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FLOURISHING IN FRAGILITY

HOW TO BUILD ANTIFRAGILE ECOSYSTEMS OF LEARNING, THAT NURTURE HEALTHY VULNERABILITY, IN FRAGILE ENVIRONMENTS IN THE WESTERN CAPE (SOUTH AFRICA) WITH AT-RISK LEARNERS.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my father, Robert Edward Bowdler Youngleson.
A most excellent man.
He lived a meaningful life marked by his enthusiasm and grace for others and their purpose. His example of kindness, good humour and patience was my reflection whilst completing this work. His legacy was my plumb line to do right by my co-creators in writing up the research.

I hope to honour his life through my actions in the years ahead.

ABSTRACT

This research is a qualitative, autoethnographic study of antifragility in fragile spaces. It was written using data from Applied Theatre workshops, rehearsals and exercises; as well as questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and open discussions in focus groups with at-risk learners from Quintile 1-3 high schools, their educators, senior management staff, parents, caregivers and peers.

Methodologically, social constructionism functioned as the schematic map that positioned the writing/writer between the self and others, and provided the philosophical scaffolding necessary to elucidate data analysis and interpretation. Institutional theory and organisational culture centered the analytical framework once thematic analysis had been conducted across the data sets.

This reflexive, feminist paper exhumes and explores fragile spaces in Western Cape Quintile 1-3 schools, using drama and conscious, performed acts of vulnerability (on and off stage) as a means of activating antifragility in the performer and the observer. The data collection took place in the Western Cape in South Africa, and specifically refers to learners and their networks and blended learning ecosystems in that context. Noted conversants include Brown, Taleb and Butler.

The findings of this study include a shift in how we define "success" in a fragile environment and an acknowledgment of antifragility as a strategy that is always in motion. Static achievement and a singular definition of learner excellence are shown to be the undesirable opposite of iterative antifragility and adaptive, holistic executive function and socio-cultural competence; and learner wholeness (as experienced and embodied by the learner themselves) is referred to as "flourishing".

KEY WORDS

Vulnerability, Antifragility, Learning Ecosystems, Applied Theatre, Institutional Theory

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CHAPTER ONE

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a detailed background to the research from a socio-cultural and academically contextual viewpoint. The background and rationale explain my involvement with the research and how, ironically, a crisis in public high schools in South Africa has made learners more likely to enroll in and excel at drama.

The research objectives, qualitative enquiries and a summarized explanation of the methodological considerations follow.

Limitations and delimitations, a brief history of the after-school program *Drama Kweens*, a consolidated overview of the structure of the dissertation, a personal note on my considerations and a substantiated research question conclude this chapter.

1.2. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Having worked in the South African public school system as a full-time educator, a school governing body appointed extra-mural facilitator and a Non-Profit Organisation-appointed mentor and facilitator (at different times) for the past 11 years, I have noticed several commonalities between institutions – and widening fissures within the system.

According to Pillay (2017), Miya (2017), and Payisa and Mtshali (2016), some of the most troubling issues preventing our learners from achieving Grade 12 throughputs and sustaining pass-rates throughout their schooling careers at Quintile 1-3 schools include:

- Safety and security travelling to and from school (as well as on school grounds)
- "No-fees" schools demanding school fees to maintain their standards and facilities
- Overworked educators who cannot invest in individual learners (particularly because of multigrading: where educators are forced to teach more than one grade or grades and even, sometimes, specialist subjects for which they are not qualified; and educator absenteeism)
- Lack of discipline and increases in bullying (from both learners and educators)
- Underpayment of educators (leading to fewer and fewer graduates choosing the profession, and the pool of active educators decreasing yearly)

- Overcrowding of classrooms
- Non-delivery of textbooks and classroom resources
- Chronic stress and anxiety amongst educators and management staff
- An increase in violent crime and drug abuse on school property

In my opinion, this unhealthy relationship between parties leads to large amounts of dissatisfaction and mistrust (in the schools themselves, in educational departments and even with the public at large); and creating a nourishing and successful classroom environment – whilst always challenging – becomes a Sisyphean task.

My training and interest area is in the performing arts and I have taught in the following capacities:

- Primary and High School drama and Creative Arts educator Grades 4-12
- Lecturer, practical facilitator and tutor for first to third year undergraduate students
- Supervisor and creative director for graduating performance pieces (as part of a practical component) in undergraduate degrees at several South African tertiary institutions.
- A Western Cape Education Department practical examiner for the Grade 12 Drama Performance Exams.

These experiences have allowed me to gain a fair insight across schools, districts, management boards, metropolitan zones and tertiary entrance processes: and it was through these unique opportunities that I realised three very striking things about Drama as a subject in Quintile1-3 schools:

Firstly, more and more learners are enrolling for drama (regardless of the success rate of the educator). I believe this to be for two reasons: an increased interest in celebrity due to amplified modeling of celebrity culture and reality television (Grol-Prokopczyk, 2018); and the performing arts (and, more particularly, drama) being seen as a fun, easy choice for learners who don't want to enroll in, are advised not to enroll in, or don't enjoy, STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects.

Secondly, many of the drama-enrolled learners "happen" to be some of the most at-risk learners in their school. There are multiple explanations for this. The primary reasons being:

the demands of drama (vulnerability, deep connection, communication skills, advanced literacy, somatic empathy, a degree of comfort with looking foolish and/or not maintaining a mask of composure) attract learners who are often bullied for these affinities in less understanding environments; and the false perception that anyone can do drama – so at-risk learners are encouraged by parents, educators and principals to enroll when they struggle to maintain a pass grade in other subjects. This leads to many unhappy classrooms populated by "drama nerds" and "drop-outs" who may find it difficult to relate to one another and make cohesive, authentic-feeling performances in group assignments (Seton, 2010).

And, thirdly, learners who are "good" at drama (this doesn't necessarily denote academic excellence) and actively develop skills, discipline and technique in their classes will almost *uniformly* begin to exhibit better attendance, substantially increased reading proficiency, confidence in group work and public speaking, and improved motivation, tolerance and empathy in all of their classes *across learning areas* (Schiller, 2008).

In other words: drama learners who want to do drama, want to come to school – and do well. Whether they consciously linked their desire to excel as a gateway to continuing drama and recreating successful patterns of self-fulfillment, or they excel at school simply because increased attendance and discipline have complementary auxiliary effects – or a combination of these, or other, factors – is an unknown (and not part of this study).

In summary: at-risk learners in low-resource schools endure multiple stressors that inhibit their learning. In environments where resilience and dominance are both necessary and prized, learners who inhabit intersectional oppression are often taught to avoid vulnerability, at the risk of being further abused. Simultaneous to this, at-risk learners are less likely to excel in both literacy and numeracy because of the cumulative effect of their stressors, circumstance and compounding shame and time. The learners who are most at-risk in the formalized schooling environment are, therefore, often the most traumatised by it. Augmented by this injustice, they are often encouraged to pursue seemingly "soft" subjects like drama: an academic area that requires high levels of literacy and acute emotional empathy – as well as an engaged psychological maturity to be able to suspend and reanimate disbelief and playmaking.

The frustration of pressure to pass, inability to access literature and an understandable unwillingness to surrender a hard-won identity leaves the learner in a very vulnerable position.

Vulnerability, however, (in performance theory) is a very powerful state of being. When the actor releases themselves, capitulates to the character's needs and becomes a mirror and an echo chamber for the audience to see and hear themselves; the writer, the director, the cast and their collaborative consequences are suddenly part of a complex and much-needed conversation with the world around them (Seton, 2006). Vulnerability in performance is the signature of a truly embodied actor. And, perhaps, the opportunity for an engaged learner to rewrite the script driving their narrative experience.

1.3 PROPOSAL FOR ENQUIRY

If one can assume that both Judith Butler and Brené Brown's definitions of vulnerability are neither "good" nor "bad" (in post-structuralist terms) – but simultaneously accept that unexplored vulnerability and its perceived associations with "fear, shame, grief, sadness and disappointment" (Brown, 2012, 33) are often experienced as highly undesirable, particularly in fragile environments – drama in education could be seen as practical preparation and a "soft landing" for life beyond a school environment (Schiller, 2008, 7). It encourages the use of a safe space to experiment with "expression and communication; and for deepening human understanding" (Schiller, 2008, 7). This modeling is of critical importance to all participants, but could be seen to hold particular value for at-risk learners who "may have insufficient role-models or opportunities for practicing positive living experiences" (Schiller, 2008, 7).

Drama uses a multimodal, multi-sensory pedagogical approach that has been proven to have a resoundingly positive effect on "cognitive, social, emotional and physical development" (Schiller, 2008, 8) and promotes individual ownership and accountability for a learner's deliberately observed actions. This awareness of an audience and co-created consequences has an immediate effect on behavioural patterns both in and outside of the classroom. Schiller also notes Butler's "rhizomatic consequences" (Butler, 1990) of vulnerability in improved comprehension and retention across subject areas for drama learners (Schiller, 2008).

The architecture of an antifragile environment is impossible to build (due to its reliance on unknown stressors) but antifragile humans are, in my opinion, the foundation stone of any successful school or society. It no longer feels appropriate to demand or desire the level of resilience required to withstand everyday existence in Quintile 1-3 schools from at-risk minors – especially because of the knock-on effect of emotional searing, community disconnection and high likelihood of early migration following financial or social freedom from said fragility. Pursuing a case for antifragile citizenship through drama and healthy performances of conscious vulnerability not only equips the learner and provides autonomy, but starts to re-member the fragile environment that has caused their stressors in the first place.

1.4 RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

AIM

Conversing within a social constructionist mapping of organisation studies, institutional theory and Applied Theatre theory by consulting observed evidence from classrooms, autoethnographic "thick descriptions" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, 46), and implementation of the co-created research instruments; this study aims to understand how to construct spaces that let learners flourish by cultivating antifragile vulnerability in fragile environments.

In doing this, I hope to provide a system of learning that serves expansion of knowledge and the self – and not just curriculum content.

OBJECTIVES

The above aim will be fulfilled by accomplishing the following research objectives:

- Completing questionnaires, conducting semi-structured group interviews, holding collaborative focus groups and enacting character sketches with consenting participants – and allowing for digital submissions of opinions, reflections and further explications up to one week after a session has ended.
- Reviewing the academic literature concerning Institutional Theory, Organisation Studies, precarity, vulnerability, antifragility, Applied Drama, Anarchopedagogy, learning ecosystems, blended learning and symbiosis, social constructionism, South Africa-specific Theatre for Change and trauma.

- Conducting an ongoing discussion and facilitating practical exercises and mini-performances (using a form of collective creation known as devising[1]) with learner-participants to attempt to distill possible causes of fragility in at-risk and fragile environments; and enacting ways of building antifragility in fragile circumstances.
- Writing a reflexive, autoethnographic account of my observations in the classroom and in participatory discussions surrounding the work.
- Collating this data and prospecting for parallel deposits of symbiosis between vulnerability, Applied Theatre and antifragility.

1.5 Research Methodology

When acquiring and distilling data for the purposes of a research project, the selection of a research method determines the manner, content, duration and scope of the question – and creates the lens through which the work is viewed. The research approach for this project uses "empathetic neutrality" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, 10) to straddle autoethnographic and social constructionist methodologies. The data was collected through interviews within control groups (three data sets: one for learners, one for parents and caregivers and one for educators and senior school management). All participants filled in questionnaires, participated in semi-structured group interviews and open-discussion focus groups – and were recorded during their sessions. Some participants submitted journals and personal observations through voicenotes and videos (this was on a voluntary basis as part of an ongoing archival process associated with *Drama Kweens* (see section 1.7). Participation observation and recorded video were also used to gain insight into non-verbal utterances from and between speakers and participants. There were also semi-structured conversations and discussions between the researcher-facilitator and the learner-participants that occurred on a bi or tri-weekly basis as part of *Drama Kweens* that informed the direction of the program as well as this research.

1.6 LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS

The majority of this study was conducted in a geographical area in the Western Cape known as the "Cape Flats". The primary locations for interviews, focus groups and semi-structured

[1] Devised theatre (or collective creation) is a form of performance where the entire company of makers (performers, technicians, facilitators) is involved with every stage of creation. Over time, the story emerges "covered with the fingerprints of each and every participant" (Grode, 2012, 1)

discussions (as per my ethical clearance) were Battswood Arts Centre in Grassy Park, Manenberg High School in Manenberg and Fairmount Secondary School in Parkwood.
However, secondary locations that influenced a broader base of archival autoethnographic observations and deductions were located in high schools and centres in Nyanga, Langa, Khayelitsha, Philippi, Worcester, McGregor, Robertson, Observatory, De Doorns, Kayamandi, Mbekweni, Gugulethu, Koue Bokkeveld and Camps Bay, and were gathered between January 2008 and October 2018.

The Western Cape Education Department allowed for thesis-related research tools and group discussions to be conducted with a particular sample of participants during a set period between 5 September 2016 and 30 September 2017. *Drama Kweens* ran for extended periods both before and after this period. No direct observations or recorded sessions with participants were used from times outside of the permitted clearance dates.

1.7 DRAMA KWEENS

In 2014, I started an after school drama program called *Drama Kweens* (formerly known as *Drama Queens*). *Drama Kweens* continues to operate with learners in participating schools in the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal.

Drama Kweens is a non-compulsory after-school activity where learners can participate in drama-related exercises, group work and informal performances. We aim to produce at least one element of content per calendar year (this can be a live performance, web series, short film, poetry performance and/or participatory experience within the community). Learners are able to work on their curriculum-based practical assignments if they study drama as a subject at school, but are not required to do so. Learners who do not study drama at school are able to participate. Learners who are not currently enrolled at a Quintile 1-3 school are not allowed to participate due to matters of safety and logistics on government-owned, school property. With the permission of relevant school management and principals, learners who are enrolled at a non-participating Quintile 1-3 school may join a group at a participating Quintile 1-3 school, providing they conform to that school's rules whilst on school property – and keep their school uniform on for easy identification and accountability. Any learners of any gender, race, language, ethnicity, background, age and interest area is welcome to join

Drama Kweens. Learners who do not obey the manifesto of the group (see Chapter 4, section 4.4 *Drama Kween Manifesto*) may not remain in the group.

1.8. A PERSONAL NOTE ON MY RESEARCH

> "Nee, jou poes! Ek's die fokken gentleman!" [*No, you cunt! I'm the fucking gentleman!]*
> *Found in a journal from my first year of teaching, this was one of my (many) failed schemes to introduce order into the classroom: I instituted a weekly "gentleman" (of any gender) to open the door for everyone else at the end of the class. In trying to disrupt the patriarchy and be gender progressive and inclusive, I must have glossed over the finer points of what was expected from the role.*

When I started as a young, full-time teacher I was told, in no uncertain terms, by an older colleague that it was paramount to establish a pecking order early on. They gave the following advice:

> *Send someone outside for the whole lesson. Or to the principal. Doesn't matter who. It puts the fear of God into the rest and saves you time later on, because the ones who are cheeky enough to be naughty on day one are going to be the ones you have to chuck out anyway. So you might as well get it over with. That's the real world. That's the reality. We'll lose some – but it's fine as long as the others get through.*

This archaic stance, though officially frowned upon, is – in in my experience – still practiced amongst some educators in Quintile 1-3 schools in the Western Cape. And, to a degree, I sympathise with educators who feel they have no other recourse.

Using vulnerability against a learner immediately cleaves the educator from the class and splinters trust in the classroom. The learners, inherently, understand that this educator will sacrifice justice for security and the appearance of control (not unlike Barbara Holtmann's 2011 hypothesis on the post-apartheid South African Government's forfeiture of civic safety in the name of national security). In schools like these, it often feels like we are teaching in a time capsule – and apartheid is alive and well. You can find it snuggled between the pages of outdated textbooks and unverified attendance registers; mouldering in the grout of unserviced

or vandalized toilets and pit latrines; sending up clouds of dust on the dangerous and unsupervised walks home across vleis and train tracks and deserted public parks; and festering in the embittered and unequal relationships between learners and educators, educators and management, management and local government, local government and the Members of the Executive Councils for Education – and our Minister of Education and the ubiquitous November and December exposés in the media about dropping pass rates and substandard conditions in public schools.

Traditionally, there is very little space for vulnerability in the classroom. We have been given our roles, scripts and places to stand on the stage – and we all know how this particular tragedy ends.

To return to my anecdote: I, indulgently, smiled and thanked my colleague for their advice and cautioned that "that sort of thing" wasn't allowed anymore. Instead, I suggested that they try positive reinforcement. I knew all about positive reinforcement. I had baked cupcakes. I had made Excellence badges. I had star charts. I had done hours of research. I was bulletproof (just as well, since I was teaching in Manenberg[2] at the time).

They returned my smug smile and advised me to keep two (or more) cupcakes for myself for first break. I would need them.

I did.

They had been teaching for twenty-seven years. I had been teaching for fifteen minutes into my first hour of Grade 8 Drama, when I knew that I had made a terrible, terrible mistake. I didn't want to be the kind of teacher who punished to divide and conquer. I didn't want to punish learners at all. And I didn't want to be responsible for learners who felt like they were only valued if they kept quiet, didn't disturb the class and parroted information back in a series of tests that had little to no real-world application.

If this was teaching, then I estimated around ninety percent of my classes would fail by the time they reached Grade 12. Weaker learners were sent to subjects like Drama because it is seen as an "easy" pass. I had classrooms ballooning with learners who didn't want to act, were often shy and uncomfortable; and many of whom had very low levels of literacy. They, quite simply, couldn't read. And the course requirements of Grade 8 had the most vulnerable

[2] A low-income location in the Western Cape in an area commonly known as the Cape Flats. Manenberg is often associated with gun violence and frequent gang warfare.

members in the system performing heightened texts (Shakespeare, Marlowe and Donne) in Term One.

As Northrop recounts in her extensive work with cumulative disadvantage in literacy and the resultant low probabilities of throughputs: a learner who is struggling to maintain an "average" ability in literacy in pre-primary and primary school (who is not supported through the supplementary model of complimentary home and school involvement) is substantially more likely to remain on a disadvantaged trajectory (Northrop, 2016).

Educational psychologists working in at-risk schools have noted that the most obvious difference between learners who exhibit lower levels of literacy and those who exhibit average to high levels of literacy was between socioeconomic groups returning to grade one and two classes after lengthy holidays (Northrop, 2016). Learners with a strong home support system had an overwhelmingly positive improvement in their reading levels, confidence and personal growth in the post-summer terms; whereas learners who did not have the compensatory model displayed through their support structures experienced a widening gap in literacy, numeracy and classroom confidence. And this gap would continue to distend and distort over the years, worsening with time, low self-esteem and poor resource allocation (McCoach, O'Connell, Reis and Levitt, 2006).

Drama, then, becomes torture for those individuals. But principals, Heads of Departments and parents continue to encourage "problem" learners to enroll: determined that it will be a way to push troublesome teens through a broken system. And I, resultantly, had several violently charged encounters with my high school learners in that first year.

> "E' gat jou inni kop skiet lat'ie bloed uit jou tone uitloop!"
> *[I'm going to shoot you in the head so that the blood drips out of your toes!]*
>
> *Found in another teaching journal, this was my transcription of my first conflict with a learner that resulted in disciplinary action form the principal. The context was a practical examination where they were asked to perform Shakespeare's 29th Sonnet. They were embarrassed over their literacy level and their temper escalated when I*

asked them why they hadn't asked for help sooner, since this was the day of the exam. Ironically, the sonnet (which they were not able to perform that day) begins like this:

> When in Disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
> I all alone beweep my outcast state,
> And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
> And look upon myself and curse my fate
> (Shakespeare, trans. 2010, 1-4)

The learner was suspended and I have never seen or heard of them again. In that moment, with my lack of experience, I did what I felt was right as their teacher. I did not do what was right for the individual when I let them slip through the cracks of a system that was never designed for learners like them.

Holtmann humanises the painful injustice of people who are unable to exhibit compassion because they have been raised in a South Africa that has not been compassionate to them.
In her book, *What it Looks like when it's Fixed*, she maintains that (as a country) we have been accustomed to the idea of apartheid policing of civilians for so long that we cannot imagine a post-apartheid reality that isn't "tough on crime" (Holtmann, 2011, 4). She cites that in the space of 8 years from 1999 to 2007, life sentences for convicted offenders had risen from 400 to 8000. This correlates with public dissatisfaction with security and criminal justice – but does not explain why an "estimated 80% of all South African offenders will reoffend if they are ever released or granted parole" (Holtmann, 2011, 5).

I propose that we do not have a crime problem as much as we have a compassion crisis.

Much like my colleague advising that I "strike the fear of God" into those learners back in 2013, our preemptive strikes do little but confirm our worst stereotypes and self-fulfilling prophecies. And it starts in the classroom with an at-risk learner who is told that to "get an easy pass" they have to connect with their most vulnerable parts of themselves – in front of an audience of their peers – and be judged on it.

Under those conditions, I may also threaten to shoot my teacher.

As I grew in experience and confidence as an educator, my classes and I started to practice a system of conscious acts of forgiveness with each other. Before each session started we would do a warm-up and ask each other how we were feeling, and see if anyone needed a "sorry" or "I forgive you" for something that had happened that day. The public performance of this healing exchange, even when enacted by individuals who were not responsible for the act itself, was a revelation. There was vulnerability, there was voiced responsibility, there was shared acknowledgement – and then there was healing. Public forgiveness seems a strange place to start when trying to form an after-school Drama program. But it was what we needed to be able to trust each other enough to be vulnerable together. Northrop describes these acts as "consistent expectations" (Northrop, 2016, 5) – and she determines through her research that whilst high-quality instruction is a desirable outcome for any education department, unless that instruction is coupled with high-quality intervention for at-risk learners, that learner may not improve on their literary trajectory. In fact, the instruction may even further alienate the learner and make them feel unable to be taught at all (Northrop, 2016). Her complementary model, dependent on school and home intervention, becomes the learning ecosystem that interdependently encourages growth and quality of life in the learner. In short, they flourish.

In Quintile 1-3 schools, we often work with parents and caregivers who are not literate themselves, and struggle to assist their children and wards with homework and general academic support. Communities also battle with resource allocation and service delivery – meaning that learners sometimes don't have electricity at night to be able to do homework; or safe and sanitary living environments to be able to be emotionally and psychologically prepared for school. It is only through a commitment from everyone in the ecosystem that these learners are able to escape their current narrative and rewrite their story.

Over the last five years of running *Drama Kweens* in different schools, contexts and institutions, I've learned, where necessary, to open every space we occupy with public forgiveness (asked for and granted, for whatever negative influence and energy the group may be experiencing). Usually this is kept within the confines of the group, but sometimes the need to vocalize our feelings and their repercussions extends to staff and faculty, parents and even the rest of the student body.

I would like to reiterate: this was not a conscious or sage master-plan from the beginning of our sessions. It was an organic need amongst the first group of Grade 10s that I worked with

and, as our groups and workshops and interventions feathered out across communities we started to notice an ache for forgiveness in almost every space we went to.

Gobodo-Madikizela observed the following in an audience at one of her book launches:

> *…her confession and our embrace had stirred something in the mainly white audience…did the story resonate with the audience's longing, individually and collectively, for resolution of their own past, perhaps that of as-yet-unacknowledged transgenerational traumas…* (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2008, 58)

Gobodo-Madikizela had been speaking about her experience with Eugene de Kock (noted apartheid supporter and commanding officer of state sanctioned "death squads" used by the National Party government to kill, torture and terrify people of colour in South Africa during the second half of the twentieth century). A white, Afrikaans woman had made a public apology for her complicit acts towards the injustices of apartheid and a commitment towards reparations when she returned to the country. The audience broke into spontaneous applause. The transgenerational traumas Gobodo-Madikizela refers to are, I presume, scars specific to America and its unequal and unjust history and dealings with people of colour (particularly those transported to America as slaves). But in the South African context, we have found in our classrooms a transgenerational anger, hurt and rigidity between South Africans that is very much part of the legacy of a country that has not asked for or granted forgiveness for and from the people who live in it.

Gobodo-Madikizela encourages the practice of "public accountability" to enable new pathways and identities for the people who committed or contributed towards those crimes and grievances, not just for the citizens who have been transgressed against (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2008, 58). She exhorts us to use public accountability as a way of "witnessing" each other and our collective pasts – and rewriting a story of who we would want to be in the future. Gobodo-Madikizela comments on how the mere act of witnessing this healthy vulnerability can embolden and conscientise others to behave similarly, and encourage reflection and introspection for the individual as well as the group within which they may identify.

Gobodo-Madikizela also writes:

> *When a moment opens up for emotional expression in an encounter between groups or between individuals from different sides of historical conflict, the expression of emotion may be invitational…an invitation for the other to engage with understanding – to hear the depth of the other person's feelings. The ability of the listener to engage at this level is often what opens up the space for transcendence* (2008, 59)

The most famous example of public acts of forgiveness and confession in South Africa would be the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which was based on the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, No 34 of 1995 (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, 2018).

The TRC was an attempt at a restorative justice enactment that felt, to many South Africans, like a disproportionately forgiving performance rather than a sincerely contrite act of remorse. It began in 1996 and reviewed over one thousand cases of gross human rights violations. Again, similarly to Holtmann's observations on incarceration and prompt justice: these are not the acts of an unmotivated government. Why, then, do we still see such high levels of dissatisfaction and resentment between people groups in South Africa?

Were a public apology enough, perhaps the goals of the TRC could have taken root in our communities and the trangenerational traumas Gobodo-Madikizela refers to would not be manifesting amongst our learners today. However, it is my belief that the continual traumas of everyday life for at-risk South African learners (Born Frees: who are expected to be "over apartheid" – while still very much living in its effects) anesthetise any progress the TRC may have made for their parents. They crave that window of "transcendence". To be actively witnessed by peers, educators, schools and community leaders; and to participate in the penning of a new narrative – one where their agency and identity doesn't require retroactive justification or condescending chumminess with their aggressors.

1.9. RESEARCH QUESTION

In proposing a way to build antifragility into our educational spaces (leveraging multigenerational eco-systems of learning and performed healthy vulnerability) my research asks the following question:

If Quintile 1-3 public high schools in the Western Cape are fragile spaces (and will probably continue to be for the foreseeable future) how do we reappropriate this fragility for our learners as a way of incubating antifragility – and can the performance of healthy vulnerability (both on and off stage) fast-track this process?

CHAPTER 2

2.1 OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS AND CONVERSANTS

2.1.1. ANTIFRAGILITY

Antifragility is defined as the "opposite of fragile" (Taleb, 2012, 17). It refers to systems, organisms, organizations and people that have improved through stress and chaos to achieve evolutionary saltation. It is a strength beyond resilience. Where a fragile organism cannot withstand an extreme shock; an antifragile organism absorbs the shock, learns from it, mutates and evolves from it – and, thereafter, becomes shock-proof.

2.1.2 VULNERABLILITY

Brown's working definition of vulnerability compares the Latin root "vulnerare" – meaning "to wound", "capable of being wounded" and "open to attack" – with the word weakness: defined as the "inability to withstand an attack" (Brown, 2012, 39). She concludes that one "may argue that weakness often stems from a lack of vulnerability" (Brown, 2012, 39). Her reasoning being that when we do not acknowledge our vulnerabilities, we are most at risk. She goes on to quote other researchers in her field coming to similar conclusions:

"Far from being an effective shield, the illusion of invulnerability undermines the very response that would have supplied genuine protection" (Brown, 2012, 40).

Butler's working definition of vulnerability puts forward that resistance cannot exist without vulnerability; and that the vulnerable body is, itself, a riot against the cultural imperialism of a capitalist, paternalistic bigoted world. Butler positions the vulnerable individual (often referred to as "precariat") in the centre of a rebellion, both because of their perceived passivity in relation to a dominant power but also because of our

socially prescribed roles and narratives within that world. Butler argues that regardless of how we shape our internal relationship to vulnerability, we cannot change an external story that guides the characters and narrators towards a perception of how the tale should end. Butler insists that our resistance is best fought within that story. And that our bodies and lives illustrate our rebellion against normative socialization and prejudice (Butler, 2015). Vulnerability, then, becomes a verb.

In this paper, both understandings of vulnerability are acknowledged.

2.1.3. AT-RISK

At-risk refers to the probability of extreme risk and precarity (Schiller, 2008). It is not a certainty and does not define the person being described. Potential reasons for being termed at-risk include (but are not limited to): geographic location, resource allocation, literacy, numeracy, disability, illness, abuse, trauma, historical disadvantage and generational miseducation or restricted access to education, poor mental health, crime, unemployment, teenage pregnancy, underdeveloped emotional maturity and, or, a combination of these factors (Anderson Moore, 2006).

2.1.4. SAFETY/UNSAFETY/SECURITY

Holtmann best describes the key difference between safety, security and "unsafety":

> *In English, 'security' refers to protection from a known or perceived threat or danger, while 'safety' describes a state in which less security is needed…'unsafe' and 'unsafety' are used to describe the condition that results from endemic and pervasive exposure to crime and violence, linked to fragile social systems. Unsafety is intended to convey a state in which many communities exist, where they neither feel nor are safe, most of the time. Unsafety is offered as the opposite of safety* (Holtmann, 2001, 1-2).

Many of the learners in this study live in a perpetual state of unsafety. This has emotional, psychological and physical repercussions on their behaviour and actions. And relates back to the label of "at-risk".

2.1.5. LEARNING ECOSYSTEMS

This is further explored in the Literature Review but, essentially, unlike traditional educational facilities, learning ecosystems not only acknowledge that learning can happen anywhere (at all times) but actually encourage multi-modal learning from a complementary support model (Northrop, 2016). It is a vast and complex network of people, opportunities and modalities that stimulate learning beyond the scope of a set curriculum and encourage curiosity and belonging. In some instances, Learning Ecosystems refer specifically to technological innovations that supplement the traditional classroom model (like MOOCs, (Massive Open Online Courses), online short courses, Youtube channels and learning apps) but that is not a definition that is used in this paper.

2.1.6. FRAGILE

The dictionary definition of fragile is someone or something that is "not strong or sturdy; delicate and vulnerable" (Oxford Dictionary, 2018).

Taleb views fragility as a kind of arrogance, an insistence against adaptation and evolution. He goes so far as to say: "I'd rather be dumb and antifragile than extremely smart and fragile, any time" (Taleb, 2012, 17).

"Fragilistas" (Taleb's term) are extremely risk averse and are obsessed with "optimization, efficiency and the known" (Taleb, 2012, 24) meaning that they are completely incapacitated if anything changes or mutates in their environment.

2.1.7. ANARCHOPEDAGOGY

Anarchopedagogy rejects hierarchical power relationships in the teaching and learning exchange. It is a disruption of the traditional classroom model that can take many forms, including but not exclusive to: unschooling, deschooling, freeschooling, actively disbanding the formal educational system, homeschooling, deliberately infiltrating the traditional school system as a "Trojan Horse educator", teaching beyond the scope of the syllabus, encouraging curiosity and real-world application to subject matter, encouraging self-learning, teaching about or directly teaching trades and artisanal crafts and skills (known as "reskilling"), challenging or completely disregarding organizational rules that govern the teaching space, challenging hegemonic norms in the classroom and learning environment at every given opportunity (Haworth, 2012).

> *To enter classroom settings … with the will to share the desire to encourage excitement, was to transgress. Not only did it require movement beyond accepted boundaries, but excitement could not be generated without a full recognition of the fact that there could never be an absolute set agenda governing teaching practices. Agendas had to be flexible, had to allow for spontaneous shifts in direction* (hooks, 1994, 7).

In the case studies used in Chapter Four of this paper, we maintained some aspects of a traditional teaching environment and used Anarchopedagogical instruction to create new metrics and goals for ourselves. *Drama Kweens* was not curriculum bound. We regularly used reskilling, self-learning and real-world application to disrupt sedentary hierarchical relationship chains in our sessions (Haworth, 2012).

2.1.8. SOFT SKILLS

Soft Skills are usually defined as "personal attributes that enable someone to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people" (Oxford Dictionary, 2018).

In drama classes we would add to that definition by including specific affinity for and ability in: group work, textual analysis and interpretation, clear communication, physical connection, emotional intelligence and intuition and the ability to receive, process and provide feedback in a constructive manner to one's peers. Soft skills and executive functioning are, sometimes, seen as similar and, or, entwined concepts.

