Playbuilding: Considering Identities, Agency and Self-Efficacy

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the role improvisatory and collaborative playbuilding processes play in enabling positive self-efficacy in children from low-income homes in Singapore. The study also examines how shifts in identities and agency, and the participants’ relationship with a facilitator outside of the low-income community affected the young people’s perceptions of selves and opened up the space for them to reflect on their possible futures. This thesis discusses the findings from a thirty-two-hour playbuilding programme with a group of sixteen children from a subsidized public rental neighbourhood in Singapore. The participants were between the ages of six and twelve and the project was conducted in collaboration with a voluntary welfare organization located in the same neighbourhood. The playbuilding programme took place between March and May in 2015. This qualitative case study critiques and reports how improvisatory and collaborative processes within playbuilding acted as sources of influence to the young participants’ sense of self-efficacy. Employing reflective practitioner approach, this study investigated the facilitator-researcher’s use of specific drama conventions and techniques in the playbuilding process and at the same time, examined the impacts of the close working relationship the researcher shared with the community worker from the voluntary welfare organization. The facilitator’s reflection journal was the main source of data in the research, and the notes in the journal were examined together with data collected through
observation, video recordings, semi-structured and unstructured interviews with the children and community worker, debrief sessions after each workshop and performances. The qualitative data were analysed initially using categories that had been pre-determined through the literature reviewed and also the researcher’s prior experiences of working with young people in similar settings. New categories were added later when the data did not fit into the existing ones. Collectively, the categories formed the core arguments in this thesis which are reflected in the three chapters that examined topics of ‘playbuilding processes’, ‘shifts in identities’, and ‘voice, perspectives and ownership’. This thesis argues that participation in collaborative and improvisatory playbuilding processes created the space for young people to re-imagine and visualise possible outcomes in their lives and devised ways to achieve plausible counterdistinctive ends in the drama. It is expected that this study will contribute to the existing discussion on the use of theatre-making processes as a tool to support the healthy development of young people from challenging backgrounds. At the same time, it is hoped that narratives presented in this thesis will add to the current conversation in Singapore about the struggles and problems faced by young people in poverty.
Statement of Orginality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

(Signed)

Jennifer Wong

01 September 2018
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<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>AWWA</td>
<td>Formerly known as <em>Asian Women’s Welfare Association</em>. Now known as AWWA.</td>
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<td>NAC</td>
<td>National Arts Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSLE</td>
<td>Primary School Leaving Examination</td>
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<tr>
<td>RSC</td>
<td>Rainbow Service Centre</td>
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<td>VWO</td>
<td>Voluntary Welfare Organisation</td>
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Jae Ann, Jae Ren, Jae Sen and Jae Len, my children, for playing with me.
Relevant Research Output

Publication


Conference Presentations


Chapter 1

Introducing the Research Journey

This thesis discusses the role of improvisatory and collaborative playbuilding processes to enable positive self-efficacy in children from low-income families in Singapore. The three-month long playbuilding programme in this research with children between six and twelve years old met with many unanticipated challenges which brought me on an intense learning journey. I found myself being stretched and tested in ways which I had not expected. On more than one occasion, I questioned if I was capable of completing the playbuilding process with the young participants. Looking back now, I am proud that I have matured as an applied theatre practitioner from this experience and better understand the terrain of working through drama within an impoverished community.

In the research study, I undertook the roles of the drama facilitator in the playbuilding process, the reflective practitioner examining my own praxis and the researcher collecting data to answer my research questions. The heavy emphasis on reflective practice in this research project meant that I constantly challenged myself to be very honest about the work I had been doing with children from economically marginalized homes. At the same time, it allowed me to look critically at the purported benefits of engaging them in a drama process. Etherton and Prentki (2006) remind us “to have ideas of how to reform our praxis in order
to contribute to long-term solutions” (p. 143). They caution against falling into the trap of believing that we are doing good work that benefits the community when we are actually ineffective. My reflections-in-action and on-action modelled after Schön’s (1983) reflective practitioner method formed the spine in the planning and development of the playbuilding programme in this research.

Prior to this research study, I had worked with children and youth from low-income families to make theatre. I found that participation in theatre had a positive impact on the young people’s overall sense of well-being and participants gave me the impression that they had become more confident and motivated individuals by the time the programmes ended. However, I found that I could not articulate what it was about the drama programme that might have brought about the positive changes. This research study thus became a means for me to investigate the process of playbuilding with young people from low socio-economic backgrounds to understand how my praxis and playbuilding might be able to support positive developments in youth.

