. The comic audience shares the artist's task, even without dialogue or text, to interpret and give meaning to a story. Often consciously or unconsciously viewing such images through the lens of one's D/discourses (Gee, *Social Linguistics*), the reader engages with material that may present alternative views of culture, history and life in general. This is one way, for example, of giving voice to diverse viewpoints.

It is said that in comic book author Art Spiegelman's work "self-reflexivity becomes his means of achieving complicity with the audience, authenticating his vision of self and history, and speaking about an unspeakable reality" (Hatfield 151). The most notable instance of this connection can be found in Spiegelman's 1992 Pulitzer Prize winning comic, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, a biography of his father's life during the Holocaust. I highlight this comic because of the impact it has had worldwide as both a powerful work of nonfiction, using image to detail the unspeakable, and its influence, which has challenged mainstream society's acceptance of comics into the literary canon. This was just one of the comic examples I brought to the youth participating in the Literacy in ACTion project.

For educators, the use of graphic novels and comics in the classroom offers "the opportunity to implement critical media literacy in the classroom—literacy that affirms diversity, gives voice to all, and helps students examine ideas and practices that promulgate inequity" (Schwarz 62). The use of comic series such as *No Fear Shakespeare* and *Maus* within classrooms allow for multiliteracy exchanges that can touch on multiple subjects and curricula (Cope and Kalantzis). This vehicle for cross-curricular opportunities allows a variety of themes within comics to be explored critically. The medium offers more diverse voices than many traditional state issued textbooks, with graphic novels and comics being successful in opening dialogue about issues such as social justice; comics challenge stereotypes while still subversively meeting the state standards for literacy and it can be argued, the arts.

The Literacy in ACTion project used the comic book as the culminating product for the dramatic process, creating a type of performance space for youth. The theatre, like comics, offer according to Spiegelman, "encapsulated sets of abstractions that trigger a response" (*MetaMaus* 166). These abstractions illustrate moments as depicted on stage that seek to elicit for the audience a response to the action. In comics, each panel and each page are literally an encapsulated moment and part of a larger story. These mediums share the aim and desire to both tell and show stories. For this reason, the use of drama and comics as a hyper-medium in the Literacy in ACTion project encourages the comic page to become the dramatic stage.

<u>Conclusion</u>

The theoretical foundations of this project that are expressed here represent only a fraction of the larger canon of research belonging to each of the theories discussed in this chapter. This project sought to put into practice specific key theories in a multifaceted and effective way that would focus the work of this facilitator/researcher and assist both teachers and students to succeed more easily within the education machine, through the use of a cross-curricular drama based participatory project. Chapter Two illustrates for the reader how my project with marginalized youth incorporated both critical literacy and pedagogical practices through the use of personal narrative and applied theatre methodologies to develop a comic book that examines and challenges youth stereotypes.

CHAPTER TWO

Bringing Theory to Life

This chapter is developed from my facilitator journals and reflections of the process at the time of the drama workshops/field work. My goal is to give you the reader an inside look into the day-to-day processes and decision making. This is not the complete story, but edited to emphasize highlights from the project. Initial reflections from the journals are incorporated here, and identified as such. Further discussion of some of these key understandings and dilemmas sparked by this field research are found in Chapter Three.

Week 1: Group Building

Day 1: Project Introduction

My stomach is in knots as I make my way to ALBA for the first session of my research. The chain link fencing surrounding the school makes it feel like a compound, especially since it's relegated to the farthest corner of another high school's parking lot. The irony is palpable. ALBA school is made up of an office housed in a portable trailer, locked bathrooms, picnic tables and 7 portable classrooms. The site has recently been condemned, but deemed acceptable enough to last a few more months until the end of the school year, so this is ALBA's last year in this location. Despite this Ms. J, the art and life skills teacher, has been working on painting the sides of some of the portables to 'spruce things up a bit.' One of the concrete perimeter walls has an unfinished portrait of President Obama. To enter the compound, the custodian must unlock the chain that keeps the gate closed at all times. He locks it behind me, and I sign in at the office. This

will be our routine, the custodian and mine, twice a week for the next five weeks. For the kids I am serving, this routine will continue for several months beyond.

I select high-energy, focused, drama-based trust and group-building exercises to kick off the project and foster an honest and equal playing space. This is most important to set a foundation for trust and to generate respect amongst the participants, the staff and myself. Stories or characters developed through the use of Image Theatre exercises will be explored further through a story-building phase, and finally preparation for comic creation. In the end, the comic book should be a collectively created product evolving from the students' dramatic processes and their personal literacy.

My goals for the students are: to provide them with opportunities to explore social themes that may be symptomatic of larger social issues affecting the youth group, and as part of the current research, I hope to identify what components of the project are most useful when working with youth to help stimulate dialogue.

In the Life Skills/Art portable classroom I prepare for the first session, pushing away all the desks and tables to create an open space where we can move. There is a light blue rug in the center of what would become our playing space. I usually like to have participants take off their shoes and sit on the floor when I conduct drama workshops; I find that something about being on the floor interrupts a typical classroom routine and eases an unsure participant into engaging in the experience. After closer inspection, I realize that it's probably best we don't sit on *this* floor -- chairs will have to do. I set them up in a circle

away from both tables and desks to create our playing space. As I fill the room with my drama supplies, I await the students and grin in anticipation for the potential this empty space holds.

As the students begin to file in, I smile and instruct the group to leave their books on the side table. In response to their skeptical looks, I explain that for the next 5 weeks we won't need them. Still I receive raised eyebrows. Immediately trust building begins. It starts the instant each individual walks through the door and sees me in their class. It's my moment to set the tone for the project. Our drama sessions take place immediately following their lunch period and just before end of day dismissal. Understandably, these two factors deflate the students' energy level and as a result, their engagement. Ms. J assures me with a smile not to take it personally. I know enough not to.

On the first day my goal is to introduce the students to the project and attempt to get them excited or at least slightly interested in the work. For drama-based work to be meaningful and positive the students need to start to feel comfortable with one another in this new context and with me, the facilitator, as the outsider joining their class. I'm on their turf and acutely aware of that. I have both the advantage and disadvantage of arriving during the spring semester "initiation period," a period described by Ms. J as a "highly charged time where neighborhoods are identified and alliances/allegiances are quickly established" (personal correspondence 2009). With these youth, 'turf' is something they take very seriously.

I feel saddled with all of the paperwork that I know I must administer on

the first day of research. It feels almost wrong to ask students to become co-researchers in a project that they don't yet understand. So I decide to push the paperwork for later, and in true drama style, get things rolling with a name game![10] The group continues to look at me suspiciously…

We play our way through warm up games (**Name Game**, **Come my Neighbor**, **People to People**), and I hope to get to the main sculpting activities of the day. Overall the topics and level of participation that emerges remains superficial and 'safe.' This doesn't surprise me for a first day, especially considering that these students have never really participated in anything dramatic like this before. Being a teenager can be awkward enough without the drama lady coming in and asking them to loosen up! The lack of dramatic arts classes is apparent, as only two students had ever seen a play. But done drama before? None.

When I facilitate any group, I never enter class in the role of the drama academic who has all the answers. In fact, if I were to describe my style of facilitation in one word it would be: Dork. I purposefully take a low status and connect with "at risk" populations through my 'dorkiness.' Teens are often overly conscientious about how they appear to their peers; I try to take the pressure off by engaging them as they would one another. When energy lags, I keep things afloat by ribbing students whenever I can. I play on their words, I play on their body language, and I let them believe that I think Tetris is a violent video game because blocks explode. I do whatever I can to help them be less self-conscious in

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[10] All games are described and referenced in an alphabetical glossary in Appendix C.

the work. As I play the role, I provoke them to explain themselves further or let go of some of their hang-ups about looking 'cool.' If they see me goofing around, encouraging high levels of enthusiasm, it becomes okay to be silly together and it enables them to openly play without fear of peer ridicule. What matters most for me in these early sessions is cracking their wall and supporting their risk through play. If in the process they think I'm a total dork, and that's what it takes for me to engage them in this process, then I'm okay with that.

Each session begins with trust building games and moves into drama games that begin to develop the dramatic skills necessary to build our collective creation. After starting off slowly in the first series of games, the group quickly surprises me with their ability to join together. Outside in the courtyard we play **Blind Cars/Buses** (Boal, *Games* 121), and I can tell that they're becoming more focused as a group. Prior to the activity we discussed what trust meant and how our games can sometimes put these concepts into practice. As we play outside I notice out of the corner of my eye that the principal and the dean of students make up our audience. Of course the minute they're watching, Lili[11] guides Jimmy into a potted plant, causing an argument to erupt between the two. I freeze the activity and ask the group, what works best in this game? What doesn't work so well? In the group I hear some thoughtful answers that tell me that they 'get' the point of what we're doing. In the next round partners switch roles and I hear Jimmy, the victim of the crash, under his breath say "revenge." I quickly redirect the comment and encourage that the best revenge would be to show Lili just what a

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[11] Participants' names are pseudonyms that they chose to ensure confidentiality.

great driver he was. That's just what he did! At the next variation, Jimmy did an amazing job driving his bus of 4 and even parallel parking it between two sets of stairs. The other bus of students is a mess, but witness just how great they can be if they focus. I plan to return to this activity again later in the project to build on these skills further (Urban 3.3.09).

These initial activities act as a litmus test to discover where these students are in their dramatic abilities while we develop our common dramatic language. Image Theatre relies on sculpting and tableau creation, which in most elementary schools is the basic introduction to theatre. For these students, how well they master these new skills will influence the pace of the project. I must, as drama in education practitioner Brian Way famously said: "Begin from where you are" (28). I believe this applies to both myself as a facilitator, and to the groups I work with. I begin with youth where they are, just as I must acknowledge where I am at as an evolving facilitator. As I move the group into activities that require more application of skill, I try to keep in mind just where these youth have begun.

Scrambled Eggs (StageLeft, *Workshop* 2007) combines teamwork with the creativity and movement utilized in self-sculpting. As I give the instructions and objectives for the activity I watch blank expressions wash over the youth's faces. I ask the group to take the shape of the game's namesake: scrambled eggs. Again, more blank stares. It occurs to me that they truly have no idea what I am asking them to do. Scrambled eggs hardly have a shape so almost any movement would have been acceptable. As a drama facilitator with experience in both Ontario, Alberta and even at ALBA in the past, this is the first time that I've

worked with students with no concept of shape making.

The principal is observing again from the corner of the room as I proceed with the activity, side coaching more than I have ever coached before! I half-guide half-sculpt the group myself so as to model how to play the activity. Eggs they don't connect with, so I try bacon -- they are beginning to catch on. Victizzl and Samuel are the first to really begin to play, and we start to add to our image. I call out utensils and David, a new student to ALBA, copies the shape I model. I decide to move onto some more concrete objects in the hope that the entire group will join in. I ask them to sculpt themselves into the Empire State Building and slowly more students get off their chairs to join the activity. The shapes are simplistic and loose in their form, but to see them develop this far in only 15 minutes is huge. The shapes are there. When I ask for a washing machine nearly everyone rises to his or her feet. Lili refuses to participate, but is watching very closely. Ms. J stands near her and encourages her to join, as do I… but I will not push her to join. I make it clear that participation is voluntary and only to the degree that they feel comfortable (Urban 3.3.09).

The groups' progress as an ensemble is encouraging. The activity morphs into a version of **Build the Object** (Boal, *Workshop* 2006). While this group really isn't at a level where they can split into a competition, unification is still most important here. As an additional variation we attach sound and motion to each object the group builds. Victizzl and Samuel lead the group in the activity and keep it moving. Lili surprises me by side coaching the group along with me as they build each of the final objects. Together they create a backhoe, helicopter

and a grandfather clock, which they set to dismissal time (Urban 3.3.09). My intention will be for a theme to eventually emerge as different objects are sculpted. Based on where this group began, the very fact that they can collectively create any object and add sound and motion is an indicator of success to me. Further indicators of participant success are discussed in Chapter Three.

With only 15 minutes left till dismissal I introduce them to sculpting techniques through **Quick Sculpt**. I want the group to begin to develop skills instead of rushing through activities with no meaning or connection in the end. Right now, we practice shaping "intelligent clay." I notice the history teacher present in the room and a college intern. The two are sculpting one another along side the students in the project.

Mr. B joins us in our closing circle as I explain to the group that these games are a part of a research project I hope they will join me in. As Mr. B holds the "Speaking Squishy" (our version of *Lord of the Flies* "conch") he tells and advises the students to really embrace this opportunity and to have fun with it, to let down the walls they have, and to not worry about their image. That the staff are here to support them and that they should just try to participate and have fun! He reminds them that ALBA is a place to change their behaviors, and that's why they are here. This is a space where they could practice that. I hope the look of shock on my face isn't too great – because everything he is saying is true and it shows that he supports the project and me (Urban 3.3.09). I appreciate his initial encouragement and approval of the project.

<u>Day 2</u>: Building the Arsenal of Drama Skills

It is important to me that the group feels that they have a say in how the project develops and how it will be managed. I believe in facilitating a democratic classroom (Shor, 1992). Even though I developed the project, the students will be the ones to help shape and direct how it unfolds. In the first session I didn't address all of this specifically and so it's important for me to return to it as quickly as possible. I need genuine commitment from the group to this project before we develop our rules and expectations – the expectations for the project and of each other. The group comes up with rules that help everyone to succeed. When Lili offers a rule stating that they only work with the same person all the time; the rest of the group quickly votes against it. I'm happy they disagree.

We play a quick warm up game and move to our first trust activity: **Pushing/Pulling Against Each Other** (Diamond, *Handbook* 25). As I introduce and explain the goal of the activity it occurs to me in the moment that to me, and for this population, I shouldn't be calling it "Pushing/Pulling," I should be naming it "Balancing." This minute change of the name changes the reception and execution of this activity. Right here, right now, the activity isn't about the inherent conflict that makes theatre, as David Diamond discusses in his Theatre for Living workshops – for me it's about the support of one another while each step up in the role of supporter. It should be about that point of equilibrium, where it's met and both are balanced, not about the point of greatest tension. There is enough of that in the lives of these youth. Here is an opportunity for these kids to see and experience that they can indeed have the same goal, to balance and

support one another. At the end of the Pulling portion of the activity Victizzl reflected it best, "I had to let David support me."[12]

At the start of this activity I compete with some chatter from Lili. I choose to address this resistance directly and invite her to partner with me. I'm aware that this can go well or horribly and am even a little nervous about my quick decision. In the end, as hard as she pushes me, and as hard as I have to work, I absorb and return with balance. I support her. I can take the push and I don't push back like she seems to expect me too (3.5.09). Lili is unsure of how to react and returns to her far off part of the circle. I know I need to gain her trust or pique her interest if she's to reduce the distractions she causes. I'm unsure of just how.

Image creation is important to the comic development so we move to **Complete the Image** (Boal, *Games* 139). It fosters stream of consciousness thinking, where all answers are correct. The activity is about what *they* see. We begin with a neutral image that I create and I let them call out everything that they see. The group is slow to start and appears to have some difficultly with this type of abstract thinking. It's also difficult over the constant chatter of Lili and Pilar. Typically in this activity themes quickly emerge from the images and in my experience, people usually jump into the images, naturally finding their place and shape in the pictures. As we try to play, the images that emerge seem superficial and the group seems distracted. I call a timeout to refocus the group and address the distractions from Lili and Pilar. A group established 'motto' develops from this moment: "You get out of it what you put into it" (Urban 3.5.09). The activity

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[12] Direct quote recorded immediately following the session in facilitator journals.

goes smoother, but involves me having to side coach more than I typically do. In each image I try to encourage them to deepen their perceptions with questions about their placement in the image.

At the end of the activity I don't see a clear theme emerge from our work; which is unusual in my experience as a drama facilitator. Perhaps the culmination is a medley of snippets of their life experiences. I'm not entirely sure what it is. Typically this activity is reliable in growing dramatically and thematically through images. I'm not sure if it's that the group isn't ready for Complete the Image or if the distractions caused by Lili and Pilar are too much for the others to ignore at this stage in the process.

In our closing circle Cristina reflects on the fact that there is too much of a lag time between people entering the images and that it's frustrating. "There was no flow," she says.[13] It becomes clear that the behavior of the two girls is compromising the dramatic experience for the rest of the group, and I can't allow that to continue for the short period of time that we're together. I've never had to do it - I hate to do it, but I can see that I must establish consequences. Actually, I'm going to have the group establish the consequences; I am after all modeling a democratic classroom. The group will be held accountable and they will be the ones to decide how we'll manage disruptive behavior.

Week 2: Image Work – Theme Development

<u>Day 3:</u> Theme Exploration.

The goal and hope for this week is to uncover a theme that can become the

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[13] Direct quotes taken from closing circles were recorded with permission.

hook on which to hang our dramatic work. When one did not emerge in our last session I felt the pressure of our limited time together rise and a drive to unearth a theme so as to move the project forward. At this stage in the project everyone's still getting to know each another in this new type of classroom dynamic. I decide to use more peer sculpting because of the challenges they exhibit when I ask them to use their own bodies to physicalize objects, thoughts, and ideas (3.10.09). Perhaps they can see things more easily in shaping others' bodies, rather than to shaping their own.

In our opening circle we reflect on the previous session and discuss how we can ensure success for everyone in the future. Both classroom teachers suggest to me that students should be kicked out of the project if they aren't behaving. But with only 7 students enrolled, I don't feel I have the 'luxury' to be tossing out people for any little thing. I truly want this to be a place where they can all be successful, and where we can try to explore some of their issues through the dramatic process. It's fundamental to the project to do so. These are kids that have been kicked out of their previous schools once, maybe twice already. They frequent the office of the dean of students, and I don't want to be just one more adult that throws them out because they're difficult (3.10.09).

In our circle I emphasize the importance of peer responsibility. I ask them if they think they can be a pal, and give their peer a polite reminder when/if someone isn't 'stepping up' or is being distracting (3.10.09). These kids, as much as they may not always follow the rules – they are well aware of them, they know how to create them and they understand how consequences work. In fact, I found

it surprising that when I asked them to discuss and establish their own consequences, they too jumped right to dispensing "VT's" (Violation Tickets). Violation tickets are a one-way ticket to the office, something I try to avoid handing out at all costs. Together we settle on the following three steps: 1) Take a minute outside. 2) Go to the counseling office. 3) Get a VT. I hate that consequences have to be created primarily for two students; but I feel that everything has to be decided on as a group, especially when it can potentially affect the rest of the students' experience in a negative way.

We play three rounds of **Circle of Knots** (Boal, *Games* 62) as a warm up because I want them to get used to the idea of problem solving as a group and being in close proximity to one another. I ask the teachers to join us, but just to be extra bodies, not to solve the puzzle and on the second round I jump in too. The work of untangling the knot is left up to the group; and I offer side coaching and encouragement. In our second round we end in two separate circles and the group is starting to get the hang of the activity. To my surprise no one freaks out about holding each other's hands or their proximity to one another (Urban 3.10.09). The group is starting to make connections and as they solve each knot smiles emerge on their faces. I hear Victizzl say how cool he thinks it is. And in response to my standard questions, "What was in that for you?" "How does this connect to what we are working on together?" Cristina talks about understanding that they all have to work together. I use this activity early on because I think it's a good introduction to the very critical thinking that the group needs to start developing in order for the next series of activities to be effective (3.10.09).

As I explain the **Graffiti Wall** activity to the group I stumble a little on the focus question. It's here that I have what I call an 'Aha' moment. The springboard is based so much in *my* research questions that I feel a detachment from the group the moment I pose the question. Something about the wording isn't right. It seems too complicated for the actual process, so in the moment I rephrase the springboard question from How do you feel society stereotypes you? to 1) As who you are, in the many different roles you play – how do you think the outside world (society) relates to or understands you? Then on another large piece of paper lying next to the first they explore a rebuttal question 2) How do you respond (what do you say/do) back to the world (society) then?