2.1.9. NATION BUILDING

The term nation building is usually used in reference to a country that has newly received independence or has undergone a major change in governance (Oxford Dictionary, 2018).

The South African Department of Arts and Culture have an ongoing definition for Nation Building, however, and it refers to how we are continually amending, adding to and envisioning the South Africa that we want for ourselves and for each other. This is the definition acknowledged in this study:

> *Nation-building is the process whereby a society of people with diverse origins, histories, languages, cultures and religions come together within the boundaries of a sovereign state with a unified constitutional and legal dispensation, a national public education system, an integrated national economy, shared symbols and values, as equals, to work towards eradicating the divisions and injustices of the past; to foster unity; and promote a countrywide conscious sense of being proudly South African, committed to the country and open to the continent and the world* (South African Department of Arts and Culture, 2013).

2.1.10. QUINTILE SYSTEM

In response to unequal access to good education in public schools, the South African Schools Act was amended in 2005 and all public schools were separated into a quintile system (Ally and McLaren, 2016). Schools are now categorised between 1 and 5, depending on the conditions and relative wealth of the surrounding communities. Quintile 5 schools are located in resource-rich locations and Quintile 1 schools are located in low-resource locations (Ally and McLaren, 2016). Quintile 1-3 schools are known as "no fee schools" because "they are not allowed to charge fees" while Quintile 4-5 schools may supplement their smaller governmental support by charging fees (Ally and McLaren, 2016, 1).

The Quintile System is often viewed as ineffectual, and even problematic, by educators and management staff. This is due to the high incidence of corruption and financial mismanagement in the Quintile 1-3 areas, as well as the misclassification of schools that are resource-rich adjacent. Learners who commute to other geographical locations in the hopes of a better education are also not taken into account. Inability to pay school fees is cited as the primary reason for learners dropping out of the school system (Ally and McLaren, 2016, 2) and this is an increasing trend, as Quintile 1-3 schools cannot afford to maintain their "no-fee" status.

2.1.11. BORN FREES

Born Frees (also known as the "Mandela generation") are South African citizens who were born after 1994. They represent more than 40% of the country – and they have been voting in the National Elections for the past 6 years (Maswili, 2014,1). Despite the focus on education, service delivery and community upliftment in post-apartheid election campaigns, many South African feel that the majority of Born Frees are still experiencing the detrimental effects of Apartheid laws and legacies in their daily lives.

2.1.12. POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

Post-apartheid South Africa technically refers to South Africa after the 1994 collapse of the Apartheid state and connotatively refers to a renewed commitment to democratic rule throughout the country and over all of its people (Desai, A and Padayachee, A, 2013).

2.1.13. SAFE SPACE

The term "safe space" has been used more and more frequently over the past few years, and has garnered substantial amounts of criticism and debate due to the multiplicity of definitions associated with it; and the resultant confusion some users experience when including it in a conversation (Ho, 2017). It is most commonly perceived as a designated place (physical, online or elsewhere) that allows physical, psychological and emotional freedom from ridicule and danger amongst "like-minded people…it emphasizes respectfulness and discretion" (Ho, 2017). Ironically, a rising number of users have called for more academic and intellectual safe spaces, where freedom of speech and the ability to speak without fear of reprimand from others can be enjoyed within the academy. Institutions of learning can find this dichotomy difficult to navigate, and the preservations of everyone's rights to be heard and valued almost impossible to uphold (Ho, 2017).

In this study, the safe spaces referred to denote co-created havens of understanding, respect and trust where learners, staff, caregivers and parents can discuss and unpack their concerns without fear of prejudice or judgment.

2.1.14. APPLIED THEATRE

> Also known as Applied Drama, Applied Theatre is commonly accepted as the term for theatrical performances or processes that promote social change and community awareness and involvement (Ackroyd, 2000). Applied Theatre is rarely performed in traditional theatre spaces and is usually adopted by individuals or groups who work with (but do not necessarily constitute themselves) untrained actors who are not well-versed in theatre techniques or traditions. Thompson specifically stipulates that Applied Theatre should be a "practice by, with and for the excluded and marginalized" (Thompson, 2008, 15).
>
> Participants use a variety of techniques, including but not exclusive to: role-play, collective creation, improvisation, tableaux work, physical theatre, choral recitation, the many methodologies of Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed[3], oral tradition and playback theatre (Thompson, 2008, 21)

The aim of Applied Theatre is to enact change through facilitated experiences that create conversations and platforms of mutual understandings within communities (Ackroyd, 2000).

2.2. LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE FORMALIZED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT – AND A PROPOSAL TO COUNTER IT

2.2.1. FEMINISM, INSTITUTIONAL THEORY, ORGANISATIONAL STUDIES AND THE CLASSROOM

> Social innovation in a school might involve programmatic innovations in curricula and in pedagogical processes and structures. But it might also involve experiential innovations in the quality of the relationship between teachers and students – or in the nature of staff engagement.
>
> Often, these experiential innovations are assumed to be the result of the programmatic innovations, in which case scaling would simply be a programmatic effort, with the assumption that if other schools adopt the curriculum/ structure/process in question, they will experience similar experiential shifts. Scaling strategies could, however, be experiential as well, focused on exposing people directly to the kinds of experiences organization members are having…many modern social purpose organizations have

[3] Augusto Boal is widely acknowledged as a major influence on Applied Theatre and subsidiary tangents of performative practice in promoting social change. Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) is a methodology and canon comprising some of his most important techniques, exercises and observations in decades of work in Brazil and across Europe. For the purposes of this paper, Boal and his literature will not be considered an important focus, despite his eminence in the field.

deeply experiential missions like youth engagement or community building.
Such organizations seem ripe for research into experiential scaling (Nilsson, 2015, 389).

Although this study has not used gender as a specific lens, per se, through which to view the research, the autoethnographic nature of the research tools and the fact that all of the participatory groups were heavily gender-specific (the non-compulsory, non-exclusionary sessions were attended by cis-gendered girls, womxn[4], femme-presenting learners who chose not to disclose their gender, non-binary learners on the gender spectrum and trans girls – in the vast majority) emphatically meant that space needed to be given to a feminist reading of the organisational culture and institutional theory that underpinned our sessions. And the methodological paradigms presented in this thesis (see Chapter 3) incorporate and acknowledge Feminist Organization Studies as a theoretical guide to understanding practical Social Constructionism in this particular instance.

Calás and Smircich (2006) insist that while post-structuralist Feminist Organisation Studies has its genesis in gender, it grows rhizomatically (Butler, 1990) and symbiotically along intersectional tangents of inequality and social injustice.

Whilst different theoreticians may debate the particularities and nuanced manifestations of the purpose of Feminism in Organizational Studies, Calás and Smircich maintain one point on which most agree: "it is the recognition of male dominance in social arrangement, and a desire for changes from this form of domination" (Calás and Smircich, 2006, 213). Feminism is a political, personal and intellectual movement for social change and justice that requires both practical application and theoretical rigour to uphold its tenets (Benschop and Verloo, 2016; Calás and Smircich, 2014).

Calás and Smircich (2006) also caution against investing fixed meaning in the terms

[4] *Womxn* is a definition of women that explicitly includes all self-identifying people that consider themselves to be a woman or on a non-male spectrum (or, potentially any spectrum). This may or may not include: cisgendered women, trans women, femme/feminine-identifying women, genderqueer and non-binary folx. It relays a complexity of gender and identity (Peters, 2017)

"sex" and "gender" – referring to de Saussure's (1974) linguistic turn, which denotes the instability of language when making meaning. Language is a membrane through which meaning must be felt out and, as such, will always obscure its exact form. Post-structuralist, transnational, postcolonial feminist organization studies, therefore, is never fixed in its form, but must be able to occupy a liquid, gas and solid state to keep us all hydrated and alive.

In French postmodern feminism, Irigaray, Cixous and Kristeva (influenced by de Beauvoir, Derrida and Lacan) also use language as a point of traction for the positioning of the self as subjective/objective and, by extrapolation, beyond articulation. Lacan's notion of the hopelessness of a significant existence (*jouissancei*) for the "other" (Calás and Smircich, 2006) is the central précis around which the oppressed identity operates in a phallogocentric construction of reality.
"Institutional work" (Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca, 2011, 52) is a dynamic practice whereby individuals and groups use their institutional theory knowledge to purposefully erupt, disrupt and recreate from inside the organizational structure. The traditional understanding of institutional work is as a prop to maintain the authority (and authoritarian precedence) of institutional theory. When one is only accepted as the logical extension of the other, institutional work is presumed to represent a zenith in efficiency, innovation and normativity (Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca, 2011). While this is a possible outcome in Organisation Studies and Institutional Theory, Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca prefer to acknowledge the individual perspective and role in creating and shaping an institution; rather than the institution's role in shaping and creating a successful and well-trained individual. It is possible for the outcomes of both approaches to be similar, but the experience for the individual is, often, vastly different (Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca, 2011, 53).

This viewpoint, substantiated by Berger and Luckmann (1967) relates wholeheartedly to Social Constructionism, and the way our understanding of ritual and role fulfillment is actualised within a shared reality. Berger and Luckmann recognized the cohesive power of organisational culture both in the ochlocracy of institutional rupture and the docile conformity of institutional silencing. "…habit and action both count…[and this] allows a richer understanding of how individuals might actively and reflexively

maintain institutions, even while fulfilling socially prescribed roles" (Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca, 2011, 54).

When attempting to disrupt the knotty and wicked problems of the Quintile 1-3 school in a 45 minute extra-mural drama class, there is very seldom time to reflect on academic notions of institutional agency. However, an "institutional biography" (Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca, 2011, 55) was incorporated early on in our practical process as a hybridised means of writing character sketches and monologues for ourselves while unpacking the institutional culture and construct that determined how we behave and, to some extent, who we are when inside it.

An institutional biography is "the exploration of specific individuals in relation to the institutions that structured their lives and that they worked to create, maintain or disrupt" (Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca, 2011, 55).

Writing these fictional accounts of ourselves, embedded in the organization but, simultaneously, outside of it, provided the necessary self-reflexivity to consciously disrupt and challenge our schools – using drama as a means of facilitated, healthy vulnerability.

Marti and Mair (2009) specifically researched entrepreneurship in financially at-risk communities and made the astute observation that agency "goes beyond new ways of doing things and implies new ways of seeing things" (Marti and Mair, 2009, 93). Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca reference Marti and Mair's research when redefining institutional work, agency and the institutional biography; and suggest that the supposed vulnerability of financially precarious actors in an organization – far from the "safe" tactics of fragile actors with "everything to lose" in their current position – freed them up to challenge normative strategies, experiment with alternative resources and solution-centred frameworks, and discouraged them from replicating traditional models that were successful in contexts so obviously different from their own (inherently producing new, data-rich approaches). This process, essentially, resulted in a version of Taleb's antifragility. Both in the individuals and groups who constituted the organisation – and the organisation as it was being consciously made and remade through its active members.

2.2.2 ANTIFRAGILITY

> *Some things benefit from shocks; they thrive and grow when exposed to volatility, randomness, disorder and stressors, and love adventure, risk and uncertainty. Yet, in spite of the ubiquity of the phenomenon, there is no word for the exact opposite of fragile. Let us call it antifragile* (Taleb, 2012, 16).

Nassim Taleb writes extensively about the advantages of "antifragility" and how it can be harnessed to flourish in spaces that seem, counter-intuitively, to be hostile. He posits that withstanding the tremors and aftershocks of trauma allows an organism to build a state of being that is beyond robust: "the fragile wants tranquility, the antifragile grows from disorder, and the robust doesn't care too much" (Taleb, 2012, 34).

In other words: if you hit a flower, it will be crushed. If you hit a table, it will withstand the blow, but learn nothing from it – and will continue to be hit time and time again at the point of your choosing, absorbing distress (or even damage) to its structure as part of its lot in life. If you hit me and I survive, I'll learn to duck or run. Quickly. And my sense of accomplishment and good fortune at escaping from further harm will rewire the way I think about other people's potential to hurt me, and how I can and should react to avoid their behaviour affecting my reality. Taleb encourages experimentation by welcoming these shocks and conundrums into our business endeavours, relationships, modes of parenting, partnerships and research methodologies. Without them, we cannot iterate our ideas, evolve our core values and motivations and distill our methodologies down to their most unshakable states (Taleb, 2012, 61).

A sedentary antifragile system ceases to be antifragile. It must improve, constantly, via vibratory experience and shock. It absorbs the uncertain, the risky, the messy and the incomplete and it uses these fault lines as trenches to rest, recover and plan the next attack – while gaining more ground.

I must pause here to note that when working with at-risk learners in fragile environments it seems at best ill chosen and at worst downright unethical to encourage exposure to more stress. Critics of Taleb (Connor, 2016; Platje 2015) are quick to point out that his theories are reductionist ponderings on Darwinian law and the "fail faster" maxim (although they both

admit that, until Taleb, there was no one word to encompass the positive effects of stressors in the same way that antifragility does (Connor, 2016, 114). Taleb has also been criticized about actively seeking out stressors that could lead to compounding trauma for ill-equipped individuals that are already at-risk (Connor, 2016, 116). And, I would like to extrapolate on that point: in my opinion, Taleb's work viewed through a phenomenological or heuristic lens when working with at-risk learners would be classist. The inevitability of the learners' fragile circumstances would create a laboratory of trauma that could, very easily, become overwhelming and unhelpful. However, using the social constructionist paradigm, where learners, educators and stakeholders are actively constructing their reality and their role in its impact on their identity and sense of self, the stressors and trauma of the realities in a Quintile 1-3 school can be recalibrated and reviewed as a positive exercise in organic adaptation and personal growth.

We could, for example, extrapolate the term "fragile" to encompass not only the learners but the classroom itself: an environment that doesn't easily adapt, where the stakes are unreasonably high with the odds stacked against learners, educators, parents and management – and the entire system lumbering along under the weight of various checks and balances implemented to avoid exploitation but often resulting in gross abuse of the individual for the apparent "good" of the collective. Has robust stoicism proven to be the best way forward over the last 24 years?

The schooling system in South Africa will not and, truthfully, cannot change overnight. But our attitude and methodologies of teaching can. And rethinking how we perceive and process trauma and shocks to the individual and the teaching environment could invigorate new growth and stimulate an evolutionary saltation.

2.2.3. ANARCHOPEDAGOGY: LEARNERS DON'T LEARN ALIKE

> *Universal education through schooling is not feasible. It would be no more feasible if it were attempted by means of alternative institutions built on the style of present schools. Neither new attitudes of teachers toward their pupils nor the proliferation of educational hardware or software (in classroom or bedroom), nor finally the attempt to expand the pedagogue's responsibility until it engulfs his pupils' lifetimes will deliver universal education. The current search for new educational funnels must be*

> *reversed into the search for their institutional inverse: educational webs which heighten the opportunity for each one to transform each moment of his living into one of learning, sharing, and caring* (Illich, 1987, viii).

The contemporary concept of Anarchopedagogy as already outlined in Illich's manifesto for deschooling is not a new one. It is, however, a term that still causes concern for mainstream educators, principals and management – and, often, parents, caregivers and other stakeholders. It is a term that (by its very prefix) demands a disruption of schooling as we know it: an unraveling and a dismantling.

There is no, one, definition of the term, since this would be counter-intuitive to its fluid application and defiance of rigid states of governance (that are perceived to be inherently violent and oppressive). Anarchopedagogy is used, loosely, in two main arenas: to imply a rejection of and a removal from mainstream schools (this may or may not include homeschooling, deschooling, unschooling and reschooling) and an embracing of alternative knowledge systems – sometimes indigenous to the cultural or geographical context of the learner); and to refer to the process a learner, their caregivers and educators undergo once that learner is removed from the mainstream school environment. Thus, it can refer to both the practice of a philosophy and the psychological manifestation of the practice in implementation (Bruno-Jofré and Zaldivar, 2012).

Todd (2011) describes Anarchopedagogy as a radical, inclusive and courageous way to approach learning, for every participant. Goldman enthusiastically extols:

> *…the child, however, has no traditions to overcome. Its mind is not burdened with set ideas, its heart has not grown cold with class and caste distinctions. The child is to the teacher what clay is to the sculptor. Whether the world will receive a work of art or a wretched imitation, depends to a large extent on the creative power of the teacher* (Goldman, 1969, 154).

Anarchopedagogy is of as much benefit to the educator and the institution as it is to the learner. The current educational crisis in South Africa as surfaced by the *Fees Must Fall* movement and ongoing demonstrations against declining standards in public schools (Maswili, 2014) has made visible the disappointed expectations of Post-apartheid South African voters (Desai, A and Padayachee, A, 2013). What are our ready solutions to a failing

system? When have we needed radical, inclusive and courageous education more than we do now?

Anarchopedagogy starts deschooling educational institutions by tearing down the notion of formalized education as a point of accomplishment: a destination (Bruno-Jofré and Zaldivar, 2012). Littered with certificates acting as pseudo passports and supercilious cairns to arbitrary accomplishments; the education systems stood (and still stands) as gate-keeper to employment, integration and social cohesion in the complex swarms that dictate our living spaces.

2.2.4 THE LEARNING ECOSYSTEM

In keeping with Illich's original teachings, advocates of deschooling and Anarchopedagogy (and some educational theorists) maintain that networks, not establishments, are the solution to conscientising and socalising learners in an impactful, responsible way. In this model, "networks" refer to "autonomous, non-heirarchical" exchanges of information that "facilitate a variety of diverse modes of learning and community interaction" (Todd, 2011, 67).
The obvious flaw in this structure being a strong reliance on self-discipline; Illich insisted that its stability was woven into the intergenerational accountability of multiple stakeholders in the learning process – not just learner-educator, educator-parent and/or parent-learner-parent.
He referred to this interconnectedness as a "learning web" (Illich, 1987, 76).

This move towards more meaningful modes of understanding had the added advantage of circumventing the normalizing influence of the controlled institution; and is what Todd describes as a redemptive "rupture" (Todd, 2011, 69).

Brighouse (2005) states that educators should value learner autonomy, a capacity for contribution (in the emotional, personal and economic sense), a sound understanding of the terms of democracy, the ability to co-operate, and the encompassing sense of individual "flourishing" (Brighouse as paraphrased in Grant, 2012). Moreover, he adds that "at the foundation of the arguments for preparing children to be autonomous and preparing them for the labor market is the idea that these are extremely valuable for them to be able to live flourishing lives" (Brighouse, 2006, 42). Brighouse does not think this is the complete

picture. He stipulates that holistic "flourishing" is defined by seven key influences in one's life: financial condition, interpersonal relationships (usually involving the nuclear family), occupation, community and friendships, well-being (physical, emotional, spiritual, mental), freedom (perceived and experienced) and a rooted sense of personal value (Brighouse, 2006, 57).

Grant adds to this premise by acknowledging that there is more than one notion of a "good life" associated with success, and that not all of these lives are focused on the accumulation of wealth and status (Grant, 2012, 924). Grant further comments that Brighouse does not take into account the demands of context and upbringing, psychology and history of the people group the learner may be born into and, therefore, cannot escape influence from; and suggests an amendment to the core criteria or checklist of inclusive assessment to the following practices: "(1) self-assessment, (2) critical questioning, (3) the practice of democracy, (4) social action, (5) tools of adjudication" (Grant, 2012, 920).

2.2.5. BLENDED LEARNING AND SYMBIOSIS

When referring to a learning ecosystem, inherent in the concept is an allowance for complexity in content creation, consumption and delivery – and sophistication in the relationships between those complicit in the process of learning

(Nikolaidou, Sofianopoulou, Alexopoulou, Abeliotis, Detsis, Chalkias, Lazaridi and Anagnostopoulos, 2008). Classrooms no longer refer to a single chain of delivery and methodology of knowledge transferal.

Blended learning (Olapirivakul and Sher, 2006; So and Brush, 2008; Bonk, Cross, Graham and Moore, 2005) is often thought to mean technology integration in classrooms – but it actually refers to multi-modal, stratified and organic learning patterns that appeal to learners and students through diverse approaches and a use of a combination of traditional pedagogy, mentorship, peer-to-peer learning and technological assimilation (Nikolaidou et al., 2008).

To explore the implications of blended learning in the interrelations between stakeholders (learners, instructors, and technicians); the concept of blended learning ecosystems was proposed and adopted by research practitioners in educational psychology (Nikolaidou et al. 2008).

Learning ecosystems allow for multiple stakeholders, multiple modes of learning, and for messiness. They compensate for the fact that learners absorb information differently, and at different paces – and encourage instructors to approach their pedagogy as a means of

acquiring knowledge themselves. Learning ecosystems do not rely on single resources, but gather as many means of building as vast a knowledge commons as possible (Nikolaidou et al., 2008).

Holistic education acknowledges multiple change agents (Zaka, 2013) and the ecosystem approach urges input from all stakeholders at all times.

Zaka warns that capacity building and educator buy-in are crucial multicellular organisms in the evolution of learning ecosystems, and managerial and departmental support become critical to their success if they are to be expected to shoulder the responsibility of facilitating a learning network on this scale.

When examining the practice of Anarchopedagogy and deschooling in subjects like drama, there are further considerations to be made. Schools tend to be highly risk-averse and wary of escalating expectations of record-keeping and archived accountability from management and beaurocracy (Hardy, 2012). Accumulative administrative responsibilities keep fragile spaces like Quintile 1-3 schools deadlocked in a fragile state. And, where time is precious and little, many are particularly wary of the creative and performing arts as an area of slippage and uncertainty within the closed ranks of the academy (Hardy, 2012). Applied Drama, then, becomes a nimble and responsive answer to the question of at-risk learners who tend to have fewer or poorer quality complementary support networks of their own (Northrop, 2016); providing a window for Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca's (2011) "institutional biography", Nilsson's (2015) "experiential scaling", Berger and Luckmann's (1967) social constructionism (through performance and by critical feedback), Taleb's (2012) "antifragility", Illich (1987) and Todd's (2011) Anarchopedagogy and deschooling and Brighouse's (2005) call to "flourish" – all within Zaka (2013) and Nikolaidu et al.'s (2008) blended learning ecosystem.

Applied Drama in the Quintile 1-3 classroom, I propose, is the sweet spot for this data-rich and self-reflexive point of entry into decentering fragile educational spaces for learners and recentering their potential contribution, self reliance and ability to co-create an alternative life narrative.

2.2.6. APPLIED DRAMA: AN ANTIFRAGILE ECOSYSTEM OF LEARNING MADE MANIFEST

Schiller (2008, 15) citing Way (1967) and Backstrom (1988, 1989) suggests that drama "contributed to an improved self-concept by providing opportunities to gain personal confidence by working in an uncritical atmosphere". I would add to that, and note that inherent in an Applied Drama model is the idea of feedback, constructive criticism or "notes" given to every performer after their practical contribution to the class. The act of performance and healthy vulnerability on an elevated platform like a stage (even when the stage is merely a classroom floor) invokes Grotovski's "holy contract" (1965, 3) – and this, in turn, develops a healthy relationship with critique and self-development from co-creators seen as allies rather than opponents. Another positive result of Applied Drama in the classroom is the opportunity for the learner to improve their own ability to constructively and healthily critique their peer's work in a safe space. This contributes to the social development of all parties in the blended learning ecosystem through a collaboration of response acquisition, response practice, response shaping, and cognitive restructuring (Courtney, 1995; Jendyk, 1981).

When using an Anarchopedagogical perspective on Applied Theatre, one can quickly conclude that the very undertaking of acting out a scenario, tableau and, or, scripted performance requires a complex process of monitoring and evaluation actualized via discussion, devising (improvisation and collective creation), character research, physical adaptation, vocal modulation, synergy and commitment with and to the ensemble. And (after the performance has finished) a rigorous reflexive and collaborative reconstruction of the process (known as a rehearsal) is facilitated and physically embodied by the members of the organisation in a repeated and ordered fashion. Through this engagement, reflection and re-engagement process, it may be many weeks before a piece can feel "finished" or ready or be observed in its entirety. Here we see Bandura's (2004) theory of socio-cognitive behavioural change in action (and reaction): as learners use characters to explore attitudes, psychologies and reasoning in scenes and workshops, so they distill and solidify their own choices and behaviour outside the classroom. This allows a critical distance from which the subject/object paradigm of a vulnerable precariat can start to conscientise their responses and behaviour and – thanks to the antifragility their characters have gained – all without having to experience the explored trauma, directly, themselves.

Wagner notes the following in her explication of Educational Drama as a means of nation building (1999, 94):

> *In the late 1980s, several research projects focused on the learning environments young people judged effective in fostering their social and academic learning and persistence. They found drama and role-playing to be a component of 90% of these organizations. The vast majority of youth organizations that young people in inner cities considered most effective included either conflict-resolution segments or performance drama. Only in rare cases were these youth-chosen learning environments in community drama linked to traditionally conceived school theater programs*.

Since then, a notable increase in budget cuts for performing and creative arts extra mural activities has correlated with an increase in behavioural problems, low through-put rates and bullying, and a decrease in comprehensive social skills, literacy and the ability to demonstrate self-discipline and auto-navigation in the average at-risk high school learner (Shaw, 2017, 398-407). Of course, there are multiple factors in these complex iterations of wicked problems (and Shaw is writing from the U.S. while in South Africa we have a socio-cultural and historical specificity to our learner's multifaceted precarity); but an acknowledgement of this intersection of cause and effect gives reason to pause.

Holtmann's (2011) book *What it looks like when it's fixed* is an immersive exploration of what it would take to "fix" a fragile space, co-created with the community in question. Holtmann begins by exploring the differences between safety, unsafety and security and how a lack of empathy and opportunity for vulnerable, post-apartheid South Africans has lead to a compassion-deficit amongst the most at-risk in these communities (Holtmann, 2011, 4). Applied drama will not "fix" at-risk learners, their grades, the inordinate amount of stress their educators are under – or the years it will take to right the wrongs of a decades-old unequal education system and its socio-political, transgenerational trauma. It could, however, promote intra and inter-organisational empathy between stakeholders in the blended learning ecosystem. And stimulate a culture of compassion, political awareness and a sense of individual and group purpose in an organisation, institution and, or, community (Heathcote, 1994; Catterall, 2006).

2.2.7. SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM THROUGH DRAMA

Performative transformation through elevation from daily to extra-daily activity (the social constructionist notion of unconscious performance as part of every day life as opposed to the actor's complicit dedication to conscious performance for an a colluding audience), as defined by Eugenio Barba and his concept of Theatre Anthropology, is a permissibly transgressive act against socially constructed reality (Barba, 1982, 573). Indeed, Barba's devotion to the heightened states within extra-daily performance demands a complete release of "truthful" expectations and a willing suspension of disbelief (Barba, 1982).

Noted conversants in the arena of theatre and performance as a means of broaching constructionism and a bridge between constructed reality and manifested reality include Schechner (2017), Fiscger-Lichte (2008), Schneider (2011), Parker and Sedgwick (2013), Read (2003), Nelson (2013) and Beeman (1993).

2.3. LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE SELF: PRECARITY, PERFORMANCE AND VULNERABILITY

2.3.1.FRAGILITY, VULNERABILITY, PRECARITY

> *…if women or minorities seek to establish themselves as vulnerable, do they unwittingly or wittingly seek to establish a protected status subject to a paternalistic set of powers that must safeguard the vulnerable, those presumed to be weak and in need of protection?*
> *Does the discourse of vulnerability discount the political agency of the subjugated?* (Butler, 2014, 2)

Over the past forty years, the term "resilience" has been appropriated by several disciplines in the academy; and has come to be a kind of catch-all when describing ethnographic denominators in areas such as gender studies, queer studies, academic feminism, social work, education, literary studies, psychology, counseling, political science and urban studies. Notable theoreticians in the field of feminist resilience include Butler; Brown; Franz and Stewart; Freedman; Hernandez and Roberts; Lam and Grossman; Williams and Mickelson;

Balsam; Freedman and Kinsel. Whilst resilience can be a keystone in identity studies (particularly in ethnographic, auto-ethnographic, phenomenological, ethnomethodological, and systems theory pursuits), Butler cautions against the unfortunate corollary that at-risk groups, particularly minorities, are inherently fragile and the specificity of their fragility is homogenous – and, therefore, their resilience must be both congruent to their circumstances and to the larger expectation of what fragility is or is not. Again, this understanding remains in conversation with Taleb's urging towards the antifragile through vulnerability.

Fragility, vulnerability and precarity are terms often associated with women and minorities (Butler, 2014). Butlerian tropes of performative identity (1990) as cited by Barad (2003) elucidate the gendered self as "materialist, naturalist and posthumanist" (Barad, 2003, 803) – and collapse the praxes of sex, gender and sexuality as autonomous entities within and without the body as a site of agency. She concludes: "all bodies, not merely "human" bodies, come to matter through the world's iterative intra-activity – its performativity" (Barad, 2003, 823). Thus, the body as both subject and object become a site of meaning when precarity is reclaimed and "weaponised" as a means of non-violent protest.

2.3.2 PRECARITY IN PERFORMANCE

> *It's incredibly vulnerable, and it's not always physically comfortable or emotionally comfortable, and it's not always like I'm able to choose the way in which it's vulnerable, because you're dealing with people, so you can't always say what's going to happen. My experience has been the more vulnerable you make yourself in the world, in which you share particular things with yourself, the more invulnerable it makes you too in certain respects. The more I've been vulnerable with the people in personal or social spaces, the more often people respond with kindness and generosity and that's just something that I had to learn. Because I don't trust people. It's difficult. And, I have good reason not to, but the thing is, the more that I have, the more beautiful the experience has been and the more love I get to experience. I think there's no way that you can love without vulnerability* (Pinto, 2016).

This is an excerpt from an interview with Dean Hutton (aka Goldendean, genderqueer performance artist) where they explained how they felt about their artwork. In the

performance, the artist places themselves in a shop window, naked – except for a layer of bright gold bodypaint. The work spoke to white privilege in South Africa, the vulnerability of bodies, reclaiming personal narratives, representation, consumption, and obsessive documentation through photography (Hutton is a former chief photographer for the Mail and Guardian newspaper). In addition to this, Hutton's work provoked something extraordinary in their observers: the vast majority of people who took photographs of the artist didn't shoot Hutton on their own – they wanted a selfie[5].

The performed, healthy vulnerability of the artist who has consciously written their narrative velvets the claws of the object/subject paradigm, and precipitates a response from the observer that includes rather than excludes.

Butler supports this by arguing that the agency of the so-called oppressed should not be discounted as part of the act of "protection" – especially when true protection of the vulnerable would be tantamount to dismantling the power of the oppressor: which would equate to the disruption and dispossession of systemic power. The self-same power that resides in the "robust" palm of "imperialist, white-supremacist, capitalist patriarchy" (hooks, 2004).

2.3.3. SOUTH AFRICA-SPECIFIC THEATRE FOR CHANGE

In Prentki's (2008) critique of socially conscious theatre in post-apartheid South Africa, he observes that "learning spaces" are as segregated as our geographical locations – determined by race classification during apartheid under the Group Areas Act. He recalls the philosophies of theatre great, Peter Brook, and his deterministic approach to sites of being and sites of seeing (on a stage) when he says "no space is empty" – it is charged with memory, meaning and identity (Brook, 1996). In South Africa, in particular, no two classrooms are the same – or even similar – no two educators, and certainly no two learners. To have a curriculum that serves Bishopscourt and Bishop Lavis[6] alike is farcical, but it is also our current fact.

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[5] A *Selfie* is a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically taken with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media networks (Oxford Dictionary, 2018)

[6] Bishopscourt is an affluent area in the Southern Suburbs of the Western Cape. It is, largely, populated by people catagorised as "White" because of the exorbitant prices of real estate, and historical injustice and inequality which makes it difficult for people of colour to buy in that suburb. Roughly 25 minutes drive from there is a low-resource area called Bishop Lavis, a site of relocation

Prentki preempts this by positing a classroom bricolage of "counterhegemonic strategies of Brecht and the practical, participatory social analyses offered by Theatre for Development" (Prentki, 2008, 99). Theatre for Development is a catch-all description useful to Non-Profit Organisations and social justice movements using roleplay, theatre and performance-based games or practice as a means of social cohesion, healing and nation building. Since Brecht was notorious for his acts of conscientisation through his use of the *Verfremdungseffekt* – amongst others – (Sacks and Thompson, 1994) – whereby the audience member is deliberately reminded that they are in a theatre and, thus, is provoked to post-performance reaction and then action in the outside world; this hybrid approach to the epistemology of arts education could be seen as a form of theatre deschooling.