When I tried to articulate clearly the ‘positive changes’ I wished to examine in this research study, I found myself focused on the topics of confidence and agency. The literature I reviewed for this study informed me that confidence and agency share an intricate relationship with self-efficacy. Bandura’s (1982) seminal research on self-efficacy informs us that an individual relies on the perceived ability to successfully complete a given task before deciding if it should be
attempted at all. The perceived ability relates to the level of confidence a person feels and it affects the individual’s desire to overcome potential problems and challenges to complete the task (Bandura, 1982, 1993, 1997, 2001; Brummert Lennings & Bussey, 2017; Buckworth, 2017; Gangloff & Mazilescu, 2017; Tsang, Hui, & Law, 2012).

The notion of self-efficacy thus became a pertinent topic in my research study. In particular, I saw a relationship between two factors that influenced self-efficacy in the playbuilding work I had conducted with young people before this research study. The two factors were imaginal experiences (Tsang et al., 2012) and vicarious experiences (Bandura, 1982). I wanted to investigate how imaginal and vicarious experiences through the improvisatory and collaborative processes in playbuilding influenced self-efficacy in the young people. Tsang et al. (2012) explained that a person’s sense of self-efficacy is “complex and contextually specific” (p. 2). In this research study, I examined the specific and unique contexts in which the children’s sense of self-efficacy was influenced through their participation in the playbuilding programme.

The descriptive case study approach with a strong focus on reflective practice enabled a close examination of the children as a single group in the playbuilding programme. The data that was collected at the end of the playbuilding workshops formed an intriguing kaleidoscopic picture of the role of playbuilding in influencing the children’s sense of self-efficacy. During the playbuilding process, the young
people shared personal and collective narratives that offered insights into their lives as young residents in a tough neighbourhood. The stories formed the core data that gave insights into the unique circumstances that shaped their identities, beliefs and sense of agency. Additionally, the process of performing these stories and finding different ways to relook at the circumstances that led to the outcomes in these narratives created a platform for the children to rethink their identities, agency and self-efficacy.

Sharing Stake’s (1995) stance on including the voices of the research participants when reporting research, I felt strongly that the children’s narratives must be reflected in my narrative of what had happened in the research. Taylor (1998) advocates for a research approach that honours the voices of the participants while Neelands and Nelson (2013) argue that it is important to bring the voices of the participants to a broader audience. Gallagher and Ntelioglou (2013) argue that our research must give room for the “voices usually silenced in society” (p. 97) to be heard. In this thesis, both the research approach and the reporting honour the voices of the children and the colourful stories they shared and performed unreservedly.

I have at this stage, given the reader an introduction to the overview of the research study. The following sections in this chapter explain the inspiration to this research study and then introduce the research questions that guided the research process. A summary of the research project follows and the next
section continues with the need for this research. At this point, the attention in the chapter turns to introduce the Singapore context to the reader by focusing on the Voluntary Welfare Organisation (VWO) that hosted the playbuilding programme and the background of the children in the study. I also explain poverty in Singapore and the systemic issues confronting Singaporeans caught in an underprivileged position in a country that has been identified as one of the most expensive cities in the world. The chapter ends with the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Inspiration for the Research

I first started to work with children and youth from economically impoverished backgrounds in 2012. The National Arts Council (NAC) in Singapore introduced me to AWWA, a social service organization that was interested in using drama as an outreach programme for teenage girls from low-income families. The young women in the drama programme were between fourteen and sixteen years old and they were very reserved when we first met. After weeks of playing drama games and exploring different stimuli to build a story together, the girls finally found resonance with a fictional character called Sara who was fourteen years old. They liked the fact that the fictional character was about their age as they felt they understood the issues a teenage girl faced and they could build a story around that. Throughout the playbuilding journey, the young women engaged in
constant reflection while they reasoned and debated with each other the options available to the central character in their story.

The teenagers eventually performed their original story to a room full of invited family members and friends in June 2012. They received a standing ovation from the audience and a few parents stood up amid tears to speak words of encouragement to their children. The conversations over refreshments after the performance with the girls’ families and social workers centered mostly on how ‘impressed’ and ‘amazed’ they were at the girls’ confidence to ‘stand in front of a crowd and perform’. Most commented that they were ‘moved’ when the girls took to the makeshift stage and performed the monologues they had written; they could not have imagined their daughters or charges ‘doing something like that, being so courageous’. As the facilitator of the playbuilding workshops, I was intrigued by what I had witnessed. I wondered why and how the playbuilding process had enabled the girls to overcome their initial shyness and became proud owners of an original performance. The conclusion of the playbuilding programme with the girls led to the next project.