This inquiry is much simpler than I had stated in my initial planning. I couldn't see this earlier because I needed to hear the question out loud with an audience present. In our discussion they describe their experiences in this exercise, and it seems that they come up against societal imposed stereotypes based on their race and youth. What they experience is a kind of social exclusion, which further isolates them and diminishes their drive to change the way they are viewed. Their behavior becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The opportunity to explore and challenge these stereotypes within the project is I hope as exciting for the kids as it is for me!

The trajectory of the graffiti wall shifts, as the original theme was a facilitator inspired imposed topical theme, to a more student centered thematic question. The first wall is inspired by the query: "What stereotypes does society have about you?"

Image 1: Graffiti Wall

The group collects these words *(spelling and punctuation are theirs)*: Eye Rolling, Heartless, smirks, looks, hopeless, Goodfor nuthin, They way you dress, People disrespect you they think they know everything sometimes, Liars, smart, lazy, K.O (Knock Out), Bike (they do a lot of trick riding), Sleep all day, gang relations, Mr. Blunt, Toker, creatures, trouble maker, skater slave, MISCRIANT (*their spelling and meaning; combination of 'Mis' - creature and Delinquent*), Weird but sometimes understandable, Short loner white boy, insane, juvenile, likes music, non-talkative, bored, video games, and there were images drawn of 2 houses, a hamburger, a 40oz, a blunt, cell doors, and a pipe and bowl (3.10.09).

The second question we address on the graffiti wall is "How do you relate/respond back to these stereotypes?" The words that emerge are: Pain (three times), Beat 'em up, hurt, you're full of 'bs', go to he**, Pissed, Mad, Rent-a-Cop, Pigs, bastards, skate where I should not, ignore them until they get mad cuz your not listening, Party, suck, no!, kick rocks, F-U! prick, rude p.o.s!!! cant see

or hear u!!, say wat u want, to much judging, say it to my face! Whatever! Think wat u want. Always pikin on the white boy! When I ask if anything is missing from the board Victizzl notices that the word "Freedom" was said a number of times, but no one wrote it down. When given the opportunity, he didn't write it down either (3.10.09). They can verbalize it, but don't choose to write the word. I wonder what is behind their choice to not make the text and sentiment behind it a real component of their wall?

I've never used two graffiti walls concurrently within the same session and the results are exciting. While reading and discussing the images/words on each wall we realize that these two walls are having more than just a conversation; these two paper walls represent Society and Youth. The words on the walls are shouting at one another, and neither is listening. These walls exemplify a tension felt by the group, a tension that until now, I didn't feel. Bianca points out in our post activity discussion that: "No Love, No Respect. To Get Respect you have to Give Respect." "*Consequently*," I add, "*there's no freedom. So how do you get Freedom?"*

"Show them up," they throw back, their volume increasing.

"*What does that mean*?"

"Prove them wrong," David says.

"*But How?"* I push them further still.

David responds again; "By doing community service. By not being what they think." Cristina jumps in again, "By showing them [society] that you're good, and not disrespectful" (3.10.09).

In an amazing 40 minute session we come around full circle and identify the variable of change that can combat the stereotypes this group feels society has about their population. The Graffiti Wall activity goes longer than intended for it to, but the results make it well worthwhile. It's important that we end each session with success. I don't want to rush the sculpting and dilute the great work we've already done. Moving Sculpture Wheel to the next day is the best choice to make for this group (3.10.09).

Final circle is an important place for us to discuss and process the session, much more important than doing another activity that may add more information without allowing for adequate reflection time. The group needs to wrap their minds around the present experience setting the stage for meaningful dialogue in future sessions.

Day 4: What Words Really Say

The compound looks like a ghost town as I enter. It's eerie and the quiet is unnerving. It's lunchtime and I'm unsure of where everyone is hiding or why. I find the entire school in a portable classroom eating lunch. Turns out that it rained this morning, and when it rains in San Diego it's common for kids not to attend school. I accounted for a lot of variables affecting my project, but the weather was never one of them! Thankfully, of the 5 students attending ALBA that day, 4 were in my class.

Small classes make group driven dramatic work challenging because the few remaining must contribute so much to help move the process along. In our opening circle we return to the themes that emerged through the Graffiti Wall.

What was it saying? What do you want to know? What do you have to say? What do you want to represent? What is this comic book going to be about? The answers and themes that emerge are the springboard to the image work. That work will then be physicalized in the comic book, the product of our process. I reiterate that while I'm here as a 'researcher,' so are they. I again define for them that this as a kind of research too. Drama will be our way of exploring our research questions. The comics will be our way of sharing these discoveries (3.12.09). Jimmy our quietest but most thoughtful student is overall the most engaged in the project. Throughout the evolving process he consistently brings the most to the thematic development, but is often overlooked by his peers. As we share, Ms. J offers a lot of great ideas. But they're ones I would have liked to hear come from the students. Her suggestions help to show the scope of possibilities – but it feels as though the group is waiting for someone else to step up and choose the direction for them. I am simultaneously engaging them in a completely new experience and teaching them about the process. Within the U.S. school system inquiry based learning is not the norm. Students are not used to questions that have more than one right answer and are based on personal opinion. These youth don't know what I expect from them because this is a new teacher/student dynamic. I could have fed them the answers and chosen the direction to go as the project facilitator, but that's not what this process was about. And so I leave it there for the time being.

Typically we move from opening circle to a warm up game, but I feel that a warm up game now might derail the groups' momentary focus. Warm up

activities are immensely important in the dramatic process, but since I

consistently receive grief from the group when we do play them (albeit they do

appear to be having fun), I decide to experiment and oblige their requests and skip

the game component, moving on directly to our first activity.

The activity **Role on the Wall** (Neelands, *Structuring Drama Work* 22),

where fictional characters are collectively created by writing characteristics on a

silhouette of a gingerbread shaped person, evolved in my work to an activity I

named "**That's How I Role…** " (Urban, 2009). The title acknowledges the

participants' use of the title phrase as an explanation or excuse for their behaviors

in the outside world. Each student draws a 'gingerbread person' on their paper

and identify their INSIDE ROLES (who they are), versus their OUTSIDE ROLES

(who they are to others or who they perceive themselves to be). This activity

indirectly identifies students' primary and secondary Discourses (Gee, 1996). The

youth are challenged to identify all the different roles they play in their lives. I

begin with this modified activity as a way to then launch the group into

identifying the nuances of the roles that they will play as others create roles for

them to play through images. This activity also challenges their often-limited

view of the Discourses they are apprenticed into. Looking at their roles assists in

their critical pedagogy and in exploring their personal literacy.

Cristina lists both leader and follower as roles and Jimmy debates what it

means to be a leader versus a follower and that you cannot be both roles. Just two

sessions ago the students practiced being both the leader and the follower during

Colombian Hypnosis (Boal, *Games* 51). This role reversal and rehearsal explores

the give and take that is often not exercised in many areas of their lives – at school, at home, in the community. But here, within the dramatic process – they can practice both. It is a rehearsal for life!

I had looked forward to using **Sculpture Wheel** (Campbell, 59) today to begin building towards the comic book topics and themes. With only four students in class today, I'm concerned that the effectiveness of this activity is diminished. Even though it's now more a 'Sculpture Square' of two pairs, I choose to continue with the activity.

"Pain" appears multiple times on the wall so we sculpt that word first. Jimmy self sculpts into a position where he is hunched over at the waist, hands clasped behind his back as though he's in police custody. David's hand is over is mouth – silenced. We sculpt the words/phrases: Miscriant, Weird but sometimes understandable, Hurt, and Skate Slave. I see huge growth in David as he sculpts Victizzl into the image for Miscriant. He sculpts Victizzls' right hand into the gang gesture for West Coast and his left hand is in the shape of a handgun, raised. When discussing the image the class says: "He's B.A" which stands for *Bad Ass*. They subvert the "no swearing in class" rule by using initials – everyone still knows what it means so the rule is in a way ineffective at extinguishing the undesired behavior. Its usage isn't gratuitous; it's a part of how they express themselves. It's almost no different than slang.

Out of the corner of my eye I notice that Ms. H[14], a therapist contracted from an outside agency, who typically removes students to work with them, sits in

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[14] Name has been changed.

on our session today. The last statement I choose to explore is "don't give a shit."

Jimmy attempts to sculpt Cristina into the image he envisions but is having some

difficulty communicating in a way she understands. She's not portraying the

image as he imagines, so he self sculpts the image for her to mirror – one of our

agreed upon sculpting techniques. His "don't give a shit" image embodies a very

strong *"Fuck You,"* closed fist gesture and the rest of his body is rigid. I ask

Jimmy if he is willing to let us play with this image, and I recognize that to do

this, he and I are operating from a place of trust. We explore this image as an

example to the group of how frozen images can be "exploded"[15] (Urban 3.12.09).

Jimmy is willing to play and dynamise the image. The emotion he brings to and

through the image using our "intelligent clay" method illustrates that he is

connected to the concept and can embody what it feels like to just 'not give a

shit.' The students show investment into this part of the drama work and now

refer to this dramatic method the "Smart Clay" (3.12.09). In only a few sessions

the group is transforming the language of applied theatre by using their own

personal language, phrases and understanding of the dramatic process to take

ownership of the work and subsequently the Literacy in ACTion project. As they

begin to create their own dramatic discourse I make sure to listen to what they

name each activity or component and then use their terminology from then on in

the process. I do this precisely because it shows that the project is becoming

theirs, and I am not the owner of it, they are.

As we continue to play with the image, Jimmy proceeds to makes the next

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[15] With this group I modify some of the dramatic terminology to make it more accessible to the group. "Exploding Images" replaces the term Dynamisation.

shape in this images story. Image two: he flips the middle finger and freezes; another way to say the same thing. I ask him to hold the image and when I clap take a step toward the thing the image wants most. I emphasize the word "image." I clap and he moves the shape toward the door (3.12.09). The fight or flight instinct is very apparent. I want to know where he's headed, but there is not enough time. The activity is short, but the energy is high. We all shake it out and I can see that Jimmy needs a minute to process. He has never played with images before. As a student who is often withdrawn, this was a huge accomplishment for him. I ask Jimmy if it was his *image* that wanted to beeline for the door, or *him*? He smirks, and with his head tilted downward, shakes his head: "Naw Ms., it was the clay" (3.12.09). It was already almost the end of class and overall we didn't move as quickly or progress as far as I had hoped. I must accept that they will go as far as they can, and that will have to be enough for me as a facilitator (3.12.09). In the end it's about them, not my expectations. As we set up for closing circle the group tells me that they want the warm up games back. I ask if they're sure, since they always seem to complain so much when we do play them. Their often-stoic demeanor really can throw a person off. They assure me that they want them back and I'm encouraged. They must care at least a little if they are requesting certain elements be returned to the process.

I allow the therapist into closing circle, as she's not a stranger to the group; she knows them, works with them each week. Her insight is valuable and it's encouraging for the group to hear her perception of their growth. As active observers, both the teachers and the therapist are part of the group and can speak

in circle. The therapist gets her turn with the Speaking Squishy and in what I know is meant to be encouraging, she tells the circle that "this process really seems like therapy… how great is it that you are talking about your feelings and acting them out" (3.12.09). I don't want the group to lose trust in me or think that I'm there to do therapy with them. With squishy in hand, I clarify for the group that while sometimes the work might be *therapeutic* its intention is in no way to be *therapy*. I share with them my experiences in drama based participatory workshops and promise them that I will never ask the group to do anything in the dramatic process that I haven't done myself as a participant. I know what it's like to be unsure of the process and its direction. Even more so the emotions or anxiety the process can trigger. I 'get' what it's like to be where they are in this type of research, and it's for that reason that I do it today. I share with them that it was an amazing experience for me in the end, and as I look around the circle I can see that they are attentively listening. My having 'been there, done that,' appears to have connected with them.

Day 5: Exploding Ideas into Scenes

The group selects the words hate and anger from the graffiti wall to explore in **Image of the Word** (Boal, *Games* 176). They self sculpt themselves into an image that they feel represents, hate and anger. I immediately see that some of my typical facilitation instructions for this activity need to be modified. Instead of having the group turn their backs to the circle, sculpt, and then turn around for all to view; they simply close their eyes and self sculpt. Even the smallest additional element is enough to tax the groups' focus today.

It takes some time for the group to settle into the process, but once they do I see the images begin to take shape. Their movements are subtle as they work out the shapes, unsure of how to move their bodies to represent their thoughts. This is a large step for this group and the images they settle on are their truth. **Magnetic Images** (Diamond *Handbook*, 42) proves to be a challenge for the group because their images aren't obvious to decipher and so there's difficulty in finding one like their own. With some side coaching we manage to separate into two groups.

We discuss the similarities of the images and the feelings within them, then begin the dynamisation process. While one group is in the playing space, the other is no longer passive and becomes what Boal describes as the "spect-actors" (*Oppressed* 122). I describe this role to the group as being an "active audience." The active audience is encouraged to assist the players and participate in the creative process. I give the audience sketchbooks thinking they might sketch some of the images as they develop for later use in the comic. This doesn't pan out as I predicted. The books remain on their laps untouched. The timing needs to be reconsidered for this specific element, but perhaps not for this particular group or this project. As we move through the first and second **dynamisation process** (Boal, *Games* 178) the group begins to generate meaningful images. The audience titles the images The Alley, Barrio Logan, The Funeral, and Pelea (fight). The group chooses to dynamize the image "Pelea" first. As we begin the dynamisation I struggle to quickly and effectively guide the group toward a true and honest exploration of the conflicts that underlie the stereotypes from the Graffiti Wall.

Image 2: Pelea

While Victizzl and Samuel are in the reality of the image I question Victizzl and Samuel about the shapes/characters they're playing. This is the first time we're doing character work and they quickly establish the characters, context and conflict. "Pelea" is about two students; one who's moved in on the other's girlfriend. As the image explodes further a handgun inevitably appears in the scene. I immediately freeze the process and poll the audience about the truth of this situation. I'm unsure at first, but as it turns out, this is an issue for these youth. Handguns are easier to come by in the United States than in Canada, and while they may not always make their way into the schools (ALBA does not have metal detectors) – parking lots are still close in proximity. This is a reality for the group.

Our deep involvement with these initial images shorts us on time to move onto creating an Ideal Image (Diamond, *Handbook* 51). As I leave the compound I'm energized with the anticipation of a solid collectively developed creation. This is not just my energy; it was the energy in the room before I left. If we can continue to move efficiently through the creative process, through images,

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through characterization we'll be able to develop a graphic novel that represents this group's honest experiences and relationship with stereotypes.

Week 3: Story Building -- Deepening Images

Day 6: Samuel's Story Images

Our foray beyond image theatre isn't as fluid as I had hoped it to be. These students find it challenging to create stories from single words or thoughts, and then to form them into images. It's sometimes too abstract for them. Today I'm going to attempt to lead the group to their stories through an alternate direction. I'm returning to what these students do very easily – story-telling! They will tell their stories to one another in small groups. My intention is to use today's stories as springboards for more work later. After a quick round of **Zip, Zap, Zop** we return to the circle; our space that promotes open sharing. I feel as though I'm the conductor in a Playback Theatre[16] performance. I ask if anyone has a story they'd like to share connected to any of the words on our wall. Samuel quickly offers: "I've got a story! I stole my Ma's truck" (Urban 3.17.2009). This made me wonder, just how often do these kids get an open and honest opportunity to talk about incidents from their lives without fear of additional retribution - a neutral space where they don't fear additional judgment.

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[16] Created in 1974 by Jonathan Fox and his wife Jo Salas, Playback Theatre is a form of theatrical improvisation in which people tell real events from their lives, then watch them enacted on the spot. The playback form provides a space in which the processes of representing experience can be made visible. The Conductor helps facilitate the telling of the story by the audience member (Teller), to ensure that the Actors receive the detailed information they need to "*play back*" the story to the teller and the audience.

<u>Borrowing Moms Truck</u>[17]

In Samuel's story, he describes an incident where he 'technically' (he emphasizes the scare quotes) stole his mother's truck while she was out at a party. He was caught after a joyride with a friend. Not only did he articulate his story in a concise way, he later broke it up into tableaux with a clear beginning, middle and end. I'm very happy with Samuel's story. It's not great that he stole his mothers' truck, but it's great that through the dramatic process Samuel is able to not only deconstruct the incident into moments of action, but also honestly identify and reflect on some of his thoughts and feelings at each stage of the tableaux (3.17.2009). Who are these kids and what did they do with my usual uninterested class? The preliminary exploration of stories and images shows that the group can come together and develop a solid scene when it is a story with which they can identify or connect. An alternative starting point is just what they needed to fully interact with the process. I had hopes of deeper dialogic exploration; but given that the Literacy in ACTion project was for most of the students their first experience with drama, their work today showed huge growth in these youth.

The themes and issues raised by the group hold very real and legitimate roots for them. They particularly exhibit feelings of being misunderstood. That "life is unfair," and "the world isn't a great place" (3.17.09). As we navigate our way through their stories using image theatre, we get closer to addressing one of

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[17] The final comic based from this story can be found in Appendix D and E. In comic form alone, the dialogue may seem minimal. Samuel exploded and worked with this story for the rest of the project. It went through a number of revisions that allowed him to explore how the choices he made landed him in ALBA.

my research questions: How effective is using image theatre to encourage and stimulate dialogue with youth at risk? With so much yet to uncover, and a limited number of sessions left in the project I question whether I have built too much into this project for these students.

<u>Day 7</u>: Storytelling and Sculpting

If there's one thing you can expect when working in an alternative high school… it's the unexpected. Two new students, Isaiah and Julio join the class today, almost half way through the drama project. At ALBA the numbers fluctuate and the class dynamics change from one day to the next. Spring is typically a busy time at ALBA. Kids have burned through all their chances at their regular school and finally find themselves here. I only have a moment to adjust my lesson plan and figure out how to both move forward with the project and back enough to allow the new students a chance to find their place and their story.

I use our warm up game as an opportunity to reestablish and redefine our group dynamic. I return to an earlier game **Blind Cars** (Boal, *Games* 121). Outside the portable Isaiah and Julio choose to work together. I encourage them to work with the other students, but if this is where they feel comfortable I'll allow it. Jimmy did really well at this activity in our previous session so I ask him to explain the game to the group. He does it perfectly! Jimmy even describes the objective and models the hand movements necessary to play the game. For someone usually so quiet Jimmy is very articulate. I just wish his peers would pay more attention to what he has to say. His instructions show that he understands

both the goal of the activity and the underlying connection to the social action work. They came together as a group and did much better today than in the initial round (Urban 3.19.2009). I think the new students will be fine. Julio in particular seems curious and interested in this 'non-traditional' class he's found himself in.

I throw out my original plan to dynamise the moment of crisis from the last session's images. With the addition of two new students it doesn't feel right to move ahead without them on board. It's necessary to bring them in quickly so that we can stay on track and get to the comic development. I consider explaining the project to the kids, but instead ask the group give the explanation. From their descriptions, I can hear the group's interpretation and understanding of the project; slightly different from mine, yet still very accurate. This informs the co-creation process and shows huge growth. Both Isaiah and Julio agree to the project.

We examine the themes that the group created over the last few sessions, and throw out the ones that the group no longer feels relevant. They vote on the direction in which they want to move. This requires some side coaching, and my guarantee that I will not be the one making the final decisions; it's up to them. In this space they'll make the decisions and we'll explore the results in a safe way. I encourage them to embrace this freedom! That very freedom they said they wanted just a few days ago.