2.3.4. TRAUMA AND VULNERABILITY

> *Trauma work entails not only the mending of physical and psychic wounds, but also…the reconstruction of narrative structures mourning for the vulnerability of the self with an awareness of the vulnerability of others* (Saal, 2010, 453).

Referencing Elaine Scarry's persuasive text *The Body in Pain*, Saal writes about how pain (and, inevitably, vulnerability) unravels our umbilical cord to the physical world and often, with it, our connection to language to be able to express this loss and disconnection. Noted researchers of trauma Caruth (2014, 2016) and LaCapra (1999, 2016, 2016) and their work on how trauma permeates identity, community, memory and language have suggested the powerful way that extreme trauma removes language from the body and replaces it with primordial wrenches (moans, cries, shouts and exclamations). Saal suggests a constructionist approach to healing would be to reword trauma (the actual event, not a reaction to it) after the fact: give it new language and rewrite the way it defines those it has changed. She offers stories and theatre as a means of reappropriating the past so as to mourn and heal – whilst maintaining a skepticism of how to do so without losing agency for the victim, upholding the immediacy of what their trauma is and is not, and ensuring complicit observation of this process through the membrane of theatre in a relationship that feels ethical to all parties (Saal, 2010, 454). She relies heavily on a Butlerian definition of vulnerability as resistance while proposing creative writing and autoethnographic practice as a means of processing

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after the forced removals of the 1970s in the Western Cape. It is, largely, populated by people who were categorized as "Coloured" under apartheid law.

distress and providing a vocabulary for healing.

"Well, I have a vulnerability issue. And I know that vulnerability is the core of shame and fear and struggle for worthiness, but it appears that it's also the birthplace of joy, of creativity, of belonging, of love" (Brown, 2010). Brown's viral TedTalk encouraged her listeners to find safe spaces and people with whom they could practice their vulnerability through the conscious act of telling stories. She urged them to ask themselves "Who has earned the right to hear my story" – and then to honour their loyalty by including them in the narrative going forward. She goes on to speak about the loneliness of perfection – and how revealing our most vulnerable selves buoys others up, gives us a chance to heal, rewrite and reject our formerly unhealthy patterns and limitations, and include our community in our successes and progress. In this act, I believe she is unconsciously (or, perhaps, consciously) referring to Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca's "institutional biography" and creating a way for communities to coalesce into organisations that are accountable, aware of every member and sensitive to the needs of the individual as an indication of the overall wellbeing of the group).

2.3.5. PUBLIC VULNERABILITY

Performers are encouraged to be vulnerable. Seton (2006) urges that the sign of a truly great performer is not technique or (by implication) dexterity in the "skill" of acting – but the ability to lose oneself and find a character (Seton, 2006, 31).

This presupposes that a shared, generated, socially constructed "truth" is possible, and that it is the goal of a performance.

When dealing with at-risk participants, it is inadvisable to incorporate therapeutic practice if the mentor-educator does not have adequate training in the area. Seton refers to this schism of ethics as "post-dramatic stress" (Seton, 2006). Any learner or student attempting to build a character and excavate analysis of a text, choreographic score or language-less sequence will be confronted by the vulnerability of performance. This is the quickness and courage of standing up in front of others and demanding their attention. It is personal and political and uncomfortable. It can be antifragile – and it can result in unhealthy fragility.

Seton makes particular note of this when framed in a classroom context, and speaks bout the "powerful interplay between actors as performing bodies, and the teachers as witnessing and shaping bodies" and how the ethics of inter-corporeality and active vulnerability define the learner's performance inside and outside the physical and philosophical boundaries of the

teaching space (Seton, 2010, 15).

2.4 LITERATURE REVIEW OVERVIEW

To probe further into my research question: if Quintile 1-3 public high schools in the Western Cape remain such unjustly fragile (and complex) spaces, governed by the brittle platitudes of governmental bureaucracy (as examined through the lens of institutional theory and organisational studies) – wouldn't it serve the learner to strengthen their resilience rather than shore up the holes in an already besieged system? And, to move beyond resilience and engage a capacity for adaptation, how can our vulnerability can be reframed as a means of Butlerian embodied resistance: how do we reappropriate this circumstantial fragility for our learners and leverage in order to incubate holistic antifragility? And, furthermore, can the performance of healthy vulnerability (employing Brown's theories on shame and vulnerability and Butler's definition of precarity as protest) mechanised by the techniques of Applied Theatre, Anarchopedagogy and multigenerational eco-systems of learning shift the balance of power in our shared social construction of meaning-making to redefine how we determine "success" and "merit" for our learners?

It is my belief that performing and inhabiting vulnerability in front of an audience is an act of empathy and self-reflexivity.
Learning to practice antifragile vulnerability as a means of empathetic understanding of the vulnerability of others, so as to be a story-teller and healer, is an act of revolution.

CHAPTER 3

3.1. INSIDE, OUTSIDE, UPSIDE-DOWN: CONTEXTUAL INTRODUCTION

Working in low-resource areas in South Africa – as a middle-class, English speaking white woman – has had a presiding influence in the way I notate and experience my understanding of drama, Applied Theatre and why I make creative work. The stark differences between my life and the lives of the majority of the learners I work with have enabled certain biases and assumptions to dictate my thought processes and project goals. The advantage of an autoethnographic methodology in a social constructionist framework is that it forces me to explicitly examine these predispositions and question them within the confines of a set meta-theoretical paradigm.

Initially, I was highly visible when I drove into areas like Grassy Park, Parkwood and Manenberg and would often be asked by passers-by if I was lost or, quite astutely, which Non-Profit Organisation I was looking for.

Dual membership for the researcher (particularly within an institution or organisation) from an *emic/etic* (insider/outsider) perspective has been well researched in cultural studies for many decades (Hayano, 1979; Lewis, 1973; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Ethnography, traditionally, has promoted the idea of *etic* (outside) observation as a means of ensuring objectivity – which has lead to much criticism due its problematic categorization of people on an axis relative in proximity to the researcher's idea of normativity (Motzafi-Haller, 1997; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Historically, balances of power and financial distribution meant that the observer-researcher seldom had to be self-reflexive about their observations, and constructed their perception of the participants without adequate analysis or critique of their findings and how representative they were in and outside of the context in which the research took place (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

Greenfield's critique of objectivity posits that internal biases are an unfortunate and inescapable part of qualitative research because people cannot be "culture-free" and any knowledge created by the researcher will have their intellectual, cultural, philosophical and geographical fingerprints all over it (Greenfield, 2000, 233).

However, Greenfield acknowledges the advantages of an outsider-observer who can notate the particularities of a group's practices and their meanings in instances where the members of the organisation or institution may have become casual or even immune to important cultural observances and rituals that form the fabric of the environment where the research is conducted. Greenfield continues by determining the ideal positionality for the researcher: insider/outsider participant. This is a combination of both inside the community and outside of it, and is someone who identifies as a "culturally marginal person; these are people who have had important socializing experiences in more than one culture" (Greenfield, 2000, 233).

Using this definition, I would self-identify as a culturally marginal person: I am a historically advantaged, middle-class, English speaking white woman from KwaZulu-Natal who chooses to work in historically disadvantaged, low resource, predominantly Afrikaans or isiXhosa speaking communities in the Western Cape.

I am not from a low-resource area and I cannot speak for the communities I work with (who are not homogenous themselves and have many and varied opinions on the matters concerning my research). I have, however, gained a lot of empathy for and (I hope) understanding of the learners, educators, senior management, support staff, parents, caregivers and district leaders I have worked with over the years; and this has afforded me a modicum of acceptance in some circles where, despite the legacies of apartheid, I am rendered a little less visible.

When working as long and as closely as I have with a group (albeit in flux due to the nature of schools and learners who, eventually, move on) it becomes impossible and, at times, unethical to deny an *assumed* insider status that may not be felt in equal measure, or at all, by the rest of the group (Colic-Peisker, 2004; Lewis, 1973). In other words, I may feel I have assimilated more than I have. When I first started working in Grassy Park in 2013, I had very basic, grade 12 Afrikaans and an embarrassingly small collection of isiXhosa words with no grammar to string between them. In social constructionist theory (where language of any kind is a construction of the reality that governs the research and its validity), this is known as a "crisis of representation" (Turner, 1998, 598). In 2018 I am a fluent Afrikaans speaker (in vernacular, conversational and performative, heightened Afrikaans), a semi-confident isiXhosa listener and a growing-in-confidence speaker, and have started learning isiZulu to be able to further the work in KwaZulu-Natal. To reiterate: six years later, I am still a barrier

to progress in my own research and practice. And the *emic/etic* separation inherent in ethnographic observation will construct a texture to the research that simply wouldn't be there had someone from the community in question conducted the study. From a social constructionist perspective, other textural layers would have been added to shape of the work, of course – but it is important that I remember the ways my realities force an unwelcome ethnography into my imperfect autoethnography, and acknowledge the resulting consequences in this paper. Language, culture and religious practices can bind a group that contain a mixture of insiders and outsiders but there will always be inauthenticity in relaying research that forces either the research or the participant to relate to one another in a language that is not their primary choice (Colic-Peisker, 2004). As an autoethnographic researcher, data production relies on my ability to form relationship and sustain conversations and interactions with the participants of the study in a way that feels authentic and unrehearsed to both parties (Fielding, 2004). This puts an inordinate amount of pressure on the constructionist analysis of the data sets.

Notwithstanding the enormity of building trust across languages (and the problematic structural and hierarchical tensions this implies – particularly considering South Africa's colonial past), an autoethnographic approach towards a social constructivist interpretation of the research activates a constant negotiation between "self-awareness and reflexive self-evaluation" – and how they are both useful when acknowledged and applied during data collection and interpretation (Colic-Peisker, 2004, 86).

As well as these more obvious differences between us, the weeks revealed further cracks and ravines to repair and bridge. Education was a huge barrier to relationship for a lot of the parents and educators I spoke with (and was, at times, a cause of conflict, stress and insecurity for educators and unmerited deference, exclusion and lack of connection for parents and caregivers). Age ostracized me from learners and community leaders, senior educators, principals and parents alike (I am too old to be a teenager and too young to be an elder). The fact that I am a woman and I don't have children was cause for great concern amongst all participant groups, and elicited unwarranted pity from some of the parents, caregivers and educators – and more than a little mistrust from portions of the community delegates and leaders.

My clothes, taste in music, the car I drive, what I do on the weekends, where I live, the food I enjoy, where (if) I worship a deity, my ideas about what it meant to flourish and be successful, what I post on social media…there, often, seemed to be more differences than similarities between us.

But in the social constructionist paradigm, where our culture is created by us but also helps to create us, collaboratively, with those who subscribe to the same realities (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, 122), we nudge our performative selves towards our idea of what the other person will best connect with – and in so doing, the insider/outsider status of the research can shift from participant to participant as relationships and trust are formed (Maydell, 2010). This, counterproductively, can lead to a breakdown of relationships and trust, as intra and intergroup participants realise this adaptation and may view it as a kind of toadying or flip-flopping.

It is imperative to note that, at any stage during data collection, a participant identifying or disagreeing with the researcher in a group context can lead to disproportionately strong feelings of distrust and disconnection in the group(s) at large when other members feel marginalized, excluded and, or, judged by this clumping of opinion (Maydell, 2010). A researcher must have a heightened awareness of their internal adjustments and "tuning in" to insider/outsider status when attempting to build trust within the group (Maydell, 2010) – however tempting as it may be to self-identify as similar, wholly empathetic, like-minded and understanding.

With all this in mind, I began my research.

3.2 THEORETICAL INTRODUCTION

The main focus of Chapter Three is to present a description of the research process. It depicts the methods used during the process of procuring, analyzing and presenting the research; as well as a justification as to why these methods were adopting in this particular way.

It describes the distinct movements in the research: how participants were selected, how data was collected, and how data was collated and analysed. I will also discuss the role I play as a qualitative, autoethnographic researcher and how I maintained an adequately "reflexive turn" (Ropers-Huilman and Winters, 2001) in my position within the work.

And I will begin with an explication of my understanding of autoethnography, social constructionism and qualitative research – and how these paradigms and lenses have shaped my data.

This research examined how Applied Drama and the conscious performance of antifragile vulnerability affected the experienced precarity of at-risk learners and their immediate communities (specifically involving the after-school program known as *Drama Kweens*). The researcher-participant relationship took place over a 12 month period, but the participants were almost all known to me before our designated research period started (and I have continued to be in active communication, collaboration and relationship with many of them to this day). This influenced the data in positive and negative ways, and forced me to scrutinise my autoethnographic inside/outside biases all the more carefully. I used the models found in Feminist Organisation Studies to better understand how the individuals shape and are shaped by the whole (in this case: the *Drama Kweens* group, their families, peers and friends, the school, educational staff and their communities) and acknowledge my use of social constructionism as the schematic map that allowed a sophisticated interplay between my role in the research, my role in analysing the research, my influence in the interpretation and presentation of the research, my relationship between multiple participants in the research, and my writing of a thesis intended for an ideal reader of my construction.

3.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

When I started my process of formulating a research question and methodology I knew I wanted to do qualitative research. Even though I was in a Business School. Possibly *because* I was in a Business School. I've spent a long time working with people in low-resource spaces, and there can be a suffocating depression in the air around us that insists that things will never change, and the only way to improve one's life is to leave for somewhere or something better. This research will serve (I hope) as a crack in that atmosphere. And start to redefine what we see as "low-resource" and unblinker how we determine what is valuable – especially amongst our youth. But to do that using quantitative research would have taken large amounts of capital, hours in the field and a minor miracle of bureaucratic co-operation. I chose the scenic route. Following Denzin and Lincoln's (2005, 46) "Twelve Core Strategies of Qualitative Enquiry", I began to map out the suggested timelines and touchstones for design, data collection, and analysis and reporting. Immediately, I recognised that the language of qualitative methodologies complimented the practice I was already engaged in: "naturalistic enquiry", "emergent design flexibility", "detailed, thick description", "empathetic neutrality", "mindfulness", "systems perspective", "unique case orientation",

"creative synthesis", holistic perspective", "context sensitivity" and "reflexivity" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, 46-47).
Qualitative research provides "thick" data: it is not only an understanding and interpretation of the case study and those who are actively involved in it, it also allows for intention, emotion, nuance, opinion, motivation and gut.

> *Had she worked solely with data collected by others or only at a distance, she would never have discovered the crucial differences in the classroom she studied – differences that actually allowed her to evaluate the innovative program in a meaningful and relevant way* (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, 57).

Qualitative research provides an exploratory and descriptive understanding of data, as opposed to an explanatory conclusion. The descriptive nature of a qualitative enquiry creates capacity for a detailed explanation of the feelings and experiences of the participants – and this will serve to support or test the theoretical assumptions upon which the work is based (Meyer, 2001).

Having established that I was interested in understanding a qualitative theoretical reasoning as to why so many of the drama learners I worked with over the years had exhibited antifragile adaptation in their academic and social lives (despite, largely, remaining in fragile circumstances), I quickly realised that I would struggle to find adequate metrics in this study. How could I measure the improved degree of comfort with which a learner speaks in front of a class? How do I notate an improvement in attitude or atmosphere that a learner brings with them into a rehearsal?
I could mete out and measure improved literacy (to a degree) and make a spreadsheet of grade averages that bumped up a symbol – but the real joy we experienced as a group had very little to do with marks.

We celebrated when we "flourished" (Brighouse, 2006; Grant, 2012).
And we decided what that felt like.

To some, it was handing in written homework on time. To others, it was being comfortable enough to do somatic group work (physical theatre, touch-based warmups, clowning, body-

based tableaux construction). Some of our learners were frightened to speak in front of the group, or didn't like their accents – or didn't think they were smart enough to have the "right" opinion. A learner I had worked with for several years had selective mutism when they joined the group. One day, during a perfectly ordinary rehearsal, they called me out for paraphrasing a line in the script. I am very strict with learners about saying their scripts exactly as they are written: as an actor, it is disrespectful to the playwright to assume we know better and unimaginative to ourselves to assume we cannot flesh out any inconsistencies or shortcomings in a script with our subtext, physicalisation and gestural language. The *Drama Kweens* knew this all too well. And, in that moment, the manifesto of the group, the contructionist reality we had created and the Organisational theory that clubbed our value systems together invoke an indelible line in the sand in that classroom, on that day. And that learner spoke in front of me for the first time in three years. And they said "You're breaking the rules![7] Say you're sorry!"

This, to us, was a level of flourishing we'd never expected. It is still one of my proudest memories in teaching, years later. But how could I convey the magnitude of that moment without telling the story behind it? How could I explain that (almost) nothing on my CV could ever compare with being reprimanded by a teenager?

Autoethnography, as written about by noted academics Anderson (2006), Chang (2008), Ellis and Bochner (2000, 2006) and Reed-Danahay (1997), not only allowed stories and autobiographies space in the research – it insisted on them. The demands of autoethnography in a qualitative enquiry stipulate an excavation of the self in relation to others, from the perspective of self-narrative (Ellis and Bochner, 2000).

As a professional playwright and theatre producer, autoethnography seemed a logical choice when considering my methodological framework. Suddenly, I wasn't trying to twist our experience into something thesis-shaped. I was *just* telling our story. It reduced the pressure on participants to "provide data" in a traditionally ethnographic sense (although, of course, my relationships with participants were the lifeblood of the research) and re-centred me as the insider/outsider other rather than exoticising anyone else to legitimise the enquiry. Chang (2008) emphasises that while autoethnography is formed from a cultural perspective (and, therefore, describes a phenomenon most commonly experienced by a group) it can only be accessed through the writers reflexivity with themselves. In other words: my growth (or

[7] See *Drama Kweens* manifesto in Chapter 4, section 4.5

"flourishing") through this project was as important as the learners' (even though how we defined flourishing could look vastly different) – and without personally prioritizing this outcome or actively coding the data to find it, I was robbing myself, the learners and the readers of my thesis of the complexity and elegance of what it is that we were/are doing.
Referencing Chang (2008) and Muncey (2010), Denzin and Lincoln (2005, 102) urge that "autoethnography is both a perspective and a method" – and so, with this is mind, I started to work on the social constructionism that bound these approaches to our practice.

Social constructionism asserts that because humans have developed the ability to interpret their experiential understanding of a co-constructed reality, what one individual perceives as "real" may be very different from another individual's equally valid and self-substantiated belief (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). In short, "human perception is not real in an absolute sense" and is constantly constructed, examined, challenged and reconstructed as we define ourselves "interpersonally and intersubjectively by…interacting in a network of relationships" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, 121). Denzin and Lincoln then go on to explain that shared meanings and "truths" within a construct between members of an institution, organisation and, or, community create shared consequences for transgressions against or violations of said "truth" – and that determines very *real* boundaries for those who subscribe to the construction.

Social Constructionism allows for the co-existence of multiple realities, all dependent on the individuals and, or, groups who have constructed them – and because ontological relativity refutes the notion of empirical objectivity, constructionism encourages the dialogue between users of multiple realities as a data-rich source of enquiry rather than a weakness in the sample set (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

This paradigm wholly supports the perspective of autoethnography as I am forced to examine myself and my realities (and the nexus of their relevance and meaning to me), the reality of the classrooms and school environment (and the institutional laws and constructed cultures that govern administrative processes), the realities of the participants in the research (and how there is no homogenous experience for the groups I worked with – there is even a splintering of reality every time we devise or script a theatre performance together because none of us have the same idea about what someone from South Africa looks or sounds like),

and the constantly constructed realities swirling around in the shifting conclusions I decide the research has highlighted while I write up my findings.

Important to note, here, is the influence of power and authority over social constructionism. As an educator and someone who is educated to the level of a post-graduate degree, I was afforded an unspoken authority by the groups over which realities we subscribed to during the data collection phase. I was, initially, expected to bring a rigid framework of research tools, expectations and preferred outcomes to allay any uncertainty about what "the point" of our sessions was. I quickly learned that the semi-structured conversations, interviews and focus groups did not flow easily until the questionnaires had been completed. The structure of the questionnaire seemed to feel "real": participants were asked a question and they could fill in the (literal) blanks. Focus groups, however, were set up to ask the participants what the data was – and what it was saying. I was imploring them (us) to take authority over what it was we were doing, using their insider perspective. The biases our socially constructed reality permitted (around who was "in control" of the session) meant that it took a very long time – and several carefully considered and uncompacted strata of questions – before the groups felt comfortable with the idea that we were all "in control" of the conversation.

3.4. SAMPLING AND DESIGN STRATEGIES

I limited the participants in the study to three Quintile 1-3 learning institutions in Grassy Park, Parkwood and Manenberg: Battswood Arts Centre, Fairmount Secondary School and Manenberg High School. These schools were chosen because I already had a strong working relationship with the learners there, I was entrenched in the school system and body – and I had a proven track record with both educators and parents so my requests for support and commitment wouldn't be my first point of contact. These were also schools that fulfilled the basic criteria for the research (Quintile 1-3, at risk learners, fragile environment, potential for antifragile growth and observed healthy vulnerability) and were spread across three geographical areas in the Western Cape (although all three are located in a larger area known as the Cape Flats). This method of sampling is called *convenience sampling* and is typified by the following characteristics:

> *Convenience sampling…is a type of nonprobability or nonrandom sampling where members of the target population that meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate are included for the purpose of the study* (Etikan, 2016, 2).

Convenience sampling is inherently biased towards the convenience and interests of the researcher and, particularly in quantitative studies, considered to be less exacting than random sampling. Because of my autoethnographic approach, I consider convenience sampling to be an appropriate method of selecting participants because it reflects not only the data shared in the sessions but also the relationships, trust and loyalty formed over time as an indicator of the research in praxis.

In those three schools, I worked specifically with learners who were enrolled for school and were between the ages of 15 years old and 19 years old. I was not exclusionary in who could join in the research sessions, but learner-participants had to have attended *Drama Kweens* for at least one school term and hand in a signed consent form to be considered a part of the research. There were some *Drama Kweens* who chose not to have their opinions recorded or notated, although they did attend the sessions. There were also some *Drama Kweens* who chose not to attend the sessions when they knew I would be holding specific data-collection processes (focus groups, questionnaires or semi-structured interviews). Some of the *Drama Kweens* chose to submit opinions after the sessions had ended via voicenotes over whatsapp, through short videochats or by sending text messages. They were given a window of one week in which to do so, and those who did respond in this way generally submitted their responses in the first 24 hour period. These time-specific opinions, observations and reflections were included in the research. I have called the collaborators on this research "participants" not because I think their role is less important than mine or that they are *merely* participating (indeed, they were driving a great deal, if not all, of what was uncovered) but because we agreed as a group that this would be the easiest way to describe the people who wanted to actively take part (in whichever format they chose). It destigmatised those who chose not to take part, but still wanted to be in attendance, and implied a non-compulsory aspect to the work – which was very important to our shared value system.

Although convenience sampling was the primary technique of sampling used when compiling the participant groups, my final choice of the three schools (as opposed to any of the other schools I work with and enjoy a close relationship with) included a method of purposive sampling as well. Purposive sampling is the "deliberate choice of participants due to the qualities the participants possess…by virtue of knowledge or experience" (Etikan, 2016, 3).

These participants are information-rich and I knew they would provide Denzin and Lincoln's "thick descriptions" for this study.

The autoethnographic design strategies I undertook included conscious reflexivity as to where I would locate myself in the research and its pre and post-construction; and how my sense of what I wanted to achieve with the participants would influence what I would achieve – especially given the high reliance on emergent design flexibility and naturalistic enquiry inherent in qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, 46).

I limited my note taking, journaling and transcribed observations of the participants engaging with the research tools to the demarcated sessions (clearly notified to all participating parties) – but I acknowledge the comprehensive "bleed" between educator-learner-colleague relationships and observations and opinions I have long held with some of my participants (based on years of contact time) that influence data collection and analysis. This period of influence falls outside of the demarcated 12 months stipulated by my ethical clearance.

Despite the disadvantage of having preconceived ideas of participants, it proved to be extremely valuable to the autoethnographic understanding of my internal biases when my assumptions were discredited by unexpected responses from participants.

3.5. DATA COLLECTION AND FIELDWORK STRATEGIES

3.5.1 JUSTIFICATION OF RESEARCH TOOLS

I conducted a short period of macro-testing before my actual data collection began, so as to understand how best to engage the participants of the study. Due to the nature of my insider/outsider status (which manifested in different ways amongst different members of each separate group) I quickly realised that one research tool would not resonate with learners, parents and caregivers, and educators and senior management alike. The learners, with whom I had the best rapport and had earned more trust, talked most freely and with deepest insight during an unstructured interview or open discussion in a focus group scenario. However, they required the questionnaires and semi-structured questions to "warm up" to the idea of what we were discussing – and collect their thoughts on the topic.

The educators and senior management filled in questionnaires the quickest, and were eloquent and ready to answer semi-structured interviews with cohesive answers to

matters of strategy and organisation theory. In general, these groups were least responsive to the open discussions in the focus groups.

The parents and caregivers had very mixed responses to all of the research tools provided, some leaving the questionnaires blank, some talking in open discussion formats in answer to semi-structured questions and some asking questions back to the group completely unrelated to the research at all, but sparked by it in some way.

Adhering to Denzin and Lincoln's suggestions for naturalistic enquiry and flexible design, I decided to include five research tools with the learners' participatory group: a questionnaire (specific to the participant group), a semi-structured group interview, a focus group where open discussion was encouraged, autoethnographic observation and note-taking, and a video recording of the sessions as visual record. Due to the time constraints on the sessions with parents, caregivers, educators and senior management; I reduced these tools to: a questionnaire (specific to the participant group), a semi-structured group interview, autoethnographic observation and note-taking, and a video recording of the sessions as visual record.

In all of the groups I offered an opportunity to submit digital contributions to the research if participatory members were unable to attend a session or needed time to reflect before they gave their opinion.

Through choosing this spread of research tools I hoped to gain a holistic understanding of each individual, their role in the organisational structure and system and their construction of the other individuals within that collaborative space. I was aware of my use of language, jargon and vocabulary in the sessions and the participants' use of language and dialogue and how our conclusions were constructed. This is of particular importance because many of the discussions were held in a mixture of conversational Afrikaans, Cape Flats vernacular and English. Intra-group meaning-making, then, was potentially constructed in one language, understood in another, spoken back to in a third and further discussed in a combination or mixture of all three. Even though I assumed my primary function would be as an autoethnographic-researcher it was necessary for me to also serve as a facilitator and translator (ensuring the group understood each other and the topic being discussed). Again, this led to imbalances of hierarchy and distrust as to whose opinion was most

easily heard. The variety of research tools, in this way, helped to minimize the risk of any participant feeling as though they could not contribute if one of the tools did not suit their sharing style. As a result, it is my opinion that the reporting and analysis of the data is (to the best of my ability) reflective of the participant's views as they were collaboratively constructed in our sessions together.

3.5.2. TESTING PERIOD

In each school, sessions with learners took place over 5 weeks, where we would spend 35 minutes of one of the 75 minute sessions we had together a week, talking and debating about this research. We had to intersperse these sessions with rehearsals and content creation, otherwise the learners became bored and felt as though their sessions were being hijacked. This was a quick lesson in trust and insider/outsider status as an arts educator! Some of the open questions we talked about in the focus groups and semi-structured interviews included:

- What are some of the ways we see each other flourish?
- What does flourishing mean to us?
- What made you want to join *Drama Kweens*? Did you want to?
- What do we think makes fragile spaces fragile? Can we name specific fragile spaces we've been in (physical, emotional, spiritual)
- What is antifragility to us (not just the definition but what does it feel like?)
- Can feeling vulnerable be a good thing?
- Do we think antifragility can be a positive in a fragile space? How?
- How does performing vulnerability feel different from actually being vulnerable?
- What are some of the ways we build empathy for other people when we perform our versions of them?
- What makes a person antifragile (whatever that means to us)?
- Does drama makes us antifragile? How?
- What would it take to "fix" our communities and ourselves? Would we want to?
- Have you learned/improved in anything in *Drama Kweens* that you know you couldn't do before? What is it?

The learners had a total of almost 3 hours of contact time with me to discuss their answers, and in each session I had an average of 14 participating learners (absenteeism

and athletics meetings affected a consistent attendance record). Across the three schools, I had a total of 8 hours and 45 minutes contact time, with a total of 41 individual learners participating in the study, 7 of which did not participate in all 5 sessions, but did attend 3 or more sessions. Learners who attended less than three sessions without justifiable reasoning were not included in the study, but were welcome to remain in the sessions and contribute with the group.

I repeated this process of questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and invitations to one week of post-session digital interaction with each groups' parents and caregivers; and repeated it again with their educators and senior management staff. These two sets of sessions were significantly less well-attended than the learners' sessions (of the two, the parents and caregivers' session had the smallest number of participants present). I limited the time to a total of one appointment of 35 minutes for each school, with each group (this does not include the mini-introductory session. Some of the open questions and topics we covered in the focus groups and semi structured interviews included:

- Have you seen a difference in the learners who regularly attend *Drama Kweens*? If you have, was it an improvement?
- What value does a program like *Drama Kweens* have for you (or your institution)?
- Do you have any behavioural issues with your learner(s)?
- Do you ever talk to your learners about emotional and, or, mental health?
- Where do you see your learners in 5 years' time? Where do you want to see them?

The group of parents and caregivers (the smallest group) had a total of 35 minutes of contact time with me to discuss their answers, but the majority of the participants in the Whatsapp group who physically attended the session motivated the participants in the Whatsapp group who didn't attend to make some form of digital contribution to me - and a few did. It is very difficult to calculate hours in terms of digital content, because I don't know how long each participant took to formulate their responses or follow-up questions. Across the three schools I had a total of 1 hour and 10 minutes of physical contact time (one school's parents and caregivers did not attend at all), with a total of 11 participants physically attending the sessions. I received 33 responses to questions and follow-up thoughts from 8 participants who did not physically attend their session.

The group of educators and principals had a total of 35 minutes of contact time with me to discuss their answers. None of the members of this group wanted to join a Whatsapp group or post digital contributions. Most of the participants were firm about the session being their only contribution to the research due to time constraints. Across the three schools I had a total of 1 hour and 45 minutes of contact time, with a total of 9 participants. In each school there was at least one Creative Arts or English educator and one educator or member of staff in a managerial role (Head of Department, Principal or Vice Principal).
Unanswered examples of the three questionnaires handed out to the three separate groups can be found in Appendices 7.1.2, 7.1.3 and 7.1.4.

In qualitative research it can be very difficult to specify the exact number of participants, or the amount of time spent in their company that is needed to surface the data necessary to create informative insights (Marshall, 1996). Rather than identify a specific number, qualitative data is conducted until a point of saturation is reached (this is when no new themes are being surfaced through the research tools). If, at this point, the researcher feels the research tools were appropriate and they have constructed an accurate representation of the participants' expressions of self and others in the co-constructed space, there may no longer be a need for more interviews (Hutchinson and Wilson, 1991; Marshall, 1996).
In the case of the learners I believe we had reached saturation point by the third session. The demands of the group to return to rehearsals in between interviews was proof of that! But continuing through to the fifth session allowed some further insights to be garnered, and reassured me, as the researcher, that we had reached a point of saturation for all of the participants in the group, including myself.
I do not think the other two participatory groups reached saturation point for every member of the group. Unfortunately the sessions were very short, but I could not confirm a suitable time or firm commitment from the participants to hold follow-up sessions. In these instances, the lens of autoethnography was extremely useful, and I relied heavily on non-verbal communication, gestural language and interpreting silences to formulate an idea of the organisational theories at play.

3.5.3. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This thesis and all of the corresponding fieldwork, data collection and analysis was done with full ethical clearance from the University of Cape Town. All participants signed consent forms to take part in the research. With participants who were under the age of 18, parents and caregivers were asked to co-sign their consent forms in advance. Every session began with a short introduction to what we were doing, a request for a quick show (by nodding of the head or saying yes) of consent, and a reminder that any participant could leave at any stage of the process (on any day, if applicable) and not be penalized in any way. The consent forms are attached to the questionnaires and can be found in Appendices 7.1.1 and 7.1.2.