NAC funded my second playbuilding project with a group of children from a different low-income neighbourhood in 2014. The children in this second project were between the ages of six and twelve. Over a period of twenty-four hours, we co-created an original play titled *Play!* In this second project, I battled attendance problems, anger management issues, constant fighting amongst the children and
negative displays of confidence. There was some level of skepticism at the beginning of the project from \(^1\) Rainbow Service Center (RSC) that this playbuilding programme would be able to run its full course.

The situation turned around from session six onwards when the children and I started to work on a performance for their families and friends. The children became more committed to the playbuilding process, and attendance became consistent thereafter with more children joining us at each session. The ensemble that eventually performed to the room full of family members and neighbours totalled sixteen children, with some children finding out about the opportunity to perform and joining us that morning itself when we were having our final rehearsal. The pride that exuded from the children’s faces that evening when they performed to their families was not a familiar sight to me and the community worker who had observed each playbuilding session as a bystander. The anxiety exhibited by the children before the performance was a departure from their usual larger than life personalities. They had, at that moment, lost that \(^2\) garang persona that was projected often during our drama workshops.

\(^1\) Pseudonym given to the social service organization to protect the identities of the children.

\(^2\) Fierce or powerful in Malay
The playbuilding process and final performance by the children in the second playbuilding project and the teenage girls in the first programme inspired a list of questions in my mind. I wondered why performing to their respective families made them so excited yet nervous. I questioned why the young people in both programmes became more committed and serious to the playbuilding process when they had the choice of audience. Most importantly, I wished to understand and be able to articulate clearly what happened in the playbuilding process that enabled the changes in the young people’s dispositions. What was in the playbuilding process that engaged and encouraged the young people to actively explore possibilities and took risks to experiment with different ways of looking at challenges and being? These questions paved the path for my research journey.

1.2 Research Questions

The value drama has on the personal and social development of young people has been extensively researched and documented widely (Burton, 2010; Burton & O’Toole, 2009; Gallagher, Freeman, & Wessells, 2010; Gallagher & Rodricks, 2017; Greenberg, 2010; Holland, 2009; Lynch, 2011; Neelands, 2012; Nelson, 2011; Nicholson, 2002; Ogolla, 1999; Stickley, Crosbie, & Hui, 2012; Vettraino, Linds, & Jindal-Snape, 2017; Winston, 1996, 2001). A low level of perceived self-efficacy in adolescents has detrimental impacts on their personal and social development. The low level of self-efficacy affects the identities an individual
embodies and the relationships built as well as choices made as adults (Bandura, 1982, 1993; Brummert Lennings & Bussey, 2017; Gangloff & Mazilescu, 2017; Muris, 2001; Rudy, May, Matthews, & Davis lii, 2013; Scott & Dearing, 2012; Shek, 2006; Tsang, Hui, & Law, 2012). My experiences and the initial reading in the field have led me to the central research question in this study: ‘How does participating in collaborative and improvisatory drama playbuilding processes enable a positive sense of self-efficacy in children from low-income families in Singapore?’

After extensive reading about efficacy, playbuilding processes and participation in drama, the following sub-questions emerged to further guide the research process:

i. How does participating in drama become a means for children to explore issues pertinent in their lives?

ii. How are voice, perspectives, ownership and agency enabled through participation in playbuilding activities?

iii. Does the relationship between the facilitator and participant matter in a collaborative and improvisatory process?

There is a high level of interconnectivity between the questions but they were answered as separate entities in this thesis to provide clarity in understanding how each aspect contributed to the enabling of self-efficacy.
1.3 Research Project

The descriptive case study in this qualitative research employs reflective practice to inform the praxis of the facilitator-researcher. The playbuilding programme in the research took place between March and May 2015 in Singapore with a group of sixteen children between the ages of six and twelve. I partnered RSC, a VWO in Singapore, for the playbuilding programme. RSC operated one of their offices in 3Sen Ling estate to provide social service support to residents in the low-income estate. The young people were residents in a subsidized government-owned rental estate reserved for low-income families. The children and their families qualified for the subsidized rental housing because they had a combined family income of SGD1500 or less.