The topics are narrowed to: Image, Change, Environmental effects on self, and Life is an experience. Life is about learning from your experiences & mistakes *(but sometimes not)* (3.19.2009). The group decides to explore the last

theme. I notice Ms. H; the school therapist is back in class observing. She's no longer removing students for her sessions. I am concerned that I'll be called out on the topics we're exploring and asked to suspend my research. I don't believe we're glorifying their offenses and I continue to encourage them to look critically at each situation. There lies the safe zone.

After spending time on individual stories I use storytelling and additional sculpting activities to allow more voices the opportunity to be heard. In pairs, the students tell a story based on our agreed theme and create 3 images that tell that story. The middle image is the climax, or as the kids call it, the "Oh crap!" moment. This method allows us to explore multiple stories and share in a more time efficient way (3.19.2009).

As each person shares their story, it becomes a part of the rest of the groups' story – so long as they truly identify with or understand what's at the heart of the story. This idea of removing the ownership of the story from one person and turning it over to the rest comes from my experiences devising Forum Theatre pieces. This has been at the heart of the Literacy in ACTion project as it developed. The intent is to distance the focus of one student's actions and find common events that everyone can relate to in some way, thereby making it part of a collective understanding.

I attempt again to incorporate sketchbooks into the project. I've made an assumption in my planning that kids would embrace the opportunity to draw/doodle during class. As the group work goes on it becomes increasingly difficult for me to side coach everyone and help each pair (3 pairs) at the same

time. Without asking, Ms. A steps in to help guide Samuel and Jimmy. The

substitute teacher goes to help David and Lili. I overhear them talking about

drinking and I see the substitute quickly come down on them. I cringe, but can't

get over there in time to redirect; Ms. A effortlessly steps in and I hear her tell the

substitute that it's "*that kind of class*" and the topic is allowed. While the

substitute appears uncomfortable with this, I'm glad to see Ms. A feels

comfortable enough to assist. It shows that she believes in the process and is truly

a part of it. Additional teacher help ensures the authenticity of the groups'

sharing. Without honest story exploration, the fictional situations student tend to

create prevent students from being critical of their experiences. They regurgitate

stories they think I'm looking to hear. I assure them that their stories should not

be 'after school specials' (3.19.2009).

It's time to return to our stories and images and I'm still not entirely sure

what's about to happen. My facilitation is now operating on instinct. The next

activity is based on theatre activities I experienced in my first year of my

undergraduate studies. It's as though those experiences as a participant and later

as a facilitator are now a part of my facilitator body memory and accessible when

it seems I need them most.

Julio reads as though he is a rough kid, and hard to connect with. To my

surprise he's genuinely likable and forthcoming when it comes to sharing his

story and transforming it into images. After just one team-building warm-up he

seems comfortable with the group and the process. I believe it's due to the

freshness of this nontraditional project for him. Julio chooses to look back at the

reasons for his incarceration in Las Vegas and reflect on his time in 'Juvi.' His story "Getting Caught: Hit A Lick," later known in the comic as <u>The Big Bust</u> is featured in Appendix D and E.

Julio's story is rich in his perception of how he believes police officers act, and through the dynamisation process, how he believes they think. His images illustrate where he understands his place to be within that dynamic. This is the first time I'm seeing one of the students connect so directly to the research question. And he just learned about it the previous day! Meanwhile, Isaiah self sculpts as the door to the home. I am amazed! No other student has sculpted him or herself as an inanimate object to create a complete image before. His instinct is great and it gives me hope for what is to come.

The activity runs like the old View Master toy – every time you 'click,' (close your eyes and reopen them) the next image from the story appears. While the pair sets up their first image our active audience sits with their eyes closed. The audience opens their eyes, and those in tableau freeze their image for a count of 8. This process repeats for images two and three.

Image 3: Viewfinder Activity

I ask the active audience a few questions. "What do you see? Who are these people? Where are they? What is their relationship? What are they doing? Do you see anything else you want to add? Is this the final image of the story? Or could there be another image that follows this? These questions help crack open the facts of the images for the group, and the ownership of the story is removed from the image creator to the group as an entirety. As a group they create titles for each story and for the rest of the project the stories are referred to as such.[18]

In closing circle the energy is up! We revisit the all-encompassing theme the group selected to explore: "Life is an experience. Life is about learning from your experiences & mistakes *(but sometimes not)*." The group added the qualifier "but sometimes not," because they themselves acknowledged that they have not learned from all of their mistakes. As I listen to each student's checkout it occurs to me that the stories we're uncovering and the images we're creating truly can be the link that brings the group much closer to the comic creation on the computers.

The speaking squishy ends with me and I pose a question to the group, "What do all these stories have in common?" Samuel sees where I'm going even before I'm even sure I do. "These stories are about how we got to ALBA," he says. Eureka! Even if the story isn't the ultimate reason why they landed at ALBA, the stories exemplify the varying behaviors that inevitably led them here to this room with me. I realize that my initial hope of a single collectively created graphic novel just isn't possible. But I believe it can be a collection of short stories connected through a shared theme. Each story can be one of the student's,

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[18] Further exploration of these examples is found in Chapter Three.

but devised in such away that perhaps there can be less of the personal exemplified, and more of the collective incorporated. It is my hope to generalize more of their stories as most of the youth can connect in some way to each one. There are shared experiences here.

I envision a comic with two parts. The first section is the story of how they got to ALBA, and the second, a look at what can happen after; a fictional exploration of how these students can make different choices given the same original variables. Or an image based exploration of what the youth expressed earlier during Graffiti Wall: How do we show society that we're not these stereotypes? This section of the comic will be loosely based on David Diamond's "Ideal Image" (Diamond, *Theatre for Living* 206), where we can examine through images what would have been ideal in those circumstances. The dramatic process and the comic book product will allow the students to explore alternative realities and alternative ways to react. While this may sound conformist and patriarchal, perhaps a part of still me hopes that as in Blagg!, these youth will be able to see that there are other available choices. That something positive can come from something considered negative. Currently it's not looking the way I imagined it to, but it's still exciting in the moment to be getting somewhere (Urban 3.19.2009).

Week 4: Story Boarding with Images

Day 8: Story Search

Of all our warm-up games, **Shark Attack!** (Thompson, *Blagg!* 51) is the most dynamic in the way the kids play. As I remove sections of the 'safe islands,'

the amount of available island surface space is reduced, therefore making it more difficult for participants and increasing the level of cooperation necessary for all to succeed at the game. I explain to the group that the objective of the game is to save themselves and a friend from getting eaten by the shark. As the game proceeds the group turns it into 'extreme' Shark Attack, and it's every man for them self. This game no longer is just about avoiding sharks; it's indicative of how these kids live their lives. I reflect that something/someone they rely on is there one minute, and then gone the next.[19] They scramble and adjust to cope with the changes and new realities (Urban 3.24.09).

<div align="center">Story Section</div>

Part 1: Find your story

Since we spent a large portion of our time already playing with images and stories through drama, I focus their attention to comic creation as a group. On day 5 we used **Magnetic Image** (Diamond, *Handbook* 42) so I choose to return to it as a way to move us forward into further thematic exploration. However when I introduce it, the group looks at me as though they've never met me. I'm confused. It's in this moment that I learn (out of necessity) to be comfortable in silence. In the silence when some are processing, and others are zoned out. My mind's racing, questioning how I could have confused them, meanwhile my body language 'acts' as though everything's going exactly as planned (Urban 3.24.09). Slowly we work through this and move on.

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[19] Further reflection of this game as played on Day 8 and 9 can be found in Chapter Three.

Part 2: 'Shape' your Story

The group creates individual images from an actual time in their life or from a feeling they've experienced that connects with the theme. I see slow and minuscule changes begin to emerge, this tells me that some are trying, while the others are dragging their feet and hesitate to participate. This heel dragging is a common frustration for some and discourages their participation. Stronger shapes finally develop and we merge the images into small groups, where they discuss what it was about each others' images that connect them.

Part 3: Story Sharing

As I walk around the room, I expect to hear discussion about their images and the story that prompted it. After all, that's what I asked them to do. Instead I hear awkward chatter. I remember the sketchbooks locked in the cabinet and stop the class to distribute them. I regroup and try another tactic; I suggest that the kids write out their stories first before they share them. I'm shocked and pleased with the results. Each group does better when they write, storyboard and sketch out their stories. I look around the room and see that everyone is quiet, focused and completing the task. Their writing isn't too bad either (03.24.09). This balance of drama work and seatwork turns out great, though I didn't plan for it. This tells me that the group needs a little solo work in addition to the group work to move their stories along. In doing some of the work this way, the kids aren't frustrated by those who aren't participating, as they were earlier, because now their progress isn't impacted.

I model storyboarding/comic design on the board and the students sketch

6-8 panels and plot out their story. I remind them of the future process where they'll be the directors of their own comic. They're encouraged to be honest, just as they were during the trust building games. Some interesting artwork emerges and I challenge them to explore characterization and setting. Cristina calls me over to share a new story the group entitles I'm Not Mental.[20] Cristina's story shows that the dramatic process gave her the opportunity to be open about her choices and experiences. She's often been in trouble for fighting prior to her arrival at ALBA. In this story a girl came to her house about a prior conflict and the two had a physical altercation. When the police arrived Cristina was arrested. Upon viewing her record they saw her history of violence and took her to, as she calls it, the "mental hospital" (03.24.09). They medicated and kept her for two days under observation because of an "anger problem." David unexpectedly opens up and says to the group, but mostly to himself, "I've been there too." I genuinely love this easy, open discussion!

Day 9: Bringing it Together

In an attempt to give the kids as much extra time as possible I come in during lunch for extra computer lessons on the *Comic Life* computer application. Three of the students take me up on this offer and I'm able to give them some extra tutoring. It's nice to see them engaged in this process and willing to give up some of their free time to work on the project.

Part 3: Story Sharing *(Continued)*

In circle I return to the theme, and one of its components, 'mistakes'.

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[20] The first pre-edited comic version of this story is found in Appendix D.

David speaks up and shares his story <u>Runnin</u> and his sketches from the day before. He says at first that his mistake was running from the police and hiding in the park instead of somewhere else. His story is choppy and I can tell there's more to it. I use skills from Playback to help flesh out the rest of the story and get to the heart of it. David thinks a moment and starts the story again from the beginning, this time providing the whole picture. Underage drinking is a struggle for David. In this story he and two friends were drinking at one of the boys' home. The neighbors call the police, and upon their arrival David and one other boy run for it. They thought they had gotten away with it, but the boy whose home it was ratted them out and the police tracked them down. After being in custody they were then released to their parents. David now lives in a group home and reports to a parole officer.

David believes that his actions affect only himself. He doesn't see a connection between his drinking and how it affects anyone else. I rely on my facilitation experience of the Blagg! program to start a discussion about how every action has a reaction; that contrary to their belief, there is a ripple effect that happens and that it's not all about them. Even the neighbors who called the police have been affected by his actions. I believe that opening up the conversation to a larger context helps, because as I saw earlier in Shark Attack, each member of this group is very focused on him or herself, and not able to see how he or she is a part of a larger community.

<u>Conned</u>

Victizzl shares his story but first prefaces that "it's lame." I doubt it, and encourage him to go ahead anyway. His comic is about the 'last straw' situation that got him expelled from school. During a basketball tournament another student asked Victizzl if he wanted to go under the bleachers to search the bags there. Victizzl doesn't want to, but when the other kid does – he goes under too. Why? "I dunno," he says. The other student steals an iPhone and when a student above spills her drink, she catches the two under the bleachers. Victizzl is asked to hold the iPhone since the other kid was spotted, but he says no. Technically Victizzl has done nothing wrong, other than being in the wrong place. Later that afternoon the vice principal comes to Victizzl's class. He (Victizzl) describes feeling "this dead feeling… like I know I'm about to get in trouble" (3.6.09). When the other boy met with the Vice Principal he pinned the whole incident on Victizzl, turning the story around so that is appeared that Victizzl had stolen the iPhone and the boy was just holding it for Victizzl. The police came and both Victizzl and the other student were taken into custody. While in the cop car the other kid tapped Victizzl on the shoulder and whispered, "I'm sorry." Victizzl is still very angry about this and as he shares his story, he talks about how embarrassed he was for having to walk through the school in handcuffs (3.26.09). The group begins a lighthearted chitchat, a kind that I've never heard from them before, so I decide to let it continue for a few minutes. At one point Victizzl turns to me with a smile and asks: "Do *you* have a story?" The sharing was great, both for comic development and as a form of team building for all of us. My

participation in the conversation, and my honest answers I believe connected us further.

Step 4: Capturing the Images

I take the positive energy from storytelling out into the courtyard with our cameras and begin the image sculpting for our comic. Their focus is scattered and I try to keep them on task. Since Victizzl's story is fresh in our minds we begin there. The responsibility is on Victizzl to sculpt his classmates into the images that'll tell his story and take the photographs that'll show it. The kids aren't making this easy for Victizzl and I can see the frustration on his face. "They're not listening," he says. I encourage him and the group to work together on this. They co-create the images as I hoped they would and with each suggestion, whether it is images, or staging the setting, the story becomes less Victizzl's and more a collaboration.

We move onto Samuel's story but run out of time. I realize one of the limitations is our lack of options for location variation. With so few sessions left, using *Photoshop* to change or alter settings is unlikely. We'll have to get creative here in the ALBA compound.

I feel energized by the session and excited about the image creation. I'm impressed with the work they did. When the group sits down for closing circle they are tired, hot and whiny. Around the circle I hear "today sucked" and I'm totally surprised. I have them explain why they believe it "sucked" and they agree it's because the process was harder when everyone is goofing off. I try not to smirk at this honest observation, and we discuss how to ensure that next session

will "not suck." The group comes up with ways to adjust their behavior and I appreciate their honesty and commitment.

Day 10: Tableau to Photo

Step 4: Capturing the Images *(Continued)*

After a quick opening circle we return to finish Samuel's story. The group is working much better and distracting one another less. Some days I feel as though I'm working with a different group altogether. They're moving quickly, efficiently and with minimal whining. As they move through their images and negotiate the participation of their classmates they're totally engaged. It's one of the few times that they're entirely focused and set on achieving the goal (3.27.09).

David surprises me when it's his turn to be the director and take photos of the images for his story. He's direct in his image sculpting, precise in his location choices and motivating in constructing the images he wants from his classmates. David's "not taking shit from anyone," he says when I compliment his technique. He's tired of everyone messing around and he's into the photography component of the project. I like that he has a vision for his comic. He asks if some of his sketches can be scanned and included too. Of course they can!

With the stories coming together I hold onto a small hope that we'll be able to dynamise each of these images into Ideal Image. But realistically, we just don't have the time to follow through with it. With only two working sessions remaining I'm aware of how much farther we have to go in examining our theme and infusing these images with their honest truth (3.27.09).

<u>Day 11</u>: Comic Creation on Computers

Prior to coming into class I prep for the computer work by saving all of the pictures on numerous external flash drives for each student to use in the comic creation. They each have their own file, but are encouraged to use any of the photos in their own comic because they are all up for appropriation. Thankfully the students each have a school laptop to use during this process.

With the whole group in attendance (which isn't often) I turn over the choice of warm up game to the group and they decide to play **Move Your Butt** (StageLeft, *Workshop* 2007). At one moment I observe the adult student ratio in the room to be 1:1. There are staff members hanging out in the entryway. This ratio hasn't affected the integrity of the game at all. In fact, there's a definite change in everyone. Almost every student is asking better questions and they are holding each other accountable if a lame question is asked. If a question's repeated from the last time we played, the group yells at the questioner for not trying harder and then makes them ask another one (Urban 3.31.09). They developed these additional 'rules' on their own. This is huge growth! Their questions are no longer superficial. They get to the guts and ask questions about smoking weed, personal hygiene, time at 'Juvi,' their enjoyment of the dramatic process, and college hopes. We manage to laugh and poke fun at each other a little bit too.

<u>Creating the Comics</u>

I don't have a solid notion of how the comics will turn out, so I wait to see where the group takes the development before I make any decisions. In my

planning I thought about doing a comprehensive computer lesson on the *Comic Life* program first, but I recognize that with this group, they won't pay that much attention anyway. Not with a computer in front of them. Consequently I'm going to have to teach as we go. The minute the group gets to the computers they lose their focus and start creating their Pandora queue or checking MySpace. I have to be on them to only have the *Comic Life* application open. As they begin, I hook up my computer to the projector so I can answer questions and give examples as they come up. We discuss the usage of Speech Bubbles, Captions, and the job of the Colorist. How coloration and filters can denote different emotions, help establish settings or an overall tone for the story. We address the different types of layouts and how panels can be manipulated to help tell the different components of their stories. Just like our viewfinder activity, the comic also establishes setting/characters, the build, the "oh crap" moment, and the dénouement.

A rubric develops in my head as I see their work on the computers. I write the objectives on the board for all to see. Their comic must show a progression of their story through images, contain meaningful dialogue, and aesthetic page composition (3.31.09). The students that were here for most of the project have more image resources to draw from in their comic development. So, those that either joined us later in the project, or just weren't participating have a more difficult time creating their comic. Cristina is doing a great job and Julio can't help but look over at her work. I hear him say, "Hey, yo, how'd you do that thing over there?" as he points to her screen (3.31.09). She helps him with his comic as the room falls quiet again. Everyone's seated around two tables and working

quietly on their comics. Mr. B stands in the doorway for a moment to observe the project. This is only the second time I've seen him check in and I'm surprised that he doesn't come in any further or ask any questions. Later another staff member comes in to take pictures of the class presumably hard at work. I interpret this as continued support of the project.

The comics are coming together and I see so much potential in them. I still struggle with my own expectations of this project and hope that in the last session we can deepen some of the comic dialogue through group discussion at least. The dialogue in the comic doesn't have to be what was really said; it can even be what should have been said, it can be what they were feeling but didn't show, it can be any number of things just so long as it's authentic. In the initial project planning I intended for the process to be open to the group, co-developed and their stories diffused among them till they no longer resembled one experience specifically, but all in its entirety. A comic based on reality and turned into fiction (3.31.09). As the group works, I ask myself: What really indicates success for this project? Will the final comic be interpreted as the only measurement of success for this group? I'm worried because I know that the comic is only a single depiction of the work that's been done. While the physical comic is the tangible final product, I see the process, their participation and personal development through dramatic play as the most important indicators of success.

Day 12: Last Scheduled Session

Today is the last scheduled session for working on the comic project, as well as the last class before spring break. I'm exhausted and the kids are amped

up. In our opening circle I give them the choice of whether they want to start with a warm up game or go straight to the computer work. They choose to get to their comics right away, so I pass out all of the external flash drives containing their images and comic files. Due to privacy issues nothing can be saved onto the computers' desktops because other classrooms use them. I realize that I made an assumption about this group based on their age, but I didn't take into account the population. I stereotypically assumed that the students had moderately high computer literacy. While most are versed in using social media websites, online gaming and playing video games; they have difficulty with simple computer user actions such as saving material to a specific drive and inserting a jump drive into the USB port. I doubt most have computer access at home, which explains why I spend extra time kicking them off the Internet to focus on their comic pages (4.2.09).

Each glance at the clock increases the pressure I feel. I need more time with them. The comic can be so much more. I assure myself that what is produced today is okay, because it's what we created. I side-coach the kids on their comic individually and work with them on expanding and exploring their story through dialogue, placement of panels, editing of images and coloration. Ms. A and Ms. J follow my lead and make the rounds helping. Just as in the dramatic process, the students check in about profanity within the comic. I tell them that the same rules apply on the page as they did in the class. If it's necessary, and not gratuitous, then it's allowed. Throughout the process I encourage them to 'keep it real,' and keep it authentic. The space we created and worked in for the last five weeks has

been dependent on that openness (4.2.09).