The confidentiality of every participant was paramount, and it was clearly communicated to the participants that specific details of an individual's responses would only be shared with my academic supervisor, and only when absolutely necessary. Participants agreed to me relating their role in the research, any unique action or phraseology that was deemed important to highlight and, or, any extraordinary event that took place during our sessions – as long as pseudonyms were used and identities were uncoupled from individuals. Participants also gave written permission for me to use photographs of our sessions together, provided that the captions associated with them uncoupled their identity and provided anonymity. In cases where photographs were of participants younger than 18, parents and caregivers signed on their behalf.

One of the areas I struggled with in gathering this research was maintaining "empathetic neutrality" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, 57). It was easiest to achieve with the parents and caregivers, because although I had met some of them at year-end functions or drama performances over the years, I had not worked with any of them directly. Empathetic neutrality with educators and senior management was not impossible, but certainly required some careful insider/outsider reconstruction of our shared purpose. Spending as much time as I have in schools means that there have been many triumphs and tribulations over the years over classroom spaces, funding, timetabling and school governing body support. I didn't have the advantage of as much anonymity with this group as I did with the parents and caregivers – and, more than once, I wished I were more of a neutral outsider! Although, of course, both

outsiders and insiders are never truly neutral. Social constructionism dictates that we are a product of our interactions with each other and our physical and social environments (Burr, 1995; Shweder, 1990). In fact, Much (1995) argues that it is our interconnectedness itself that forms the collaborative culture that determines the boundaries of our shared realities: while we submit to constructionism under another's gaze, and the construction shapes us, we construct our version of reality in this space, and so contribute to the collective reality that governs other members of the group, too.

When working with the learners of all three schools, "true" empathetic neutrality proved to be almost impossible. We are used to lively, robust debate and frank feedback with each other, so my silences were often interpreted as judgemental displeasure or even anger. I, in turn, didn't want to lead the discussions and dominate the conversation, enforcing my power hierarchy and dislocating the organisational structure and culture of the group. And sometimes I was just scribbling down notes, not wanting to miss a pivotal moment I had just been able to witness. When learners pointed out the fact that I wasn't talking, had my head down or seemed "disinterested" in what they had to say through my lack of contribution, my personality type would often lend itself to overexplanation and overcompensation for my actions. I would try to relocate the motivation for my behaviour in my research methodology and reassure them that there were no wrong answers because they were living proof of what I wanted to write about. But by the time I had said all of that overly academic explication – the rhythm of the conversational discussion had been disrupted and it would take several minutes to get going again. This didn't happen during every session, but almost always happened when a particularly interesting point had been made, shared or debated over. It was in the very act of getting closer to what it was that lead to antifragile flourishing that we most often slipped into a fragile collapse. This was no coincidence. I believe it is because conscious vulnerability is something that needs to be practiced in a safe space: and while the uncovering of our constructions and socialised constrictions is a very healthy and antifragile act, it destabilises the construction in which we locate our safe space. This act, however necessary to culture and community building can feel transgressive and exposing to the group in general and individuals in particular. Added to which, I was making the

space feel even more unsafe by excitedly witnessing this rupture and scribbling it all down – reinforcing the insider/outsider binary (Maydell, 2010).

My attempts to "perform" the identity that best resonated with each participant within each organisational structure on each particular day (without isolating or disconnecting with other participants in each structure on each day) meant that I was simultaneously performing multiple realities that I co-constructed with my participants in the hopes of creating a space that allowed them to create their own constructions and conclusions without being influenced by me (Gergen, 1991; Iedema and Caldas-Coulthard, 2008). I did this to the best of my ability; but I understand that my intentions to construct a "me-free" zone so that I could neutrally observe and notate what happened in them as an empathetic but uninvolved interviewer is naïve in the extreme.

The multiplicity of our interactions (and the unknown number and variety of combinations these interactions can take) means that there can never be one, stable manifestation of the self. Therefore, autoethnography will always include "multiple reflections of others which elicit a variety of expressions of self" (Maydell, 2010, 6).

I acknowledge my shortcomings in this respect but would like to propose that they contribute to the data in the following ways:

- By challenging my design flexibility and approach
- By forcing me to be less manipulative and controlling of the data and embrace any and all revelations as they unfolded (even if they don't support the research in the way I wanted them to)
- By making me consciously zoom in and out of myself and my role in every session, and not to assume my position was neutral or understood (by the participants or me), regardless of where we were in the process
- By ensuring that I slow down and stay present in each session as it happened (instead of worrying about how the next session would contribute to what I had already recorded or trying to preempt a conversation that could substantiate something I hoped would come out in the final findings)
- By reminding me that I was as much a part of this organisation as the participants were, and I needed to acknowledge my role as outsider/insider educator rather than feel self-pitying about my self-imposed ethnographic-outsider-researcher status.

3.5.4 ANALYSIS AND REPORTING STRATEGIES

Due to the high volumes of data needed to accurately represent the multiplicity of all of the participants, I decided to employ a combination of thematic analysis and positioning theory to sift through it as quickly as possible. Thematic analysis identifies the "most interesting and representative patterns" across the raw data (Grbich, 2007; Maydell, 2010) and allows for a holistic, digestible view of the entire data set in one thematic map – usually elucidating a unique occurrence or practice (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Following the writings of Maydell (2010), I then further expounded my data set with the help of positioning theory (enabled by my autoethnographic approach).

Thematic analysis proved to be invaluable in the first few weeks of reviewing all of the data I had mined from my time with the participants. Initially, I could only identify the differences between the answers and commonalities seemed to be grouped around the negative aspects of my reporting (participants who didn't want to attend sessions, or who thought the questions were pointless, or who had negative opinions about *Drama Kweens*). I couldn't seem to find answers to my questions that resounded across demographic sample sets. I had made a classic, amateur error: I had assumed there would be an *answer* to my research question – and that it would be articulated through language. Despite all my research and reading, I still didn't know what I was looking for!

The most interesting autoethnographic responses from me happened when the participants went "off script" and weren't giving me the answers I'd not-so-secretly hoped for. Their rogue (to my mind) constructionism meant that I had to re-examine why I was there and what we were doing. When participants questioned my intentions, viewpoints and insider/outsider status, my flustered responses and unconscious adoption of multiplicitous performances to regain status and control told me a great deal about how I see antifragility and flourishing – and it was not a very flattering pair of glasses.

Similarly, but in a completely different application, some of the most revealing data wasn't spoken at all, but was pointed to by how much or how little the participants spoke because of it.

Without necessarily realising it, I had already begun the process of analytical deconstruction. Deconstruction is a concept created by Derrida and continued by Foucault that refers to an analysis of breaths, silences, obscurities and power relations within communications (Culler, 1982; White, 1993).

Commonly, during qualitative data analysis, a researcher will look for shared constructions (value systems, “truths”, desires – anything that can point to a common absolute). These constructions must then be consciously deconstructed so as to better understand the reasons for the construction, and how it was conceived of by the individual and, or, the group. This required me to be responsive to several layers of data simultaneously, while consciously processing my own construction of the research in real time, and remain mindful of the socio-economic and socio-historical context in which the discussions took place. All of this informed the analytic framework and contributed to the thematic analysis – whilst interrogating my relationship to positionality and dominance of voices in the conversation.

Certain topics got people talking and certain triggers clammed people up. Thematic analysis and positioning theory allowed me to look beyond what was said or understood in the meetings and examine what moved people into spaces of vulnerability and antifragility. And once I knew that I needed to highlight the moments that came just before these emphatic responses from all of us, I started to understand some of the dimension and breadth of what we had achieved.

3.5.5. THE PROCESS OF ANALYSIS AND THEME SELECTION

The video recorded sessions were transcribed and translated verbatim by the researcher and written texts were created of each session. The identities of the participants were removed from these transcriptions and, where necessary, pseudonyms were assigned. These transcripts were then compared to my hand written field notes and observations, as well as what I could remember for myself (this comparison was, where possible, conducted within 48 hours of the session taking place). Thought threads, comments and points of conflict or excitement were colour coded and stapled together, and coupled with responses from the questionnaires that either challenged or supported the tensions found in the data. This process of creating living palimpsests took several weeks. And, in the case of the learners, every week I would receive new data and need to cross pollinate it with what I already had and re-member (and remember) a deeper level of analysis and self-examination. And the colours and staples and stories would etch further into themselves and find new reasons to group or uncouple themselves into a construction of their own.

The themes I teased out of the data were based on the results of all of the research tools, and represented the participants' primary patterns of self-construction and community positioning. Interestingly, these themes resonated very strongly with me as well: despite having such a seemingly different experience of the spaces we work in and the work we are doing. As educators, learners, parents, caregivers and senior staff, we were all slipping between insider/outsider status in our mutual construction of each other, and had very similar dreams and goals for our community, our education systems, our learners and ourselves.

The four themes I distilled from the data were: *Hybrid Identity*, *Feeling Excluded from an Organisation*, *Underdog Identity and Reappropriating Shame*, and *Fear of being Worn Down and Experiencing Pressure to be a Role Model*.

These themes are organized chronologically in the way they have manifested in my own identity transformation, as well as in some of the other participants' journeys (Maydell, 2010). The feelings participants expressed seemed to surge, swell, recede and coagulate as they worked through their own vulnerabilities and fragilities towards a more antifragile version of themselves. In other words, we began the sessions by expressing our difficulties with hybridization and feelings of exclusion, but segued into a reappropriation of identities through the cultural construct of "underdog pride" which rejected our former shame – which, quickly, gave way to collective fears around what would happen if we grew weary and stopped standing up for what we knew to be important for ourselves and our communities; and then our emotions gentled as we allowed ourselves to be more vulnerable in the group by sharing our feelings of pressure to perform, imposter syndrome and an uncertainty about our own abilities. This progression mirrored my own feelings as a researcher on this project almost exactly: the constant construction, deconstruction, reconstruction and collaborative imagining of who I am, what my role is and what we are trying to do was eerily echoed in the groups. No one in the group (of course) used terms like "hybrid identity" or "Underdog Pride and Reappropriated Shame" in the discussions – but we all expressed the slippages between feeling uniquely equipped to enable antifragility and healthy vulnerability in ourselves and our spheres of influence; and completely inept and overwhelmed at the thought of how much work there was to do, and how few collaborators there seemed to be in actioning the process.

I would propose that the act of sharing our self-doubts and affirming each others contributions created (even if just in those sessions) the momentum needed to recognize organisational structures already at play in our networks. And the building of antifragile blended ecosystems of learning is as achievable as it was in those 35 minute blocks: we did it. Right there. We learned from each other in a non-hierarchical system that induced intellectual and emotional saltation and reinforced Butler's value of reclaimed vulnerability as a means of visible, non-violent resistance.

3.5.6. METHODOLOGICAL CONCLUSION

Autoethnographiy as a research practice, used in conjunction with social constructionism as a theoretical approach, is an idiosyncratic, revealing, challenging and (at times) painfully confrontational affair. I was appalled at my own attempts to coerce, manipulate and "prettify" data to my advantage (both during collection and analysis) and was made very aware of my own shortcomings as I was required to deconstruct and contextually reconstruct my responses, articulations and reflexive practices. Empathetic neutrality and the insider/outsider dilemma (Maydell, 2010) proved to be my biggest challenge, and my personality traits of people-pleasing, active overachieving and wanting to be liked (qualities that have served me very well in educational, non-profit and professional theatre spaces) suddenly became a barrier to progress in this research. I was forced to self-scrutinise even more closely during data analysis (particularly when translations were required) and ratchet up my research integrity as I interpreted my own constructions of someone else's words, language and (sometimes divorced) meaning through my own, imperfect autoethnographic practice.

The theoretical position of this concept is called *double interpretation* "The participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world" (Smith and Osborn, 2003, 51). Doing this through the membrane of another language or, in this case, languages – particularly when post-colonial South Africa still endures the colonial notion of the superiority of English as an "intellectual" language (Barkhuizen and Gough, 1996) – felt like a *triple whammy*.

But, as ever, it reframed the obvious need for conscious, healthy vulnerability and purposeful acts of antifragility to get "beyond" my self-doubt and imposter syndrome. My

muddled, uncertain and, at times, problematic good intentions led to a type of working praxis.

In autoethnographic scholarship, social constructionism lends a "philosophical scaffolding" to analytical framework which helps to identify and triangulate data themes and phenomena (Maydell, 2010, 8). Social constructionism also underscores the contribution of all of the participants (and the influence of their individual and collaborative networks and organisations) and the construction of meaning and order within the shared reality of the groups. All data is considered to be co-created by the researcher and research participant (Cromby and Nightingale, 1999); and in a study like this one, the distinction between research and research participant collapses even further under inspection during the analytic process. As Chang (2008, 65) expounds: "…culture is a web of self and others, autoethnography is not a study of self alone".

However, because I become the physical lens through which the data is read (especially given my constructionist standpoint and self-through-others positionality), my process of analysis and interpretation will, inevitably, influence the data (Tuffin, 2005) and result in a subjective reading of the conclusions of the research – and the self in it.

In examining the participants and their responses to the research tools, I hoped to filter out an answer to the question of flourishing in fragility. What was shaped by the process was a realisation that it was only by practicing vulnerability, activating antifragility and affirming each other though sharing the ways in which we saw each other flourishing that we could "feel" when it was working. My own journey towards flourishing is inseparable from the search for a way to map the participants' journey!

> *Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract and resist cultural interpretations. As they zoom backward and forward, inward and outward, distinctions between the personal and the cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition* (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, 739).

CHAPTER 4

4.1 THE FINDINGS: WHO, WHY, HOW, WHERE?

A public high school in the Western Cape is comprised of a whirring mass of many moving parts. Some of them are necessary.

And a lot of them contribute towards individual and communal precarity and fragility; and this can manifest through any or all of the physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual spaces that make up a learning environment.

It is my opinion that it is unlikely (perhaps impossible) to change the learning experience of every learner in every public high school in South Africa by directly addressing the repercussions of any number of knotty problems of the education system; such as bad classroom management, persistent use of corporal punishment, lack of resources – especially textbooks and subject-related equipment – corruption, escalating drop-out rates, transport and feeding scheme logistics and on-site security (Manpane, 2004). For a long time I, too, assumed that creating the perfect learning environment was the logical way forward – and spent many years trying to "fix" the system around the learner.

I no longer think this is the kindest (or quickest) point from admission to actualised success (whatever that may look like for each learner).

Of course we must improve our learning spaces. Of course it is unacceptable for our learners to be subjected to sub-standard classrooms and disinterested or bullying educators – and of course I do not agree with lowering pass averages to improve throughput statistics.

I still see the merit in "fixing" our schools. I just don't think schools are the only answer we're looking for. I think they are a very fragile part of an entire eco-system of learning; and I think that fragile learning spaces left to their own devices create fragile learners who are ill-equipped to contribute in a meaningful way towards self-sufficient and reflexive nation-building and individual flourishing.

To return to my question: if one can presume that attempting to change a fragile learning environment is both an exhausting use of time and resources and unlikely to happen, holistically, in the near future – what can we do to enable and equip at-risk learners who currently have no other recourse but to be educated in a fragile space?

Many educators and academics advocate for methodologies that encourage robust resilience from learners (Werner and Smith, 1992; Smith and Carlson, 1997; Blum, McNelly and Nonnemaker, 2002; Arthur and Sawyer, 2009; Bawden, Blackmore, Sriskandarajah, Tidball

and Wals, 2010; Krasney, Lundholm and Plummer, 2010; Sterling, 2010, Mampane and Bower, 2011; Hall and Souers, 2016). And while this is a necessary and effective way of getting learners through the system – I do not believe it is always the best way of developing attuned and emotionally aware adults. Especially when we are hopeful for those adults to change and invest in their home environment. As in Holtmann's study, we don't want "success" to ultimately end in a mass migration from the fragile location (in this case, the neighbourhoods – both literal and psychological – that house quintile 1-3 learners, their parents and caregivers and the educators who work there). We want to know "what it looks like when it's fixed" so that we can induct our learners as Trojan horses, build back into our communities and change them from the inside out (Holtmann, 2011).

This insistence over terminology may seem pedantic, but I firmly believe that it is the heart of what we did and are doing in *Drama Kweens*. A resilient learner (and, of course, resilience can be many things) absorbs the knocks and keeps going. They usually have one goal in sight: to make good, get through and overcome. They are often groomed for success by an adult who recognizes unique potential. They are our top achievers: our scholarship hopefuls. Make no mistake – a truly resilient learner in a quintile 1-3 school in South Africa is exceptional. I do not make this distinction to try and knock the tireless teachers who build resilience into their coursework, the NPOs who spend millions of rands on equipping learners with tools and skills to enable resilience, the parents who sign on to see their children through fragile spaces and watch them with pride as they come out the other side – or the learners themselves who defy all odds to become the role models their siblings and school peers will want to emulate. I do it to create space for growth and recognition for the learners who (by traditional schooling system standards) may never seem to be exceptional. Who, despite all their best efforts and dedicated persistence, might not be accepted for tertiary opportunities – or even pass their grade 12 examinations. Who may very well not be considered important or valuable because they don't show the quantitative metrics necessary to inspire funders to affect radical change, through them, in their sphere of influence.

Many of the learners who come to the *Drama Kweens* program are not singled out as "exceptional".

With time, most showed growth in literacy and numeracy skills. Many surpassed expectations in communication, group work and the ability to debate – and we were pleased to see a subsequent improvement in subjects like English, Afrikaans, isiXhosa, History and

tourism. Many of our learners had remarkable improvement in school attendance (particularly on *Drama Kweens* days) and general discipline, self-management and the ability to demonstrate executive function and self-regulation skills. But the truly remarkable common denominator for every single learner in every single group was this: they were able to be self-reflexive and welcomed and applied constructive feedback from their peers (within the safe space of the *Drama Kweens* program). They adapted. Regularly and with rigor.

In our weekly rehearsals, critique and performance analysis is an inherent part of how we fast-forward improvement. Whenever we gather together, we know we will be commenting on each other's performances and how we can improve. Critique can be very uncomfortable for learners – especially those who have been subject to bullying and shame from teachers in the classroom. To make matter worse, artistic critique can feel very personal: we bring the gift of honesty balancing on paper-thin skin and intention, we examine it under a stage-shaped microscope, we offer our peers and teachers our most vulnerable and naked self – and then they get to sit back and tear it apart while we have to listen and then say thank you? It's not surprising that the first month in our groups has a steep learning curve attached to it! But as we develop a vocabulary with learners, forging a way of processing our responses to work and distilling a means of wording our emotions or "gut feel" to be constructive and creative rather than just criticising (and as the group fosters trust and empathy between and in each other) reflexive understanding of oneself and other people becomes instinctual. And that, I think, is what is so valuable in a program like this. We start to understand the "why" of it all. Who we are, what we're doing, where we're going and how we want to get there.

Most actors (if they're honest) will tell you that one of their big fears on stage is not feeling "present". It's very difficult to explain unless you have acted yourself. One minute you can be embodying a line, looking at your fellow performers, inhabiting the costume, props and stage set (if applicable) and physically moving across the stage in exactly the way you are supposed to – and the next you are acutely aware of the actor's body: your own thoughts and your own feelings of anxiety or inadequacy, foolishness or insecurity. Any number of things can make an actor snap out of character on stage. We often don't even know the reasons ourselves. But it is terrifying. And the more we try to "be present" the worse it gets. The performer (instead of the character) fills the space between our fingers and inside the folds of our ears. They crouch behind our blinking eyes and in the dryness of our mouths. And suddenly we don't know what to do with our hands or why we are standing with one foot

behind the other – or why our voices have unexpectedly come out an octave higher than they should have. And when the group presents feedback after a scene (and if the performers are truthful about what happened) nine times out of ten the answer behind a strange use of gestural language, any vocal anomalies, odd or limited interaction with the ensemble and, or, unmotivated movement and physical expression on stage comes down to variations on one theme: I did not feel present in that moment so my character disappeared.

If we can assume that the "objective truth" (a term I cannot use without irony, especially within a social constructionist paradigm) that an actor has built into their interpretation and portrayal of a character has the potential to resonate with an audience member in a way that feels authentic (the audience member willingly suspends their disbelief and subscribes to the story presented to them despite concurrently understanding that it is a constructed performance and can never be "real") then, conversely, we should recognize that an audience member (who may not have any knowledge or understanding of performable theory or practice) can provide valuable insight into the ways in which moments or performances do not feel "truthful" or authentic. Once the learner (or any actor) understands that acting is an exchange of simulated and shared "truths" – housed within a performance which, by its nature, is a vehicle of multiple truths and lived experiences – critique is no longer a personal attack or a value judgment of their abilities. It is a roadmap to those rare shimmers of connection between humans who may never meet in "real life" but who touch each other through meaningful exchanges and acknowledged recognition of their vulnerability and reaction to lived experience.

An antifragile learner learning the value of feedback and critique activates the safe space of a classroom while they are encouraged to engage with their most vulnerable selves under the gaze and guise of purposefully staged representation (including the times where observers felt disconnected, apathetic or even displayed an active dislike towards them). An antifragile learner then chooses to participate in a communal analysis of their work that requires them to justify their choices, assimilate the feedback and present their performance again to the same (or similar) audience in a way that convinces them that the feedback has been reflexively administered and that the work has improved. These positive feedback loops are mandatory for every performance in every session. And this is where we travel beyond resilience.

Evolution, adaptation, iteration and shared meaning-making are built into the way we do our work.

Youngleson, P. (2017). *Learners reading from their process journals and discussing peer feedback on performances*. Cape Town: Manenberg.

So if the fragile space of a traditional learning environment in a quintile 1-3 school cannot be easily changed or improved to the benefit of every learner currently enrolled, how do we address the injustices of our education system?

We build antifragile learners who learn about success beyond resilience and set metrics. We encourage antifragile learners to covet the art of connection, communication and sharing a co-created reality that moves people. We show antifragile learners the power of vulnerability in action – and how observers can be mobilised through conscious acts of healthy vulnerability.

This dogged commitment to habitual recognition of our interiority – and deliberate feedback and deconstruction of our choices surrounding its manifestation on stage – is integral to the analysis of the data and the findings of this study.

The practice of reflection is, in my opinion, largely why our program works. And although they may not know it, it is why learners keep signing up to join us, and educators school staff and parents notice such a marked difference in our *Drama Kweens*.

4.2. THEMES

When organising the data I gathered in our research sessions, I was able to group the responses from participants into four main themes.

They were tethered to a combination of spoken utterances and responses, facial reactions, written notes or answers to the questionnaires, and unstructured or semi-structured discussions amongst, between and, or, involving participants of this study. Loose themes were identified using Gordon-Finlayson's (2010) methods of core and axial coding and memo-making to distinguish common patterns and relationships between participants' responses and behaviours.

From there, I went back to my field notes and process journals to reinterpret the themes that I had identified through my autoethnographic lens and present the findings as the cumulative result of these processes.

The tenets I distilled from this data were: *Hybrid Identity*, *Feeling Excluded from an Organization*, *Underdog Identity and Reappropriating Shame*, and *Fear of being Worn Down and Experiencing Pressure to be a Role Model*.

4.2.1. THE PERFORMANCE OF HYBRID IDENTITIES

We began the group open discussions with *hot seats* (performed character sketches) – a theatre exercise where members of an audience can interact with an actor via a specific set of questions. Traditionally, one person is "in the *hot seat*" and must answer 20 or so questions about their character (whilst performing the role of said character vocally, emotionally, psychologically and physically) related to who they are, where they come from, what their likes and dislikes are and what they believe in. In so doing, the audience helps the actor provide a backstory to a character that comes less from a calculated response based on conscious choice and more from an intuitive consciousness spurred by embodiment and co-creation.

But, in this case, we put ourselves in the "*hot seat*" and tried to get to know each other through a quick-fire round of back-story questions.

Essentially, we forced each other to express our communal hybridisation.

Hybridity is a biological concept referring to the purposeful combination of two different elements in order to make a third completely different element or species (Jaffe, 2000). In the social sciences it is used more as a counter-thesis to the static

notion of monolithic identity – and supports the social constructionist paradigm of multiple realities. Hybrid identities often refer to a combination of a cultural (or subculture-based) identity and a biological identity (Jaffe, 2000). In the case of our participants, the *hot seat* proved to be an exercise in quick-fire hybridity expression. Were they gendered first? Or was their occupation more important? Being a parent (where applicable) was usually listed early on, but identifying as the child of a parent wasn't noted by any of the participants – of any age. Perhaps their financial success or precarity should be a feature I include in my field notes regardless of their stance on the subject, given the study and the context of why we were gathered? Age, in some instances, especially amongst learners, was listed early on as a marker of maturity – but, ironically, was mostly concealed by the parents and educators. Geographical identity featured strongly, but so did sports team affiliations and hobbies. In the school setting, educators and learners identified themselves as such very early on, and senior management primarily described themselves as authority figures in every instance. This is unsurprising, considering the context of the research sessions and the organisational theory that governs the social constructions in those buildings.
Several of the participants expressed their frustration at having to whittle down who they were in one or two sentences – and one even shouted at the group "Just buy me coffee and we'll talk later. Ek begin self vergeet wie ek is!" [*I'm beginning to forget who I am, myself!*]

Every participant in every group recognized their hybridity (although most of the participants had never bothered to name or acknowledge the concept), and some had even realised the multiplicity of their performances before we used the guise of describing a "character". It was when we introduced the concept of an active, observing audience that the question of hybrid identities began to surface vulnerabilities and tensions for some of the participants. I, certainly, found it difficult to position myself for the group. I wanted to be whatever they needed me to be, to be comfortable – and my shifting personalities, often, did the opposite of that! Negotiating hybridization in front of an audience (particularly in a fragile environment) is incredibly difficult. And building trust with participants who can observe you shifting in an act of trying to "perform" or curry favour is almost impossible. The *hot seat*, then, became a microcosm of the *Drama Kweens* learning

environment: the observers could sense when a participant was performing instead of being. When they were not present.

Youngleson, P. (2016). *Group warm-up and spacial awareness exercise*. Cape Town: Grassy Park.

When working with the separate groups, it was interesting to note that the participants who most easily self-identified as hybridised were the learners. They spoke freely about being "more than just" a learner (term used by a participant), engaged in rapid discussions about life outside of school and were eager to be "taken seriously" by their peers, parents and friends. The implications of these discussions being that to be seen as a learner alone would be to be seen as someone of lower status who was socially and emotionally immature and wouldn't deserve respect or attention from other members of their social circles. This group spoke about their hybridity (although that term was not used, even after I brought it up in conversation) and was keen to emphasise that there was a strong likelihood that their identities would continue to change, shift and expand as they formed new relationships and matured in age and social standing. Subcultures, hobbies and group interests that were shared between learners became points of lively discussion; and many of the learners were surprised

at the vast variety of interests in the group – and spurred each other on to talk about themselves in as much detail as possible.

The group that struggled the most to "admit" (term used by a participant) that they were composed of more than one persona or performance was the circle of educators and school management. I acknowledge that because the sessions took place on school grounds, it must have been very difficult for this group to relax enough to show their own multiplicity. In many ways, the educators collapsed themselves into stereotypes dictated by the school environment, their learners and the expectations of the Department of Education; wedging the gaps in the system with a parody of efficiency in the school room that leaves little to no room for vulnerability, co-creation and mutual learning. Educators and senior management almost exclusively introduced themselves as their job description first, as spouse and, or, parent second (where applicable) and their self-identified gender third. Almost all of the educators struggled to find ways to share their identity after that. If an educator did elaborate on themselves, they would often use the disclaimer "but not here" or "when I'm at home I'm like this…" - inferring they could not love their dog, do needlework or own a motorbike at school. There were no suggestions or multiple choice prompts in the design of the sessions that point to an external reasoning behind this uniformity. But across the participating schools, this was the consistent result of the *hot seat* questioning.

It lies beyond the scope of this paper to further interrogate why this phenomenon was so consistent. However, it is my belief that the fragile school classroom operates in such a way that it denies vulnerability and humanity to the educator. I spoke to one of the participants about this after the session and she struggled to come up with an answer, but her observations on being an educator and preserving her privacy (and, in some ways, access to her humanity) in an at-risk school were fascinating:

> Ek wil net 'n stukkie vir myself hou, jy weet? Elke dag is almal op jou case. Die principal soek dit, die leerders soek daai en die ander onderwysers soek die res. Ek is nou oud! Ek het klas gegee vir amper 32 jare. Klas gee is my lewe. Maar ek wil nie my private goeters vir dié mense sê nie. Meeste van hulle ken my al, in elk geval. Selfs jy, jy sê dié vergadering is vir die kinders maar jy will ook van my weet. My goed is my goed. Ek is net Mevrou

> (*surname removed for confidentiality*) vir die leerders. Hulle vra my "Ohh, Juffrou, wat is Juffrou se eerste naam en waar bly Juffrou en wat is Juffrou se man se naam en wat doen Juffrou die naweek?" Nee, nee, nee. Hulle hoef nie weet wat met my aangaan nie. Hulle mag net nie dop nie. Dis al wat hulle moet weet.
>
> [*I want to keep a small part of myself to myself, you know? Every day everyone is on your case. The principal wants this, the learners want that, the teachers want something else. And I'm old now! I've been teaching for almost 32 years. Being a teacher is my life. But I don't want to tell these people all about my private life. Most of them know me, anyway. Even you, you said this meeting was about the children but you also want to know all about me. My stuff is my stuff. I am just Mrs (surname removed to protect confidentiality) to the learners. They ask me "Oh, Ma'am, what is your first name and where do you live and what is your husband's name and what are you doing this weekend?" No, no, no. They don't need to know what I'm up to. They're not allowed to fail. That's all they need to know*.]

This conspicuous removal of individuality and low tolerance for learners' curiosity is fairly common amongst the educators I've interviewed. And I understand why it is deployed as a fairly standard measure against familiarity. I have, at times, used it myself with a difficult class who are trying to waylay our time together. But I have to circle back to the literature on vulnerability and modeling vulnerable bodies as sentient, anarchic acts of rebellion against an unjust system (Butler, Browne, Illich, Todd); as well as the institutional theory examples of experiential scaling (Nilsson) and institutional biographies (Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca): when learners observe resistance to vulnerability, antifragility and co-creation within the institution they inhabit for seven to nine hours of the working week, what kind of patterns and behaviours are being transferred in the subsequent social mirroring we see outside of the classroom?

Youngleson, P. (2016). *Educators performing a warm-up ice-breaker*. Cape Town: Grassy Park.

The parents and caregivers, mostly, presented themselves as a monolithic identity: parent. The *hot seat*, rather than being a quick point of access into their own hybridity, became a master class in character performance. Questions would pivot around the learner and their position a parent or caregiver and answers would volley back neat, conversational cul de sacs – usually about wanting to give their children the best opportunities possible and how they hoped they were "good (term used by participants) in their role.

The one group of parents and caregivers that had very low attendance spent a large portion of the *hot seat* exercise remonstrating about those who were not present by asking rather leading questions like "How do you manage to make time for your child when so many other parents can't even be bothered to show up", "Are you one of the good parents who always comes to your children's school events?" and "Do other parents in your community look up to you as a role model because of the way you are reliable and interested in your child's development?"

Hybridity in the parents and caregivers groups were often discussed in relation to their role in the family and the family unit being an example of hybrid identity itself (rather

than the individuals within it). Interestingly, this conversation started through a discussion of when a parent or a caregiver is "allowed" (term used by participants) to call themselves a parent, and when they are simply viewed as an adult in the household. Some of this, too, resulted from dissatisfaction with poor attendance from other parent and caregiver participants in these groups – and the title of parent was purposefully removed when discussing these absent members. Considering the monolithic identity favoured by those present, it seemed to be a strong indication of their feelings towards seemingly uninvested parents.