The young people in the playbuilding programme explored issues and circumstances related to their lives and devised two original performances for an audience made up of their families and friends. The in-action reflections and the reflection notes recorded after each playbuilding workshop became the building blocks for planning the next session of work with the children. My regular discussions and debrief sessions conducted together with the community worker

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3 Pseudonym for the residential estate where the children lived
who was tasked to support the playbuilding programme became an additional planning resource for the workshops. The reflective practitioner approach in the study formed the core source of data to explain how the playbuilding processes enabled positive self-efficacy in the children. Supported by the data collection methods discussed in Chapter Three, a multi-layered picture of the role of playbuilding in enabling positive self-efficacy in the children emerged in the study.

1.4 The Need for the Research

Gallagher et al. (2010) argue that it is important to “examine the relationship between youth’s sense of agency and the social structures and rules” (p. 8) in which young people operate. Once the relationship is established, it provides an insight to understanding the circumstances that lead to young people’s risky behaviours and sense of agency. This research study was concerned with examining the interaction between the playbuilding processes and the enabling of a positive sense of self-efficacy in the children. In the research, the attention was focused on understanding how the playbuilding processes created the space for the children to discuss pertinent issues confronting them and at the same time, how the drama techniques used facilitated multiple or alternative perspectives and re-imagination of outcomes. Lastly, it examined the role of the facilitator in the playbuilding process and discussed the sensitivities and advantages of having a facilitator who was an outsider to the community and had entered the space to do creative work with the children.
When I was planning the research, I read extensively to inform me of the work done in the field. From the literature, it was evident that young people benefitted from participating in drama processes and their confidence levels, construct of identities and sense of agency are positively affected (Bundy, 2000; Burton, 2002; Burton & O'Toole, 2009; Cahill, 2002; Cahill & Coffey, 2013; Dunn, Bundy, & Stinson, 2015; Gallagher & Rodricks, 2017; Gallagher, Starkman, & Rhoades, 2017; O'Brien & Donelan, 2008). However, the gap remains in shaping my understanding of what was done in the drama process that enabled such positive changes and the relationship of the tools used with the dispositions and motivations exhibited by the participants. Furthermore, there were limited links between the study of efficacy in youth and participation in playbuilding which encourages storying, ownership and multiple perspectives. This research project therefore aimed to close that gap and contribute to the body of knowledge in the field, further extending the theories and practice of playbuilding in child development and at the same time, marrying the understanding of efficacy constructs in young people with improvisatory and collaborative tools in the process of making theatre.

White et al. (2009) argue that the adolescence period is a critical time for development and it impacts the mindsets young people carry with them as they enter adulthood. The children in this research study belonged to a socio-economic stratum in Singapore that had been classified as “unseen poor”
In the island state of Singapore where average individual income was SGD65,000 per annum (Basu, 2013b), these children and their families had a combined family income of SGD1500 or less. Citizens in Singapore who belonged to the lowest socio-economic strata in Singapore had become unseen as the wealth gap in the country widened exponentially and the poor had been left behind as the economy grew. A more detailed discussion of the children and their economic status can be found in the following sections. This research study is crucial as it contributes to the existing knowledge of using drama as a means to support child and youth development. Furthermore, the Singaporean context in this research illuminated the struggles of a hidden group of people in the first world country and examined how participation in a drama programme created the space for the young people to re-imagine and visualize possibilities and agency in their lives without subscribing to the inevitable rhetoric of a poverty cycle, a plight highlighted by local researchers (Basu, 2013b; Donaldson, Loh, Mudaliar, Kadir, Wu, et al., 2013; Ng, 2013, 2014, 2015a; Smith et al., 2015) due to a lack of opportunities available to this class of citizens.

1.5 Poverty in Singapore

Singapore does not have an official poverty line. Donaldson et al. (2013b) argue that while the living conditions and incomes of the poorest amongst the Singapore resident population had not reached the level of destitution experienced in
developing countries, it is nonetheless important for the government to reassess the way in which poverty is acknowledged. In the 1990s, government officials declared that the island state had successfully eradicated poverty (Ng, 2013, p. 36). However, with rapid economic growth in the country, the widening social and wealth gap in Singapore drew significant attention amongst the social and community development agencies, and the general Singapore population just after the turn of the twenty-first century (Donaldson, Loh, Mudaliar, Kadir, Biqi, et al., 2013a; Ng, 2013, 2015a, 2015b; Smith et al., 2015; Wong, 2013). The concerns of the Singapore citizens were mainly in two camps; the dichotomy of the urban poor, typically the sandwiched middle class who were finding it difficult to meet the rising costs of living, and the unseen poor, typically the low-income group who struggled to put food on the table. However, it is difficult to account for the exact percentage of Singaporeans living in poverty as there is scant information except for sporadic estimates by researchers (Ng, 2015a).