With only 30 minutes left in the class a new student joins! The classroom teachers feel that it's too late for her to become a part of the project, but I still want to be inclusive. I explain the comic component of the project to her and Shady Loka goes to work on her comic. In 30 minutes she puts together a one page, 4-panel complete story about how she came to ALBA (4.2.09). The clock is ticking down and the closer it gets to the end of session, the closer it gets to spring break, the less the group listens to any instructions I give. In closing circle I'm a little sad that it's our last one and pleasantly surprised by some of the responses I hear. Victizzl thanks me for coming in and says that he's glad he did the project. Cristina articulates what a good experience it's been and gives me a thank you letter and a chocolate bar. Both Ms. A and Ms. J take the opportunity to point out how much growth they see in everyone and how worthwhile they think the project has been (4.2.09). I thank the group for their hard work and remind them that I'll be back with the completed comics. They fill in their check out sheets and in a blink of an eye the room is empty. I collect my things and exit through the chain link gate. I feel drained, confused and unsure of the next steps. We're done, but not done yet. I still have to assemble and return the comics. I have that still to look forward to (4.2.09).

Day 13: Returning the Comics

Ms. J has ordered pizza and soda for the class to celebrate the end of the project and the distribution of the comics. Over the schools spring break the printers did a great job on the comics and I'm excited to see the reactions of the

students. For kids who usually don't express themselves or engage in group work well, this is something to be proud of (4.14.09). Prior to the class party I interview the school therapist about her impressions of the Literacy in ACTion project and the process as she saw it. During our discussion, I hear students yelling and general freaking out from out in the courtyard. Cristina storms into the trailer I assume because of the lunchtime chaos. It's an appropriate soundtrack for our discussion about how youth manage their ever-changing feelings and the necessity for safe outlets for exploration of these emotions. Something as minor as a "look" from another student can be the impetus for a throw-down. Cristina sees me and her body language immediately changes. As though she's been 'caught' and embarrassed that I witnessed her behavior. I call her out on it and tell her that she's not going to get to our party that way. I wonder how much they pout with the regular staff? How much of this is defiance/manipulation?

Julio is absent from class, Isaiah is missing, Lili was involved in the fight and David has run away from his group home and no one knows where he is. While half of our group is missing, the other half is enjoying pizza. When Mr. B arrives I thank the kids for their hard work and distribute the comics. There's a silence as everyone looks for his or her comic first and then through the rest of the book. I hear Mr. B say almost in a whisper "It's nicer than I thought it would be," followed by, (just loud enough for me and the teachers to hear) "I won't be able to show this to the district." He then becomes very quiet and thoughtful (4.14.09).

This is the first I've heard mention about the school district at all since I began the Literacy in ACTion project. I'm fine with the comic not being "district

appropriate." Do I wish it was? Sure! But it's not. And that's okay. It's what the students offered… it's what they could give. And more importantly, it was never meant to be for district eyes. However I should have known that it might have been (4.14.09). Mr. B addresses the class and quite frankly, initiates and takes over our final circle. He asks the class "What did you lean from the project?" Lili of all people says that she's learned "stuff about drama and computers." Samuel says thank you, and that he liked the games and the comic making. Victizzl says that the best part was that he got to share his story, and others could hear it and understand what it was like for him. Jimmy will not answer while Mr. B was in the room.

Mr. B directs his next comments to the group, but I feet they are intended more for me than them. He speaks about what's represented in the comic. Specifically to the profanity sprinkled throughout. The very issue he raised, I made the conscious decision to allow. Because it's what's real - their stories are real. Hiding from what's real or pretending it didn't happen that way doesn't make it stop or disappear (4.14.09). This project is designed to be process driven. It's the process that gets them to this point; fueled by great discussions and moments of introspection. His comments are about a project that he saw only twice for a few moments each time. Those of us who were in the room know how things evolved and emerged in the process (4.14.09). The comic book is a representation of their dramatic process. And as I said in the project, "there is no double jeopardy here." You can't get in trouble for the same behavior twice. It's already happened and now you're here. So let's talk about why? That was the

point. And there we were… all of us, feeling as though we're being scolded for analyzing the decisions that brought us here. (4.14.09).

As he continues I'm getting nervous and know that the kids must be feeling horrible. My facilitation choices did this. Mr. B finishes speaking and I take the opportunity to impress upon the students that they worked really hard on this comic and explored important moments of their lives; and it was good. While yes it is on paper, it's not the end of their story. It's only a part of their story. 10-15 years from now they can show this to someone and say, "This is how I was." Now they can be the change, they can be the 'action' and move beyond. I admit to the group that while I hoped we could get to a 'Part 2' of the comic, looking at alternate behavior choices, as far as we got is still really impressive. I want both the group and Mr. B to hear this. I feel that I must respectfully take back the project from Mr. B and remind the group that what we created here is valuable (4.14.09). Even if what we did isn't "district appropriate."

In an attempt to continue with our session I distribute the check out sheets for a 'final' closing circle. Victizzl says something I'm glad that Mr. B is present to hear for himself: "I'm actually glad that I did get something out of it. And I wish I could just use what you taught me in some ways to help other people" (4.14.09). Victizzl continues to make me smile and give me hope that these weeks together have made some sort of impact. Mr. B says that he has a meeting to attend and leaves the class with his copy of the comic in hand. There is a collective sigh of relief as he walks out the door, followed by an awkward silence. Everyone looks at me. "Is there anything you want to say now; that you didn't

feel you could when Mr. B was here?" I ask the kids point blank. Jimmy is finally

able to say what he wanted to when first asked. "It's Kick-Ass," he says (4.14.09).

Both the teachers and I feel deflated and they assure me that they don't think it's

that crude. I feel unsettled over the events of the last hour. Essentially, the

students are being asked to censor their stories, and conform to the

administrations and societal standards and expectations of how they should be.

Right before our eyes, in response to the honesty these kids' expressed, we

experience the very theme that we used as a springboard into our comic creation.

Discounting the very basis of the dramatic process, which began as a discussion

of issues in these youths' lives and evolved to an exploration of how they perceive

society relates to and/or [mis]understands them (4.14.09). And this time, I'm

pretty sure I feel the same way the group does: misunderstood. Due to my work

commitments I have to leave class early. When I leave the compound there are

only 25 minutes left of school before the end of the day. What could possibly

happen in 25 minutes?

CHAPTER THREE

Theory in ACTion

"A text, whether written on paper, or on the soul (Plato), or on the world (Freire), is a loaded weapon. The person, the educator, who hands over the gun, hands over the bullets (the perspective), and must own up to the consequences"

(Gee, *Linguistics*, 61).

Many interpretations and investigations of the impact of the Literacy in ACTion project with this population are possible. This chapter assesses the response to the comic by both the administration and the students who created it. These responses provide insight into some of my primary research questions: How did this project explore how these youth relate to the world and how do they perceive society relates to them? In addition: How do the images/stories the youth chose to represent reflect their relationship with society? This chapter also explores how the students engaged with key components of the dramatic process as a result of certain facilitation choices and facilitator characteristics.

Not Quite Over

The youth who participated in the project told their stories, and did so by expressing themselves through the exploration and negotiation of their primary D/discourses, that is, social context and language. The school was aware of the dramatic nature of the project and that we would be investigating issues/situations direct from student experience. Given that the project was about a group process of personal story telling, this response by the administration has to be viewed as censorship.

Each drama practitioner has an ethical responsibility to the community group and individuals with whom they are working, not only throughout the

dramatic process, but also later. The degree of this responsibility is contingent on both the resources of the community and the type of issues raised within the work. This ethics of care (Noddings) raises the question: What happens when I [the drama practitioner] leave? Drama practitioners should always consider the potential consequences of time spent with a community and its potential effects on that community. The story of the Literacy in ACTion project did not end where Chapter Two suggested, because with only 25 minutes left in the school day the project had continued without me. The following is an excerpt from an email I received from the classroom teacher the morning after the last session with the students:

On 4/15/09 Ms. J wrote:

> *thanks so much, alison. we're handling the fallout over the profanity...we need a retracted [sic] version for Mr. B to show to his boss…. The books have caused so much controversy that we took them back. Please help us create a "clean" version without the curse words and that god awful weed picture!!!*

When I received this email the next day I was made aware that I had not considered enough the potential fallout from the work as a project outcome. I felt an overwhelming sense of responsibility to this group, especially to the students who agreed to participate in this journey, and I was proud of their authenticity and the authenticity of all that they offered to share within their work, curse words and all. As the facilitator of the project I should suffer the fallout for the outcome of the project, not the students. Especially considering that in this case I gave them

permission to use profanity in their work.

On 4/16/09, Ms. J wrote:

> *no worries alison. reprinting the book should quell the
> controversy. the kids are kinda thrown for a loop. the dean called julio in
> and questioned him about the weed pic, since that's what he got kicked
> out for. jimmy and cristina fought like demons to keep me from taking
> their books. jimmy said his dad saw it and laughed his ass off. i got them
> all back except for three, victizzl and shady loka, who said they'd bring
> theirs tomorrow, and mr. s who came to me privately and said that he
> doesn't want to give his back. i texted a msg. to lili about the news that
> you're going to reprint the books and she told me she wants her old one
> back too…. Overall he [the principal] was extremely magnanimous about
> the situation. He was out sick today, but I spoke with him on the phone
> about the situation. At no time did he trash the merit of the project. see u
> tomorrow.*

Day 14: Second Final Session -- Censoring the Comic

I'm unsure of how I'll be received by the students and the staff when I
return to the compound. Will they be upset with me? Have I lost their trust in? No
longer am I concerned with the profanity solely, now I've begun to question most
of the directions our process took. The situations portrayed by the students are
real, and show lapses of judgment or an offending behavior. The title of the comic
is "The Road to ALBA: This is our story…" Throughout the dramatic process
students were offered a chance to explore and reflect on how their choices landed

them here. Through group discussions we explored each situation and how these might be avoided in the future, post ALBA (Urban 4.16.09).

Inside the compound gates both teachers thank me for coming back to help. They tell me about the grumbling from staff members about the comic book and that the principal isn't pleased about the profanity. It occurs to me that the progressive thinking of these classroom teachers is not consistent with that of the administration. My primary concern is for the students, and secondly that both teachers don't receive any negative professional repercussions from my time in their classrooms. We created a structure that valued and allowed different standards and expectations than the rest of ALBA in the name of personal validation and emancipatory education. They are very calm about the situation, but I fear they are doing that for me.

When the class starts a few students ask: "Why are you back?" I answer their question with a question, "Why do you think I'm back?" This opens up the classroom to a discussion about why this comic might not be acceptable to some audiences. Some students are upset for two reasons: 1) they don't want to do any more work and 2) they say this issue is Mr. B's problem and not theirs. I take responsibility and explain to the group that I never thought that he would show their comic to the district and so I never 'censored' their work. The administration's reaction was as much a surprise to them as it was to me. As a facilitator and educator committed to student empowerment and critical education, I was conflicted over the mixed reactions to the comic. Our objective was to tell stories that honored students' lives, enabling them to own their

histories and gain potential insight into future events from those experiences. I was sorry that my project created conflict between the students and the administration, and caused the teachers that had been so supportive of the project to have to do damage control over fallout not of their making. Because of my relationship with the teachers, the school and my role within the district my impulse was to 'make things right' where I could. I sought to maintain the strong relationship with the students as I looked for a way in which to turn this case of censorship into a 'teachable moment,' an opportunity that presents itself where unexpected learning can flourish.

I point out to the group that what we have here is a great opportunity to be even more precise in what it is each comic means to say. The students have a chance to tell their story to the very people whom they believe don't understand them. I challenge them to think about how they can tell their story to 'the suits,' those people behind desks whose decisions affect their education.

I ask the group how they feel about this, and they stand up for themselves and say, "This is how we talk." They recognize that they are depicting moments and situations in their lives and that the dialogue they use is truthful or in the spirit of the event. Before we go to the computers, I ask the students to think about these edits in a new way. Initially these books were a class project for us. Now, there is an opportunity to share these stories with a wider audience. We get to use these comic books to let the district know what the youth are really about. I further explain that some audiences can't understand what they are saying based on how it is said within the comic. Some people cannot hear the message if it has

swear words in it. It's as though it's in a different language. The challenge now is to look for what is really meant when the character says, "I'm so fucked." Those words illustrate a strong feeling, but what are those words really trying to convey?

Each student gets a computer and returns to their story to make the requisite changes.[21] ALBA boasts that it is about second chances, and so here we all are, exercising our second chance. Because some students were missing from the first final session, today gave them an opportunity to complete their work; and others, once they saw the effort their peers had put into their comic pages, had an opportunity to improve the aesthetics of their story and comic. The class works well with minimal distractions. As a team, the two classroom teachers and I mill around and encourage the students to work on dialogue and discuss the story further. They are encouraged to eliminate profanity, find the meaning underneath it, and reflect on what that story evokes for them, then find a way to express that through dialogue, images selection, coloration and image placement.

At the end of the session we have our final circle. Because our project already had its final closing, this one is considered informal. I structure it as a conversation and tell them that they've graduated to not using the 'speaking squishy.' They seem to like this change. I ask the group to discuss their thoughts/feelings about having to re-edit their work and about their work being both given to them and taken away on the same day.

Samuel: "I think it's bullshit" [about having to re-edit the work]

Shady Loka: "We had to work twice" [about having to re-edit the work]

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[21] The edited comic version can be found in Appendix E.

Cristina: "That's the first reaction we had," "At the moment you don't think about it, you just do it." [About the language as it was used]

Shady Loka: "We never meant for it to be for Mr. B" [this from the girl who only had 30 minutes in the project before the last session].

Jimmy: "You ain't takin' my shit" [about when Ms. J took back the book. Lili recalled and confirmed Jimmy' reaction].

Cristina: It was "Awesome, people got to see it, my mom got to see it." [About the comic book] (4.16.09).

The original comic book has become sought after contraband around the school. The district's health nurse says she's heard about it and comes in to see a copy of it, then requests a copy of both versions to take with her. She is very interested in the comics and makes a point of sitting down with me after class to see the new edits on my computer. Her reaction is surprising to me because I expected from her a similar reaction as the principal. Instead she is quite impressed with both the project and the product and sees no issue with the original content. The resource teacher, Mr. S, who was partly involved in the process requested to keep his copy but was unable to. A number of the students also wanted to keep the first version of the comic. Cristina admits to stealing a copy of it and showing her mother. She thought that her mother would be mad, but when she saw the "profane" version, she wasn't. Jimmy's father laughed when he saw it. These are not the reactions from parents that Mr. B anticipated.

Just before the final bell rings, I see Mr. B in the courtyard, take a deep breath, and walk over to say hello and update him on our progress. I feel the need

to gauge his feelings about the project and its outcome. The profanity is an issue for him, and his concern is primarily for the image of the school. He doesn't want people to think that the comic reflects what ALBA is like. I think that what he doesn't see is that the comic illustrates exactly what ALBA *is* like: a place where kids can explore their behavior choices and get another chance to do better. What's inside the comic isn't ALBA, the comic *is* ALBA. Unfortunately Mr. B doesn't see it that way. I politely thank him for allowing the Literacy in ACTion project and me into the school on such short notice. I assure him that the revised comics will be printed within the week, and they will be of the same aesthetic quality as the last. He informs me that he will be retiring from education at the end of the school year to focus on being a pastor. The bell rings and the kids race past us on their way out. I hear "Bye Ms. Alison!" as they rush the gate. I wish Mr. B well and return to the classroom to collect the completed computer files for the next printing.

RESPONSE TO THE COMIC

James Paul Gee writes: "Literacy education is not for the timid" (*Linguistics*, 61). Considering the initially negative reception the Literacy in ACTion comic received from administration, I now understood this on a visceral level. One cannot be timid when engaging in critical literacy and striving to be an empowering educator. It was my responsibility to be confident about the project and supportive of the students' process and progress. The principal's concern about ALBA being perceived as a school filled with students who use profanity and have made poor choices was in some ways laughable. Because ALBA is that

kind of school! The very premise of the alternative school is to engage students that have had moments of poor decision making and provide them with an opportunity to make things right. What the principal was missing was the opportunity to look beyond the page, beyond the vernacular and see what really took place in our dramatic space: play, reflection and analysis.

In fact, the critical literacy skills that were exercised through the practice of developing the first comic correlated with the same ideals Mr. B sought to achieve in his school. By his immediate criticism of the profanity within the comic and his reference to Jesus as the potential audience of the comic, Mr. B expressed his belief that when people speak and act according to mainstream social discourse, they will be viewed as belonging to that community. While this correlates with Gee's notion of 'identity kits' and social D/discourses (*Linguistics*), Macedo claims that the development of voice should also be taken into account: "Critical mastery of the standard dialect can never be achieved fully without the development of one's voice, which is contained within the social dialect that shapes one's reality" (Freire and Macedo 129). Voice in this instance refers to a means in which individuals make themselves 'heard,' a way for youth to define themselves as active, or authors of their own world. In taking into consideration the youths' primary Discourses, and honoring that voice within the drama project, we were able to develop the foundation for apprenticeship within the school-based secondary D/discourse, but perhaps not in a way the administration would have preferred.

The comic book itself acted as a space where students could exercise these

literacy skills, exploring through its creation, in addition to the dramatic process, the behaviors and choices that led them to ALBA. The school therapist in a post project interview supported this view, "In terms of what they were doing in the drama class, and how they are in [formal] classrooms, for the most part, the drama classroom was more their kind of learning. This population needs that experiential kind of way to learn" (Ms. H 4.14.09). Developing these critical literacy skills can be done through multiple methods; what is important for consideration is what will work best with this population.

Administration

Mr. B's comments and actions upon receiving the comic reinforced the types of societal oppression these students experience daily. The silencing of the first version of the comic by an attempt to confiscate all copies conveyed to the students that what they did, what they created, was inappropriate and unacceptable by the prevailing societal discourse. It said that their efforts do not fit within the schema of socially acceptable behaviors or schoolwork and must be hidden from view, not acknowledged or celebrated. This censorship discounted and undermined the empowering intentions of the project. Donaldo Macedo, in his conversation with Paulo Freire, discusses this common occurrence in schools and its subsequent impact on groups:

> When curriculum designers ignore important variables such as
> social-class differences, when they ignore the incorporation of the
> subordinate cultures' values in the curriculum, and when they
> refuse to accept and legitimize the students' language, their actions

point to the inflexibility, insensitivity, and rigidity of a curriculum

that was designed to benefit those who wrote it. (124)

In this instance, "those who wrote it" refers to ALBA's administration and school district who are content with the "hidden curriculum," a curriculum that instructs students how to conform to social and economic norms instead of being active and critical thinkers (Apple 42). The passivity generated by the formulaic curriculum of a mainstream social agenda further disenfranchises those youth that embrace opportunities to negotiate societal values and norms so as to understand and potentially challenge their socio-economic status. I believe that the issue with the comic arose from two conflicting perspectives: the Literacy in ACTion perspective, seeing school as about success for the individual; and the administration's perspective which in this instance focused on the image of the school, implying success on the part of the district and the school community. While ALBA could potentially reap the benefits from the Literacy in ACTion project from a public, district-level audience, that was never my primary intention, nor a communicated goal of the administration. Both the students and classroom teachers had embraced this risk and participated in a project that was not conventional by district standards. Had the administration taken the time to understand the underlying pedagogy of the Literacy in ACTion project and described the context of the work to the district administrators, the students' comic could easily have depicted the benefits of the project without necessitating a second version.