4.2.2. FEELING EXCLUDED FROM AN ORGANIZATION

Most of the participants in the learner groups felt as though they did not "naturally" fit into their social and work environments. It was noted consistently throughout the groups that members felt "*anders"* [different] in some way. This feeling of exclusion often ran towards a negative connotation, implying that they had suffered some degree of rejection or loss due to their unique positionality or understanding of the social constructions they subscribed to and operated under. Feelings of isolation, hopelessness and even suicidal ideation were mentioned by some members. This cut across demographics, sexual orientation, gender identity and ethnicity. Frequently, there was surprise within the group when a member admitted to that feeling or experience, and the action of vulnerability from an individual often led to an animated discussion and more lucid and vulnerable sharing of opinion on the topic from the rest of the group. Again, these conscious and healthy acts of vulnerability and actioned trust imploded the fragile space and forged antifragility for both the individual and the organisation in a defiant act against a constrictive hegemony. *Drama Kweens* began as a safe space for learners to have fun and express themselves during the "red zone" hours (a term used by the Western Cape Education Department to describe the time between the end of the school day and the time parents and caregivers get back from work – usually 2.30pm to 6pm in the work week). The core membership of *Drama Kweens* was initially comprised of girls, non-binary and femme learners who identified across the gender spectrum, and many of whom identified as LGBTQIA+. Over time the groups expanded and we absorbed members who didn't necessarily identify with these social markers. But mental health and holistic wellness, underage sexual experimentation, abuse, exposure to violence, bullying, substance abuse,

teenage pregnancy, gang initiation pressure from siblings and family members and limited future employment prospects have been topics of discussion for as long as we have run *Drama Kweens*, and we have all engaged in these knotty problems from time to time over the years. And the feelings of being an "other" seemed to resonate with even the newest members. The focus groups and semi-structured discussions, however, finessed these issues into a legible timeline - in fact, a perverse family portrait of what the apartheid forced removals under the Group Areas Act had done to nuclear structures and ancestral legacies in South Africa. And a large part of our time together was spent talking about how learners' mental health was increasingly at risk – and increasingly ignored or hushed up by the adults around them.

This was a particularly powerful theme amongst the parents and caregivers, many of whom expressed extreme trepidation and fear before attending their session. In fact, this was one of the themes that coaxed the most authentic responses out of the largely performative display of parenting documented in the hybridity section above.

Interestingly, many of the participants were quick to compliment other parents and caregivers but reserved rather harsh judgment for themselves.

They would often speak about how they "hoped" (term used by participants) they were doing a *good job* (sometimes the phrase "good enough job" was used) but were able to affirm others in the definite affirmative. Examples of this would be "Ek probeer om hulle reg te leer. Ek doen my bes. Maar ek weetie." [*I try to teach them what is right. I do my best. But I don't know*.] and the response from the group: "Nee, kyk hoe vorder jou kind. Penny het gesê sy is dan só goed en die ander kinders vra altyd om saam met haar te werk. Nee, moenie so aangaan nie. Jy is a goeie Ma, finish en klaar." [*No, look at how your child is progressing. Penny said that she's improved so much and the other children are always asking to work with her. No, stop going on about it. You're a good Mother, and that's the end of it*.]

The institutional theory at work here points to a strong subculture of experiential grace for other parents and caregivers that deliberately excluded themselves in almost every instance. This did not appear to be false modesty: in addition to feeling excluded in home, work and schooling contexts, these adults often othered themselves when it came to the learners they were supporting – and assumed they weren't doing a good enough job because of their children's precarity in a fragile environment.

Having been summoned to many teacher-parent conferences over the years (the vast majority of the at-risk learners these parents and caregivers are supporting have had some degree of learning difficulty, socialisation and behavioural issues, discipline and boundary issues and/or a combination of all three concerns) the cyclical construction of power, authority, blame, shame and retribution was, understandably, weighing heavy on them. When I started the session by complimenting the parents and caregivers and commending their children's improvement and dedication, and how it reflected back on them and their homes, some of the participants acknowledged their roles in in upward trajectory of the learners – but most of them were embarrassed by my affirmation and refused to accept that they could have a positive influence in their child's life. Many claimed that while they had "done their best", the odds were stacked too highly against them and their families. It was frequently commented that doing one's best was all that could be done, but failure seemed to be inevitable. The more confident parents repeatedly attempted to motivate and affirm the less confident parents, pointing out the obvious improvement in the learners. With time, the organisational culture of the group began to shift (and with it, the "truth" about the learners and their environment surfaced), and parents not only agreed that they could see the improvement themselves, but joined their peers in brainstorming ways these improvements could remain a permanent part of their children's world view and daily practice – and even how they wanted to incorporate them into their own lives (Ackroyd, 2000). In all honesty I must admit that the sessions together were too short to know if this shift was an organic and honest reaction to the tough love from an organisational unit formed during our feedback; or if the less confident parents simply caved to the tactics and wheedling of the more confident parents – but the brainstorming felt sincere and was inclusive of the whole group.

Youngleson, P. (2016). *Parents "building" a safe-space-machine with their bodies during the warm-up*.
Cape Town: Grassy Park.

The educators and senior management staff felt some degree of exclusion from their employers and the parents. They spoke about the extreme pressures of working in an at-risk environment as an employee in a low or no-fee paying school; and how they were expected to improve results with very little change in structural support from municipal or national departments. Some of the educators spoke about why they had started as teachers and what they had hoped to achieve in and for the New South Africa, while others didn't want to increase their involvement in the system and made it very clear that they were simply there to work the allotted hours and then they were entitled to their own time. This precipitated some exclusion towards the differing factions within the groups – and those who expressed their disinterest in further involvement in after-school and extra-mural programs or clubs suffered the ire of the participants who were advocating for improved organizational inclusion. This, naturally, led to hostile feelings of exclusion from the organisation from those who felt no urgency to oblige; and so the exclusionary ouroboros continued to encircle the group.

In an attempt to diffuse the tension I shared my own fears about exclusion: the obvious ones where I was clearly an outsider to the communities I was working with (and how I didn't want to appear patronising or condescending – and I certainly didn't want to exercise my white privilege in a space already saturated with the destructive legacies of the apartheid regime) and the not-so-obvious ones, like the reflexive turn my post-session journal-writing had taken. I was starting to wonder why I was doing this research (and, actually, why I was doing the work of teaching drama as a means of motivating non-violent resistance in violent educational systems – and whether any of it mattered).

This chance schism in the membrane of decorum our sessions had exemplified up until then led to a very valuable space of autoethnographic reflection for me.

I'd spent most of my adult life eschewing corporate social investment jobs in favour of grassroots social justice work. I was proud of my feelings of distaste when it came to capitalistic "dirty money", and considered myself a living counterpoint to the system I grew up in. In this sense, my outsider status had always been my badge of honour.

…and that was exactly when this research started to reveal my middle class privilege: with no dependents or significant personal debt I'd never had to worry about sacrificing my life goals and job satisfaction for better pay. Perhaps my entire life was a constructed performance in altruism and white guilt? Maybe everything I was doing was a selfish construct to make myself hyper-visible and give my beige life substance? Perhaps.

Or perhaps I was overthinking it in the middle of a self-reflexive process and letting self-pity cloud my purpose and motivation.

It is worth noting that, in my experience, people who are drawn to theatre and the performing arts are, generally, more willing to open themselves up to emotional expression. When the data started to show that we were all experiencing the feeling of being the other and an outsider, there was always the distinct possibility that this was merely us leaning into our performances for each other. Was this our magnum opus of performative self-pity? Or a genuine expression of vulnerability and a heartfelt need for community?

I think it's both. And a host of worthy expressions of self in between. And I'm not even sure that it matters which it is, or when. In the end, the effect this vocalization of status and self-stasis had was enough to allow the rest of the group a platform to build antifragility into the conversation. Should the individual choose to remain fragile, that is their choice. But we didn't observe this in our sessions. Overwhelmingly, the collective culture of the group shifted towards the positive, and strengthened the redemptive power of network through shared stories and support for one another.

Cross, S. (2016). *Penny facilitating the focus groups in a brainstorm*. Cape Town: Grassy Park.

4.2.3. Underdog Identity and Reappropriating Shame

As the sessions started to join the dots between reclaiming stories and identities that seemed fragile in order to iterate and adapt beyond them (and own our own paths in them), the notion of reappropriating the "underdog" story was, somewhat logically, the next theme along which the conversations shifted. If being an outsider could be reconstructed as a positive learning path, being seen as a tenacious underdog (held together by the elastic skin of our teeth, wit, pluck, grit – and bits of inconsistent funding) surely epitomized the way we reclaimed that identity.

Due to the unique positionality of each individual's underdog experience, I would like to begin this section by sharing some anecdotes of my own shame reappropriation journey, taken from my process journal and reflexive field notes:

> *85% of the men and women we interviewed for shame research could recall a school incident from their childhood that was so shaming, it changed how they thought about themselves as learners. What makes this even more haunting is that approximately half of those recollections were what I refer to as creativity scars. The research participants could point to a specific incident where they were told or shown they weren't good writers, artists, musicians, dancers or something creative* (Brown, 2012, 190).

Drama Kweens began as and, I hope, always will be a space where marginalized learners can feel safe. The term "safe spaces" in schools has become shorthand for gathering points of students and learners who are seen as othered. A place without bias or preconception, criticisms or exclusions. A safe space sounds like an excellent idea – on paper. But my fear is that these spaces can create echo chambers for the participants who gather there, and serve to paint bulls eyes on their backs for their bullies. They polarise the collective space and create a sharp contrast in feeling and belonging for anyone who encounters them. If one space is declared *safe*, by default everywhere else is *unsafe*. And while this is very often true, it can serve to heighten the very tensions safe spaces were created for in the first place.

In one of the high schools I was working with, I had decided that since *Drama Kweens* was largely attended by learners who identified as girls, femmes, trans, non-binary and female (we didn't always discuss this in detail, some learners may have fallen outside of this spectrum) we would claim the space as officially LGBTQIA+ friendly. Whilst we did not openly exclude cis-normative male learners, we certainly did not canvas for them either. We openly made work about #MenAreTrash[8] and

[8] An international hashtag that trended on Twitter in 2017 (and continues to be used at time of writing) referring to hegemonic patriarchal and misogynistic abuses towards womxn, femme and non-binary people. It was particularly popular in South Africa in the wake of the vicious murders of Karabo Mokoena and Zolile Khumalo – these testimonies gave South African survivors the courage to share their own stories and created a community and social justice movement around them.

#NotAllMen[9] and #MeToo[10] and we talked about the topics we were interested in – a lot of which were unapologetically feminist, sex positive and queer-related. And the little eco-system we built seemed to work in this symbiosis very well – for a few weeks.

…And then there was a timetable clash with extra maths in the lead-up to Grade 10 November exams – and soccer practices were unilaterally cancelled.

With the majority of the league in hours of exam prep three times a week, the remaining boys half-heartedly kicked a ball around in the grassless courtyard outside our classroom. While they ran at each other, they would often make loud jokes about *Drama Kween* learners and what we were doing with our "girly stuff" and "play-play acting". Sometimes the remarks were very personal, particularly about the learners in the group. I spoke to them about it, I spoke to their class teachers about it, I spoke to the principal about it – nothing improved. I asked if we could move but all the classrooms were booked. I asked if they could move, but they weren't, officially, in anyone's way. They were in a communal area.

My discomfort seemed to spur these latchkey kids on. The dull thwack of each foot against the ball outside our window was like water torture. We knew there'd be a remark sooner or later. And our safe space would be violated by low resource allocation and deliberate malice.

But as powerless as I felt, I had an opportunity: to teach my learners about the root of shame and how deferred disappointment and hurt can manifest as anger and bullying. I could have tried to defuse the microagressions in the banter between the boys by naming what they were doing and asking for their help in understanding their behaviour. But the truth is that I didn't want to. To my mind, they represented exactly why we needed a safe space in the first place. They were the enemy, prowling on our doorstep and proving my thesis about healthy vulnerability and how it cracks open the intra and intergroup dynamic for healing and restorative antifragility. Those five teens (they were probably fifteen years old, at most) banded our little crew together against a common enemy. They justified the, sometimes awkward, insistent visibility of my whiteness and feminism and otherness in a space used mostly by people of colour and

[9] A popular retort used by offended men to derail feminist messages about patriarchal misogyny.

[10] A social justice movement started by Tarana Burke in 2006 but popularized on Twitter in 2017 in the wake of sexual assault allegations against Harvey Weinstein in Hollywood. #MeToo is now associated with any abuse of power or harassment (particularly regarding sexual harassment or abuses of power) in any industry.

managed predominantly by patriarchal men. These boys were my business card: I handed them out in School Governing Body meeting and Zone Management workshops with parents. They justified the necessity of me campaigning for the rights of learners in the arts and the dire lack of empathy in schools. These fifteen year olds represented all evil! Learners like these were whom I (in all my well-meaning, Social-Justice-Warrior glory) was defending my *Drama Kweens* against.

And so I didn't bother to see their point of view. I positioned us in a convenient construction where we were the *Underdogs*. As a measure of self-preservation, we decided we were more intellectual and emotionally developed than they were. To deliberately misquote Michelle Obama (2016) "We went high while they stayed low". And we comforted ourselves in the knowledge that no matter what they said about us and how little they thought of us in a system that propped up their hegemonic bigotry, we were safe in the knowledge that at least we weren't *them*.
I had turned our safe space into a toxic space, all in the name of protecting *my* learners.

And then one of their group walked into our classroom.

I still don't know why he did. He told us it was to flirt with the girls, and maybe that is true. He was very quiet and only watched for the first four sessions he attended. And then he wrote a script called *Ons Siekte* [Our Sickness] about Zombies in Parkwood and Grassy Park[11]; infecting and killing everyone who got in their way. And he cast the play with actors from the group and starred in it himself – and he directed the scenes, organized the props and sourced the minimal costumes so that we could film it for our open day.
He was consciously rewriting his story of a teenager growing up around substance abuse and gun violence as a schlock comedy and inviting us all to share it with him. And just as shame sears creativity, withers it away and chokes out the confidence and trust required to be vulnerable in front of others; so commitment, candor and vulnerability ignite creativity and create capacity for extraordinary honesty,

[11] Parkwood and Grassy Park are both low income locations in the Western Cape in an area commonly known as the Cape Flats. These areas are known for high incidents of drug use, gangsterism and violent crime.

experimentation and nation-building. And only after we had finished, when we were talking about the play and what we liked or didn't like about the process, did I realise how easy it was to sacrifice those boys for the "greater good" of *my* precious learners in *my* project. And how easily I could've lost a budding playwright and dedicated member of *Drama Kweens* – who has been faithfully attending, mentoring and participating in our work for the last 18 months. In the following weeks, the rest of his friends visited the group as well. Some stayed, some didn't. But the jeering outside our door eventually stopped. Not because the space shamed and excluded those who necessitated its existence: but precisely because it *didn't* by *existing to its fullest extent* in the first place.

Youngleson, P. (2016). *Suddenly, a soccer team came to class*. Cape Town: Parkwood.

Another of my favourite memories of that group is when we paired up experienced actors with newcomers, and one of the queer boys chose to work with their former tormentor. Again, I don't know why they[12] did it. Perhaps they thought they were

[12] They/them are the learner's nominated pronouns

protecting their friends and classmates. Perhaps they felt confident enough not to be intimidated. They could, even, have had daydreams of exacting some sort of revenge for their years of abuse in the hallways and bathrooms of their high school.

Regardless, the two of them worked together, brows furrowed and chairs side by side for the hour and then presented their performance to the group. The scene took place in a realistic setting where the two actors, essentially, played themselves. They both pretended to be sitting on a wall outside the school, watching people walk by and commenting on life in Zeekoevlei and Parkwood and what they wanted to be when they "grew up". Their speech patterns were halting as they stopped just short of fleshing out a future. There were vague references to families and cars and jobs from both of them, but nothing concrete. And at the end of it, they simply greeted each other and walked away.

From a theatrical point of view, the piece was a "failure". Most of the group were bored stiff and told them so in no uncertain terms during the feedback. But, perhaps, this was a moment for Gobodo-Madikizela's transcendence. They had created a space where the two learners were equal. With equal rights to an "ordinary" future just like any other South African. And for all the intricacies of their identity and machismo and orientation and acceptance and rejection and shame and confidence and humiliation and indignation and hope (hope, most of all!); to be publically acknowledged by each other and by an audience felt momentous. To verbalise and visualise their right to be ordinary. In their dream, they didn't have to be extraordinary to be allowed to feel safe, loved and accepted. They didn't have to win a STEM scholarship or invent an app that cures cancer or have a rags-to-riches story go viral on Facebook or impress Bill and Melinda Gates to feel valuable and worthy. They saw themselves as worthy, even if it was through the misty footlights of a bit of play-acting in a dusty classroom. And, more than that, they saw each other as worthy, just as they were.

The fact that their play making was boring to their peers really got my attention. Because their dreams were so relatable, so mundane.

But it took an exercise in fantasy for garden-variety safety and wellbeing to feel attainable.

Youngleson, P. (2016). *When I'm 25 I will be…* Cape Town: Parkwood and Grassy Park.

Brown further explains the nature of shame (and how it can atrophy creativity and enthusiasm in any organisation) in the following way: "Shame can only rise so far in any system before people disengage to protect themselves. When we're disengaged, we don't show up, we don't contribute, and we stop caring" (Brown, 2012, 192). Holtmann's Safe Community of Opportunity Model (Holtman, 2011, 7) posits that until we understand the compassion gap in our communities, our wicked problems will remain the complicated, interrelated and seemingly unsolvable "reality" that is post-apartheid South Africa. Shame and transgenerational scar tissue are teaching our children a specific kind of resilience: one that holds on for dear life, keeps its head down and just tries to get out of everything alive.

After his first hour with us, I asked that former soccer player for forgiveness. I admitted I had judged him and made assumptions about him based on his (in my experience) worst moments. And he was gracious enough to grant it to me.
He chose not to judge me by my worst behaviour, as I wish I had had the foresight to do for him.

Shame and the underdog were (and sometimes still are) entwined, for me, during my time at *Drama Kweens*. They are Ellis and Bochner's "inward and outward" zoom of the lens (2000). I am, very often, proud of the work we do with our learners and simultaneously ashamed of my own ignorance and privilege while doing it. I am

aware that my education, access and network makes me uniquely adept at what I do, but that in doing it I occupy a space that would be better understood and more empathetically executed by someone from the communities I want to serve. Social justice is often stuck in this conundrum of plasticity: a fragile environment that, if we are willing, can be moulded into an antifragile crucible for the next mentors, teachers, makers and oracles. But if we are unwilling, our NPOs and programs can rigidly maintain the status quo and turn us into messianic megaphones that serve only our own voices, instead of those we claim to represent.

The parents and caregivers were very responsive around this theme. Or, rather, they had deep-seated issues around shame. And the fact that their children had all exceeded expectation on the program (and were collectively and individually epitomising the "David-and-Goliath" story) as triumphant underdogs was a victory they, mostly, struggled to share. This group did not feel like underdogs: they felt like they were "drowning" (term used by participant). Some parents described how many of them initially didn't want their children to do drama and thought it was a waste of time, so they felt uncomfortable when I thanked them for their participation and praised them for the learners' processes and progress. Others haltingly explained points of apathy where they felt they didn't have the capacity to engage around their children anymore; they were too tired from work, family and community responsibilities, financial pressures and the stresses of raising a family. They described *Drama Kweens* as "nice" (term used by participant) but not anything they spent time thinking about. One of the parents sent me a long voice notes, sharing that she appreciated what I did with the learners, but even though her daughter was "happier" (term used by participant) she still didn't see how that could help her in the long term. She was worried about her passing her other subjects and thought the learner's time would be better spent studying or helping at home.

There were parents and caregivers who saw merit in *Drama Kweens* and there was an acknowledgement of learner improvement (see section 4.2.2. *Feeling Excluded from an Organisation*) but a strong feedback from these participants was the separation between the learners and themselves. They felt no part in the improvement and, therefore, could not share in the triumph. Even those parents and caregivers who considered themselves to be "good" (term used by participant) at parenting and caring

for their children – and they were in the vast minority – struggled to connect their contributions to the work we did at *Drama Kweens* and the multigenerational learning eco-system we use and believe in. This chasm experienced by the groups between acknowledged personal contribution and positive behavioural change and learner well-being seemed to result in feeling of shame.

Brown's *Shame Resilience Theory* (2006) proposes that shame (especially when experienced by women – which was the self-identified gender of the vast majority of the participants in this group) can be described as "an intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of acceptance and belonging" (Brown, 2006, 45). Brown further explains that shame is a "psyhco-social-cultural construct" where:

> *...the psychological component relates to the participants' emphasis on the emotions, thoughts and behaviours of the self. The social component relates to the way women experience shame in an interpersonal context that is inextricably tied to relationships and connection. The cultural component points to the very prevalent role of cultural expectations and the relationship between shame and the real or perceived failure of meeting cultural expectations* (Brown, 2006, 45).

The power of the underdog is that we expect them to lose – but, against the odds, they triumph in spite of their appearance, circumstances and, or, more favourably viewed opponent. Shame precluded the parents and caregivers from sharing in their children's unlikely coups. However, with time, reappropriated shame that acknowledges the complex ways we parent and care for each other and co-opts the underdog status for every member of the learning eco-system would be, in my opinion, a holistic way of "fixing" our communities from within.

The educators and senior management staff spoke about their jobs and how discouraged they were in them. Many of the participants had been teaching for over a decade (some as many as three decades) and they felt underappreciated, over worked and at risk of violence and abuse from their work environment and the people in it (quite a lot of their fears were of unmanaged learners). The participants I spoke to were tired of being shamed by their employers for poor results when they knew they

had tried their best in a broken system. They, largely, did not feel like they deserved to feel ashamed of their results and the negative trajectories some of their learners were on, and chose to focus on the exceptional learners instead. As one educator exclaimed "Daar is nie genoeg ure nie. Ek het nie tyd om oor almal te worry nie. Dié wat wil werk, kan maar werk en ek sal vir hulle help. Maar ek gaan nie vir moielikheid gaan soek nie." [*There aren't enough hours. I don't have the time to worry about everyone. Those that want to work can work and I will help them. But I'm not going to go out looking for trouble*.]

In this set up, it is not unexpected that the preference towards metric-based exceptionalism forms an enticing narrative.

And, ironically, the traditional learning systems that dominate schools in the Western Cape unconsciously promote the exclusion, shaming and failure of learners that don't uphold the validity of their metrics – whilst supplying an underdog narratives to educators and management staff who survive the harrowing injustices of their working conditions and produce excellence in spite of their obstacles.

In a learning eco-system that encourages antifragility, inclusion and flourishing from every member, the learning environment wouldn't form part of the reason why anyone identified as an underdog.

Unsurprisingly, the learners considered themselves to be underdogs and were unanimously proud to be associated with the title. Their journey of reappropriating any imposed shame and outsider status was a popular topic of conversation – and, happily, we were able to talk about Brown's distinction between guilt and shame (although we did not directly use her theories in the discussions) whereby "'I did/said/believed something bad' versus 'I am bad'" (Brown, 2006, 50) and how it allows space for greater empathy with ourselves and our dealings with other people. One of Brown's Shame Resilience Theory continuums is the "reaching out continuum" and she explains it in the following way:

> *The reaching out continuum is the measure of one's ability to reach out to others to both find empathy and offer empathy…Developing mutually empathetic relationships is a critical element of shame resilience. Participants reported that when they reached out to offer support to others, they felt an increase in their own shame resilience. This appeared to happen through the*

> *building of support networks that allowed them to identify shared experiences and demystify the isolating properties of shame. These networks also became important sources of ideas and strategies that elevated their critical awareness of…their understanding of shame* (Brown, 2006, 49).

In my experience of working with at-risk learners in public high schools in the Western Cape, shame is a major contributor towards poor self-discipline and anti-social behaviour, underdeveloped social skills, self-imposed seclusion, low self-confidence and an ongoing struggle to feel accepted. Shame rarely springs from exactly the same source in all of the learners, but it tends to manifest in relatively easily identifiable patterns. So the notion of reappropriating shame, addressing the places it came from and turning a story of fragility and failure into a testimony of antifragile self-actualisation and underdog victory filled a happy half-hour of our time together as a group – and made me very hopeful for the future of learners like these.

Youngleson, P. (2017). *For Muslim Girls who have considered Dancing when the Stereotypes are Enuf (with apologies to Ntozake Shange)*. Cape Town: Manenberg.

4.2.4 THE FEAR OF BEING WORN DOWN AND EXPERIENCING PRESSURE TO BE A ROLE MODEL

Once the participants (and, truthfully, this level of reflexivity was only reached by the learners in their sessions, there wasn't enough time in the other two sample groups) had established that there was a lot to gain from leaning into their own vulnerabilities and showing others how to create their own sense of antifragility in fragile environments; there was a collective intake of breath.

From now on, we have to care about everything, all the time: for our own journey as well as everyone else's. The realisation that there is always social justice work to do has led many social activists into states of "hopelessness, helplessness and cynicism" – commonly referred to as Activism Burnout (Wollman, 2016).

It was a lot of pressure. As we discussed how this pressure to perform was experienced, a startling revelation came to light: for many of the learners I was speaking to, the notion of flourishing was, at times, starting to become a burden.

They were made to participate in acts of inclusionary tokenism at school events. They were shown off as community examples at home. They were participants in my study, a potentially publishable document that claimed: "they flourished, so you can too!"

Everyone they cared about *needed* them to keep flourishing so the social construction wouldn't collapse. And they desperately wanted to please their family, educators and friends, but this determinism was choking their joy.

It was a significant day in my autoethnographic journey when I realised that by pushing my own agenda and trying to quantatively force a conclusion from the data, I could, potentially, create an environment where the learners I so fiercely cared about could slip from consciously reclaimed antifragility back into a passive, fragile state – as much a victim of our success as they were a victim of the schooling systems' failures. And that *my* idea of what flourishing looks like would be the stick used to beat them back into submission.

Their qualitative contribution was clear when they were left to exhibit it in praxis: they created meaningful, trust-based cultures within their environments that clearly showed community and organisational strength and cohesion. They displayed

personal engagement with their own expression of antifragility, and encouraged acts of conscious, healthy vulnerability amongst their peers and networks. They did not need me to get them to perform the work as proof that we had built something – they were the building, they were the classrooms. They were the moment in time I needed to record…not the time-based conversations I asked them to participate in for this study.

As the researcher I felt like a total fake. I had put my learners at risk and actually created a space that increased their fragility! Having wrestled with Imposter Syndrome[13] for years I had the sinking feeling that my fears were founded all along: my well-intentioned meddling had definitely made things worse.

And, perhaps, they had. In my experience, however, self-pity rarely leads to positive change. So I chose to de-centre my own feelings from what the learners were saying and ask them Holtmann's pivotal question: "what would it look like if it were fixed?"

By opening the conversation with *Drama Kweens* learners and conceding that understanding a new layer of fragility in our environment doesn't undo our antifragile work; I was able to "absorb the knocks" that Taleb speaks about and reframe my own positionality as to what antifragility looks like for conscientised learners in fragile spaces.

The learners in this study don't have to be perfect for the research to be successful. The whole notion of *Drama Kweens* as an educational model doesn't need to work for the research to be "successful" (more, unfortunately, on that later).

And the idea of success being a stagnant state that can be examined under a microscope is fragility in the extreme – Taleb specifically warns his readers about what he calls *causal opacity*, a concept highly applicable in this instance:

> *…errors and their consequences are information; for small children, pain is the only risk management information, as their logical faculties are not very developed…complex systems are, well, all about information. And there are many more conveyors of information around us than meet the eye. This is what we call causal opacity: it is hard to see the arrow from cause to*

[13] *Imposter syndrome*, first written about by Clance and Imes in 1978, is an internal belief by an individual that any success or achievement is a matter of luck or chance and that they will soon be exposed as an intellectually inferior fraud.

> *consequence, making much of conventional methods of analysis, in addition to standard logic, inapplicable* (Taleb, 2012, 71).

Before we began *Drama Kweens* I did not imagine I would be writing a thesis on why after-school drama clubs are more important in solving knotty social problems on the Cape Flats than anti-bullying campaigns or scholarship incentives could ever be…but here we are. And I believe that wholeheartedly. Similarly, I could not have imagined that so many of the learners in our programs would exhibit such profound reflexivity, empathy, self-determination and kindness to themselves and those around them. And I certainly could not have predicted that, after working through some of their own thoughts and feelings and behaviours, these learners would ever experience burnout or performance fatigue as a result of the "success" their journeys afforded them in the eyes of the fragile spaces they still occupied – and the ones I created around and in *Drama Kweens* itself.
This is causal opacity. And antifragility is not a metric of success measured by a rehabilitated learner (rehabilitated into what, one may well ask!) but it is the very ability to keep on learning, assimilating, adapting and absorbing the lessons that fragile spaces require of them.

As unhappy as I am that our program increased any learner's precarity: the ability of the learners to vocalise their fears, interpret experienced traumas and consciously necessitate a way to make the space less fragile for them (even if it meant dismantling previous solutions to other lived problems) was and is antifragility in motion.
And it is the praxis of my theory (which I, myself, hadn't fully understood until that point).

4.3 CONCLUSIONS TO MY FINDINGS

In examining Brown and Butler's ideas of vulnerability as both a riot against hegemonic totalitarianism and a relationship pathway towards empathy and reflection; and Taleb's conclusions of antifragility as an oscillating speck on an ever-changing horizon I realised that the participants in this study were more antifragile than I was. And that they, certainly, had a more sophisticated, innate understanding of how to forge antifragility in a fragile space – despite not having done the readings.

My research serves to support the literature I have read and reaffirms the value of praxis in conjunction with theory – particularly in practical spheres like performance studies.

The value of my research, I think, lies in the way we used sociological and psychological exercises in theatre spaces (and engaged our bodies, minds and psychological experiences) to halter "characters" that helped to facilitate antifragility for ourselves and each other. The use of creative practice and imagination (especially when embodied during a scene) allowed for lateral problem-solving and prevented participants from feeling "stupid" (term used by participant) when they made innovative and unexpected suggestions or proposals.
Where this research is particularly exciting is the destigmatisation of feedback and reflection through dramatic critique – and how learners became so comfortable with the ideas of positive feedback loops, iteration, ensemble collaboration and empathetic learning eco-systems that they regularly applied these methods of reflexivity without prompting or petulance.

The most significant take away from my research, I feel, is the understanding that multigenerational, antifragile learning ecosystems are performative and can best serve the participating members while they are in process; and that healthy vulnerability and empathy can lower the risk and fragility of learners – even when their environment and circumstances remain fragile (or increase in fragility).

4.4. NAT THEATRE SCRIPT

Nat [*Wet*] is a theatre script written in conversation with the *Drama Kweens* program and participants. Although our conversations in *Drama Kweens* inspired some of the plot of *Nat*, it is a fictional story and is not a factual account of anyone who has ever participated in *Drama Kweens* (or been associated with *Drama Kweens*).

Nat was performed at three national theatre festivals and in several local theatres in the Western Cape. All photographs reproduced here were taken by Jesse Kramer and show Iman Isaacs and Richard September as the performers. Iman and Richard are professional actors and were never part of the *Drama Kweens* program. *Nat* has an age restriction of 16 for language and adult themes.

Kramer, J. (2016). *Shh! Die boere gat jou vang!* and *Ek speel nie kinderspeeletjies nie*. Cape Town: Rosebank.

NAT SUMMARY

Written and directed by Fleur du Cap award winner Penelope Youngleson, *Nat* was originally performed by Iman Isaacs (Suidoosterfees Best Actress 2016) and Richard September (Fiesta, WoordTroFee and Fleur du Cap Best Actor 2015).

It is a multi-lingual performance (Afrikaans vernacular, English, isiXhosa) that uses text, movement and soundscapes to reflect a reality of at-risk South African youths living on the Cape Flats.

Nat follows the lives of three adolescents in Grassy Park, rupturing around an inescapable emergence of sexuality and violence that seems to mark their rite of passage into adulthood. These are the "expendable children" that populate our disadvantaged communities – the children who are too poor to have a childhood.

JONGETJIE *[the diminutive Afrikaans word for a youth]*

Jongetjie is a mixed race (known as "coloured" under apartheid law) male adolescent who has been severely physically and sexually abused by a stepfather (his father is in prison and his mother is unable to care for him). He is revered in his school and community as an intimidating and dangerous character. He is best friends with Meisie (who is, ironically, the more dangerous of the two – but usually dismissed by her peers and adults because she is a "girl"). Jongetjie falls in love with Ntombazan, but doesn't have the vocabulary (literal and emotional) to form any kind of relationship with her.