In a country that is very proud of its success in achieving a high percentage of home ownership amongst its citizens, Ng (2013) claimed that there had been an increase in the demand of rental flats. Over 80% of Singapore’s citizens and permanent residents lived in government-built apartments and amongst this group, 90% of them had purchased the apartment they lived in (Housing and Development Board, 2015). The remaining 20% live in private apartments or houses with land. Citizens who were unable to purchase an apartment and had
met the requirement of a combined family income no more than SGD1500 per month could apply for one of the rental apartments at highly subsidized rates.

1.5.1 Children in poverty

An imbalance in educational and personal development opportunities compounded the problem for the Singaporean children living in poverty. Approximately SGD820 million is spent annually on private tuition by parents who have the financial means to help their children attain better grades in school (Wong, 2012). Private tuition in Singapore is a lucrative business with over 500 tuition centres set up nation-wide, and this excludes freelance tutors whose statistics are not captured by the Ministry of Manpower. Ewing (2013) explains that “families with less purchasing power have decreased choices about their lifestyles” (p. 84) and educational options. However, she also argues that “Education is often championed as the way to give children a better chance, with the potential to raise incomes and therefore life opportunities” (Ewing, 2013, p. 84). The argument is problematic because education as a means to improve the future living conditions for the children in the research study might not be plausible due to the unique way the education landscape in Singapore is developing. The children and their families did not have the financial power to afford the additional enrichment classes that children from middle and higher income families are enrolled in. The young people in the study depended on the
school system for their educational needs while their more privileged peers have advanced beyond the syllabus the school provided.

Loh (2011) explains that families who have the financial means are better able to support their children in their academic pursuits by engaging professional help, such as tuition centres and private tutors. Ewing (2013) furthers the argument explaining that better educated parents are able to better prepare their children for school and the educational journey which would extend to the employment and social opportunities in the future. In Singapore, the additional educational help from the enrichment centres give the children from middle- and high-income families an important and highly unfair advantage over their financially disadvantaged peers in their studies. These same families are also likely to be able to afford to enroll their children in enrichment programmes that cater to character and cultural development. McClure, Tanski, Kingsbury, Gerrad and Sargent (2010) stress that the gap in educational opportunities and attainments caused by wealth factors might result in a lower sense of self-efficacy in children from low-income families. I saw resonance of McClure et al.’s (2010) argument with the young people in the research study. The children articulated a lack of desire to remain in school and they did not see the meaning of education and its benefits to their futures. Instead, they saw themselves as lacking in intelligence and ability to progress academically. Many of them did not see themselves beyond secondary school education in Singapore.
1.6 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is structured to tell the story of the research and guide the reader on the journey to understand the playbuilding programme with the children from low-income families in Singapore. Chapter Two, the Literature Review, highlights the core theoretical underpinnings of this study. The chapter examines the three main domains in the research: self-efficacy, participation in drama and playbuilding. The literature review forms the bedrock of the research by introducing the theories and practices of scholars and practitioners in the field which then guided my data analysis and thinking throughout the study.

Chapter Three, Methodology expands from the literature review to frame the research design. I discuss the research project and outline the decisions that guided the way of working in the study. At the end of the chapter, I present the data collection and analysis methods that supported the shaping of the research story.

Chapter Four to Chapter Six analyse the playbuilding programme and tell the stories of the research process. They share emerging findings that shed light on the research questions. Chapter Four highlights the strategies used in the playbuilding programme to enable the process of re-imagination and visualisation for the young participants. I also discuss the working relationship I shared with Zaty, the community worker who was a critical part of the research process and
then I close the chapter with a reflection of my identity as an outsider to the community and how that added an additional layer to the emergence of narratives and voices of the children.

Chapter Five begins by highlighting four children’s journeys in the playbuilding programme. The four young people were chosen as they each represented a selected group of children in the study. The second section in the chapter examines the collaborative efforts of the children within the playbuilding process and discusses how the young people’s membership in the programme met some of their needs which had been left unfilled in both academic and family settings. The chapter closes with an examination of how the young people’s involvement in playbuilding had fostered a sense of community and built a separate identity for them that was independent of their association with the communities in the rental housing.

Chapter Six discusses the narratives that had emerged in Phase Two of the playbuilding process. It presents the different types of narratives that the children had offered and performed as part of the creative process and examines the platform created through playbuilding for the young people’s voices to emerge.