The school therapist, in her reflection, saw the project through a staff lens and raised ideas that I had not initially considered from within the dramatic process. She states, "I don't think they realize the impact of those stories on us" (Ms. H 4.14.09). Referencing stories, "Hit A Lick" and "Barrio Logan" specifically, she discussed her discomfort and fear for the students upon witnessing these honest creations of images and their dynamisation. Theatre practitioner James Thompson observed something similar in a Vavuniya refugee camp when a workshop with youth was opened to the community. Since applied theatre workshops are usually closed to an audience, the notion that the process would be observed was unusual for Thompson. He identified this as "watched play." In war torn areas where being outside can place a child in danger, a certain level of protectiveness "is heightened by violence, or the threat of it, to the point where children can be drawn into a tighter reliance on their family" (Thompson, *Stories* 136). Similarly, I believe this same sort of protectiveness occurred with those ALBA staff who observed our dramatic process. These moments of "watched play" "connects the adult and maintains the protective gaze" (136) over youth. The hope was that through the observation of safe risk-taking that some of the drama games and activities require, the staff would allow themselves "a gentle act of relief—a letting go" (136). I would like to believe that this initial kind of unease experienced by the refugee parents is what ALBA's staff may have experienced upon seeing the honest lives of these youth enacted. Perhaps a similar fear for student safety outside the compound created a protective sense of

"watched play" in the therapist. The opportunity for her to observe the youth she worked with play freely within a safe space provided a new level of understanding of each student. Through the dramatic play, the staff was able to see beyond the harshness and truth of the profanity, to what the comic truly stood for: a place for youth to process, explore and make sense of their wor(l)ds.

Students

The principal's reaction to the comic, his pensive expression and rigid body language spoke even louder than his many words, conveying to the students not to feel proud of what they had accomplished. I believe this further marginalized an already sensitive population of youth. Shor suggests "the difference between empowering and traditional pedagogy has to do with the positive or negative feelings students can develop for the learning process" (23). Through the dramatic process the students grew and began to show confidence in what they were creating. Resorting to stealing in an attempt to regain their intellectual, emotional and psychological property, the students showed their recognition of their work. I believe these acts of resistance were directly connected to their belief in the value and merits of their work.

GROWTH

Throughout the project the student body as well as the teachers experienced moments of growth. The youth benefited from this drama-based participatory process because there was no fear of persecution for what they said or shared. The level of trust that comes with lack of fear was an asset to both the students and to all the support staff that observed as an audience. A staff member

discussed this process:

> What you were seeing, and [it's] really important that you realize
> this, is that you were able to access a part of their personality that
> doesn't easily get accessed, in a structured positive way. We have
> access to that all day long [referring to the yelling in the
> background that came from Cristina, a student in my project]. But
> what you got was a contained version of that [the yelling]. You
> provided this safely, this structure, so that this personality that
> came out, that you saw, is full of what they're dealing with. But
> you made it in a sense that it was safe, contained. (Ms. H,
> 4.14.2009)

The design and ritual elements incorporated into the Literacy ACTion project were based on my experiences in Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal) and Theatre for Living (Diamond) workshops. While much of the dramatic process was improvised and unpredictable, it was important to build a structure that was predictable for youth that fostered dramatic spontaneity. Each session was consistent in its design of opening circle, warm up game, main activity, reflection time, final circle and check out sheets. The framework of the sessions remained unless as a group they chose to change it. This structure and predictability was especially beneficial for youth "at risk" who were engaging in a new experience.

The project structure and activities were particularly helpful with students like Jimmy, who chose to disengage from most activities. The drama project both helped him adjust to being a new student, and "gave him a sense that he belonged

to that group" (Ms. H, 4.14.2009). An outside observer discussed why Jimmy's participation in the drama project was such a huge accomplishment:

> He is just so wounded. It's an amazing situation that he was able to open up, to stay in the entire time. It also helped teachers to get to know him in that environment. Because he's so withdrawn, he doesn't put out much. It's hard for us to figure out how to work with him, but in that situation it helped him. You worked with him and were able to get him to be functional. He was amazing. He was really amazing. And it helped people to like him, where before he wasn't presenting himself as likable. (Ms. H, 4.14.2009)

The drama project provided teachers as well as additional support staff an opportunity to see the students in a context other than their typical classroom settings. Staff not directly involved with the project noted changes in the youth over the course of the project. These new insights provided staff with potential alternative ways in which to better connect with the youth through observing facilitator tools and tactics perhaps not previously considered. The open dramatic play allowed youth to participate with their guard down. From this new vantage point staff were provided a positive way in which to both get to know the students and find ways to help them succeed during their, hopefully brief, time at ALBA.

Overall, the staff presence in this "watched play" did not affect the project as one might have assumed. Youth, especially those who have a history of getting into trouble, have a tendency to get quiet the moment adults enter a room. However, in our space the students addressed topics ranging from gun violence,

theft, drug use, personal hygiene, 'tagging' or graffiti without the slightest hesitation. They could continue delving into these difficult themes because none of the adults intervened or tried to prevent them from sharing these kinds of events. As one staff member noted, "Sometimes when kids have adults in their presence, allowing them to be kids in a safe way, and the adults are accepting of that, it's a positive thing so they continue to be kids" (Ms. H, 4.14.2009).

THEATRE WITH[IN] THE BODY

The oral and experiential tradition that many practitioners call "the dramatic process" is, like all living subjects, constantly evolving and changing (Heathcote). Helen Nicholson in "Promises of History" discusses how a critical genealogy of current Applied Theatre and Theatre in Education practices engages practitioners with "the past[,] and when its values are renewed somatically, emotionally and intellectually through the kinesthetic imagination" (153), the rich tradition of these fields becomes "entrenched through a process of 'surrogation' ... within which new pathways are forged" (150). I argue that this "surrogation" was achieved through the embodiment of a facilitator body memory (of former drama participant and facilitator experiences) and further relied on the transmission of theatrical oral history and experience through dramatic practice.

Within the project's dramatic processes students engaged in a similar type of body-subject "surrogation." Youth grew in their image making and their working relationships with one another as the dramatic experience was explored. Image Theatre allowed students to inhabit both space and time as they took on the shapes/images they themselves sculpted, or were sculpted into by their peers. In

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using embodied story as a springboard for thematic exploration the youth had an opportunity to experience in a new way, grounding themselves in their bodies through image. Allowing those images to be filled with emotion and context, as is the objective of Intelligent Clay, youth further connected their bodies to the subject, and consequently to the dramatic world we played in.

In taking on varying roles for the comic creation, youth continued to draw upon their own experiences through the imitation of images. According to Lakoff and Johnson, "Imitating makes use of an ability to project, to conceptualize oneself as inhabiting the body of another. Empathy is the extension of this ability to the realm of emotions—not just to move as someone else moves, but to feel as someone else feels" (281). In taking on the shape of another's body within the dramatic process, there is an enhanced ability for participants to begin to feel what it was like for the other, to be within the moment represented. While this being 'in the moment' will never be an absolute mimetic experience of previous events or others' situations, the process of embodiment through image creates opportunities for youth to achieve a kinesthetic empathy toward their peers, and perhaps others in their lives.

As youth participated in Literacy in ACTion, for them a new subject of study (drama) and a more progressive educational model, students had an increased opportunity to belong in and to the present moment, their body-subject in constant formation as each dramatic experience belonged to the now, and would never exist within the same moment again. Each experience of the group/individual added to their total being. No matter how many times a game

was played or an image re-created, each time it was new again. This occurred because we, participants and facilitators, all are in constant development and growth. We are changed by each experience we encounter, and so each time we create an image or an activity, we, each of us, are changed in some way by those experiences. Therefore, when we replay a drama game or retake the positions of an image, we have gained experience through embodiment, and so we are changed. As the youth in this project engaged in each game, each drama activity and each dynamisation, they connected in a new way to a larger community and to another social language or the dramatic social Discourse. Their participation in a drama-based participatory project connected them with the legacy of students and community members who have also taken part in similar projects. Throughout this chapter multiple notions of embodiment will be discussed in conjunction with specific examples from Chapter Two.

Why Drama?

In Drama in Education philosophy (Bolton and Heathcote; Neelands; O'Neill; Way) the notion of using theatre and drama as a way in which to connect with curriculum standards and learning objectives is embedded. Drama educator Sharon Grady describes this pedagogy as a combination of "presentational theatre and participatory educational drama work: when the tools of theatre are focused on a significant curriculum topic, they can provide a profoundly effective way of engaging a classroom of students in active critical learning" (66). This kind of dramatic process seeks to empower students and stimulate them to explore and own their individual stories and voices as part of their negotiation of socio-

cultural D/discourses. This type of student centered learning emphasizes the validity of student voice and story through both the story topics youth choose to share, and the language with which they choose to share them. The school therapist, regarding the effectiveness of the Literacy in ACTion process, pointed out that we "were able to move past some of that resistance of sharing, which in therapy is very difficult to overcome" (4.14.2009).

In my encouraging of students to identify and explore their 'identity kits,' as sites of verbal and physical expression within the dramatic container, I exercised pedagogy that Freire and Macedo both highlight for working with youth: "In this sense, the students' language is the only means by which they can develop their own voice, a prerequisite to the development of a positive sense of self-worth" (151). This initial development was important to building both group trust and individual confidence prior to the main dramatic activity of image creation and story building. This is crucial, as "educators must develop radical pedagogical structures that provide students with the opportunity to use their own reality as a basis of literacy" (151). This pedagogy lies at the heart of critical literacy.

Why Image Theatre?

Given these accounts of the effectiveness of drama education methods and techniques, there are still the questions: Why Image Theatre? Why with this specific population? The common biodeterminist approach to the study of adolescence suggests that there is a structural difference between the "teenage brain" and the adult brain, specifically in the frontal lobe of the brain where

decision-making and judgment are located. This suggests to explanation why

young people fail to exercise self-constraint and thus tend to get themselves into a

lot of trouble (Steinberg 2008). Current literature on adolescence and risk taking

seeks to challenge and disrupt the biodeterministic binaries to promote the view of

youth in healthier more accurate ways. This approach suggests examining

adolescence alongside other cognitive and sociological research so as to consider

the context of risk exposure. Judith Bessant highlights experience as an important

factor of youth development by suggesting that "If we deny young people

responsibility and opportunities to build a repertoire of experience and to learn

how events connect to emotions, and if we deny them the chance to reflect on

what works and what does not, then we are denying them the chance to develop

their capacity for good judgment" (358). The youth taking part in this study

showed their struggles with anger, alcoholism, and the violence they have

committed and/or has been committed against them. In using Image Theatre as

part of the Literacy in ACTion project, the process of using the body to create

pictures of events, feelings or future actions provides a structured process of

reflection through tableau and dynamisation. Images in Image Theatre also act as

surfaces on which to place one's personal interpretations. For a population that in

general is used to 'being wrong' in one way or another, tableau provides a

wonderful opportunity, within a safe space, to act as a clean surface where there

are no 'wrong' interpretations. In addition, Image Theatre as a methodology uses

the scaffolding of multiple drama activities to create images to be activated into

dramatic scenes. This structure is efficient in that it maintains fluidity as the

project evolves in response to the students' dramatic process, and effective in the subversive way youth, especially those skeptical of anything that may make them look silly, naturally begin to engage without noticing that they are in fact doing drama.

Drama techniques engage youth externally through high energy and physical games, and with focused reflective drama activities that engage the individual and/or the group. Prendergast and Saxton suggest that "key to applied theatre facilitation is the recognition that the community participants—both actors and spectators—hold the knowledge of the subject under investigation, whereas the facilitator holds the aesthetic knowledge of the theatre form" (18). In Image Theatre the direct theme work is devised from the small group, with minimal external conditions being imposed on them, which is usually the case for mainstream school-based texts and curricula. Image Theatre achieves the same goals as most drama methods, which is to engage participants in a whole body experience. However, Image Theatre achieves this in a specific way that I believe is beneficial particularly to those that may not be able to express themselves easily. The use of images provides deeper analysis than cerebral discussion alone or a textual exploration of character. Image relies foremost on the body as a point of inspiration, creating a somatic experience for youth. This embodiment allows participants to simultaneously access their lived experiences and their sources of individuality ('identity kits') through the body. The use of personal experience as a point of departure in Image Theatre makes the use of a written, fictional text as inspiration for theatre work obsolete. For youth who have never participated in a

dramatic process, I believe this internal connection to be an important factor.

<u>What Can Games Offer?</u>

The choices and use of selected warm up activities generated the most experimentation on my part. Games are more than just fun activities that warm up the body and mind, or build camaraderie; they are strategic, building necessary skills for the rest of the drama project. Drama games are a place where we can truly let down our guard and play. In my experiences with youth, I have found that they appear to have forgotten how to let go and play. Another form of interpretation is that they have found a need to guard themselves from potentially exposed vulnerability (social, personal, physical, academic), and so do not engage into an 'unlearned' style of play. This hesitation suggests that youth need to be encouraged to participate in informal social interactions that do not involve a computer or gaming system that mediates and isolates play (this does not take into account newer gaming consoles such as Wii and Xbox 360 that encourage movement and group participation). Once reminded that they could let their guard down, the students in the Literacy in ACTion project put their anxiety to the side, and allowed themselves to experience something new, and most importantly to have fun! Because of the generally low risk and engaging nature of drama games, they are the first experience students have with the process. Games are a way in which to tap into embodied memories of childhood play. As silly as they can sometimes seem, these activities are a useful tool for the drama facilitator. Boal describes the use of games as "designed to relax and reduce inhibitions and to introduce ways in which imagery, created out of the participants' use of their own

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bodies, can capture the essence of social tensions and problems" (Boal 1979 qtd. in Jackson 155). As Boal observes, the facilitator can identify where tensions may reside within the group, if there is a hierarchy established, how they work together and most importantly at what ability level the group is working. As the group dynamic begins to evolve throughout the dramatic process, more can be learned about the group and how they engage with larger themes and issues. I highlight an example of this from the project.

While playing Shark Attack![22] (Thompson, *Blagg!* 51) on Day 8 and Day 9, some important information was revealed about the group. Augusto Boal asserted that in workshops and Forum performances, "Unless it's expressly forbidden, it's allowed" (personal communication, 2008) and this group was not hesitant to exercise that directive. In Shark Attack! the objective of the game is to save yourself and others from the 'sharks' by keeping your body on the newspaper 'islands' as they erode. This group chose to focus on saving themselves and would push their classmates to the sharks if they tried to share their newspaper islands. I believe that being put in this situation, however safe and contained, may still have activated certain instincts in these youth. They sought to bend, push, and manipulate the finer details of the rules so as to increase their chances of survival within the game, just as many of them must do in their daily lives. As facilitator, I watched this happen, and yet I had no reason to stop them from playing the game as they wished.

The next day, the students surprised me by requesting to play Shark Attack! again. This group had always groaned and shown resistance to our initial

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[22] All games are described and referenced in an alphabetical glossary in Appendix C.

warm up games, so I inquired as to what about this game was different from the others. The variation they included this day was to begin to erode their own islands in their own time. This was done so that they did not have the capacity to be responsible for rescuing another person. They could only take care of themselves. They would drag tiny pieces of newspaper underfoot waiting for me to call "Shark Attack!" Those that had not mastered this new variation were quickly out of the game. I believe that the repetition of activities within a drama program provides participants with multiple opportunities for success and mastery of certain skills. In this situation the skill the youth mastered was how to subvert the objective of the activity in a new way. It is as though they were becoming strategic in their play. This activity became less a game and more an active representation of how these kids interact with the world at large.

I chose Shark Attack! with the goal of further developing a sense of teamwork. This was in an effort to scaffold the level of teamwork necessary to create the themes and images for their stories. Whether the group followed the rules exactly or not was inconsequential at that point; what was important was that they did it together. At that time in the project the way in which the group played these games indicated to me that they were in fact critically thinking about the games as we engaged in them. If they did not care, or were not engaged in the process, they would not have tried to find as many ways to survive the game. Their manipulation of the process actually showed progress in their engagement with the Literacy in ACTion work, and revealed that while they were not yet a working unit. Their collaboration in subverting the process showed that they were

beginning to gel as a group.

<u>Embodiment</u>

As we experience different characters, ideas, feelings, and circumstances, it is as though a particle of those events is written on us and becomes a part of the corporeal self. I speak from personal experience with Theatre of the Oppressed techniques and performances. This embodiment (as experienced through the dramatic process) is a type of learning that I believe can touch us on an almost cellular level. This is supported by Howard Sercombe who states: "Experience (including thinking, feeling, remembering, watching, walking and reading) creates physical structures in the brain, … as a structure [the brain] is shaped not only by genetics, by biology, but also by environment, by experience" (34). This experiential learning in the world becomes part of our physicality. While it may not be accessed for long periods of time after it has been enacted; the learning is still present, dormant, waiting for a time or a situation that in some way, shape or form triggers our experience of the dramatic encounter. In her discussion of applied theatre methods, Helen Nicholson shows her support of this type of embodied learning. She says, these "pedagogies which are embodied, therefore, involve a more complex understanding of how the body is culturally and socially constructed and experienced by different members of each drama group" (*Applied Drama* 59).

This type of embodiment is as dynamic as it is flexible. Just as in the game Shark Attack! where students brought elements of their daily lives to the game, we can apply what we have experienced within many kinds of dramatic processes

to future situations. Within the scene development or image creation we retrieve experiences from our own lives to help give shape, feeling, and connectedness to the images we embody. In the same way that synapses fire within the brain, the devising of Image Theatre acts as a method to make connections and forge new pathways.

Applied theatre methods and drama in education techniques are fundamental to Literacy in ACTion as they necessitate a considerable degree of participation. This is a key element as so much of the project incorporated play, the sharing and developing of story, and the honoring of individuals' lived experiences as sources of information. Shor offers a summary of the conditions necessary for successful classroom participation which apply to the dramatic process: "A participatory pedagogy, designed from cooperative exercise, critical thought, student experience, and negotiated authority in class, can help students feel they are in sufficient command of the learning process to perform at their peak" (21). This feeling of ownership and locus of control (personality psychology theory) within the classroom is connected to students' participation in the dramatic process. As students begin to participate fully in the process, the once frightening drama activities become comfortable and easier to negotiate for youth. These new experiences encourage youth participation and engagement to the extent that they truly feel comfortable. In Literacy in ACTion, this developed for the participants a new understanding of how their participation in the act of learning could be constructed within formal schooling.

EMERGING THEMES & STORIES

Graffiti Wall

Graffiti Wall is an activity that most drama in education practitioners know and use, but cannot point to *exactly* where it originated. It belongs to the canon of activities and is passed down through the development of the practice. This activity has been used, adapted and appropriated because of its effectiveness in getting internalized thoughts and feelings externalized in an engaging and concrete manner. Graffiti Wall is used as a foundational activity and tactic to stimulate discourse about emergent themes for later image and dramatic development. In a project that had a limited amount of time and a lot of information to process, Graffiti Wall was selected early in the process as a tool to deconstruct what Shor refers to as a Topical Theme (55).

What stereotypes does society have about you? By opening up this question to the group, this ever-evolving research question became less mine and more theirs to interpret. The act of handing over the research question to the group through Graffiti Wall provided, as I expected, the group with a venue to be heard regarding this topic. And what they shared further shaped the research questions and themes explored.

Using large pieces of butcher paper and an assortment of lively colored markers, students surrounded the paper on the floor and were asked to respond to this question using words, phrases, or drawings. The group particularly enjoyed that I encouraged their 'tagging' skills in this activity, something discouraged by society. During this activity students made visible in a concrete way their

thoughts and feelings. As each person contributed to the wall, they were asked to say their word or phrase out loud for all to hear. In one instance, Victizzl asked the group "how do you spell bastard?" Not only did we explore what that image would look like and how it fit into our theme, but in that moment we also addressed the practical side of sounding out and spelling the word. Within this activity multiple literary and critical components of literacy were being met.