MEISIE [*the Afrikaans word for Girl*]

Meisie is a mixed race (known as "coloured" under apartheid law) female adolescent who has one real relationship in her life: with Jongetjie. She is seen as "unladylike" by her peers and teachers. She is extremely intelligent and fiercely loyal, but turns against people very quickly and is prone to extreme violence. Meisie is not sure how to "make" people like her, and tries to bully affection from others. She and Jongetjie have had sex before, but they have very different understandings of what their intimacy means. *Despite being a girl* (and the stereotypes expected of her) she is always seen and always heard – and people despise her for it.

NTOMBAZAN [*the isiXhosa word for Girl, sometimes used to mean girlfriend where the more formal "ntombazana" means girl*]

Ntombazan is a black female adolescent and an victim of prejudice and colourism in her new school (mainly attended by mixed race learners). She does not speak Afrikaans well, although she can understand it. She upsets the understanding between Jongetjie and Meisie and incites a desire for more "traditional" romance from Jongetjie. This upsets Meisie and sets a series of events in motion, set to the backdrop of Guy Fawkes night. Ntombazan is a voice over and is never seen on stage. Anything addressed to her character is spoken directly to the audience (they become the lover and hope of something "more" for Jongetjie – and motivation for revenge from Meisie). The cross purposes of the love-triangle dialogue between the three learners are intentional. She is a "good girl". She is never seen and seldom heard.

Special Note: Ntombazan's dialogue is spoken in a mixture of English and isiXhosa vernacular. Unless explicitly written in isiXhosa, any part of the English can be translated – depending on how "sturvy" (posh) she is going to be played. The actor can use their creative license and discretion, and consult with the director.

A NOTE ON CONTEXT

Guy Fawkes (5 November) is a well-known commemoration of the British Gunpowder Plot of 1605. Ironically, it is celebrated in a particularly vivid way in at-risk areas like Grassy Park, Lotus River, Parkwood and Lavender Hill in the Western Cape, South Africa. It is common for groups of youth to pelt each other (and strangers) with condoms and socks filled with excrement and urine, throw paint, attack parked cars with sticks and clubs and fashion a type of Medieval flail out of a sock filled with brick pieces or scrap wood with screws or nails driven through it). It is not considered safe to be outside in the streets on Guy Fawkes night – but for many of the learners interviewed as part of the devising process for this play, it was merely a 24 hour concentration of their everyday lives.

This play is set on the 5th November and takes place between 8am on that day and midnight that night. It ends as the fireworks explode over the skyline.

A NOTE ON THE TITLE

Nat [*Wet*] refers to the idiom "nat agter die ore" meaning wet behind the ears. This is similar to the English saying, and means that someone is immature or lacking in experience.

It also refers to a sexualisation (or even over-sexualisation) process that begins disproportionately early for a lot of the learners I got to know during the writing of this piece. They become adults very quickly.

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

I started writing *Nat* after being a teacher at Battswood Arts Centre in Grassy Park. My time there made me very aware of how many learners are subjected to micro and macro aggressions on a daily (if not hourly) basis in the Western Cape public school system. How fences, gates, buildings, teachers, principals, school rules and prejudices are failing our children. I wrote this play in response to the fourteen year olds who have been told to leave school because they are pregnant. For the nine year olds who aren't allowed to come to school until their bruises subside…and they never do. For the little boys who are cuffed over the head and called "moffie" [homophobic pejorative] if they cry when they are bullied. By their teachers. For the ten year olds who get their first period and miss class because there isn't money for pads or tampons. For the teachers who come to school every day scared of stray bullets and learners who have been pushed too hard the day before. For the eighteen year olds who are still in Grade 9.

I wrote this play with the help of my extra-mural learners who generously shared their stories and talked through their experiences with me. Thank you my Kweens!

Nat agter die ore. Nat tussen die bene. Woestyn in jou mond.
[*Wet behind the ears. Wet between your legs. Desert/wilderness in your mouth*]

A NOTE ON STAGE DIRECTIONS AND WRITING CONVENTIONS

This play was originally written to be performed by actors in front of an audience. As such, there are stage directions and they are written in italics, usually in a separate paragraph from the dialogue and indented. These indicate the physical actions or directions taken by an actor.

The script was written in Afrikaans vernacular, English and isiXhosa. Translations are provided in italics and are written directly after the dialogue and within square brackets.

e.g.: Nat [*Wet*]

Characters' names are written in bold when they are about to speak.

OPSIT KERS
[A particular candle that was lit when lovers met during courting. They were only allowed to be in each other's company for the amount of time it took for the candle to burn out]

> *Stage is in darkness. The two actors are crouched, centre stage. They have 24 boxes of matches in front of them, matchsticks spilling out and around them. The act of match lighting becomes choreography, using breath (escalating breath and holding breath) and striking motion to create rhythm.*
>
> *The actors keep striking and extinguishing matches throughout their monologues. This should be the only light on stage. Instrumental music swells under them. Pauline Oliveros, Stuart Dempster and Panaiotis' "Deep Listening" is a good reference.*

JONGETJIE:
Is net die manne wat hierso operate. Ons run die joint, verstaan? So don't push me. En if you do? Wees bereid, hoor. Wees net bereid, ou maat.

Want ek gat jou kop oopskiet. Lat die bloed uitjo tonnaels uitspat.
Moenie met my rondfokie. Hoor?
Moenie met my fokken rondfokie.
[*It's only the men who operate around here. We run things, you understand? So don't push me. And if you do? Be prepared. Just be prepared, old pal.*

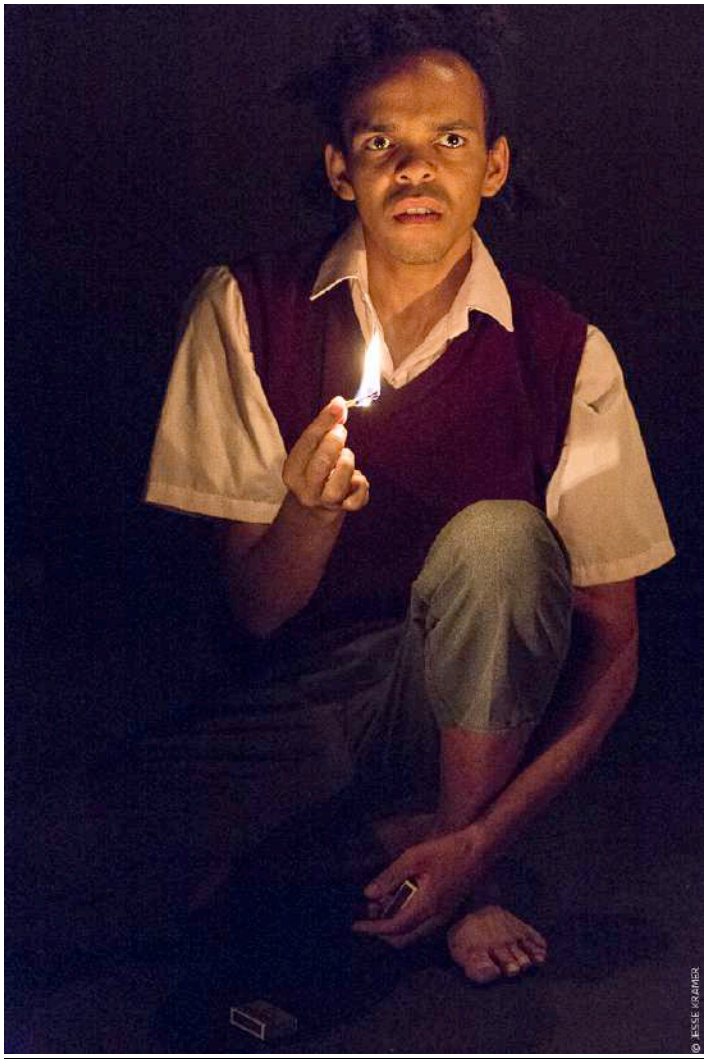
Because I'm going to blow your head off. So hard the blood pours out of your toenails.
Don't fuck me around. Do you hear?
Don't fucking fuck me around.]

MEISIE:
Ja. Die groot mense. Hulle loop daar buite. En hulle gat werk toe. Maar hulle's nie wakker nie. Jy moet wakker wees. Heeltyd. Werk maak 'n mens sag. Hulle kykie waar hulle loopie. Hulle kyk net vir die einde vannie maand. Daar's nie 'n einde van die maand vir my nie. Ek kan geld enige tyd innie hand kry.

Issie moeilikie.
[*Yes. The adults. They walk around out there. And they go to work. But they're not awake. You have to be awake. The whole time. Work makes you soft. They don't watch where they're going. They only look out for the end of the month. There's no end of the month for me. I can get money any time I want.*

It's not hard.]

NTOMBAZAN:
Voice over
I stopped talking last year. My tongue was too heavy and the words didn't make any difference. English. Afrikaans. isiXhosa. They laugh, no matter what you say or how you say it. Because you're not them. Because you'll never be them. And because they decided that a long time ago. Or their parents did. Or their parents' parents. I'm not old enough to be this old.



Kramer, J. (2016). *Jongetjie*. Cape Town: Rosebank.

AFRIKAANS IS NIE DIE WITMENS SE TAAL NIE.
[Afrikaans is not the White people's language]

> *School bell rings. Music fades out and stage lights come up. Actors busy themselves with checking for rival gangs, teachers or anyone who could be threat. Once they are sure they are safe, they strike up an easy familiarity with each other, each busy in their own thoughts.*
>
> *Meisie is picking up all the spent matches and putting them back into empty boxes. Her back is to Jongetjie.*

JONGETJIE:
Hey! Darkie!

> *Meisie looks around. Sees he's talking to Ntombazan*

MEISIE:
Sy hou nie van jou nie.
[*She doesn't like you.*]

JONGETJIE:
Sy ken my nog nie. Hey! You. What's your name?
[*She doesn't know me yet. Hey! You. What's your name?]*

Ntombazan doesn't respond

JONGETJIE:
Kan sy Engels verstaan? Of praat sy net daai kliek goeters?
[*Can she understand English? Or does she only speak in those click things?]*

MEISIE:
Ek weetie! Ek's nie vrienne met haar nie.
[*I don't know! I'm not friends with her.]*

JONGETJIE:
Gan praat bietjie met haar, man. Ek hou, mos, van dark meat.
[*Go and talk to her, man. You know I like dark meat.]*

MEISIE:
Jy's fokken vuil, jy. Praat met haar self. Ek's nie jou Ma nie.
[*You're fucking dirty. Go and talk to her yourself. I'm not your Mother*.]

JONGETJIE:
Nee, jou Ma sou vir my geluister het.
Sy het gisteraand.
[*No, your Mother would've listened to me.*
She did last night.]

Meisie runs at Jongetjie as if to attack him. He laughs at her and easily pushes her away, he is more rough with her than he needs to be, but doesn't notice.

JONGETJIE:
Nou gan sê haar ek wil haar naam weet.
[*Now go and tell her I want to know her name*.]

Meisie looks irritated. Picks up the last of the matches – as slowly as possible to delay Jongetjie's request. Finally walks over to Ntombazan.

MEISIE:
Wat's jou naam?
[*What's your name?*]

Ntombazan doesn't respond. Meisie gets increasingly irritated.

MEISIE:
Hey! Ek praat met jou. Ons wil weet wie jy is.
[Hey! I'm talking to you. We want to know who you are.]

Ntombazan doesn't respond. Meisie speaks louder and more slowly.

MEISIE:
Do you speak English? Ag fokkit man, Jongetjie. Ek hetie heel dag om kak te praat nie.
[*Do you speak English? Ag fuck it man, Jongetjie. I don't have all day to talk shit.*]

JONGETJIE:
Rustig, Meisie. Ek praat self.
Hey! Jy!
[*Relax, Meisie. I'll talk to her myself.*
Hey! You!]

Jongetjie addresses his monologue to the audience as if they are Ntombazan. His speech is hesitant but hopeful, shy. The instrumental score is lighthearted. William Basinski's "Watermusic II" is a good reference.

JONGETJIE:
Ek..ek hou van jou. Smaak jou dik. Maar issie net…
Ek hou van jou nek en hoe jou hare jou kop… ag, somme how it look, man.
I like your… smile, because you look happy and that makes me happy to see you like that. And I like your legs because they're long…en só.
Gestures to show how shapely her legs are.
Ja. Ja, ek like jou legs.
En jy's nie net mooi nie jy's bleddie mooi. Soos…'n painting. Of Beyoncé.
Ek wil jou vashou en movies kyk en tjoklit eet en luister na jou kak musiek en lag vir jou. Met jou. Ek wil 'n… movie wees. Vir jou.
Ek ken jou nie eers nie maar ek wil jou gelukkig maak, ok? Ek wil jou fokken gelukkig maak.
[*I…I like you. I really fancy you a lot. But it's not just…*
I like your neck and how your hair makes your head…ag, I just like how you look, man.
I like your…smile, because you look happy and that makes me happy to see you like that. And I like your legs because they're long…and just so.

Gestures to show how shapely her legs are.

Ja. Ja, I like your legs.
And you're not just pretty you're bloody pretty. Like…a painting. Or Beyoncé.
I want to hold you and watch movies and eat chocolate and listen to your shit music and laugh at you. Laugh with you. I want to…be a movie. For you.
I don't even know you but I know I want to make you happy, ok? I want to make you fucking happy.]

Meisie addresses her monologue to the audience

MEISIE:

Ek wil ‘n mes vat, en die lem rond elke tand in sy kop indruk. Ek wil sy tande uit hul tandvleis uitpop en sy tong stilsit met ‘n mond vol bloed. Ek het nie krag vir vys-slaan nie. Ek gan sy tande uitsny en in ‘n sakkie om my nek sit om my te herhinner. En elke keer as ek droom aan ‘n ander toekoms gan ek hulle uitgooi op die mat. Soos Mr Bones.

Smiles.

En hy sal nie daai kak-vreet-glimlag vir my kan gooi met ‘n bek vol fokol nie.
Sy mond gan stilsit. Ek gan dit doen.
[*I want to take a knife and run the blade around every tooth in his head. I want to snap his teeth out of his gums and shut him up with a mouth full of blood. I don’t have the energy for hitting him. I’m going to cut his teeth out and put them in a little bag around my neck to remind myself (of what this feels like). And every time I dream about a different future, I’ll throw them out onto the carpet. Like Mr Bones.*[14]

Smiles

And he won’t be able to smile that shit-eating grin at me with a mouth full of fuck-all. His mouth is going to shut up. And I’m going to do the shutting.]

NTOMBAZAN:
I know they are talking about me. Want ek verstaan Afrikaans. [*Because I understand Afrikaans*.]
I don’t speak it because I don’t want to.
This place splits your face in two. Until your throat falls out of your skin and the one can’t speak for the other anymore. They’re talking to my face. Not the feelings behind it. And my spine is shortening just like the days. And I have nothing to say to these children who won’t sit next to me in class because they think my colour is catching but want me to sit on their laps once the lesson is over.
Ek verstaan Afrikaans. Ek weet wat hulle sê.
[*I understand Afrikaans. I know what they are saying*.]

[14] *Mr Bones* is a Leon Schuster comedic movie about a sangoma (traditional healer). Sangomas cast bones, teeth, shells and other small objects of value to the ancestors in a practice of divination. The objects are thrown onto the floor and the Sangoma interprets the way they have fallen and in what order they land. This can be referred to as “throwing the bones” and it is an art and a calling.

Kramer, J. (2016). *Meisie and Jongetjie meet Ntombazan*. Cape Town: Rosebank.

WYS MY JOU PANTIE?
[Show me your panties?]

> *These prayers and scriptures should be recited in a fast, anxious pace that infers little meaning or understanding of what she is saying. Meisie performs a ritualistic choreography stage right, not unlike a stylized combination of the acts and motions of Christian repentance and Islamic tawba (the two most widely practiced religions in the Western Cape).*
> *High quality brown noise increases in volume and intensity throughout this monologue.*

MEISIE:
En hulle moet van die bloed neem en dit stryk aan die twee deurposte en aan die bo-drumpel, aan die huise waarin hulle dit eet. Die bloed sal vir hulle ‘n teken wees aan die huise waarin julle is: as Ek die bloed sien, sal Ek by julle verbygaan. En daar sal geen verderflike plaag onder julle wees wanneer ek die land tref nie.

Liewe Vader.

Ek loof U, ek aanbied U. Vader stort U liefde so oorvloedig baie in ons harte uit dat ons U en U seun Jesus Christus sal lief hê met ons hele hart, verstand en met ons hele siel.

Liewe Jesus.

Ek loof U, ek prys U. Dankie vir U teenwoordigheid in my lewe. Dankie vir die vrye toegang na U. Ek bid dat U ons land sal genees van die sondes-plaag en dat U kinders ‘n passie sal kry vir gebed, want dis al wat ons land sal genees.

[*And they must take the blood and paint it on the two doorposts and the lintel, on the house where they eat it (the lamb). The blood will be a sign for you and the houses in which you live: if I see the blood, I will pass over you and your home. And there will be no infectious plague amongst you when I smite the land.*

Dear Father.

I worship You. I beseech You. Father, shower Your love in our hearts like a flood so that we can love You and Your son, Jesus Christ, with our whole hearts, understanding and with our whole soul.

Dear Jesus.

I worship You, I praise You. Thank you for your presence in my life. Thank you for the free access to You. I pray that You will heal our land from sinful plagues and that Your children will have a passion for prayer, because that's the only way our land will be healed.]

Meisie's tone changes. The following section is more heartfelt. And angry. Her movements are more staccato and abstracted.

Liewe God.

Waar is U? Waar sit U? In die holtes van my oë? Want ek U nie kan sien nie. In die spasies tussen my tande, waar die vlees bly na die nagmaal? In die donkerte van my ore, wat nie U stem kan hoor nie?

Waar is my vrede? Ek staan voor U sonder sig, sonder smaak, sonder…sound. Mind. *Smiles.*
[*Dear God.*

Where are You? Where do You exist? In the hollows of my eyes? Because I can't see You. In the spaces between my teeth, where the flesh remains after we've had Communion? In the darkness of my ears, where Your voice can't be heard?
Where is my peace? I stand in front of You without sight, without taste without…sound. Mind.]

Meisie looks at Jongetjie and Ntombazan (audience).

Hy wat my vlees eet en my bloed drink, het die ewige lewe, en Ek sal hom opwek in die laaste dag. Wie my vlees eet en my bloed drink, bly in my en Ek in hom.
[*He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will resurrect them in the last days. Whoever easts my flesh and drinks my blood remains in Me, and I in him*.]

Sound cuts out. Jongetjie and Meisie jump from stage right and stage left, next to each other centre stage. Jongetjie continues to interact silently with Ntombazan while Meisie explains their gang of two to the audience.

MEISIE:

Die ding met ‘n gang is, almal dink hulle’s skollies. Maar daar sit jy veilig. Dis buite die gang waar jy kak moet opveë. Ek’s nie interested om ‘n Funky of a Cat te weesie. Ek en Jongetjie stig somme ons eie ding. Ons noem ons die Cannibal Kids. En ons maak daai naaiers sat.
[*The thing with a gang, is that everyone thinks they are the trouble. But that’s where you are safest. It’s outside the gang where you have to shovel shit. I’m not interested in being a Funky or a Cat*[15]*. Jongetjie and I have started our own thing. We call ourselves the Cannibal Kids. And we will finish those fuckers*.]

Instrumental music similar to “Deep Listening” is played over the sound system. Meisie and Jongetjie mime walking, side by side, centre stage. They walk briskly, greeting or reacting to people and things they see in front of them. This carries on throughout this following dialogue.

JONGETJIE:
Wat’s haar naam nou weer?
[*What’s her name again?]*

MEISIE:
Ntombazan.

JONGETJIE:
Wat?!
[What?!]

MEISIE:
Girlie

JONGETJIE:
Wat?! Is that her real name? Don’t she have a proper name. Like something people call her on?

MEISIE:
Her name means “girl”.

JONGETJIE:
Oh.
Hey! Girlie! Wys my jou pantie?
[*Oh.*
Hey! Girlie! Show me your panties (underwear)?]

15 The Junky Funky Kids and the Yuru Cats are two notorious gangs in the Western Cape

MAMMA SE KINDTJIE
[Mamma's little child]

Meisie comes downstage to talk to the audience while Jongetjie practices talking to Ntombazan upstage. He does this while balancing on an invisible ledge. The more confident he becomes as a romantic hero, the more unsteady his footing should be. All of this is silent and achieved through mime and gesture. It should not distract from Meisie's monologue.

MEISIE:

Is nogals [*quite*] difficult. Being a girl. Here.

My Mummy did push me out when she was sixteen and couldn't go back to school after. I got three brothers. But I'm the only girl. She did *push* me out. And she never pulled me back close to her.

Ek gee nie om nie. I grew myself. Ons het maar almal sonder 'n ma gestruggle. Dis nie news nie.

[*I don't care. I raised myself. We all struggled without Mothers. It's not news*.]

Long pause.

En ek is betere. Betere as daai ou gam-goffel van 'n ma.

[*And I'm better. Better than that old common coloured (perjorative term) of a Mother*.]

I don't evens want to be like her. Not now, not when I have my own kleintjie [*baby*]… Of, ja. Whenever. En I don't want to be like my Daddy. Or the other girls in my school.

Like those swirlkous, smet-bek tiewwe what look down on her. And me.

Sê wat jy wil –

[Like those straight-haired, dirty-mouthed bitches that look down on her. And me.

Say what you like -]

Jongetjie breaks out of his reverie to shout across the stage as if he were one of Meisie's tormentors.

JONGETJIE:

Vat jou leë papsak holle en loop, jou dakskroef!

Jou ma het jou uitgekak, want haar poes was te besig!

[Take your empty bag of cheap wine (unattractive and alcoholic ass) and go away, you hideous hag (very derogatory term).

Your Mother shat you out because her cunt was too busy!]

MEISIE:

Ek het self geleer hoe om…Ek het self geleer hoe. Somme everything.

[*I taught myself how to…I taught myself. Pretty much everything*.]

Kramer, J. (2016). *The Cannibal Kids*. Cape Town: Rosebank.

NAT AGTER JOU ORE. NAT TUSSEN JOU BENE. WOESTYN IN JOU MOND
[Wet behind your ears. Wet between your legs. A desert in your mouth]

> *Jongetjie and Meisie are walking together again, but this time they are trying to keep undercover and avoid being seen. They should be going through the same terrain and aware of the same obstacles and potential threats in their body language and gestural interaction.*

JONGETJIE:
Niks maak ‘n meisie nat vinniger as ‘n bietjie excitement nie. Jy weet? Dit het alles begin by Guy Fawkes. Is mos net vir kinders. Is lekker. Is pret, man. Is a big deal in onse gemeenskap. Ons bars rockets en gorilla boms en klappertjies en ons gooi die mense met paint. En van

hulle sit julle pis en ah in condoms en gooi dit vir mense, lat dit bars op hulle. Kak en pis orals op hulle! En hulle sit skroewe en blades en vrot eiers in die condoms ook. Enigeiets jy kan vind. Of steel.
En, ok, van die brasse slaan die darkies daar dy die station. Maar hulle los die coloureds uit, jy weet? Daar by Retreat.
En ja, daar gan 'n paar mense dood elke jaar. Maar nie baie nie. Maar daar gan 'n paar mense dood elke fokken dag hierso. So dis business as usual.
[*Nothing makes a girl wet quicker than a little excitement. You know? It all started with Guy Fawkes. It's just for kids. It great. It's fun, man. It's a big deal in our community. We explode rockets and gorilla bombs and Jumping Jacks (types of fireworks) and we throw paint over people. And some people put piss and poo in condoms and throw it at people, so it bursts on them. Shit and piss all over them! And they put screws and blades and rotten eggs in the condoms too. Anything you can find. Or steal.*
And, ok, some of the guys hit the darkies at the train station. But they leave the coloured people alone, you know? There at Retreat.
And, yes, a few people die every year. But not a lot. And people die here every fucking day. So it's just business as usual.]

> *Jongetjie and Meisie run away from other children in a more dangerous part of town, through the playground and out onto the street. Suddenly they are in the clear and laugh at their dominance in the local neighbourhood – they know the children here are terrified of them.*

MEISIE:
Die boere gat jou jaag, met die sweep, ja! Hulle haal die kinders in, een vir een.
[*The boere (White policemen) are going to chase you, with a whip! They arrest the children, one by one*[16]]

> *Clicks fingers and points at imaginary children, laughing.*

Hardloop! Hardloop! Hulle gat jou oë van hul holtes uitklap en jou bek toe slat en jou ore afkap.
En dan gat hulle jou opvreet.
[*Run! Run! They're going to smack your eyeballs out of their sockets and slap your cakehole shut and chop your ears off.*
And then they are going to eat you whole.]

> *Laughs. Instrumental music ("Watermusic II" as reference) plays under the following monologues.*

JONGETJIE:
It always gets a little rough, you know. Not for everyone. But some of the children..they don't know when to stop.
Last year they did put klappertjies [*Jumping Jacks*] and gorilla bombs in die honde se ore [*the dogs' ears*]. En die bek [*And the dogs' mouths*].

---

[16] This is a warning given to misbehaving children who don't listen to their parents in Grassy Park, and is a stern reminder of the days when people of colour had a curfew and could be arrested on a whim for being in the wrong place at the wrong time under apartheid law. In this context, boere (White policemen) and the idea of a bogeyman are interchangeable.

Jinne toe spring daai een hond op en skrik himself nat! Ons het lekker gelag! Ja, ‘n paar brakke het klappertjies in hulle ore gekry. Die beste is as hulle groot ore het. Ons noem hulle Dumbos. Dan maak hulle so!
[*Goodness, that one dog got such a fright he jumped up and wet himself! We laughed a lot! Yes, a few of the mongrels got Jumping Jacks in their ears. The best in when they have big ears. We call them Dumbos. Because they go like this!]*

Makes a flapping movement with his hands.

Fok dis snaaks. Apie, hy bly in my straat, het twee klappertjies gevat en in sy hond se bek gesit. Die ding het getjank! Jhoe! En toe bloë die kop te veel.

Ons het hom doodgemaak met ‘n emmer.
[*Fuck it’s funny. Apie, he lives in my street, took two Jumping Jacks and put them in his dog’s mouth. That thing cried! Wow! But then its head was bleeding too much.*

So we killed it with a bucket.]

NTOMBAZAN:
There’s no fence at my school. So there’s no inside, or outside, or anywhere. It’s just people. Everywhere. Spilling out into the classrooms like blood running down the walls. Do you know how to slaughter? You start with the neck, so it’s quick and the animal doesn’t feel anything. Also so you can work more easily without it struggling against you. Then you drain the blood out of the body. If you don’t do that, the meat is tough and tastes bitter. Then you cut the carcass into smaller chunks so you can eat it. Piece by piece.
That’s what school is. A kraal[17] with no fences. Or gates.
What kind of a kraal is that?

JONGETJIE:
Naai! Ons het nie die blerrie hond verdrinkie. Ons het somme die metal bucket gevat en hom geslaan until he stop tjanking. Jy weet? Hy’s nie ‘n puppy nie. Hy kannie in die emmer pas nie. Jy mal?
[*No ways! We didn’t drown the bloody dog. We just took the metal bucket and hit him until he stopped howling. You know? He’s not a puppy. He can’t fit into a bucket. Are you mad?]*

Jongetjie continues to laugh about the dead dog and the idea of humane killing. Meisie drops down onto her haunches and addresses the audience directly.

MEISIE:
‘n Mens is mos net vleis. Van julle dink juls betere as dit. Maar jy’s niks anders as vleis nie. Niks.
Glo my nie? ‘n Fokken bullet weet wie jy is. Wat jy is. ‘n Homp tjops en wors en chakalaka. Fok jou, jou naaier. Minute vir jou. Jy’s nie betere as enigeiemand nie.
[*A person is only meat. Some of you think you’re better than that. But you’re nothing more than meat. Nothing.*

[17] A traditional enclosure for livestock

Don't believe me? A fucking bullet knows who you are. What you are. A pile of chops and sausage and chakalaka[18]*. Fuck you you fucker. It's over for you (no one cares about you). You're not better than anyone else*.]

Kramer, J. (2017). *Ons noem hulle Dumbos*. Cape Town: Rosebank.

ULWIMI OLUNYE ZANGE LONELA
[*One language is never enough]*

> *Music snaps out. Actors whisper. Huddled together, centre stage. Overhead spotlight is one them.*

MEISIE:
Hoekom moes ons hier buite wag? Is koud!
[*Why do we have to wait outside? It's cold*!]

JONGETJIE:
Trust me. We're gonna find those small children and smeer [*rub*] them with nugget [*shoe polish*]. Then we're gonna hit them with paint. On their heads.

MEISIE:
Why?

JONGETJIE:
Because. It's Guy Fawkes. It's befawk [*pun on "befok" meaning very good or cool*]!
Hey...you get it? Kak snaaks [*Very funny*].

[18] South African vegetable relish served with meat based dishes

MEISIE:
Issie befokie. Jy moet die mense straf. Hulle loop op onse strate. Paint en polish? Jy speel kinderspeeletjies.
[*It isn't cool. You must punish the children. They're walking around on our streets. Paint and shoe polish? You're playing kids' games*.]

JONGETJIE:
And you? What are you playing at?

MEISIE:
Ek speel nie. Dis die fokken punt.
[*I'm not playing. That's the fucking point*.]

Lights dim down as a spotlight comes up on the two characters. They're running as fast as they can

BLOEDSPOORTJIE
[Diminutive word for a trail or track made of blood – implying a wounded animal]

NTOMBAZAN:
Jongetjie and Meisie are performing an intricate choreography that takes them through the school property (gates, fences, corridors and security measures) so that they can prey on other children. They help each other where necessary, but Meisie struggles to keep up with Jongetjie. This surprises him.
The spotlights following both characters will increase in intensity on the particular character Ntombazan is talking about to imply she is pointing at them.
I heard the kids at school say that girl is pregnant. That's why she doesn't get her periods like the rest of us. And that it's her brother's. And that it happened in the holidays when the lights went out because of Eskom and they were bored so they made a baby. And that her Daddy's in prison and her Mommy doesn't even get out of bed anymore. Except to go to the smokkelhuis [*unlicensed tavern*] and buy more alcohol.

Lights intensify on Jonngetjie.
Ntombazan whispers, with some empathy in her voice.

And some of the children said his stepfather did rape him when he was in grade 3. Before I came to this school. And no one knew about it until they had to do laps for athletics day and he had blood running down his leg and through his white shorts. And the teacher had to ask him why and he didn't say anything, he just started to cry. And he was crying and the blood was running and the teacher didn't know what to do because we don't have a social worker in our district. And she kept saying "Now what must I do?" until the principal called his Mommy to come and fetch him.
And when he walked he made little red footprints through the school.

I don't know if it's true or not, but everyone says it is. They were all there. On the bottom field. Grenville says he looked like he got his periods or something.

Chuckles softly, then excuses her own behaviour.

Things stop being sad after a while. Everyone's story is sad. You can't cry all day.

School bell rings three times in a row.
Brown noise is very loud. Jongetjie and Meisie are running on the spot, very fast. They have been spotted by a teacher on school property. They dodge trees and fences but keep their pace at a sprint. Both actors should be breathless.

MEISIE:
Hardloop! Hardloop! Hulle gat jou oë van hul holtes uitklap en jou bek toe slat en jou ore afkap.
En dan gat hulle jou opvreet.
[*Run! Run! They're going to smack your eyeballs out of their sockets and slap your cakehole shut and chop your ears off.*
And then they are going to eat you whole.]

JONGETJIE:
Hou jou fokken bek, Meisie, en hardloop. Die meneer gat ons kry!
[*Shut your fucking face, Meisie, and run! The Sir is going to get us!]*

NTOMBAZAN:
Suddenly we were running. A grownup had seen us and even though we hadn't done anything wrong we were running because the other children were running. And Jongetjie kept saying we were going to lose the skin off our backsides.

JONGETJIE:
Come on man, Ntombazan. Run!

MEISIE:
Kannie meer nie. My maag pyn.
[*I can't anymore. My stomach hurts*.]