Chapter Seven completes the story of this research study. This chapter summarises the findings from the research process and responds directly to the research questions. Limitations of this study, and recommendations for future
work with children from low-income families through playbuilding are discussed before the chapter closes with final thoughts about the entire research process.
Chapter 2
Understanding the Terrain: Literature Review

The research study investigates the question, “How does participating in collaborative and improvisatory drama playbuilding processes enable a positive sense of self-efficacy in children from low-income families in Singapore?”. The literature reviewed for this study guided me in my understanding about the construct of efficacy in young people and underpinned my praxis when I was working with the participants during the playbuilding process. This chapter has been structured in three main sections to address each of the three main components of the research question. It is, however, important to stress that these sections share commonalities and overlaps amongst them but have been discussed separately for ease of reading and understanding. The sections in this chapter are:

i. Self-efficacy

ii. Understanding Participation in Drama

iii. Playbuilding

This chapter opens with a critical analysis of the term self-efficacy. It further examines the cyclical relationship between how an individual’s thoughts and actions are influenced and impacted by their sense of self-efficacy. In the first section, I draw attention to sources of information that feed the levels of perceived
self-efficacy. The correlation between the sources of information and a person’s sense of agency are elaborated to provide further depth to illuminate the importance of a positive sense of self-efficacy in a child and youth’s social and cognitive development. This section closes with a discussion about the long-term impacts of a low sense of self-efficacy in youth.

In section two, I scrutinize the reported impacts of arts engagement in child and youth development by considering specific drama researchers’ work with vulnerable communities. I analyse how being engaged in drama provided the young participants in these studies the space to discuss and reflect on the difficult and compelling situations they faced. Furthermore, I critically examine the development of social relationships and identities through membership in drama processes. The studies presented for discussion in this section span diverse drama programmes to allow investigation of a wide spectrum of impact and participant involvement.

Lastly, I examine definitions of collaborative and improvisatory playbuilding processes. This section provides a thorough understanding of ways of working when engaging in theatre-making with children. As playbuilding is the central model of working with young participants in this research study, I examine the principles of playbuilding and how participants work in this collaborative yet individualistic process to undertake performance-making.
I recognize that research in the areas of self-efficacy and participatory drama programmes is wide-ranging and continually progressing. It is impossible to examine each aspect of my research question completely because the developments in the field are ever growing. However, I have identified key theorists and studies in this research to support my comprehensive understanding of the various aspects and to assist me as I embark in the research work as a learned worker in the field. By the end of this chapter, I would have described important theories that have emerged through the extensive discussion of literature, and that relate to my research study.

2.1 Self-efficacy: Impacts on Behaviours and Performance

Cahill (2010) expounds that “Identity and Agency are central concepts to address as in the drama we are constantly at play with who we can be, and what we can cause to happen” (p.162). As the central mechanism of human agency, self-efficacy plays an important role in a person’s thought patterns, actions and emotional arousal (Bandura, 1982). An individual’s sense of self-efficacy is concerned with “judgments of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations” (Bandura, 1982, p. 122), and this concern is linked to the success rate upon completion of the task.
Buckworth (2017) explains that judgement of success affects an individual’s “adoption and maintenance of health-promoting behavior” (p.40). An efficacious individual may feel competent in navigating undesirable obstacles and challenges which have the potential to affect the level of success negatively. In other words, the individual’s perceived ability to be successful after overcoming difficulties builds a sense of efficacy towards a given task (Bandura, 1997). However, it has been argued that self-efficacy is domain specific and should not be used to generalize a person’s sense of self-efficacy to all aspects of his life (Daly & Thompson, 2017; Williams, Swift, Williams, & Van Daal, 2017). Gangloff and Mazilesco (2017) disagree and suggest that a general perceived self-efficacy can still result from the belief of efficacy in specific aspects. An individual who has a strong sense of self-efficacy is likely to have acquired skills and mechanisms that can be transferred to other aspects of life to meet with the challenges.

Bandura’s seminal research on self-efficacy forms the basis for theoretical positioning of the construct of efficacy by many researchers (Bandura, 1993; Buckworth, 2017; Jonson-Reid, Davis, Saunders, Williams, & Williams, 2005; Muris, 2001; Scott & Dearing, 2012; Tsang et al., 2012). Bandura (1982) states “Self-efficacy is concerned with judgments of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations” (p. 122) and he later expanded the definition to include social efficacy. Rudy et al. (2013) added to the discussion and defined social self-efficacy as “one’s beliefs about his or her
ability to perform behaviours or interact successfully in social situation and/or situations that are evaluative” (p. 107).