Graffiti Wall engages participants in multiple modalities of experience. Students were writing, drawing, saying their thoughts, and hearing the thoughts of others. They were sharing materials, working in close proximity and talking to one another as they processed the task. One idea triggered another idea, which inspired another idea and soon the paper was filled with a visual representation of how the youth felt they were stereotyped. So much so that it raised an additional question to address with the group.

For the first time in my practice it was necessary to use two Graffiti Walls to cover all that the topic had generated in terms of content. The second wall addressed the responses to the primary inquiry. From there the question that evolved was: How do you relate or respond back to these stereotypes? The group moved between these two walls on the floor and had a place to immediately challenge and confront all the feelings/thoughts generated by the first question.

By including a second wall immediately, I was able to channel the focus of the group and come around the theme full circle. It allowed for instant identification of how these stereotypes can be challenged by the youth in positive ways. Within a 40-minute session the group had moved from a single idea and

observation, to visual, aural and oral documentation of a range of complex feelings and impressions, to lastly identifying further actions that could challenge society's perceived opinions of these youth.

While much can be gained from the use of Graffiti Wall with youth, much more can be explored through the attachment of image work to these expressed feelings. Cramer, Ortleib, and Cheek believe that any "curriculum as a dramatic process that involves multiple ways of knowing is built upon both an aesthetic and cognitive framework of knowledge.… Without the 'drama' of literacy, students are limited to the reading text instead of reading the world through text" (1).

Sculpture Wheel

The Sculpture Wheel activity is a follow up link to this notion of "reading the world through text." However, in this situation the images created from words serve as our texts of study, and by including various interpretations of word through image, students are encouraged to read each 'text' anew. Typically, in my work, Sculpture Wheel is done immediately following the creation of a Graffiti Wall. The purpose for this is for participants to immediately engage in the physicalization of thoughts/feelings/ideas generated by the Wall. Through image creation, observation and reflection the group observes an array of images, usually illustrating the spectrum and range any one idea can generate when opened up to a collective. From this point, dialogue about their observations as audience to these images almost always naturally flows. In my experiences this activity hybridization has proven to be an effective way in which to bridge the gap

between the words on a page and images embodied on a stage.

"The Wheel," as it is called, is described by Alistair Campbell in *Playing Boal*, as created "out of sheer necessity" (60). This "wheel" word picture used by Campbell raises images of an old stagecoach wheel in motion. I prefer to use the imagery of a carousel, a Carousel of Images, because of the fluidity and motion of a carousel, almost like a dance, that allows for a "me first, now you" give and take (60). In this Carousel, half of the group forms a small circle facing outward. A second larger circle is formed surrounding the inner circle and faces inward, automatically pairing individuals with someone from the smaller circle. Those in the outer circle are the sculptors, and those students in the inside circle are the 'intelligent clay,' ready to be shaped and imbued with emotions, thoughts and story.

After each round of sculpting, the outside circle quietly walks around the inner circle to observe the multiplicity of visual meanings that a single word can inspire. This activity honors and encourages individual interpretation and embodiment; it acknowledges that we each bring something different to the sculpting/sculptor process based on our primary Discourses (Gee, *Linguistics*). The facilitator encourages the participants to notice what is similar about these images, what is different and how the shapes capture all aspects of the word or phrase. This is repeated with various words, each time the sculptor works with a new partner, and eventually the inner and outer circles switch positions so everyone has an opportunity to sculpt and be sculpted. This type of direct and timely connection to both image and text moves the dramatic process along in an

engaging way that generates opportunities for group discussion regarding what emerges from the process.

In the Literacy in ACTion project, words and phrases from the Graffiti Wall were selected to inspire our Carousel of Images. If there had been enough time to proceed to this activity on the same day as the Graffiti Wall, I expect the results would have been different. The Sculpture Wheel session had only four students in class. With the previous day's enrollment, we would have likely had better results. I was challenged with trying to achieve the same dramatic goals, but with no way to truly create a wheel. So, out of sheer necessity I developed the 'Sculpture Square.' Not nearly as effective or as appealing a model, but it worked for that session. The shape of a square allowed for, with the slightest of cheating, the entire group to witness and observe the images created by the sculptor and infused with life by the clay. I was also lucky that the four students present were active participants, showing trust in me and having taken an interest in the project. Trust became especially important when we began to look at more challenging phrases from the Graffiti Wall and to focus on embodiment through dynamisation.

When the project began the students showed great hesitation or perhaps lack of trust in self-sculpting their bodies to create shapes of familiar household objects. The addition of sound and/or motion was not an option for them; it appeared beyond their abilities. However, the ease with which the group seemed to have attained the skills necessary to not only create shapes with their bodies, but personify those images with characterization and emotion in the Sculpture Wheel, leads me to question whether skill level was ever a factor, or if, instead,

their initial hesitation was a result of their lack of trust in me—an outsider to their group. I raise this as a potential variable only because of the relative ease that some students exhibited, in later engagement, with the dramatic process.

When Jimmy took on the image of *'don't give a shit,'* from the Sculpture Square he did so because he didn't believe that Cristina was filling it with the degree of emotion necessary to show just how intense he meant it to be. An outside observer had said, "Jimmy is totally adverse to work, doesn't want anything to do with it. He cannot take any feedback at all" (Ms. H 4.14.2009). This does not fit the description of the same boy who trusted me enough to engage in a new series of activities in front of his peers.

Following some side coaching for deeper physicalization of the image, the activation process drew from drama in education techniques and Theatre of the Oppressed methodologies towards a goal of exploring with this group the vast potential contained within each individual image. As described in Chapter Two, the image Jimmy chose to take on was not passive as one might guess from the springboard phrase. Instead, the image as he embodied it gave way to a palpable level of tension, not quite anger. With each progression in the activation series, Jimmy was thoughtful before he acted.

This was a noticeable change from the same student earlier, who would hide under the hood of his sweatshirt during classes. An exhibition of a common youth underperformance that Shor suggests is linked to a lack of classroom engagement, where students who do not "experience lively participation, mutual authority, and meaningful work, will display depressed skills and knowledge, as

well as negative emotions," (21) within an educational setting. Here we have seen

that through a participatory process such as drama, "teachers can learn better the

actual cognitive level of students from which to design forward development"

(21). Jimmy's commitment to the process showed in his level of faith and

commitment to the dynamisation activity, an activity that for a group of this skill

level is complex. Regarding the use of Image Theatre as a primary component of

the project, the school therapist commented on the benefits to students: "So what

they had in your situation was a very structured thing that kept their interests, and

kept that [interest] moving—I think part of that's your personality and part of it

the way you structured it which was really well done" (Ms. H 4.14.2009).

Story Sharing

In using images as our way to showcase and embody stories, there is great

value placed on the individual stories themselves. In setting out to establish as

much of a democratic classroom space as possible, I made it known to the group

that their stories, their perspectives, and their ideas were all valuable to our

collective process. From the start I reinforced the importance of sharing. No

matter what topic was shared, it was valued; the group never took advantage of

that.

As story sharing is such a fundamental component to drama-based

participatory workshops, I never considered, as the school therapist indicated

from her experience, that there might ever have been difficulty in gaining access

to the stories of these youth. The ease with which the students participated in the

sharing components did not surprise me. Applied Theatre practitioners

Prendergast and Saxton factor this openness in part to the strategies used in facilitation. They "see applied theatre facilitation as essentially grounded in drama and theatre and in education strategies and techniques, having close kinship with good pedagogical praxis" (18). They also stress that it is imperative that "a facilitator knows how to do something, knows why it is appropriate, when it needs to be done and how to do it in the most effective way" (18). Through warm up games such as Move Your Butt, which encouraged the group to "Move your butt if…," likes and dislikes were shared, interests were shared, and through each of the details shared the group glimpsed, in a small way, the stories that made each person an individual. These types of small offerings allow for, I believe, more openness and willingness to share in larger ways later. The groundwork had been laid for the group to respect each other when they took the risk to participate fully in the sharing process. Never once throughout the project was there any disrespect or ill will among the group. However, outside of the drama room, this was not always the case, as referenced earlier by the lunchtime fighting. In referring to the altercations that occurred among students, an observer noted that I "manage[d] to be able to have them have this kind of thing go on [the yelling], but they come in [to the drama class] and stay contained. You didn't see people getting into a thing [arguments/name calling, etc.,] with each other" (Ms. H 4.14.2009). Because of this mutual level of respect within the drama process, we were able to effectively and honestly share our stories.[23]

In exploring how certain stereotypes have informed the thoughts and

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[23] I use the pronoun 'we' because I too shared with the group when appropriate. As a facilitator I also must establish certain levels of trust with the youth, so that 'we' can collaborate and create together.

behaviors of this specific population, the group offered a multitude of examples of occasions when they had felt stereotyped. These stories, generated from the Graffiti Wall and Sculpture Wheel activity were rich in narration as the youth were recounting emotionally charged moments from their lives. This was true for Cristina as she shared her story, later titled I'm Not Mental. She showed transparency as she told the group her story of fighting and being placed under observation for two days and gave detail as she discussed the fight and the reasoning for it. She described how she felt about the intake process, the woman staff member, and the room. Cristina shared how she prayed the first night and bartered with God to change her situation. Susan E. Chase has defined narrative as "meaning making through the shaping or ordering of experience" (430). This takes into account current research, which suggests that a focus on 'small stories' in everyday situated interactions can lead to an understanding of how the stories one might perceive as insignificant are actually produced as an organized social interaction and embodied in the everyday practice of storytelling. This acknowledgment of 'small stories' coincides with Playback Theatre which is centered in the honoring of individual story. As Cristina shared, we were witness to not only this autobiographical narrative, but also to her physicalization of obvious feelings about each of the events as she told her story. Cristina was candid and genuine; something her peers needed to see was possible. The inflection of her voice, her edge of the seat posture, and her frequent use of hand motions assisted her storytelling. Her performativity shaped the story as well as what she chose to share. This additional physicalization by Cristina added to the

already powerfully honest and gutsy story she shared with her peers. She took a risk, but in a way that many of these youth never do; she took a risk to address and acknowledge, in front of her peers, her anger issues and critically explore how they did not serve her well in her dealings with others. In this story the reason for Cristina's fighting is unimportant—what *is* important is the maturity with which she faced the mistakes she made. These are the moments of growth that cannot be captured within the panels of a comic, but are nonetheless very present and important to these youth.

I introduced the opportunity for the rest of the group to ask Cristina questions about her story. Through the use of questioning, the remainder of the group participated indirectly in the storytelling process. Their questions enabled excavation of missing information and achieving clarification of some parts. This additional context was important for the group because their future roles in acting through images were important components of the story.

The stories of these youth were often complex in that events often happened so fast, emotions flared quickly, and reactions were not always thought out in the moment. "Life," writes Jo Salas, co-founder of Playback Theatre, "while it is happening to us can seem random and undirected. It's often only when we tell the story of what happened that some order can emerge from the abundant jumble of details and impressions" (18). In the retelling of an event the teller slows down, and this allows them to examine what really happened. There is importance and value in sharing stories, and also in having one's story heard. When Cristina discussed her time spent under observation, David, of his own

volition, opened up that he too had shared that experience. In hearing her story, he was able to make a connection to his own life. In listening to the stories of others, there is an opportunity created for self-reflection.

SEARCHING FOR PRAXIS

These shared and embodied experiences were important as they connected the group and generated opportunity for further critical discourse and exploration of stigma and youth stereotyping through the dramatic process. While the stories for some had no personal connection, the element of role-play that occurred within the creation of images for the comic, allowed participants to gain insight (in a visceral way) into each others' experiences and facilitated the juxtaposition of ideas and experiences. These drama exercises provided opportunities for students in both the role of the sculptor and of the intelligent clay to reflect on behaviors and/or choices they had made by taking part in the construction and enactment of an image series. Image Theatre is a process, and as such the youth could slow down and consider their past behaviors as they sculpted their peers into representations of those events. This process of shaping and activating images creates a strong link to the practices of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), which highlights, according to psychologist Philip Kendall, "the role of maladaptive thinking in dysfunctional behaviour and operate[s] by adjusting distorted cognitive processing to more constructive ways of thinking" (158). Drama practitioners such as Thompson, Hughes, Ruding, and Rohd, as well as The Geese Theatre Company acknowledge this link in their work specifically with youth "at risk" and its possible place within offender rehabilitation programs.

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Through treatment, a goal of CBT according to Southam-Gerow and Kendall is "to help children build a *coping template* with the hope that children will develop a new—or modify existing—cognitive structure(s) for processing information about the world" (344). While not explicitly a drama practice, CBT contains dramatic elements that have proven effective in treating youth. Treatment strategies of CBT, include but are not limited to social problem-solving, modeling, and creating and participating in role-plays are typically used to treat a multitude of anxiety disorders. These CBT techniques maintain parallel with drama in education and applied theatre practices. Helen Nicholson concurs, "Drama is a good vehicle through which participants might experiment with different identities [through role-play] and test out new ways of being" (*Applied Drama* 82). This link between what/how we think (cognitive) and what/how we act (behavioral) is a form of rehearsal that is intended to prepare the self for new, potentially stressful (but not always) situations outside of the dramatic space, by providing youth with a schema from which to draw upon. By actively participating in image work students can, as intelligent clay, safely explore the physicality of being in perhaps a similar situation and benefit from the value of such drama-based and cognitive-behavioral links.

There are potential limitations associated with this way of viewing and developing drama-based participatory programs, in that once a student completes the program there is no way in which to control external social factors and so the transference of skills practiced may be extinguished. I believe that there is still value in this type of work because as facilitators we can only hope that perhaps

the learning did penetrate the participant in a somatic way and will be in some way beneficial.

Commitment to the physicalization of image creation produces experiences of true embodiment within participants. The development of a somatic literacy (Linden, 1999), supports knowing grounded in embodied experience. This practice of students accepting experiences, both average or troubling, seeks to cultivate a kinesthetic empathy, an empathy that is achieved through mirroring another's movements, gestures and posture. Cristina as the sculptor was very specific in the staging of her image actors, often side-coaching Samuel so as to get just the right facial expression for the specific feeling she sought to convey, thereby engaging in the process of kinesthetic empathy. When she sculpted the images that dealt with the violence in her story, the image actors, not surprisingly, required very little sculpting to embody the fight. When Cristina described what happened, Samuel and Jimmy took those positions easily. Again, I believe it is because those images were already a part of their body memories, and easily accessible for this activity. However, none of the students felt that they could embody or take on the images of the intake officer in Cristina's story, or the police officer in Victizzl's. This role fell to me, just as other adults were asked by the students to help in other image stories to play the roles of additional authority figures.

The completed comics (Appendices D and E) show that in the stories I was asked to participate in, I played the role of the "oppressor"—the adult figure that these youth saw as enforcers. Was I being stereotyped by the youth? Did they

see me in the same way they do other adults? Whether or not, my responsibility was to my students. And my students were now asking me to do the very thing I had been asking them to do: embody and personify each image, and find the truth for that character. Having the students sculpt me, and tell me what to do for their images of their comic was a pleasant role reversal for us. I could tell by the way in which they sculpted me that they were thinking about the image they were creating, from the way that they modeled their faces for me to mimic, or the care that they used to sculpt the subtle head tilt or the placement of hands. It was satisfying as the facilitator to experience first hand the drama skills they had gained and could apply to the process. This reversal of roles allowed me to support their work in an additional way, no longer just from the outside of their creations, but from within them.

Each of the students who completed the drama project used the comic as a space to challenge the stereotype with which they identified. The story I'm Not Mental that Cristina chose to share, sculpt and present as her comic was an important contribution to the Literacy in ACTion project. Her story (as the title illustrates) was a direct response to her experience of being stereotyped as emotionally unstable by the adults she encountered, and illustrated her desire to challenge that label through the project. Cristina expressed in multiple ways her disagreement with this stereotype and indicated that she did not feel that there was anything wrong with her. She recognized that she had issues with anger management but felt that medication as a solution was not appropriate. Once there was distance between the emotion and anger, Cristina could be objective and

better mediate the circumstances of the situation through the comic creation. The maturity with which she explored this topic exhibited, just as she indicated within the dramatic process, the actions or behaviors that debunked the stereotype that she felt had been put on her by society.

The Praxis Equation

Each choice the youth made regarding how their comic would look and how they presented their story provided both an opportunity and location for youth participants to transform their work and reflect on their actions. This final comic component of the project allowed for what Freire has popularized as *praxis* (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*). While the notion of praxis has its roots in the theories of Karl Marx, its present application in educational and applied theatre settings is the result of Freirean interpretation and exploration. According to Freire the element of transformation comes from the "word" which is also the "work." It is because of this naming of the word that transformation can be possible for participants. To say a true word is the work, which for Freire is the praxis.[24] But what does praxis really mean for drama practitioners and their participants? For the practitioner, praxis is the liminal space where theory and practice meet. Combined they create more than just "process," as Philip Taylor suggests; they create a site where the two can inform one another through reflection. For the drama participant praxis is the combination of Action + Reflection = Transformation. It is the responsibility of the practitioner to build this Action + Reflection into the curriculum; otherwise, as Freire warns, without

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[24] Freire creates a word picture to explain: "action + reflection = word = work = praxis" (Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 87).

reflection there is no praxis only "*activism*" (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 88).

The final comic represents more than a showcase of the events that led the students to ALBA. It both confronts and depicts the very stereotypes these youth encountered in that journey. As illustrated in the previous example, the students used the dramatic opportunities to critically engage with and act against their perpetual embodiment of societally imposed stereotypes. To do this they practiced constructing new and different ways to make their voices heard. These students had been made to feel as though they were the stereotypes that adults and society made them out to be. These stereotypes over time became embodied and stifled the creative process. Image creation acknowledged those stereotypes within the body, and through storytelling and comic creation sought to cast off that weight from the bodies and minds of the youth participants. As Huerta-Charles observes, "In analyzing the testimonies [story], we get a different perspective; we reflect and imagine that things could be different in order to achieve our freedom, taking control of our own actions in the world" (257). This process of casting off was a byproduct of the practice of praxis.

The time spent at the computers was important to this process because it allowed students to revisit the static images/digital photos they had sculpted for their comic. This is something that we are unable to do in theatre because live bodies were used. This ability to change and control the way stories are read and viewed created important sites of action and reflection. Through editing, the students were in control of the depictions, which subsequently controlled the story as read by an audience. The panel placement and text development allowed for a

different kind of reflection than possible within a staged dramatic moment. While each moment within any dramatic process will never occur again or be exactly the same, through the manipulation and editing of the image photos, a story could be frozen in time and told and shown in multiple new ways.

Comics can be read in a similar way to how theatrical images are. An image as a whole is interpreted, our eye often catching something and drawing us closer; similarly, a comic page, before the eye focuses on each panel, is seen as a whole picture. Because our group had spent their time developing their stories as a series of frozen images, the assembly of the comic was a quick and an almost natural process. The frozen and activated images of drama were easily transposed to the comic panels. The use of the computer program to assist in the comic creation allowed the youth to negotiate or shape the images, and to use Freirean terminology to 'transform the images'. This ability to manipulate digital images subsequently changed the potential lens with which the story could be 'read' or viewed. Due to the ability of participants to edit (zoom, change texture of image, color, size, etc.), the story could be told differently using the same image(s). Each image could be manipulated differently to achieve a different perspective of the story. The author is in control of this. Because youth can change and/or manipulate the images/story, a passive reflection automatically occurs. As they participate youth are engaged in praxis without them fully being aware. This is achieved in both the dramatic process and in the comic creation.