JONGETJIE:
Jou maag?
[*Your stomach*?]
Looks at her. Slows down.
Ja, ok. Gan innie toilets in. Ek sal vir die Meneer sê dit was ekke gewees.
[*Yes, ok. Go and hide in the toilets. I'll tell the Sir it was me.]*

MEISIE:
Maar ons het fokkol gedoen. Dit was die ander kinders gewees.
[*But we did fuck all. It was the other kids*.]

JONGETJIE:
Ek weet.
[*I know*]

Jongetjie turns around slowly on the spot, looking up at his teacher (the audience).

Kramer, J. (2017). *Bloedspoortjie*. Cape Town: Rosebank.

'N MAN IS 'N MAN
[A Man is a Man]

Jongetjie addresses monologue to audience as if talking to Ntombazan. He tries to show off, but struggles to understand his own feelings and fears.

JONGETJIE:
Half laughing.

Daai meneer het my nou *geslat* jong. Jirre, my holle lê nog op sy lessenaar. Ja…tien keer, met die belt. Ek is lanklaas so gesla…
[*That teacher really hit me hard. Lord, my arse is still lying on his desk. Yes…ten stripes with the belt. It's been a long time since I was hit like…]*

Looks as though he wants to cry. Stops himself immediately.
Long pause.
Slight catch in his voice.

Ek gan daai holnaaier fokken moer. Almal wee hy's 'n fokken moffie. Hy straf my want hy wil net wortelkoek en bananaloaf vreet! Ja. Fok daai holnaaier. Eks 'n man. Nie soos hy hy.
[*I'm going to beat that assfucker up. Everyone knows he's a fucking nancy (homophobic slur). He's punishing me because he wants to eat carrot cake and banana loaf! Yes. Fuck that assfucker.*
I'm a man. Not like him.]

Pauses. Looks around.
En I promise you one thing. If that bunny [*homophobic slur*] touches me again. I'll kill him. I'll kill him dead.

MEISIE:
Conspiratorially, Meisie tries to comfort Jongetjie.

It's Guy Fawkes.
Jy mag maar. Mense jag kak aan hierdie tyd van die jaar.
[*You can do it. People cause trouble around this time of the year*.]
Nothing to lose, man. The one night you can get away with anything.

JONGETJIE:
Jongetjie contines his monologue as though Meisie hasn't spoken.

Eksie *violent*, violentie. Ek kan myself beskerm. Dis for sure. Ek weet hoe.
[*I'm not violent, violent. I can protect myself. That's for sure. I know how*.]

But I don't like those other children. And they way they hurt each other. Is onnodig [*unnecessary*]. I pretend like I'm gonna klap [*hit*] some people sometimes, so they respectful. But I don't hurt the way some of those do.
Sien, a big problem here is wanting to be a man. It's not so simple as it sounds.
It's not just about being strong. Or people not fucking with you.
Of as jy 'n groot piel het.
[*Or whether or not you have a big dick*.]

MEISIE:
Meisie talks as though she is speaking to Jongetjie, but he can't hear her.
Dié strate is ons s'ne. En niemand sé ons hoe of wie of wanneer nie. Ek is klaar met nice wees. Ek is sestien en ek is klaar.
[*These streets are ours. And no one is going to tell us who or when. I'm finished with being nice. I'm sixteen and I'm finished*.]

Silence.

JONGETJIE:
I've been a man since I was seven. When your torpie [*father*] is a number [*gang member*] in Pollsmoor[19] en your Mummy can't even remember her name by 2 o'clock the afternoon?
Jy word 'n man. En manne huil mos nie. Nooit. Ons bly sterk.
[*You become a man. And men don't cry. Never. We stay strong*.]

Silence

NTOMBAZAN:
Ntombazan whispers the following monologue over Jongetjie and Meisie's last paragraphs of dialogue and continues after they have finished. She loses articulation

[19] A very large and overpopulated prison in the Western Cape, famous for its high levels of gang recruitment and organized crime inside the jail itself.

> *and increases pace and urgency as she repeats lines and tries to make them understand. By the end of her monologue the words should have lost meaning and her pleas should be language-less – a series of sounds that resemble what she had been saying and so we make sense of them, but gibberish by themselves. Jongetjie and Meisie stare out at the audience, aghast.*

There’s a language behind my tongue. A sound that isn’t loud. And doesn’t sound the way other people like to hear things. It is not a confident thing. But no one else understands it. How can I be sure of something no one else thinks is real?

There is a language behind my tongue. A sound that isn’t loud. And doesn’t sound the way other people like to hear things. It is a confident thing. And everyone else understands it. Except for me.

There’s a language behind my tongue. A sound that isn’t loud. And doesn’t sound the way other people like to hear things. It is not a confident thing. But no one else understands it. How can I be sure of something no one else thinks is real?

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There is a language behind my tongue. A sound that isn’t loud. And doesn’t sound the way other people like to hear things. It is a confident thing. And everyone else understands it. Except for me.

Kramer, J. (2017). *Hardloop! Die meneer gat ons kry!* Cape Town: Rosebank.

DIE MENEER SE KANTOOR
[The Sir's Office]

> *School bell rings and Meisie and Jongetjie are fighting to stand in front of each other, centre stage. The one pushes the other out of the way, each desperate to protect their friend. This becomes a choreographed show of their odd love.*

MEISIE:
Dit was nie sy skuldie, Meneer. Hy't net gesê hy't dit gedoen omdat hy hou van daai… It wasn't his fault Meneer!
[*It wasn't his faut, Sir. He just said he did it because he likes that…It wasn't his fault Sir!]*

JONGETJIE:
Dit was nie Meisie se skuldie, Meneer. Sy konnie bybly nie. Sy's…
[*It wasn't Meisie's fault, Sir. She couldn't keep up. She's…]*

Jongetjie gestures to her stomach. Meisie hits his hand away.

Dis my skuld Meneer. Moenie worry nie. Haal dit uit op my gat.
[*It's my fault, Sir. Don't worry. Take it out on my arse*.]

MEISIE:
Dit was net 'n bietjie pret.
[*It was just a little fun*.]

JONGETJIE:
It's fine. I'm a man. I can take it.

Suddenly Meisie can't stand it anymore. She realises how much she has sacrificed for him and how much loyalty she has shown him, and how he is willing to throw it all away for Ntombazan. She turns on him.

MEISIE:
'n Man! Jy's 'n kind, want jy kannie lekker sien nie. Jou oë is nog toe. Soos 'n puppy. Maar ek is al jare wawyd wakker. Ek was nog nooit 'n kind nie. So fokkof jy.
Of ek lem jou in die fokken maag. Gee jou iets om oor te praat. Weet jy hoe swaar 'n baba is? Waar lê hy? Hoe groot hy is? Kom ek wys jou. Hy's só groot. In die begin.
[*A man! You're a child, because you can't even see properly. Your eyes are still closed. Like a puppy. But I've been awake for years. I've never been a child. So fuck off.*

Or I'll stab you in the fucking stomach. Give you something to talk about. Do you know how heavy a baby is? Where lies inside you? How big it is? Come, I'll show you. It's this big. In the beginning.]

Meisie holds up one finger tip and drives it into Jongetjie's side.

Soos 'n albaster. Wil jy marbles speel met die ander kinders? Is moeiliker as wat jy dink. Want, sien, hierdie albaster word 'n dobbelsteentjie. Vinning.
[*Like an albaster (very common type of cheap glass marble toy). Do you want to play marbles with the other kiddies? It's more difficult than you'd think. Because, you see, this albaster becomes a dobbelsteentjie (diminutive term for playing dice used in a game of chance). Quickly*.]

Meisie has successfully made Jongetjie feel very small and stupid. He is on the verge of tears and she looks disgusted with him.

MEISIE:
Bly jy eerder maar kind. Is 'n lekker speeletjie.
[You better stay a little child. It's a nice game.]

Jongetjie roars into life and hurls himself at Meisie. They fight in earnest, tearing at each other and trying to hurt each other into submission. Physical theatre and abstracted fight choreography are used to depict their different fighting styles.

NTOMBAZAN:
These cannibal kids, they eat each other whole. There's no breath between the mothers and daughters. No hands between fathers and sons. And they're so angry. They wear their rage close. Close enough to choke them. One by one.

The fighting gets more and more violent and disturbing as they turn on each other and take out their disappointments on their best friend. Eventually, Jongetjie gains the upper hand and chokes Meisie into submission. As she rolls away, struggling to breathe, realises he's looking over her shoulder. Trying to see where Ntombazan is.

KOEK SUSTERS
[Traditional syrup-coated, plaited doughnut eaten as dessert in South Africa. Western Cape slang for a vagina]

The following monologues are spoken out to the audience. Meisie and Jongetjie sit side by side. Pretending nothing has happened. They acknowledge the other person from time to time, hopeful for an apology.

MEISIE:
Mense hou nie van bloed praatie.
Dis orals: in ons. Om ons. Vyf liters van die goed. Ons eie klein horror story. Maar ons dink mos nie aan bloed nie. Totdat dit nie meer in ons ligaame is nie.
Die bloed van ons land.
Van onse mense.
Van onse strate en kerke en skole.
Ja. Die bloed tussen my bene.
[*People don't like talking about blood.*
It's everywhere: in us. Around us. Five litres of the stuff. We are our own little horror story.
But we don't think about blood. Until it's not in our bodies anymore.
The blood of our land.
Of our people.
Of our streets and churches and schools.
Ja. The blood between my bene.[20]]

Pauses

The blood between my bones. Not legs.
But, I suppose, that too, né?

Meisie starts to laugh, sadly.

JONGETJIE:
Jongetjie seperates himself slightly from Meisie and looks out over the audience, trying to get them to understand. We get the sense that he doesn't quite understand himself, but is desperately trying to explain.

My ma het my een keer vasgehou. Só vas, ek kon amper nie asem haal nie. En al was sy dronk gewees sy het in my oë gekyk en 'n mens kon sien sy was mooi. Nie soos sy daar in die bed gelê het nie. Maar tog. Daar was iets moois. Net onder haar vel. Onder die jare.
En sy het my gesig in haar hande gehou en ek het gedink…God. Dis hoe dit moet voel om 'n ma te hê. En sy het vir my gefluister:
[*My mother held me once. She held me so tight, I could hardly breathe. And even though she was drunk when she looked into my eyes I could see that she was beautiful. Not how she was, lying there in the bed. But even so. There was something beautiful. Just underneath her skin. Underneath the years.*
And she held my face in her hands and I thought…God. This is how it must feel to have a mother. And she whispered:]

[20] In Afrikaans, "bene" is the word for both legs and bones.

MEISIE:

Meisie says the following with her arms open, voice loud as though she were an angel/supernatural being. Jongetjie extends his arms and they both look transported to a kind of heaven in this moment.

Hierdie grootsheid kan ek nie verwoord nie: Dat jou bloedspoortjie my immer lei tot aan die voet van die kruis.
[*The magnitude of this is beyond language: your blood trail always guides me back to the foot of the cross*.]

Both Meisie and Jongetjie feels their chests cave in and they sink back into themselves.

JONGETJIE:
En toe het sy weer op haar kussings gelê. Dit was die naaste aan "jammer" wat ek al ooit gehoor het.
[*And then she lay back on her pillows. It was the closest thing to "sorry" I've ever heard*.]

Lengthy pause. Music slowly starts to play (Watermusic II as reference). The two characters look more hopeful. They imagine a different world, where they could be children and have a "normal" relationship with each other. They move to sit right next to each other, reaching out to the audience rather than each other.
But as the scene dissolves, Meisie realises that some girls are more equal than others.

JONGETJIE:
Girlie, can I walk with you back home? After school?

MEISIE:
Hoekom?
[*Why*?]

JONGETJIE:
Want ek wil. 'n Man doen net wat hy wil en ek wil jou huis toe stap. En ek hoef nie te sê hoekom nie. Hoekom wil jy weet?
[*Because I want to. A man does exactly as he likes and I want to walk you home. I don't have to say why. Why do you want to know?]*

The next few lines are said directly after each other, words tumbling out and even spoken over each other as they compete for his attention.

MEISIE AND NTOMBAZAN:
Omdat ek van jou hou.
[Because I like you.]

NTOMBAZAN:
I'm 15 years old.

MEISIE:
I'm 16. And a half.
…But I act like I'm 22.

NTOMBAZAN:
It's the 5th of November and I like you.

MEISIE:
Ek sal jou nog like na Guy Fawkes, môre.
[*I'll still like you after Guy Fawkes, tomorrow*.]

NTOMBAZAN:
I liked you last week when you told me I could go on SA's Got Talent. Just for being me.

MEISIE:
Ek het van jou gehou toe ons klein was. En almal het vir jou gelag. En ek het vir jou opgestaan. Ek was die een wat altyd jou vriend was. Altyd.
[*I liked you from back when we were little. And everyone used to laugh at you. And stood up for you. I was the one who was your friend. Always.]*

NTOMBAZAN:
I like it when you say silly things in class to make me laugh. Even though you know the teacher will get mad.

MEISIE:
Ek hou van jou as jy stil is. Ons hoef nie met mekaar te praat nie, ons kan net wees. Is rustig.
[*I like you when you're quiet. When we don't have to talk to each other, we can just be. It's peaceful.*]

NTOMBAZAN:
I like you because you're older than I am. I feel safer walking home with you because the other children are scared of you so they leave us alone.

Meisie has had enough of this, stands up and turns towards Jongetjie, but he can only see Ntombazan and keeps staring out at the audience. She attacks him but he doesn't respond to her – this angers her even more.

MEISIE:
Jy het altyd gesê jy sal vir niemand sê van die baby nie. Ek het jou vertrou. Jy't my belowe. Toe ek daai ding uitgekak het en ons dit weggegooi het in die vullis daar bydie skool jy het belowe. Belowe. Ek het vir niemand gesê dis joune nie. Want ek het jou rêrig lief. Ja. Ek het dit gesê. Ek het jou lief.
Hoe weet sy dan daarvan? Sy het die Meneer gesê. Hoe weet sy daarvan? Hoe?!
[*You always said you'd never tell anyone about the baby. I trusted you. And you promised me. When I shat that thing out and we threw it away on the rubbish dump next to the school, you promised. Promised. I didn't tell anyone it was yours. Because I really love you. Yes. I said it. I love you. How did she find out about it? She told the Sir. How does she know? How?!*]

NTOMBAZAN:
I like the way you always say what you mean. And that you're smart.

Even though you failed grade 7 twice. You're not stupid. It's almost like you knew I was coming to this school. And you were waiting for me. Like in a movie.

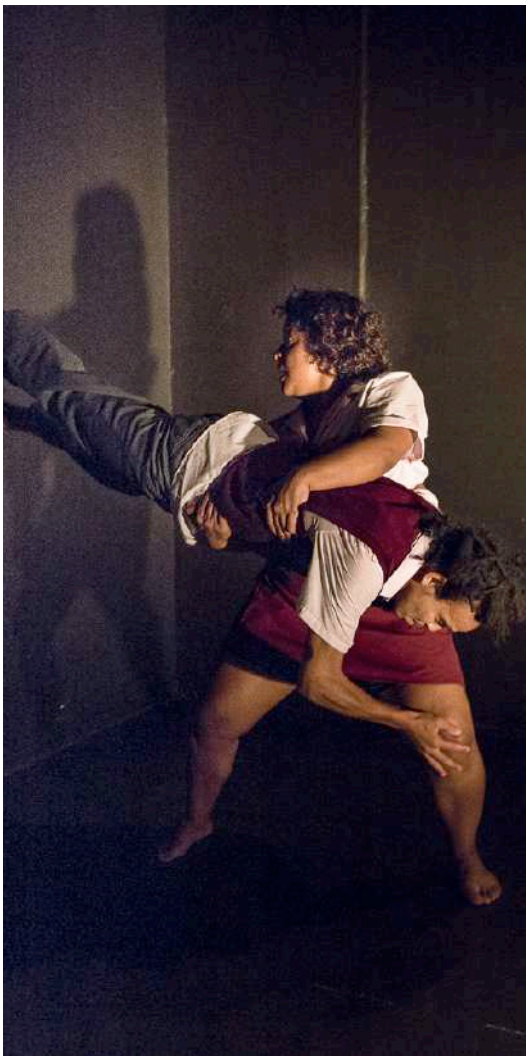
MEISIE:
Jy het begin anders praat toe sy verskyn het. Ons het altyd gesê…Jy het altyd gesê…
[You started talking differently when she appeared. We always said…You always said…]

Meisie pauses.

Fok jou.
Vat jy my vir 'n poes?

Ek is niemand se fokken poes nie.
[*Fuck you.*
Do you take me for a fool (expletive)?

I'm no one's fucking fool (expletive).]



Kramer, J. (2017). *Ons maak daai naaiers sat!* and *Wil jy marbles speel?* Cape Town: Rosebank.

ROOSTING CHICKENS, HATCHING EGGS

A large spotlight snaps onto centre stage. Meisie and Jongetjie each grab a sock weighted with barley sewn into the foot (these are hidden upstage) and stand in the centre of the light. They are frozen on the spot. Gradually they start to walk in incredibly slow motion. We should see each elevation of the heel and toe, every arch of the brow.
As Ntombazan tells her story they, gradually, start to walk faster and faster until they are running she speaks the last sentence. As they run, they spin the socks around their heads like David aiming at Goliath.

NTOMBAZAN:
We were just walking home from school. And Jongetjie said he was going to the shop to buy some things for his mother. So I went with him. Because he's my friend – well, I think he's my boyfriend - and because we were talking. And because I wanted to.

And we were walking and I saw this boy standing on the side of the road. A younger boy. Maybe 10 or 11 years old. And he had an egg in his hand. And I looked at Jongetjie because it was Guy Fawkes and the children were crazy around there and I knew what that meant. So I took off my blazer, just in case he threw the egg at me. It's black and green, with silver buttons. Anyway, that's not important. And I put my blazer into my backpack. And zipped it up. Just in case he threw the egg. Even though I'm much bigger than he is. I know it's just an egg but I didn't want my blazer to get dirty. And I started walking just a little bit faster. Not too fast. Not to make him think I was scared – he's only 9 or 10, I wasn't scared of him – but just to get to the shop and go home.
We bought the coffee and milk, and some Spookies [*potato chips*] and a chocolate for us. And we came out of the shop. And the boy was still there. Waiting. With the egg in his hand. Only now he had another boy with him. A bigger boy. With his hood over his face. Maybe 16 or 17. And he had a long sock in his hand. And I knew what was in the sock. They take paint and sand and let it dry a bit. Then they shove nails and blades into it. And when it's dry they swing it at you and it cuts you. Open. So it's just blood and bone under where they hit you. Under where they hate you.
And I squeezed Jongetjie's hand. And I said "We must go back into the shop and wait for them to go away"; but he said her mother was waiting for the milk for his baby sister. And he wasn't afraid anyway. He was 17, he could fight if he had to. So we walked towards the corner they were on.
And we got close. We got so close I could see their chests and they weren't breathing…right. They were breathing like they were excited. But too excited. Like there was something bigger than them where their heart should have been; and their skin was the only thing holding its breath to theirs. .
And the bigger boy started to lift his arm, almost like he was waving hello, and I almost wanted to wave back. And then the sock started to circle in the air and there was a sound…like a whistling sound.

Meisie starts to spin her sock around her head. Jongetjie is running, scared.

So we walked a little faster. Maybe we were running. I can't remember. And I could hear the whistling and my own breath. And I could feel Jongetjie want to turn and face them, and fight. But I was scared so I pulled him harder. We ran fast. And he dropped something: the

milk, I think. And we stopped. For a second. And then there was this hot stripe down my back.
They opened up my skin and peered inside and there was nothing they thought was worth seeing. So he hit me again on the side of my arm, and scratched me all the way to my elbow. And then the last time he hit me on the back of my head. Jongetjie had egg in his eyes and that small boy had picked up rocks and thrown them at his legs. His one knee was bleeding and he almost fell because he couldn't see.
And then the bigger boy has caught up to me and grabbed me around my waist. And he pulled me, hard, against his stomach and held me tight against him and whispered in my ear:

Jongetjie and Meisie stop dead in their tracks. Meisie drops the sock and catches it in her hand as she raises it, threateningly, in front of her.

MEISIE:
Hardloop, darkie. Jy gat bloei as jy nie nou fokkin hardloopie.
[*Run, darkie. You're going to bleed if you don't fucking run*.]

Jongetjie and Meisie slowly raise their right arms and start to swing their socks in unison. Side lighting should be used to create large shadows behind them, reminiscent of the adults in their lives that have taught them how to be violent.

NTOMBAZAN:
I ran halfway home before I realised Jongetjie wasn't next to me anymore.

Long pause. The only sound should be the whirring of the socks.

The shopkeeper called an ambulance but it took more than three hours to get there. By the time it did his face was very swollen and the blood from where they stabbed his stomach was all around him. Dark on the pavement. And he was quiet. He was so quiet. And next to his body were all these footprints. Red footprints. Walking his blood all over the street. Walking up to him. Walking away from him. Walking him with them.

Pause. *Jongetjie is standing very still, and has dropped his sock. Meisie's hand has dropped, but she is clutching her sock and is still looking into the audience, trying to find Jongetjie. She realises he's not there and that it's him who has been hurt. She, slowly, turns and looks at him. She drops her sock.*

I stopped talking last year. My tongue was too heavy and the words didn't make any difference. English. Afrikaans. isiXhosa. They laugh, no matter what you say or how you say it. Because you're not them. Because you'll never be them. And because they decided that a long time ago. Or their parents did. Or their parents' parents.

Meisie faces audience. She is utterly defeated.

MEISIE:
Ek's te jonk vir só fokken oudwees.
[I'm too young to be this fucking old.]

Silence. Sudden bursts of fireworks that explode like gunfire as the lights fade to black and Meisie slowly looks up at the sky.

4.5 DRAMA KWEENS MANIFESTO

The *Drama Kweens* manifesto was/is a collaborative project that happened over time between all of the participating groups of learners. It is an ongoing manifesto that addresses our concerns and needs as they arise. It is designed to build antifragility and flourishing into every instance in, and meeting of, our learning eco-system. It is sent to every new member of the group as they join *Drama Kweens*, and is resent to every existing member after the manifesto is updated. Below is a copy of the most recent version shared between our chapters (January 2019).

Drama Kweens Manifesto

1) We will **flourish**. This is what we are always working towards. We decide what that looks like, here.

2) This will be a safe space (for everyone). If someone hurts one of us, they hurt all of us. Start every conversation with the possibility of asking for and giving forgiveness. That's how the conversation continues. If you deliberately disrespect the manifesto and how it creates a safe space, you will be asked to leave *Drama Kweens* and you will not be welcome back.

3) Every touch we give is consensual; and we ask permission first. Drama is about vulnerability and proximity (getting close to someone – this can be physical, spiritual, psychological or emotional): those skinships aren't taken for granted or expected from anyone. If you break this rule, you will be asked to leave *Drama Kweens* until we all feel comfortable and safe again. That might be a permanent situation.

4) You can be in the space in whichever way feels comfortable for you, as long as it doesn't break any of the other rules of the manifesto. When your comfort starts to affect someone else's rights, it's not a comfort anymore. Everyone has something to contribute, you do not have to be onstage. You do have to do the warmups and check-ins, though.[21]

5) We will not judge each other by the worst thing we do. We will celebrate our growth. We will be better, for ourselves and for each other. We can ask for help if we are struggling with this.

6) We are ok with being wrong about someone/something.

[21] Warmups will be discussed and decided upon democratically amongst the group and are, usually, led by any learner who has attended for more than one full term. Where participants have current medical, psychological and/or pre-existing conditions that make it unsafe for them to join in, we will discuss ways (either in the group or privately, according to their preference) that they can, safely, feel included in our check-in process.

7) We will not make crappy art! Great art is what we decide is Meaningful and Important and True. Crap art is made to please other people. Our time is too important to waste on that nonsense.

8) Not everyone will like us or our work. As long as *we* like us and our work, we have fulfilled rules 1, 4, 5, 6 and 7 (by default this covers rule 2 as well).

9) We will make one new "thing" every school term. It doesn't need to be long, or anything specific. But we will make something. And we will record it so we don't forget what we made (photos, film, Youtube, scripts, comics, stories, drawings, voice-notes, hieroglyphics – it doesn't matter).

10) We will be proud of what we've done. It doesn't matter if people give us standing ovations or we get 100000000 likes on Instagram. If we end off the term/semester/year and we aren't proud of ourselves, inside ourselves where only we know how we feel…the work is crap. See law 7.

11) We don't have to talk about something if we don't want to. No one here is a qualified therapist (yet!) – we will never feel pressured to share anything we don't want to.

12) Teachers can be (and often are) wrong. Shaming learners into shutting up and believing everything a teacher says is not the way we learn. This isn't a law, we're just saying.

13) We can speak in any language we want. If the people in the room can't understand us, we'll get a friend to translate, use Google, write it down, act it out – or keep them guessing. We will not force each other to speak a language for the sake of our own convenience.

14) We will attend *Drama Kweens* regularly. If a member misses more than 3 sessions in a school term without a valid reason, they will be asked to sit the rest of the term out while we finish our current project. Once the project is finished, if the member wants to rejoin, they can. If they continue to miss sessions without reason, they may be asked to leave *Drama Kweens* permanently. In the schools where *Drama Kweens* happens 3 times a week or more, this law is project dependent.

15) *Drama Kweens* will never interfere with academic work. We are all about flourishing (see rule 1). We can't flourish when we're failing subjects. If you need help with a project, test and/or homework, ask. Penny is not so great at maths and accounting. This also isn't a rule – she's just saying.

16) This manifesto is never finished, we will add to it whenever we need to. Penny is not in charge of it, we all are. If someone doesn't understand it, agree with it or finds it unhelpful in any way; we will explain it, review it and/or adapt it in a way that feels helpful to us as a group. Different chapters of *Drama Kweens* in other schools may have different versions of this manifesto.

17) There will be NO PHONES used during a *Drama Kweens* session. If we're on an agreed break, you can check your phone. But if we're

rehearsing/talking/sharing/working: the phone is on silent and in your bag. NOT in your top pocket where it will fall out/vibrate mid-scene/be a distraction!

18) If you want to talk about something you learned during Drama Kweens with someone who isn't part of the group, that's fine: but you are not allowed to share stories that are not your own without that person's permission (especially not ones that mention their name). When in doubt: imagine the story is about you. If you wouldn't want everyone to know it, don't share it. You would be breaking rule 2.

19) If you have already spoken in the check-ins and feedback sessions, wait for at least 4 other people to speak before you speak again. This gives everyone a chance to talk. If you really HAVE to say something, that's ok…but chances are that comment can wait 2 more minutes.

20) Be on time, learn your words, don't chew gum on stage and don't talk when someone else is performing!

Youngleson, P. (2016). *Warm-ups and Tongue Twisters*. Cape Town: Grassy Park.

CHAPTER 5

5.1. THE BUSINESS PLAN THAT WASN'T

> *In order to fully see the picture depicted in the puzzle, the pieces must first be put together. Each piece of the puzzle has interlocking parts that connect to make the whole picture. Since every piece is joined to another, all of the connections eventually create an entire picture and any missing pieces influence the end result. This metaphor is a simplistic description of the sociological theory of intersectionality. …race, gender, class and sexual identities of an individual cannot operate independently of each other* (William, 2009, 83).

Working two lives as a professional theatre producer and director and an educator, I saw a lot of two kinds of people at my jobs: unemployed actors with a lot of expensive tertiary training and very limited job opportunities, and failing learners being taught by overworked and underpaid educators who (quite often) hadn't been trained in drama performance at all – or if they had, they'd mostly forgotten how in the interim. Of course, there are exceptions to this scenario and some very talented teachers are in the system. But, mostly, we have those two problems.

I started to formulate a plan.

I'm not going to live forever. And, much as I like being in control, what we need to really make conscious acts of vulnerability work in transforming school spaces is scale. It has to happen on a really large scale. And to do that, I need a lot of (trained) drama teachers who can facilitate all those learners. But I don't have the capital or time to upskill all the educators in the system – that could take years.
So, logically, I need a fresh workforce of specialist-trained educators.

And that's where the idea for a Drama Duel Carriageway started.

I would get all the unemployed, tertiary-trained actors who wanted the stability of a full-time job to work with me as a drama mentor for 2 years. In that time, they would support a *Drama Kweens* chapter in one of the schools I have relationship with and, at the same time, they would sign up for their post-graduate certificate of Education (PGCE) and I would help them

apply for bursaries so they wouldn't be out of pocket. After two years they could become a qualified educator, adding to the diminishing pool in South Africa and strengthening our program. Part of the PGCE coursework is to teach a few observed classes – this is easy enough once they are already ensconced in a school via *Drama Kweens*. An English or Drama educator is always grateful for time off from classwork to mark the eye-wateringly long exam and test scripts.

While all of this is happening, the flood of extra practical help and mentoring in the *Drama Kweens* chapters would almost certainly have a most desirable outcome: improved pass rates as learners got more one-on-one attention. This, in turn, meant better throughputs and a stronger likelihood of learners being able to choose their own career path. Those who wanted to could study teaching could even have a space reserved for them in the Duel Carriageway. I would never have to worry about either group again, I could "fix" everyone in one, elegant system!

I would take this business plan to the Business School, refine it, pitch it and get long-term funding. I could "fix" this!

There was just one problem: I hadn't thought to ask anyone else what *they* wanted. I knew, after all – my emic/etic insight was all I needed, surely?

5.2 MENTORSHIP

Mentorship, in its simplest terms, is a transferal of knowledge between two or more people; where one of the parties is seen to have more knowledge, experience or expertise than the other (Williams, 2009). It is not, necessarily, age, status, gender, class, race or background specific, but these identifiers can play a significant role in whether or not the mentorship is meaningful and inspires positive change in both the mentor and the mentee's commitment to the process and, therefore, their ability to grow from it. It must be noted here that Williams does own that intersectionality acknowledges the cross hatching of these social categorisations as points of traction within tropes of discrimination and, or, disadvantage. It is not always necessary to conflate these thoughts in academic research of mentorship, but for the purposes of this study, it can be assumed that intersectionality is understood as defined in the writings of Kimberlé Crenshaw, bell hooks and Patricia Collins.

The success of a mentorship is twofold: the mentee has immediate access to a role model, a template for building relationships, a safe arena to practice socialisation and conversational

skills and, hopefully, a source of encouragement to build up their self esteem; whilst the mentor is reinforcing their own revelations, testing their own mettle having a redemptive opportunity to invest in the next generation in ways they themselves wish they had been acknowledged at that age. “The mentors also internalize the processes as part of their own life skills development. As reciprocal relationships, mentorship programs have been proven to impact the mentor emotionally, socially and intellectually” (Williams and Ferber, 2008).

5.3 **THE CHOCOLATE TEAPOT: FAILURE, FEEDBACK AND SCHOOL METRICS**

> *The problem is straightforward: without feedback there can be no transformative change. When we don’t talk to the people we’re leading about their strengths and their opportunities for growth, they begin to question their contributions and our commitment. Disengagement follows* (Brown, 2012, 197).

If some of the goals of education are transformative autonomy, curiosity and healthy vulnerability for every learner (because, let’s face it, they’re not going to use Pythagoras’ theorem very often) then the goal of every educator, manager, parent, caregiver, leader and community elder should be to start having those hard conversations with them about why they are important. We need to open up communication with others about being better citizens, neighbours and nation builders – this is the only way to redirect ourselves towards a Safe Community of Opportunity model (Holtmann, 2012, 7) where many people tackle multiple parts of our communities’ knotty problems simultaneously, rather than attempting to perfect our society one problem at a time.

Failure is a polarizing topic amongst learners (for obvious reasons) and we seldom take the time to really understand what they experience when they hear the word. As an educator and believer in alternative pedagogies and learning ecosystems, I often consider normative failure to be a shifting goalpost designed to disenfranchise fragile people. As an educator, I can see the flaws in teaching learners to be fragile through standardized ideas of failure.

However, when I became a student again, I soon found that my ideas of failure were more normative than I would have thought.

Vulnerability itself is neither "good" nor bad" (Brown, 2012, 33) but it connects us to our emotions (which often feels uncomfortable, particularly under stress). Discomfort and vulnerability are commonly felt together, and for many of us that is reason enough to avoid vulnerability at all costs.