Both definitions agree that an individual’s expectation of how successful a situation may turn out to be, and how a task may be completed is the determinant for that person’s agency. Buckworth (2017) explains that, in social cognitive theory, a person’s behaviour can be predicted by understanding the relationship between the outcome he/she expects before attempting a task and the value placed on the degree of success. It is critical to note that self-efficacy may have little or no relation to the actual abilities possessed. Instead, it affects the perceptions of the degree of success attainable before a decision is even made to attempt the task. Section 2.1.2 discusses the influences that affect the sense of self-efficacy in a person which further impact the individual’s resolve to attempt the task. Possessing knowledge and skills to accomplish a task is not equivalent to a positive sense of self-efficacy. A person with a low sense of self-efficacy tends to shy away from tasks which they do not feel efficacious to attempt. However, it does not mean that the same individual does not possess the knowledge and skills required for the tasks. Buckworth (2017) explains that one reason why self-efficacy remains low for some individuals is because they tend to avoid tasks that they deem outside of their capabilities and thus they reject the opportunities to acquire the skills necessary to be successful. The gap between actual capabilities possessed and the effort made in attempting the task lies in the disconnect between a person’s perception of ability and the possession of
actual abilities (Bandura, 1982). When left with no other options but to confront the task, this same individual may choose to dwell on the challenges presented in the task, focus on the deficiencies of skills he or she has, and the negative consequences that accompany the failure to complete it. Gangloff and Mazilesescu (2017) suggest that “people can fail to achieve optimal performances when they doubt their abilities to attain them, even though they possess the required abilities” (p.1). Bandura (1997) elaborates that efficacy is a combination of the “cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral subskills (that) must be organized and effectively orchestrated to serve innumerable purposes” (p.36–37). When there is an imbalance in the subskills, efficacy may be negatively affected.

When faced with the prospect of uncertainty, self-efficacy is immediately affected by self-referencing behaviours. Bandura (1982) explains that a person's “self-referent thought also mediates the relationship between knowledge and action” (p. 122). In 1997, Bandura further expanded this claim to elaborate how reflection on alternatives, estimation and imagination of outcomes to a given task, and the assumed level of ability determines the resolve to act. Thus, self-referencing behaviour may have little or no bearing on the actual abilities of the individual. Instead, the same person relies strongly on the assumptions of his/her capabilities and projects the level of success attainable.

When participating in drama, young people are provided with the opportunities to explore alternative perspectives and ways of being through practices in reflection
and imagination (Cahill, 2010). The young participants play out different possibilities and outcomes to a situation when they engage in theatre making processes and that forms a cyclical relationship to reflection and imagination. Bruun (2017) suggests that the reflective and imaginative skills employed in drama are transferable to the participants’ real lives and, as such, would have significant impact on their sense of self-efficacy and agency. The reflective and imaginative behaviours practiced and acquired through drama processes could be transferred into reality when an individual examines the different outcomes to a given situation, and consider plausible strategies to overcome the challenges.

Negative expressions or thoughts associated with a low sense of self-efficacy undermines the ability to regulate self-referencing thoughts. The result is a downward effect as the negative self-referencing thoughts inhibit the ability to identify the best methods possible to confront the challenges ahead. At the same time, the focus shifts to how mammoth the task is and how low the success rate at completion would be, due to a lack of capabilities. A research study commissioned by Beyond Social Services in Singapore surveyed 1941 secondary school students from five secondary schools and found that the most common stressors in Singaporean youth were school and family. The stresses experienced by youth in Singapore were commonly linked to expectations of school and family on academic results while many of the youth reported they did not feel efficacious in their studies. The 2011 study examined the stressors, risk and resilience in young people and reported that youth were most likely to
respond to these stressors by engaging in risky behaviours and activities, such as drugs, theft and underage drinking. When an individual lacks efficacy towards a task, the ensuing failure further perpetuates the belief that the person attempting the task is incapable of success and results in a negative impact on the process of the recovery of a positive sense of self-efficacy. In some situations, stress and depression may occur (Bandura, 1997) which, in turn, might result in the exhibition of risky attitudes and behaviours.