Throughout the Literacy in ACTion process, each game or activity concluded with the facilitator asking "What was in that for you?" And, "Does

anyone have any questions, comments or concerns before we move on?" Each question provided an opportunity for youth to take a moment to process and absorb what they just experienced. These open, quiet spaces, after the dramatic action, proved to be additional opportunities for reflection to occur for the youth and myself as facilitator. Those moments of contemplation would be greater than for others, but as a group, allowing for observations to surface provided further opportunities for group discourse. This proved to be a rehearsal for the later critical thinking required and the assembly of the comic provided additional moments of praxis.

Conclusion

      Over the course of the Literacy in ACTion project the youth showed multiple moments of growth as both individuals and as a group. Their ability to connect to the stories that were shared through embodiment and physicalization demonstrated, to a large extent, the degree of respect on their part for the dramatic process and their peers. Image Theatre served as a non-intimidating mode for engagement that provided youth, considered "at risk" for academic failure, with an effective way in which to connect with larger social issues and stigmas so as to give voice to empower youth to speak out against those stereotypes. This rejection of those stereotypes by the youth through the comic creation will forever document how their dramatic process transcended the stage to exist on the page.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE USE

While this study is not intended to serve as a model to emulate directly, it is the hope of the researcher that this documented experience may provide current and future educators with a detailed examination of what a cross-curricular participatory project may entail. For drama in education students, I sought to provide an honest look at the types of conditions that may influence their process, and the "on your feet" accommodations of these. For community theatre practitioners this study provides an example of the possibility of educational theatre process as the aesthetic product.

An Assessment Tool

The degree of engagement by youth participants makes the Literacy in ACTion project, and future programs like it, useful tools for student assessment. This is particularly true for alternative schools where students are, on the whole, hesitant to connect with their peers and reluctant to engage with staff. Programs that focus at least partly on team building through drama-based collective creations provide students new to the school with a non-threatening experience in an intimidating venue. As exemplified in this thesis, and corroborated by the ALBA school therapist, a program such as this provides students with a space where they have an opportunity to let down their guard, and for staff, a way in which to asses the dynamics of the group, and learn more about each individual student. Seeing students outside of the typical classroom environment will often showcase another side to the student and be the window staff need for better insight of the youth. These kinds of student-centered, drama-based participatory

programs can explore themes that are pertinent to the school community and help

an influx of new students find their place within that community. It is important to

keep in mind that for a program to truly be in the spirit of emancipatory

education, it cannot be used in a way that further isolates or oppresses youth by

imposing hegemonic doctrine. It is precisely because of the thematic connection

to youths' lives that they are more likely to participate and engage in the dramatic

process. It is important for facilitators and teachers to keep in mind, however,

that due to the scaffolding nature of the program components, regular class

attendance would be beneficial. When regular attendance is not a reliable

variable, combining the program into two to three consecutive, condensed days at

the start of a semester might increase the chance of a larger attendance and could

modify the program successfully.

<u>Subject Specific Uses</u>

The design of the Literacy in ACTion project was specific for a classroom

that had much curriculum to cover and a short amount of time to do it in. I see the

future of this program, and programs like this in schools, as opportunities to give

teachers additional ways to achieve the standards as put forth by the state in fun

and engaging ways. A cross-curricular project offers teachers a way in which to

provide students with a deeper knowledge base of a single topic by using multiple

subjects through which to examine it. Drama is the glue that keeps it all together.

Drama games, activities and inquiry techniques offer both drama practitioners and

classroom teachers an unintimidating and fun way to engage students and fuel

learning. This project was specifically designed for marginalized youth

populations in alternative school settings and for potential future use in traditional schools. In either location a drama-based participatory program empowers youth of any age to be active agents in their learning. These programs could potentially help to further explore core subject areas such as English, Social Studies or Life Sciences by incorporating additional subjects such as art, drama, and computer technology to act as the vehicle with which to move the topic along. My preference is always to use drama as the method for topic exploration. Which applied theatre components are used would depend on the circumstances of the school, the students, the teacher and the topic selected. The changes to the dramatic process would be dictated by the level of drama knowledge and comfort of the teacher, in addition to the level of skill the students present. Overall, the shape of the program would not need to be modified, only specific activities and warm-up games.

<u>Areas for Further Academic Research</u>

In addition to the practical applications of this program for future use, this project revealed, for the researcher, potential areas for further academic study connected to certain literary and social theories. For example, it demonstrated the interconnectedness of this theatre practice to the embodiment of language as a speech act as explored by Mikhail Bahktin, and the project identified youth "at risk" as an "Othered" population as suggested by Homi Bhabha in *Locations of Culture*. The exploration within this study of multiliteracies and the influence of technology as text connects to the construction of personal identity and embodiment among youth. This overlap suggests a correlation with prosthetic

memory as introduced by Alison Landsberg. While these are only a few of

multiple examples, within the scope of a Masters of Arts thesis, these examples

could not be explored in depth, and an attempt to do so may not do justice to each

field of study. However, that is not to say that these theorectical explorations are

any less important to the canon of applied theatre and drama in education studies.

In fact, it has become my belief through my experience with this process that the

theoretical foundations, whether named or not, do in fact influence the work of

the practitioner and cannot be separated from the implementation of the dramatic

process. There cannot be practice without theory. This is the praxis of the

facilitator/researcher.

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Appendix A: <u>Project Outline</u>

Literacy in ACTion Project *				
Week 1	**Week 2**	**Week 3**	**Week 4**	**Week 5**
<u>Intro:</u> Group Building	<u>Image Work:</u> Theme Development	<u>Story Building:</u> Deepening Images**	<u>Story Boards:</u> Building the Story	<u>Comic Book:</u> Development
March: Tuesday 3 - Introduction - Letter & Consent forms - Group 'Rules' - Group Building Games - Introduce idea of graphic novel as genre	Tuesday 10 - Roll on the Wall - Image Work in group, in 2's, in small groups. - Begin to explode images here.	Tuesday 17 - Where's the Story? - Develop Images to fill in 'gaps' between already developed Images. - Playing with text.	Tuesday 24 - Group Planning. - Delegation of roles in the graphic novel creation, and begin computer work.	Tuesday 31 - Warm Up - Computer work - Revisit Images and script/text as needed.
Thursday 5 - Warm Up - Image as our Language - Playing with Mirroring/Sculpting.	Thursday 12 - Images Revisited - Explode previous Images - Collect 'photos' of Images	Thursday 19 - Group Planning. - Attempt to finalize a story line. - Character Development and learning more about them. Who are the characters?	Thursday 26 - Warm Up - Computer work - Revisit Images and script/text as needed	April: Thursday 2 - Final Session. - Distribution of Graphic Novels. *(?)* - Favorite Warm Up Games. - Final Closing Circle.
	Friday 13 - Begin to look at shape of story based on Images created. - Arrange Images in semi-sequence.		Friday 27 - Warm Up - Computer work - Revisit Images and script/text as needed	
*This schedule is entirely tentative & subject to change. It is based on a 70min sessions 2-3 times a week. **** The activities of Week 3 and Week 4 are interchangeable depending on the progress of the group.**				

<u>**Appendix B: California Literacy and Theatre Standards**</u>

This is in no way an exhaustive list of all California Standards met by the Literacy In ACTion project. Some objectives are technical and designed for a formal English writing course.

<u>Grades Nine & Ten Literacy Standards</u> as issued by the State of California that can be addressed to a significant degree via projects such as this one (CA Department of Education, *English-Language Arts* 57):

3.0 Literary Response and Analysis
Students will be encouraged to actively and critically:
3.9. Explain how voice, persona, and the choice of a narrator affect characterization and the tone, plot, and credibility of a text (58). The text being the comic book.
3.10. Identify and describe the function of dialogue, scene design, soliloquies, asides, and character foils in dramatic literature.
    The dramatic process in conjunction with graphic novel creation allows students to 3.11 Evaluate the aesthetic qualities of style, including the impact of diction and figurative language on tone, mood, and theme, using the terminology of literary criticism (Aesthetic approach) (58).

2.0 Speaking Applications (Genres and Their Characteristics) (64).
Using the strategies of the Listening and Speaking Standard 1.0. Students will be able to:
2.1. Deliver narrative presentations" (64) through the dramatic process.
(a) Narrate a sequence of events and communicate their significance to the audience" (64).
(b) Locate scenes and incidents in specific places (64).
(c) "Describe with concrete sensory details the sights, sounds, and smells of a scene and the specific actions, movements, gestures, and feelings of characters"(64), through the exploration of image creation.
    While developing the comic book the (d) "Pace and presentation of actions to accommodate time or mood changes" (64) can be achieved through storyboarding the comic panels.

2.2 Delivering expository presentations (64):
(a) Marshal evidence in support of a thesis and related claims, including information on all relevant perspectives (64).
(d) "Include visual aids by employing appropriate technology to organize and display information on charts, maps, and graphs" (64). The use of Comic Book Creator will provide students with the opportunity to use technology to assist in their storytelling.

2.3 Apply appropriate interviewing techniques (64):
Because students are developing and creating their own story, they will be

creating the characters through the dramatic process. This includes drama techniques that will:

(a) prepare and ask relevant questions to the characters (as played by other students and/or the group as a whole) (64).

(c) use language that conveys maturity, sensitivity, and respect (64).

(d) Respond correctly and effectively to questions (64).

(e) Demonstrate knowledge of subject organization (64).

(f) compile and report responses (64).

(g) Evaluate the effectiveness of the interview (64).

Comic creation will allow students to 2.4(c) "Demonstrate awareness of the author's use of stylistic devices and an appreciation of the effects created" (64). And (d) "Identify and assess the impact of perceived ambiguities, nuances and complexities within the text" (64).

2.6 Deliver descriptive presentations (65) by responding in character and in reflections.

(a) establishing their point of view (65)

(b) relationship with the subject (65)

(c) use effective, factual descriptions of appearance, concrete images, shifting perspectives and vantage points, and sensory details (65).

Writing standards will also be achieved in the graphic novel development. Students will be encouraged to write about characters that may share some commonalities with. 2.1 Write biographical or autobiographical narratives or short stories:

(b) Locate scenes and incidents in specific places (64).

(c) Describe with concrete sensory details the sights, sounds, and smells of a scene and the specific actions, movements, gestures, and feelings of the characters; use interior monologue to depict the characters' feelings (64).

Listening and speaking standards will be addressed through constant group dialogue about the creative process. As the novel develops students will explore and 1.11 "Asses how language and delivery affect the mood and tone of the oral communication and make an impact on the audience" (63). By using mixed media students will 1.14 "identify the aesthetic effects of media presentation and evaluate the techniques used to create them" (63).

Theatre: Grades Nine Through Twelve Proficient Standards as issued by the State of California that can be addressed to a significant degree via projects such as this one (CA Department of Education, *Theatre* 109):

1.0 Artistic Perception (Processing, Analyzing, and Responding to Sensory Information Through the Language and Skills Unique to Theatre).
"Students will observe their environment and respond, using the elements of theatre" (109). Through participating in the dramatic process students will begin

to develop and:

1.1 "Use the vocabulary of theatre, such as *acting values, style, genre, design,* and *theme,* to describe theatrical experiences" (109). In participating in the ritual of opening and closing circles and producing the comic, students 1.2 "Document observations and perceptions of production elements, noting mood, pacing and use of space through class discussion and reflective writing" (109).

2.0 Creative Expression (Creating, Performing, and Participating in Theatre) (109).

The use of Image Theatre helps students to explore "skills in acting, directing, designing, and scriptwriting to create formal and informal theatre, film/videos, and electronic media productions and to perform in them" (109).

Within the dramatic process of the students develop skills in:

2.1 "Making acting choices, using script analysis, character research, and revision through the rehearsal process" (109). Characterization through dynamisation/tableau creation and its revision for comic production achieved this.

2.2 "Write dialogues and scenes, applying basic dramatic structure: exposition, complication, conflict, crises, climax, and resolution" (110). Writing out the students' personal stories and developing them into short scenes for comics achieved this.

4.0 Aesthetic Valuing (Responding to, Analyzing, and Critiquing Theatrical Experiences) (110).

The discussion that is generated within and from the dramatic process promotes skills in engaging in tableau individually and within a group, students will 4.2 "Report on how a specific actor used drama to convey meaning in his or her performances" (110). Discussion about this process allows students to address stereotypes and meanings derived from them.

5.0 Connections, Relationships, Applications (Connecting and Applying What is Learned in Theatre, Film/Video, and Electronic Media to Other Art Forms and Subject Areas and to Careers) (111).

The cross-curricular design of the program uses drama to engage other subject areas such as literacy. "Students apply what they learn in theatre, film/video, and electronic media across subject areas. They develop competencies and creative skills in problem solving, communication, and time management that contribute to lifelong learning and career skills" (111).

Their experience engaging in multiple subjects allows students to:

5.1 Describe how skills acquired in theatre may be applied to other content areas and careers (111).

A project-based program requires students to:

5.2 "Manage time, prioritize responsibilities, and meet completion deadlines for a production as specified by group leaders, team members, or directors" (111). The collective creation of the comic holds students responsible for transforming their dramatic creation in a comic and to do so within the program schedule.

Appendix C: <u>Alphabetical List of Referenced Drama Activities</u>

This is in no way an exhaustive list of all drama activities from the program. Games listed have been learned by the researcher though her years of Drama in Education and Applied Theatre training, and are described here as they were used for this program.

Blind Buses (Boal, *Games* 121) Typically used after Blind Cars to increase challenge. Combine cars into a Bus of four. Instructions are the same, but must pass from driver through three blind parts of the bus to the front of the bus.

Blind Cars (Boal, *Games* 121)
In pairs, one person is A the other B. A's stand behind B's – they are the driver. B is the car and has their eyes closed. From behind the driver guides the movement of B 'blind car' by gently tapping them on the head. Head = go forward, Right Shoulder = turn right, Left Shoulder = turn left, Middle of the Back = reverse, No Tapping = Stop! * Avoid crashes; you are responsible for your car. Tapping the person faster on the head does not make them go faster! The car is always in control of the speed.

Build the Object (Boal, Julian. *Workshop* 2006) *modified*
In two groups, create an object that is mechanized in some way. With your bodies create the shape and what that object 'does.' E.g.: a helicopter with turning blades, a washing machine that rumbles, a motorbike within moving tires with a rider.

Circle of Knots (Boal, *Games* 62)
Make a circle with the group, all holding hands, then swing into the circle, hands in the air and grab the hand of two different people. Slowly move away and physically untie the knot, moving bodies through one another. This activity works best in silence. *Variation*: with eyes closed.

Columbian Hypnosis: (Boal, *Games* 51)
In partners, partner A holds her hand in front of partner B's face. Partner B is hypnotized by this hand and must keep his face within six inches of it at all times – any closer and he'll just get dizzy. "A" slowly begins to move around, with B following. Can be done in groups with people hypnotizing and being hypnotized. The trick is to move slowly and encourage people to explore levels.

Come My Neighbor
Separate yourself from the group and yell "Come my neighbor if you…." And insert something that is true for you. If that something is true for anyone in the group, they should run over to stand near the person who first called it. This repeats by someone stepping away from the main group and calling out their own "Come my neighbor" statement.
Complete the Image (Boal, *Games* 139; Diamond, *Handbook* 18)

Facilitator makes shape in center of the space and asks: "What do you see?"
Whatever you [the participant] sees is correct because it is *what YOU see.* If I had come into the circle and told you what I was portraying, every creative idea you had, would never have entered your mind because I told you what I was showing. By doing that I would have said "I'm the artist, what I say goes"… I don't want you to do that in this workshop. We're going to use the language of pictures/images today to start looking at what's present for us.
We'll use the shapes/images our bodies can make to show how we feel or think, without ever really telling anyone what it really is.
Someone come into the center and make a shape. It doesn't have to mean anything… just a shape. OK. Now someone else come in, and just by adding another frozen shape, complete the image – soon it will begin to tell a story. First person leave. What do you see now? Enter it. Complete the image. Now what do you see?
Continue this until a theme emerges that connects to the workshop theme.

Dynamisation Process (Boal, *Games* 176) (using Complete the Image as springboard)
When there is a 'loaded' image, ask the others in the group to add themselves to the image one by one where they see a place for themselves. Build the image and reflect.

> *Who are the people in the image?*
> *Where are these people?*
> *What are they/each doing?*
> *What does each want?*
> **What does this person want in the scene?*
> When I say 'Go', take one step toward that.
> > *Again.* – Look how the image changes.

Following the completion of the activity ask the group: What was in this for you? We all see things differently. And without words we all can interpret our own message. Where do we get these messages? Why do you think we see what we see?
* Take pictures of any interesting images or sketch them for future use.

Graffiti Wall
Using large pieces of butcher paper and offering an assortment of lively colored markers, students surround the paper laid out on the floor and are asked to respond to a question or general them/topic using words, phrases, or drawings. As students write or draw it, they say it out loud. This way everyone can hear what is being drawn and participate all together. Once the page is filled ask group to stand up and walk around the page, then stand back again and look at the words/topics/concerns that have come out for them. Tape Graffiti Wall to a white board or other prominent location. This is a visual representation of the larger theme.

Image of the Word (Boal, *Games* 181)
A volunteer is asked to create an image that illustrates the suggested theme of study. The sculptor can use as many people as s/he needs to create this image. Everyone is involved in these images – you may be happily watching, but even as an audience member, you are an active audience member. Your relationship to the images makes you a part of it. That's what this space is about. The image is only the nucleus of it all.
Once the image is created the facilitator must check in with the group and asks: Does the group agree that this is what the theme looks like? Or do parts need to be changed?? If so, let's have a volunteer make the changes. The image continues to be sculpted until the group agrees that it is an accurate image of the theme.

Additional dynamisation steps included in Image of the Word:
First Dynamisation (Boal, *Games* 184)
For those in the image, create a movement that is contained within the image (while still in your place). This will offer us some information about the image.

Second Dynamisation (Boal, *Games* 184)
As well as the rhythmic motion, give a phrase that fits the character. This phrase comes from the character, not the actor. Repeat the rhythmic gesture and/or the phrase.

Third Dynamisation (Boal, *Games* 185)
Now add a movement that indicates 'what will that character do next'? Moments need to be taken about the 'next'? Then what happens next… We've established and explored what the theme is but now steps must be taken towards the image of what comes next?

Magnetic Image (Diamond, *Handbook* 42)
Step 1: Find the Story
Close your eyes. Think about our theme. Do you have a story that is connected to this theme? Who are the people in your story? What are their personalities like? What is your relationship to them? How does this story make you feel when you think of it?

Step 2: 'Shape' Your Story
Eyes still closed and with your body, Self Sculpt yourself into a shape that you think represents your story best. You can use a moment from the story, or a feeling from the story. However you can best show your story, the one you're thinking of, in one shape.
Open your eyes and look around at the other story shapes. What do you notice about them? Are any of them like your shape? Which ones are not like your shape?
While still frozen in your shape. Move to the story shape that is like your shape. Who's shape do you feel your shape connects with? Go to it. In your group 'shake it out.' Then when I say "Go" take your shape again so I can see the groups.

 Look around at your group again. Now have a seat and in your group answer this question: What brought you all together? How do your stories and experiences connect?
(Depending on size of groups, these may become story groups)
Share your story with the group.
Group: Ask questions to get more information about the story. Remember your questions: Who, What, Where, When & How. These will help you to understand the story, and help the storyteller to tell the story better.
(Have one person in the group take notes if that helps).

Move Your Butt (Stage Left, *Workshop* 2007)
There is one less chair then people in the circle. I start in the middle of the circle. I say one of two things: (1) all change, in which case everybody has to get up and change seats, or (2) anything that some people in the group might have in common (anybody who has blond hair, people with tattoos, people born outside of Alberta, …) In the second case, the people whom the statement applies have to get up and change seats. In both cases, the person left standing without a chair is the next person in the circle.
Remember: not a contact sport & you can choose to pass on a statement. (Like come my neighbor, statement has to be true for the caller too).