I started my research on this paper confident that I had the right sample groups of willing participants who were conscious co-ethnographers. I had mindfully checked that the ethics of my research and work with children was watertight. I was accountable to my participants and regularly used check-ins and warm-ups as a way of making sure that everyone continued to feel comfortable, valued and in agreement with their session, what was shared, and their part in the archive. In short, I felt justifiably self-important. I was haughty. And more than that, I was fragile. I was, like a chocolate teapot, moments from disaster.

> *Consider that Mother Nature is not just "safe." It is aggressive in destroying and replacing, in selecting and reshuffling. When it comes to random events, "robust" is certainly not good enough… our planet has been around for perhaps four billion years and, convincingly, robustness can't just be it: you need perfect robustness for a crack not to end up crashing the system. Given the unattainability of perfect robustness, we need a mechanism by which the system regenerates itself continuously by using, rather than suffering from, random events, unpredictable shocks, stressors, and volatility* (Taleb, 2012, 21).

I distinctly remember my first meeting with my research supervisor, discussing this dissertation. I had prepped a short document on what I wanted my dissertation to be about, who my participants would be and how the data would prove my hypothesis. I estimated a short turnover in delivery and submission, and a relatively easy road towards an obvious conclusion (something I had studied, observed and seen working for many years).
They, kindly, reminded me that qualitative research is defined by an emergent design flexibility: my approach was too rigid and left no room for responsiveness to the adapting

context and participants. I, too, was kind and didn't say out loud what I was thinking: “I know better. I know these people. You don’t.”
We agreed that I would have a more open and expectant approach when it came to data collection.
I decided I would prove them wrong and hand in two months early.

> *To claim the mantle of objectivity in the postmodern age is to expose oneself as embarrassingly naïve. The ideals of absolute objectivity and value-free science are impossible to attain in question and of questionable desirability in the first place, since they ignore the intrinsically social nature and human purpose of research. On the other hand, subjectivity has such negative connotations in the public mind that to admit being subjective may undermine one’s credibility with audiences unfamiliar with philosophy of science debates. In short, the terms objectivity and subjectivity have become ideological ammunition in the methodological paradigms debate* (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, 58)

After receiving official ethical clearance I set about gathering my data. I organized think tanks and semi-structured interviews; workshops and questionnaires; and continued with my weekly sessions with *Drama Kweens*. All roads lead to Rome, and the data gathered pointed, very obviously, to my proposition: not only do alternative learning ecosystems complement and strengthen traditional learning spaces and learners; but drama in particular is an effective tool in creating antifragile, active learners and citizens.

The work was working. As I knew it would. And apart from my own gains for my research, I was genuinely proud of what we had achieved and how we had achieved it. I was inches away from starting the mentorship program, I was sure of it.

And then, quite suddenly, I had a minor altercation with a facilitator in one of the other NPOs working in one of our schools; and the principal decided it would be best if *Drama Kweens* stopped being held there. This was one of the schools I had worked in the longest, I had seen learners mature from Grade 8 through to Grade 12 and I knew their parents, their educators

and their friends. It was a massive blow to our work and our goals – but mostly to our friendships. My confidence knocked, I focused on maintaining the group as if nothing had happened. I upped our contact time by incorporating the learners into a nearby participating no-fees school and doubled down on investing in relationships with Upper Management and the School Governing Bodies, determined not to be caught unawares again. And although it was a bit of a rocky transition combining groups mid-year, for a while my research continued and the data proved my point and all was well.

Until I left for the National Arts Festival. Every year in South Africa there is a very large and very well attended arts festival; and I tour my theatre shows there. It coincides with the school holidays so I don't usually worry about it. This particular year I had the honour of presenting a show on the main stage, which meant longer hours and lead up time. I had to miss a few sessions of *Drama Kweens*, but the learners understood. They always did. And then the show toured a bit longer after the festival ended. I missed a few more sessions, but the learners understood. They always did. And then my mother needed support because my father had died and I had been too long out of town and so I missed a few more weeks of sessions, but the learners understood. They always did. And, unintentionally, my real-life problems (those unexpected shocks and tremors) had created space for something extraordinary to happen in the midst of a fragile, over-manipulated environment: by the time I got back the group didn't need me anymore.

They weren't angry and everyone was very pleased to see me (we even had a little party to celebrate my return) but no one had perished in my absence. Without me (or a mentor) to remind them what to do the learners had self-organised. They had continued with their work, led warmups, run check-ins, devised plays and even made and sourced their own props and costumes. They were pleased I was there, but it wouldn't have made any difference if I weren't because they were completely autonomous. They weren't doing it to please me – they were running *Drama Kweens* for themselves.

Any leader in a social justice project will tell you that the goal of social activism is to make yourself redundant. This leader in this social justice project is here to tell you that that may sound nice on paper but in practice you can shove it.

They were fine. Without me. *Without me*.

This did not feel like healthy vulnerability. This hurt. I felt as though I had become redundant in *my own identity*! I had. And, if I'd been paying attention, I would know that that was exactly what needed to happen.

Needless to say, the business plan would have been a failure. Or, rather, it probably would have worked out very well, but we wouldn't be building antifragile learners. We'd be equipping fragile spaces to look antifragile while we built co-dependent layers of fragility into the walls around us.

This is better. They are better. Thanks to this research and those learners, I am trying to be better.

5.4. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations I would like to give are suggestions based on my observations during *Drama Kweens* classes as well as the organised sessions with learners, educators and senior school management staff, and parents and caregivers.

5.4.1. RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING AN AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM LIKE DRAMA KWEENS

- It is impossible to replicate Drama Kweens itself, but there are after-school creative performance programs – like the WCED After-School Game Changers in association with Western Cape MOD centres. I worked on After-School Game Changers as a facilitator and director for the creative arts showcase in partnership with AssitejSA and found many parallels in limitations and recommendations with *Drama Kweens*. The biggest recommendation is to focus on upskilling, empowering and delegating to *mentored facilitators from the community* that you are trying to serve. Large amounts of time and resources are spent mentoring learners using facilitators who are already equipped and usually not from the community in question. This creates a falsely positive feedback loop and excludes an important link in the chain towards sustainable change in our communities. As much as I enjoy working, employing someone like me to run programs in at-risk areas does nothing but bolster my CV and allow for ticks next to a checklist on funding forms. We need to equip our unemployed youth who are closer in age to our

learners, have strong socio-cultural bonds to them and will contribute to a upsurge in community development by bridging the generational gaps between learners, parents, caregivers and educators.

- Principals, senior school management staff and educators need to be encouraged to see the value in performing arts programs beyond keeping learners busy after school. Until we have buy-in from authority figures that manage our institutional culture, groups like Drama Kweens will always have a stigma of being outsiders, "losers", "drama nerds" and a place for learners who are bad at sports and too dumb for extra science and maths classes. We are not a babysitting club. We are an integral limb in a body of resistance, as opposed to a cog in a machine that continues to grind – regardless of what, or who, stands in its way.
- A priority with any performing arts group is to get parental buy-in as soon as possible. This is a vital component of the multigenerational learning eco-system. There is an alchemy to parents watching other people clap for their children. I can't explain it, but even the most hardened heart seems to soften when an audience recognises the talent they weren't able to see for themselves. It is, perhaps, that shame Brown talks about that cauterises us from negotiating our own emotions (and, in return, quenches our ability to feel for others: particularly close family members that exist as an extension of our own experience). If you want to run an after-school group of dancers, singers, actors, musicians, magicians or anyone else that requires an audience: hold a showcase early on (and offer free food afterwards – never before). This ensures a large turn out of people that will stay until the end. Sometime between the metaphorical curtain-up and the literal standing ovation, at least one child will be seen by their parents in a way they were not able to see them before. Mid performance, they become visible through the recognition of strangers.
- Do not worry too much about the work being good (to start off with). Concentrate on building trust with your learners and the staff you will see every time you hold your sessions. Greet the school caretaker and bring them some cake and a card to say thank you for opening and locking up after your sessions (apart from being polite, being kind to the school caretaker is the

smartest thing you can do in an afterschool program – you will get more from them than you will from your principal, especially when it comes to after-hour rehearsals and organising parking and/or security for a concert). Be grateful to whoever has let you use their classroom to rehearse in – even if they did it under duress. Leave them a note of thanks and always leave the classroom immaculate. Nothing gets you kicked out of a space faster than a maths teacher whose desks aren't where they left them. Get to know your learners. Some weeks they can't rehearse because something major has happened at home or in the class just before they came to you. That's ok. Rather take that rehearsal off to sort out the bigger picture than push through and sacrifice your relationships with them. A learner who values your time and commitment to them will rehearse at home and bring you Art and Gratitude the next week. A learner who thinks they're there to fulfill an ego project of yours will bring you a sulky attitude and a mouth full of chewing gum. I know which one I prefer!

5.4.2. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOLS AS LEARNING INSTITUTIONS

- It is my belief that traditional models of education that currently exist in our quintile 1-3 high schools (as set out by the Department of Education and promoted by the Western Cape Education Department) do not always promote best-practice learning for each individual. We need to shift our focus from symbols and grade aggregates to wholeness and healthy development of the learner. Whilst I do not think academic excellence should be ignored, there is little to no focus on promoting social competence, managing self-esteem and autonomy, developing executive function and self-regulation, improving problem solving skills, instilling an independent sense of purpose and prioritising intellectual efficacy (rather than parroting back information).
- Learners should be encouraged to participate in an extracurricular activity. This needn't be related to the performing arts. Learners who participate in extracurricular activities are noted to experience higher levels of success both in those activities and in their classwork, as well as displaying remarkable improvements in social functioning and adjustment (Mampane, 2005, 124).

- Educators should be made aware that vulnerability is a fast-track to unifying classes and building connected relationships between multigenerational groups – as seen in Brown's observations of the "reaching out continuum" (2006, 49). Learners are responsive and loyal to the educators who encourage, support and promote learners, regardless of how academically strong or "excellent" they are. This is applicable in any teaching context.
- It is impossible (or very, difficult) to create a safe space on school grounds that permit corporal punishment or any kind of abuse towards learners. Similarly, principals and school governing bodies need to prioritise the eradication of any criminal activity (especially concerning the safety of learners).
- Learners who are deemed to be especially at-risk (particularly those who are struggling academically) need to be identified and offered extra help. It is not appropriate to ask these learners to switch to "soft" subjects like drama, dance, music, art, tourism and geography. This further destabilises their academic potential and often precipitates resentment towards the arts – limiting the learner's opportunities to find spaces to express themselves positively.
- Further to this: schools must stop promoting subject choices that are not based on the aptitude or interests of the learner. Not every learner will excel at STEM subjects. This does not make them a "bad" learner. In fact, it usually means that the educator who teaches that subject has not bothered to make their subject interesting or accessible! Rather encourage the learner to take subjects that they have an affinity for. Frustration and failure in subjects in high school can have a severe impact on the mental health and career prospects of a learner.
- The traditional school system does not always have the time or resources to promote multidisciplinary learning. Learners who pass their grade 12 exam often experience trauma when confronted with tertiary learning facilities and, or, their first job. Extracurricular activities and regular social interaction with learners who are not part of each other's organic friendship circles can be extremely useful in preparing learners for the seismic leap between school and post-school independence.

- Schools will, probably, always be fragile spaces – at least to some extent. It is not my intention to berate an already battling system – although I do believe that much can be done to improve it. This paper is not about pointing out all the ways in which we are failing our outliers and marginalised learners. Rather, it is a kaleidoscope that you can pick up, shake, rotate, and hold up to the light. The chances are that what worked for *Drama Kweens* will not, exactly, work for your space. But building antifragility into the way you teach (and into the institutional theory that governs the spaces where that teaching takes place) will always guide you towards a *flourishing of learners* (I know this is not the correct collective noun, I am a teacher).

5.4.3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR YOU AS THE FACILITATOR

- There is a strong possibility that you will work with some of the most at-risk learners at your school or after-school program. This is such an incredible opportunity! Try not to listen to remarks from other staff members or colleagues about individual learners until you have met with and assessed the learner for yourself. We can all be wrong about anyone or anything, and I have learned this the hard way.
- Please learn from my mistakes. I documented some of my most painful gaffes and mortifying oversights of ignorance and privilege not because I wanted to. I did it so that I could reflect the (socially constructed) truth of this study – but also so that others could learn from my folly.
- You are not the learners' mother (or father, or gender neutral caregiver). I struggle with this one and it made the waters very muddy. Your job is to facilitate flourishing and equip learners for self-actualisation through creative practice. It is very difficult to maintain this focus and parent at the same time, and is fair on no one. It rarely ends well, and nine times out of ten it is deep-rooted in a selfish need to be feel important and be loved. You are probably both those things, if you have built trust and loyalty and empathy into your antifragile lesson plans. Trust that and don't over-egg the custard.
- Have high expectations. Expect a lot from your learners. They will surprise you with how much they can do when someone believes in them (especially without cause). As I mentioned, in the beginning of my teaching journey I never imagined performing Shakespeare with my learners. But curriculum is

curriculum and we decided to "do" Shakespeare on our own terms. We ended up running an inclusive Shakespeare showcase that used hearing and deaf actors to sign and speak Shakespeare in South African Sign Language, English and AfriKaaps. It was difficult, but we did it! And now, among other things, we have an unofficial SASL sign for Macbeth (it is the letter "M" – the thumb of the right hand under the first three fingers of your right fist, resting on the right pinky – in an upward and downward stabbing motion…à la Norman Bates in *Psycho's* shower scene).

- Rest. As much as I believe in the transformative power of healthy vulnerability in general and performed antifragility in particular, what we are doing is not attached to a timer or a scorecard. If you do not prepare a perfect lesson plan three weeks in advance, use the opportunity to practice your improvisation. If your learners decide they'd rather do netball and suddenly your play only has half of its cast: put everyone into costumes made of newspaper and bin bags and teach them about avant-garde theatre and how society is a performed sham and nothing means anything anyway so illogical dialogue and missing chunks of text is a highly appropriate way of performing a play. You don't have to do that last bit.

  But don't take it too seriously. And rest. Unfortunately, the work is seldom finished. We can try again and be better at it tomorrow.

5.5 FINAL THOUGHTS ON THIS STUDY AND ITS LIMITATIONS

Should another researcher want to take this study forward, it would be fascinating to see how drama as a tool to promote antifragility would fare with the groups of parents and caregivers and the educators and senior management staff themselves. It would be so beneficial to give them as much time as the learners had to encourage self-reflexivity and discussion, and allow for embodiment and character analysis to separate critique from criticism.

It would also be very insightful to use the eco-system of learning and healthy vulnerability (employing drama exercises and techniques) in classes and programs that are not drama focused. Although I am biased when it comes to the performing arts, drama is also just a vehicle that promotes conversations. Using these techniques in a subject-specific class to promote antifragility in and of itself (rather than as a reflexive pathway both towards and because of creative expression) would be a more complex test of my hypothesis. This level of

academic sophistication and rigor would also provide valuable data for NPOs and school boards wanting to scale the idea and work with large-scale mentorship programs that may not have access to (or interest in) drama groups; but want to build antifragility into their long-term plans for at-risk learners.

The, clear, limitations of this study pivots around me. My autoethnographic lens was a convenient excuse to stay close to the work and give my own perspectives preferential treatment in the findings section. As much as my unique contribution to this area of study relies on my work in *Drama Kweens*, it also precludes anyone else's methods of enacting antifragility though performed and embodied exercises and regular reflexive praxis.

A comparative study of my work and other practitioners would provide a more vigorous understanding of the requirements of antifragile education in fragile environments where at-risk learners are encouraged to use healthy vulnerability as a way of engaging with themselves and their community and contribute towards personal well-being and wholeheartedness in nation-building.

CHAPTER 6

6.1 REFERENCES

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CHAPTER 7

7.1 APPENDIX

Below are some of my formal research tools (the two sets of questionnaires). The examples of semi-structured questions are listed under Chapter 3 and the informal discussions, interviews and post-session data that was sent to me privately are not included here. They are notated and coded from my field notes and progress journal.

7.1.1. LEARNER QUESTIONNAIRE AND CONSENT FORM

This is a copy of the consent form that was given to every learner who participated in this study. Any learners were allowed to participate in discussions, exercises and focus groups – but to have their observations and contributions form part of the data they had to submit these forms (signed by themselves and a parent or caregiver) before our first session commenced.

Drama Kweens: Flourishing in Fragility
Learner Consent Form

Who I am:
Hello, I am Penelope Youngleson. I am researching antifragility and healthy vulnerability amongst learners in quintile 1-3 high schools in the Western Cape.

What I am doing:
I am conducting research on how we can help learners to use drama as a way of connecting to their own vulnerability (in a healthy way!) and become more self-reflexive and antifragile (I will explain this term more in session) in fragile, high-risk spaces like high school.

The aim of my research is to gain an understanding of how best to support at-risk learners and enable them to self-define their own success and sense of fulfillment. We call this “flourishing”.

I am also really interested in how we can work together with parents, caregivers, educators and school management to make a learning environment that supports all learners.

The intention of this study is to provide data that can be used to create a sustainable, scalable programme that could enable learners to develop both themselves and their earning potential; whilst better understanding how to support those learners deemed to be “at-risk”.

Your participation
I am asking you whether you would be willing to allow me to talk to you in a focus group (amongst other learners aged 14-18) and semi-structured interview. This means you will be part of a series of discussions for 30-60 minutes each (this will not take place in one chunk of time, but over several sessions). The focus group is a pilot study.
You will also be asked to answer a short questionnaire after the discussion. The total time of your participation is 2-3 hours or less.

The focus group will be conducted in the main language spoken by participants and in a suitable venue that is easy to access and does not require extra transport to get to. I will take brief notes during the session. In addition, the focus group will be transcribed and analysed afterwards.
While I will make every effort to protect the confidentiality of your information, I can’t guarantee that other participants in the focus group will respect confidentiality, even though every member will be encouraged to do so. For this reason I advise you not to disclose personally sensitive information in the focus group or semi-structured interviews.

Please understand that **your participation is voluntary** and you are not being forced to take part in this study. The choice of whether to participate or not, is yours alone. If you choose not to take part, you will not be affected in any way whatsoever. If you agree to participate, you may stop participating in the research at any time and tell me that you don’t want to continue. If you do this, there will be no penalties and you will not be prejudiced in any way.

If you are unsure of anything on this consent from and would like it to be translated into a different language before you sign it, please alert me as soon as possible.

Confidentiality
All identifying information will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and will not be available to others and will be kept confidential to the extent possible by law. The records from your participation may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including my academic supervisor, Dr Warren Nilsson, and my lecturers at the Graduate School of Business at UCT. (All of these people are required to keep your identity confidential.) Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to me, unless you give permission for other people to see the records (including photographs, drawings, character sketches and anecdotal observations).

I am also asking you to give me permission to tape-record the focus group so that I can accurately record what is said.

The answers will be stored electronically in a secure environment and used for research or academic purposes now or at a later date in ways that will not reveal who the participants are. All future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Committee review and approval.

I will not record your name anywhere and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give. Your answers will be linked to a fictitious code number or a pseudonym (another name) and I will either uncouple you from your data completely and simply refer to a participant; or I will refer to you using the pseudonym in the data, any publication, report or other research output.

While I will ask for members of the focus group to respect the confidentiality of the group I cannot guarantee that they will do so.

Risks/discomforts
At the present time, I do not see any risk of harm for you during this project. The risks associated with participation in this study are no greater than those encountered in daily life.

Benefits
There are no immediate benefits to you from participating in this study. However, this study will be extremely helpful to me in that I hope it will promote understanding of the obstacles and opportunities learners experience in quintile 1-3 high schools and how best to support them in building antifragility into fragile spaces.

If you would like to receive feedback on my study, I will record your phone number on a separate sheet of paper and can send you the results of the study when it is completed sometime after December 2018.

Who to contact if you have been harmed or have any concerns
If you have any complaints about ethical aspects of the research or feel that you have been harmed in any way by participating in this study, please contact me immediately on yngpen001@gsb.uct.ac.za. All communication will be taken very seriously – your safety and confidentiality is incredibly important to me and to this study.

Drama Kweens: Antifragility and Vulnerability study

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION

I hereby agree to allow my child/ward to participate in research on ***Drama Kweens: Antifragility and Vulnerability***. I understand that she/they are participating freely and without being forced in any way to do so. I also understand that she/they can stop participating at any point should she/they not want to continue and that this decision will not in any way affect me or them negatively. I understand that this is a research project whose purpose is not necessarily to benefit me personally in the immediate or short term. I understand that our participation will remain confidential.

……..
Signature of Parent/Caregiver **Date**:
……..

……..
Signature of Learner **Date**:
……..

CONSENT FOR TAPE RECORDING

I hereby agree to the tape-recording of my participation in the study.

……..
Signature of Parent/Caregiver **Date**:
……..

……..
Signature of Learner **Date**:
……..

CONSENT FOR DATA STORAGE AND CURATION
I understand that the information that I provide will be stored electronically and will be used for research purposes now or at a later stage.

……..
Signature of Parent/Caregiver **Date**:
……..

Drama Queens: *Flourishing in Fragility*

Structured and Unstructured Questionaire for Qualitative Research

Please fill in the following information about yourself:

Gender:

Other □ Female □ Male □ Would rather not say □

Age:

14 -15 years old □ 15-16 years old □ 16-17 years old □

17 - 18 years old □ Would rather not say □

Grade:

9 □ 10 □ 11 □ 12 □ Would rather not say □

1) Do you belive that you are smart? Why?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

2) Do you think other people think you are smart? Why?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3) What are your favourite subjects and school? Why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

4) What is success?

_____
_____

5) Is there anything stopping you from being successful in your life?

6) Name the 5 best things about yourself – try and be positive!

7) Who was the best teacher you ever had? Tell me why?

8) What are 3 things you'd like to change about yourself?

9) If you could be principal of the school, what would you change?

10) Do you think confidence is important? Why?

11) What kind of job would you like to have one day?

12) Would you like to study at a university or technikon one day? What would you like to study?

_____
_____
_____
_____

13) What kind of qualities make for a good friend?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

14) What's your biggest fear for the next 5 years?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

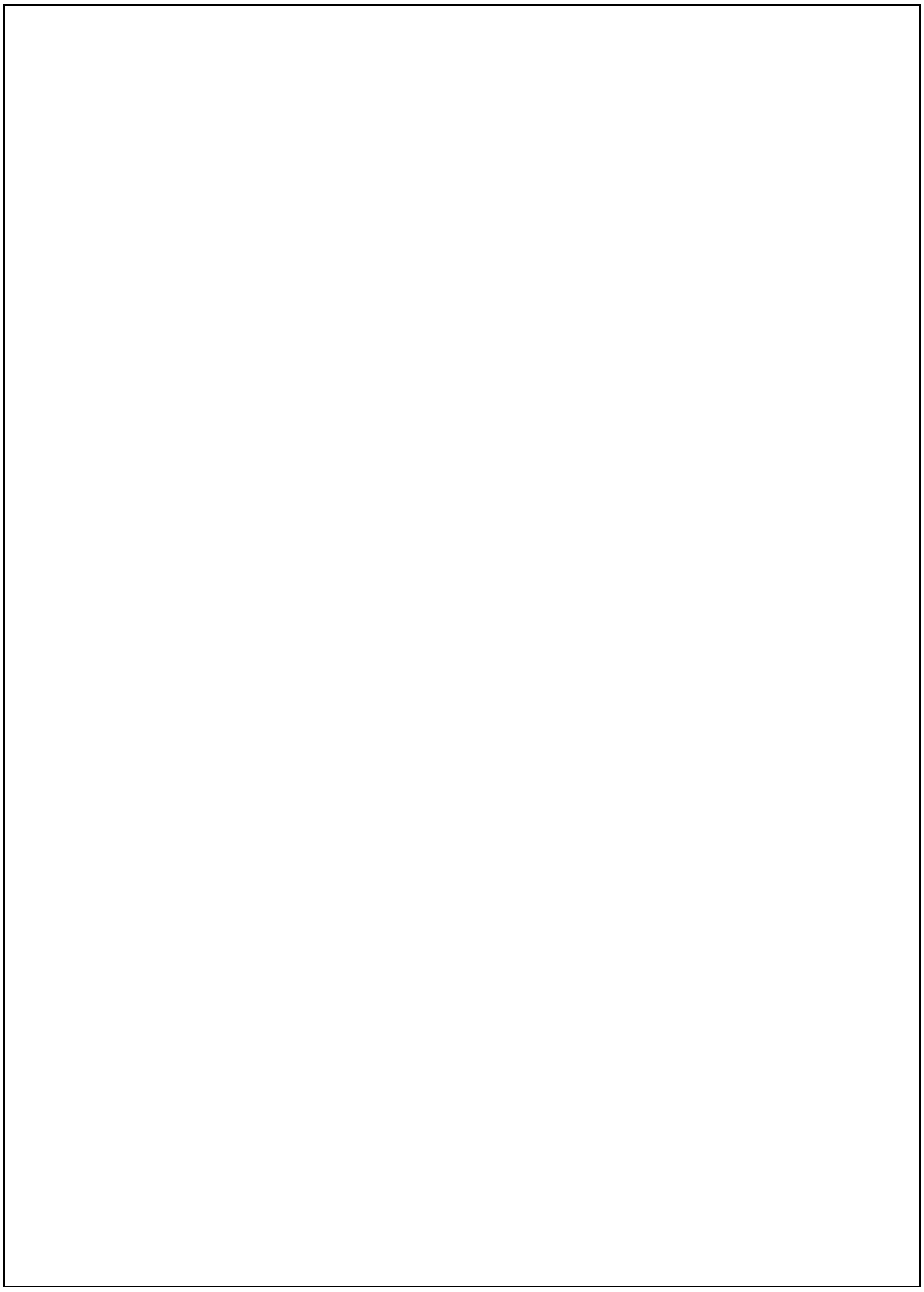
15) What's your biggest hope for the next 5 years?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

16) Where do you see yourself in 10 years time?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

In the box below, I'd like you to draw yourself using the art materials provided. It doesn't need to be a work of art – just a picture of what you see when you think about who you are. It can be realistic (look like you) or be words, shapes, colours or images that remind you of yourself. It doesn't have to look like anything specific – nothing is wrong. You're the artist! Please try and fill the box (make your picture as big as you can).



7.1.2. Educator and Senior Management Staff, Parent and Caregiver Questionnaire and Consent Form

This is a copy of the consent form that was given to every educator, parent, caregiver and member of staff who participated in this study. All participants had to submit these signed forms before our first session commenced.

Drama Kweens: Flourishing in Fragility
Parent, Caregiver and Educator Consent Form

Who I am:
Hello, I am Penelope Youngleson. I am researching antifragility and healthy vulnerability amongst learners in quintile 1-3 high schools in the Western Cape.

What I am doing:
I am conducting research on how we can help learners to use drama as a way of connecting to their own vulnerability (in a healthy way!) and become more self-reflexive and antifragile (I will explain this term more in session) in fragile, high-risk spaces like high school.

The aim of my research is to gain an understanding of how best to support at-risk learners and enable them to self-define their own success and sense of fulfillment. We call this “flourishing”.
I am also really interested in how we can work together with parents, caregivers, educators and school management to make a learning environment that supports all learners and takes some of the strain off the current education system.

The intention of this study is to provide data that can be used to create a sustainable, scalable programme that could enable learners to develop both themselves and their earning potential; whilst better understanding how to support those learners deemed to be “at-risk”.

Your participation
I am asking you whether you would be willing to allow me to talk to you in a focus group (amongst other parents, caregivers and, or, educators) and semi-structured interview. This means you will be part of a discussions for a maximum of 60 minutes. The focus group is a pilot study.

You will also be asked to answer a short questionnaire after the discussion. The total maximum time of your participation is 90 minutes or less.

The focus group will be conducted in the main language spoken by participants and in a suitable venue that is easy to access and does not require extra transport to get to. I will take brief notes during the session. In addition, the focus group will be transcribed and analysed afterwards.
While I will make every effort to protect the confidentiality of your information, I can't guarantee that other participants in the focus group will respect confidentiality, even though every member will be encouraged to do so. For this reason I advise you not to disclose personally sensitive information in the focus group or semi-structured interviews.

Please understand that **your participation is voluntary** and you are not being forced to take part in this study. The choice of whether to participate or not, is yours alone. If you choose not to take part, you will not be affected in any way whatsoever. If you agree to participate, you may stop participating in the research at any time and tell me that you don't want to continue. If you do this, there will be no penalties and you will not be prejudiced in any way.

If you are unsure of anything on this consent from and would like it to be translated into a different language before you sign it, please alert me as soon as possible.

Confidentiality
All identifying information will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and will not be available to others and will be kept confidential to the extent possible by law. The records from your participation may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including my academic supervisor, Dr Warren Nilsson, and my lecturers at the Graduate School of Business at UCT. (All of these people are required to keep your identity confidential.) Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to me, unless you give permission for other people to see the records (including photographs, drawings, character sketches and anecdotal observations).

I am also asking you to give me permission to tape-record the focus group so that I can accurately record what is said.

The answers will be stored electronically in a secure environment and used for research or academic purposes now or at a later date in ways that will not reveal who the participants are. All future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Committee review and approval.

I will not record your name anywhere and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give. Your answers will be linked to a fictitious code number or a pseudonym (another name) and I will either uncouple you from your data completely and simply refer to a participant; or I will refer to you using the pseudonym in the data, any publication, report or other research output.

While I will ask for members of the focus group to respect the confidentiality of the group I cannot guarantee that they will do so.

Risks/discomforts
At the present time, I do not see any risk of harm for you during this project. The risks associated with participation in this study are no greater than those encountered in daily life.

Benefits
There are no immediate benefits to you from participating in this study. However, this study will be extremely helpful to me in that I hope it will promote understanding of the obstacles and opportunities learners experience in quintile 1-3 high schools and how best to support them in building antifragility into fragile spaces.

If you would like to receive feedback on my study, I will record your phone number on a separate sheet of paper and can send you the results of the study when it is completed sometime after December 2018.

Who to contact if you have been harmed or have any concerns
If you have any complaints about ethical aspects of the research or feel that you have been harmed in any way by participating in this study, please contact me immediately on yngpen001@gsb.uct.ac.za. All communication will be taken very seriously – your safety and confidentiality is incredibly important to me and to this study.

CONSENT

I hereby agree to participate in research on ***Drama Kweens: Flourishing in Fragility***. I understand that I am participating freely and without being forced in any way to do so. I also understand that I can stop participating at any point should I not want to continue and that this decision will not in any way affect me negatively. I understand that this is a research project whose purpose is not necessarily to benefit me personally in the immediate or short term. I understand that my participation will remain confidential.
I understand that voluntary participation in this project involves a focus group, a semi-structured interview and a questionaire.

……..
Signature of participant **Date**:……..

CONSENT FOR TAPE RECORDING
I hereby agree to the tape-recording of my participation in the study.

……..
Signature of participant **Date**:……..

I understand that the information that I provide will be stored electronically and will be used for research purposes now or at a later stage.

……..
Signature of participant **Date**:……..

Drama Kweens: *Flourishing in Fragility*

Structured and Unstructured Questionaire for Qualitative Research

Please fill in the following information about yourself:

Gender:

Other □ Female □ Male □ Would rather not say □

Age:

19 - 25 years old □ 25-31 years old □ 31-36 years old □
36-42 years old □ 42-48 years old □ 48-55 years old □ 55-60 years old
Would rather not say □

Qualification:

Would rather not say □ Certificate □ Undergraduate Degree □
Postgraduate Degree □ Diploma □ School Leaving Certificate □
Artisan Training □

1) What is success?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

2) Is there anything stopping you from being successful in your life?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3) Name the 5 best things about yourself – try and be positive!

_____
_____
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4) Who was the best teacher you ever had? Tell me why?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

5) What are 3 things you'd like to change about yourself?

_____
_____

_____
_____

6) What's your biggest hope for the next 5 years?

_____
_____
_____
_____

7) What's your biggest hope for your child/ward/learners?

_____
_____
_____
_____

8) Where do you need the most help to turn those hopes into realities?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

In the box below, I'd like you to draw yourself using the art materials provided. It doesn't need to be a work of art – just a picture of what you see when you think about who you are. It can be realistic (look like you) or be words, shapes, colours or images that remind you of yourself. It doesn't have to look like anything specific – nothing is wrong. You're the artist! Please try and fill the box (make your picture as big as you can).