Name Game
In a circle each person says their name and connects and action to it that best represents them. The rest of the group repeats each name and action in unison as they are said. One person steps into the circle and says his/her name and does an action that best shows an aspect of their personality. Then all at once, every- body else plays that back for her. So if Alison likes football. She steps in and says "my name is Alison" while miming throwing a football. Everyone else plays back the name and action saying: "hi Alison" while throwing a football. Then the next person goes, and so on until everyone's had a turn.

People to People (Diamond, *Handbook* 31)
Everyone walks around the room, and when I call "People to People!" everyone finds a partner closest to them. The caller calls out two (respectful) body parts e.g. 'finger to knee' and the pair must make the connection. The facilitator yells "People to People!" again and everyone finds a new partner. The facilitator finds one too, leaving a participant to make the calls. They do this a few times then call "People to People!" again till almost everyone has had a turn.
Variation: same as above. But each time a body connection is called, the participants are 'glued' together in those connection points and each new connection is in addition to that. It's Twister on Your Feet!!

Pushing/Pulling Against Each Other (Diamond, *Handbook* 25)
Find someone who is about the same height as you. This is not about pushing someone over and being stronger. It's about finding balance.

A. Urban   148

PUSH – In partners face each other and put your hands on the other's shoulders. Now push. Where one person is stronger they will have to push less and the other push harder – but you will find the balance. *PULL* – facing each other, take each other by the wrists. Now lean back, firmly planting your feet, and taking the others weight. Now without talking, continue to lean out, and sit down. Both at the same time, bums to the floor. Now pulling, stand up. Can you teeter-totter?

Quick Sculpt (In two's, build an image) (Boal, Games 136; Diamond variation)
What is Intelligent Clay? Intelligent Clay means that you are able to fill these sculptures with thoughts and emotions that emerge from the body shape you are sculpted into. Take on that character you feel that shape creates.
You will all at one time or another be 'intelligent clay'. With a volunteer demonstrate the three ways to sculpt:
1. By mirroring what you want them to do. Make the shape yourself, and they copy and freeze. *It's often a good idea for detailed facial expressions to be mirrored to the clay.*
2. Marionette strings that are attached to key joints on the body. You can 'pull' on these strings and the brilliant clay will move with you.
3. By physically moving the other person into position.

Role on the Wall (Neelands, *Structuring Drama Work* 22)
Students collectively create fictional characters as they write its characteristics on a silhouette of a gingerbread shaped person.

Scrambled Eggs (Stage Left, *Workshop* 2007)
No chairs. All stand. Call out the name of something. The group has to form that thing with their bodies – not as individuals, but as a group – as quickly as they can: scrambled eggs, the Empire State Building, a passenger bus, a washing machine.

Sculpture Wheel (Campbell, *Playing Boal* 59)
Half of the group forms a small circle facing outward. A second larger circle is formed surrounding the inner circle and faces inward, automatically pairing individuals with someone from the smaller circle. Those in the outer circle are the sculptors, and those students in the inside circle are the 'intelligent clay.' A word, thought, or phrase is called out by the facilitator and the sculptors use the clay to create and image of what that word looks like to them. After each round of sculpting the outside circle quietly walks around the inner circle to observe the multiplicity of visual meaning that a single word can inspire. They continue walking till they reach the person that is one past their last partner.

Shark Attack (Thompson, *Blagg!* 51)
Sheets of newspaper are thrown around floor. When facilitator yells "SHARK!" all have to 'swim' to a piece of newspaper. After each call of "shark" pieces of newspaper are taken away – until only one piece is left. Encourage the group to help get everybody safely out of the water.

That's How I Role… (Urban, 2009)
Each student draws a 'gingerbread person' on a paper and identifies on the inside of their silhouette, their INSIDE ROLES (who they are as an individual), versus on the outside of the silhouette, their OUTSIDE ROLES (who they are to others or who they perceive themselves to be). This activity indirectly identifies the students primary and secondary Discourses (Gee, 1996). The youth are challenged to identify all the different roles they play in their lives.

ViewMaster
The activity is like the old View Master toy – every time you 'click', (close your eyes and reopen them) the next image from the story appears. While the pair sets up their first image our active audience sits with their eyes closed. The audience opens their eyes, and those in tableau freeze their image for a count of 8. This process repeats for all the images in the story.

Zip, Zap, Zop! (Rhod, *Theatre for Community* 22)
Repeat after me: 'Zip' -- 'Zap'-- 'Zop'. Again. Those are the three words you need to play the game, and in that order. We're going to pass those words around one at a time with a clap directed to the person you're throwing to. The person that says the incorrect word or delays too long is "out," and must die a dramatic death in the center of the circle and become a judge of the game.

THIS BOOK IS THE CREATIVE OUTCOME OF A DRAMA-BASED PROGRAM ENTITLED "Literacy In ACTion!!".

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THIS WORK COULD NOT BE COMPLETED WITHOUT THE SUPPORT OF THE TWO CLASSROOM TEACHERS WHOSE STUDENTS PARTICIPATED, NOR WITHOUT THE SUPPORT OF THE ADMINISTRATION, WHO SAW THE POTENTIAL IN THIS PROGRAM.
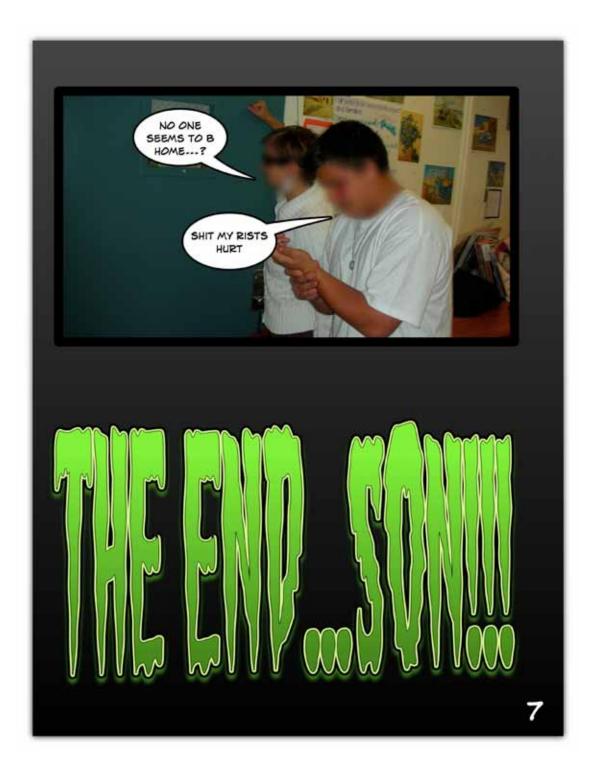
TO THE STUDENTS WHO TOOK PART IN THE DRAMATIC PROCESS -- CONGRATS TO YOU ALL!! WE ARE ALL SO PROUD OF WHAT YOU'VE CREATED! THIS BOOK IS B.A. & IT'S BECAUSE OF YOUR HARD WORK! WELL DONE!

2

5

7

"I'M NOT MENTAL"

THIS IS ME AND MY STORY

Cristina

8

the following is my story of how i got to alba. High School.

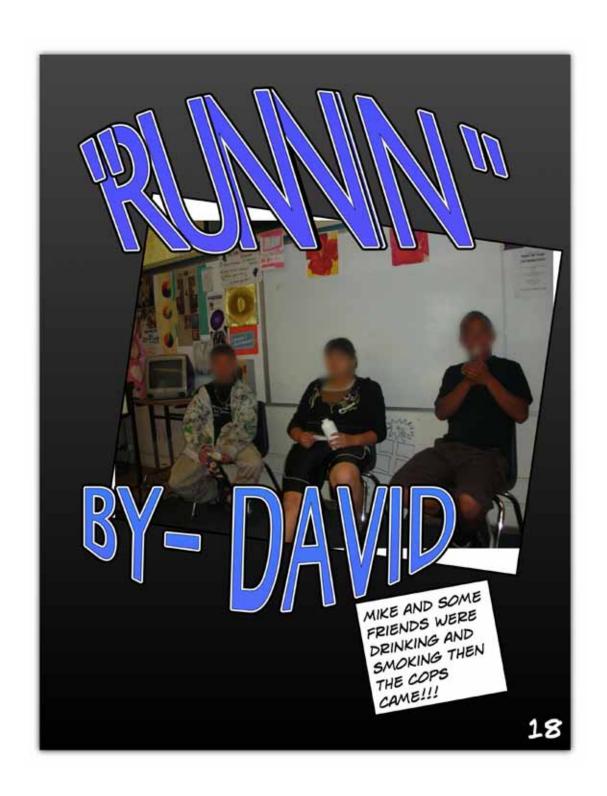i lit a toilet paper roll, and dispenser on fire at school and got caught.

that's my story

I NEED A HIT....

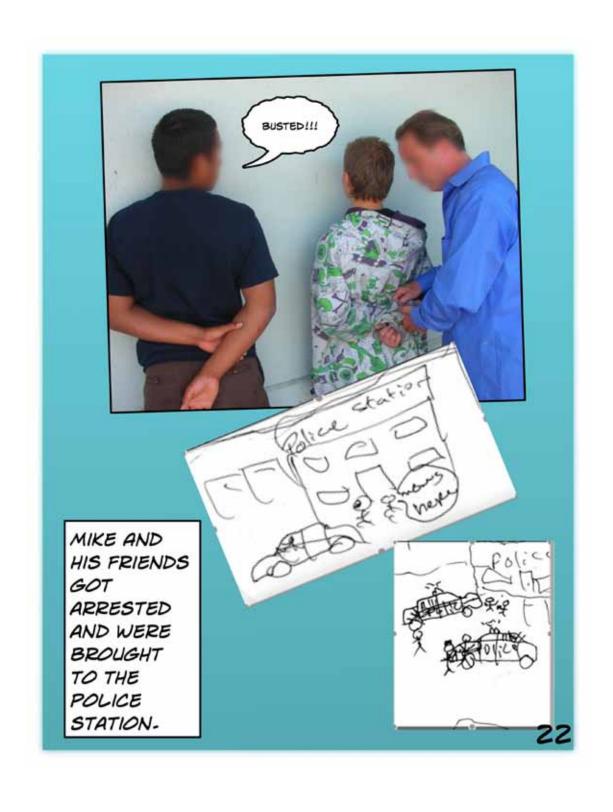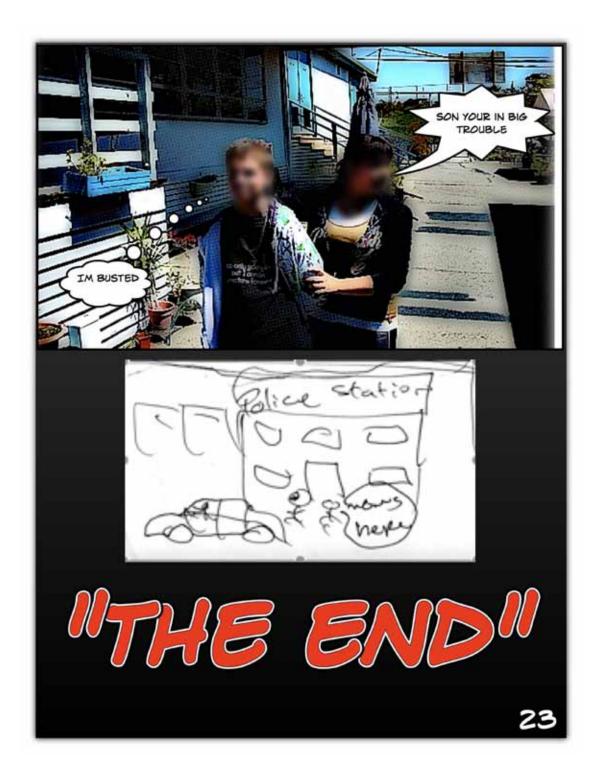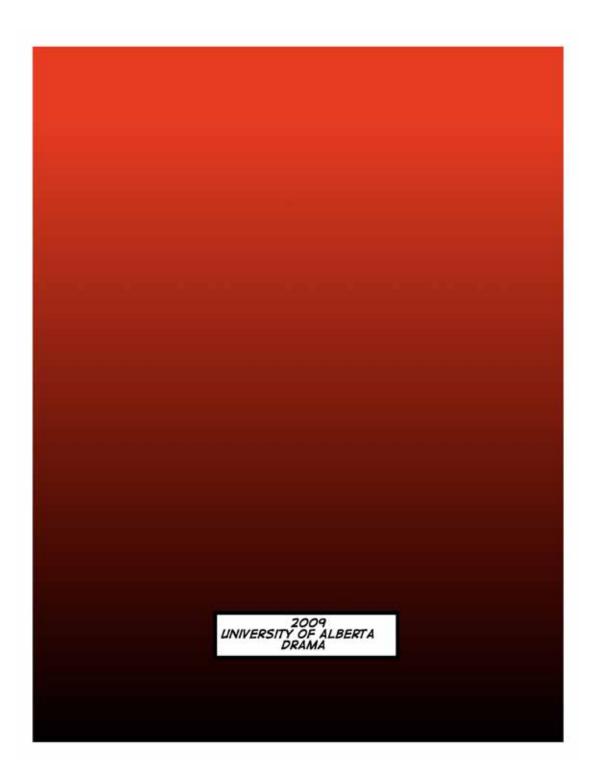BUSTED!

12

THE BIG BUST

Julio

13

SO AS ME AND THE HOMIES ARE GETING READY TO LEAVE WE HEAR A DOOR OPEN AND WE THINK....

FREEZE OR I WILL SHOOT!!

15

19

20

21

22

2009
UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
DRAMA

APPENDIX E: COMIC VERSION 2

THE ROAD TO...

A.L.B.A. HIGH

These are our stories...

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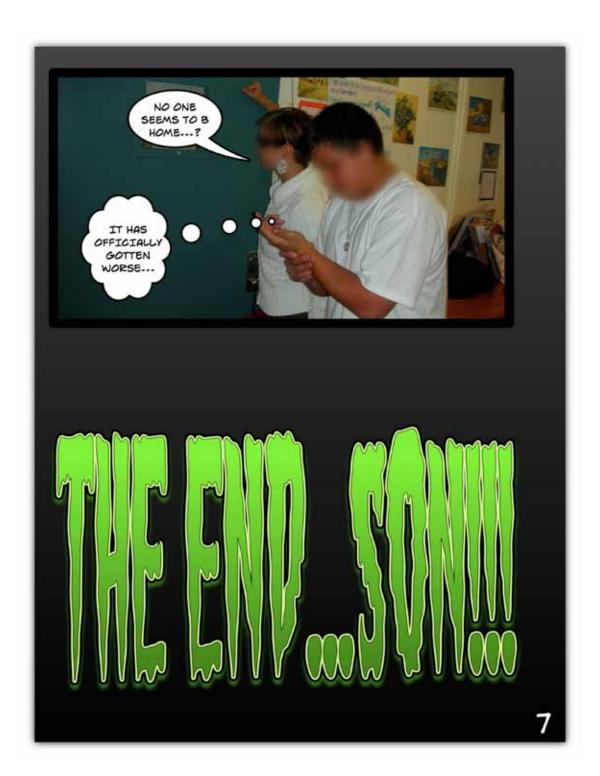
* FACILITATORS NOTE:
THIS IS THE SECOND PRINTING OF THIS GRAPHIC NOVEL THE FIRST EDITION CONTAINS STRONG 'STREET LANGUAGE.' THIS EDITION WAS EDITED TO REACH A BROADER AUDIENCE BUT THE STORIES REMAIN THE SAME.

7

"I'M NOT MENTAL"

This is me and my story

Cristina

8

10

My Story

I NEED A HIT...

BUSTED!

I MADE A REAL BAD
DECISION AND
SMOKED IN THE
SCHOOL BATHROOMS
AND GOT CAUGHT
UP.SO I GOT KIKED
OUT OF SCHOOL AND
GOT SEND TO
ALBA!!!!!!!

BY: SHADY LOKA

12

THE BIG BUST

Julio

SO AS ME AND THE HOMIES ARE GETING READY TO LEAVE WE HEAR A DOOR OPEN AND WE THINK.....DANG WE'RE CAUGHT.
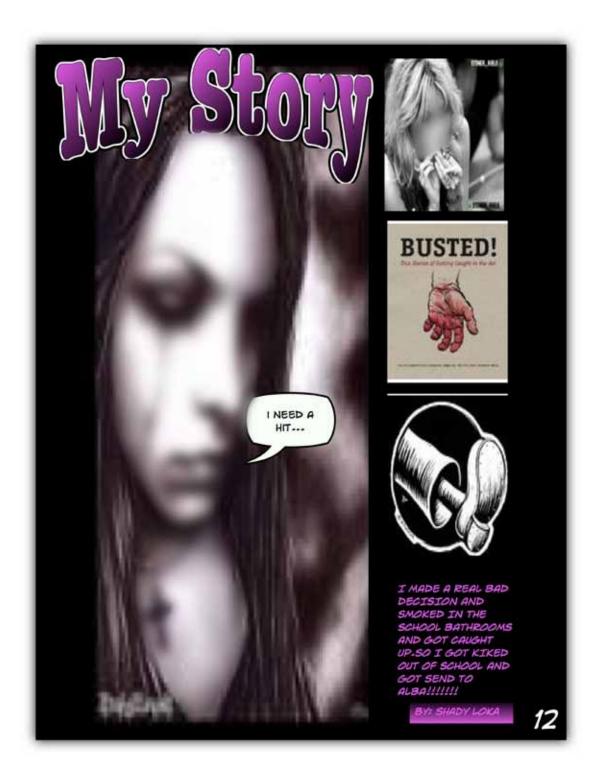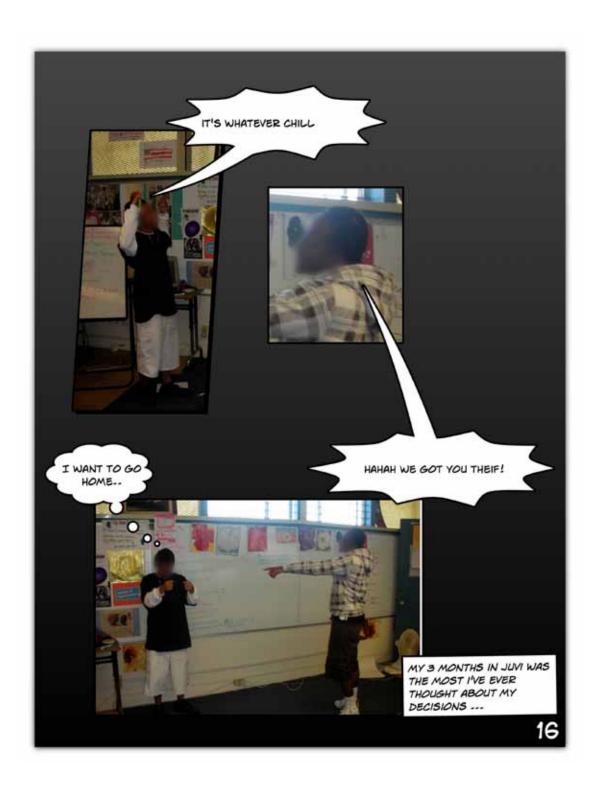
FREEZE OR I WILL SHOOT!!

16

the following is my story of how i got to alba. High School.

i lit a toilet paper roll, and dispenser on fire at school and got caught.

that's my story

"RUNNN"

BY- DAVID

MIKE AND SOME FRIENDS WERE DRINKING AND SMOKING THEN THE COPS CAME!!!

20

23

MIKE AND HIS FRIENDS GOT ARRESTED AND WERE BROUGHT TO THE POLICE STATION.

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