Conversely, a person with a positive self-referencing attitude is likely to have a positive sense of self-efficacy. When faced with the same task, two individuals with different levels of self-efficacy will result in different outcomes despite being equipped with the same set of knowledge and skills. Therefore, self-efficacy can positively or negatively mediate the performance of an individual despite the level of competency obtained (Gangloff & Mazilescu, 2017). Bandura (1997) explains that “efficacy beliefs are concerned not only with the exercise of control over action but also with self-regulation of thought processes, motivation, and affective and physiological states” (p. 36). Self-doubt becomes one of the key determinants in over-ruling a person’s sense of self-efficacy even though there is sufficient knowledge and skills present.

Rudy et. al (2013) claim that, besides negative self-referencing thoughts, negative self-statements can also be a reflection of a low sense of self-efficacy. Frequent articulation of negative self-statements stems from negative thought
processes prior to acting in a social situation and reflects a sense of being socially inept. Their study on the relationship between cognitive variables, and the development and maintenance of psychopathology demonstrated that “the frequency of negative self-statements was found to indicate the amount of social self-efficacy present with more negative self-statements being associated with less social self-efficacy” (p. 106).

An individual with a positive sense of self-efficacy views difficulties and obstacles as challenges to be mastered. They possess an efficient sense of recovery for their sense of self-efficacy if they meet with failures, and deficiencies are viewed as a lack of preparation. This presents a sharp contrast to persons with a low sense of self-efficacy as performance attainments for persons with a high sense of self-efficacy are enhanced. Instead of facing stress and depression typical in individuals with low sense of self-efficacy, efficacious persons relish challenges and strive to do better (Bandura, 1997). Buckworth (2017) furthers the argument and explains that efficacy in an individual fuels “the need for a sense of competency, that is, the need to experience mastery and achieve desired outcomes” (p.40). Therefore, there appears to be a cyclical relationship between performance attainments and self-efficacy (Gangloff & Mazilescu, 2017).

Highly efficacious persons are able to “visualize success scenarios that provide positive guides and supports for performance” (Bandura, 1993, p. 118). The visualization process Bandura (1993) has argued above is similar to an
Engagement in drama offers its participants the platform to “embodying the possible, which is not yet part of reality” (Cahill, 2010, p. 167). Participants embody different roles and characters in drama to imagine and rehearse different scenarios which facilitate the process of visualizing outcomes to the decisions they make in the fiction. There are similarities between the embodied learning process in drama with visualization abilities Bandura describes above. An individual’s participation in drama thus provides the opportunity to acquire skills needed to meet with challenges in real life. The collaborative nature of drama where individuals have to work with other participants also fosters teamwork. A regular participant in drama processes may acquire the presence of mind, which Bandura (1997) deems as important, to seek collaboration within the group to complete a task if, or when, the individual feels that he/she lacks the capability to attain success by working alone.

A less efficacious person on the other hand lacks the aptitude to prepare ahead when met with challenges. It is highly probable that a low sense of self-efficacy may result in low quality work due to a lack of effort and the reluctance to navigate challenges. The fear of failing may even cause premature abandonment of a task or prevent the attempt at all (Bandura, 1982, 1993; Rudy et al., 2013). The stark difference in responses to a potential task between a highly efficacious person and one with a low sense of self-efficacy further emphasize the roles self-perceptions and self-referencing behaviours play in affecting an individual’s assessment of his or her capabilities.
In summary, personal self-efficacy levels rely strongly on the individual’s perception of his/her capabilities. There is less connection between self-efficacy levels and the actual knowledge or skills a person possesses. Additionally, self-referencing thoughts and visualization of potential success or failure further affect the level of efficacy a person has, and the ensuing results from the attempt at the task reinforces the individual’s beliefs in his or her capabilities. In the next section, I highlight the different factors that affect the sense of self-efficacy and the interconnectivity in their relationships.

### 2.1.1 Factors influencing self-efficacy

Self-efficacy acquisition and levels are malleable through different factors in a person’s environment and relationships. After understanding the definition of self-efficacy and its construct in the previous section, it is critical to examine the sources of influence and key indicators of factors informing self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1982), there are four main factors that can influence self-efficacy levels. These are summarized below:

i. **Performance attainments**

   Mastery experiences are found to have a positive impact on youth’s growth and development. When young people participate in activities that require some form of adventure and hardship before completion, it reinforces the
need for perseverance to overcome challenges and encourages proactivity in seeking ways to negate problems. Self-efficacy that is built through performance attainments may be more durable as the young person is convinced that he or she is capable of success despite obstacles and difficulties.

ii. Vicarious experiences
Vicarious experiences create the opportunities for young people to model themselves after people of importance to them. These models could be parents, teachers, figures of authority or peers. When youth witness their models complete difficult tasks, or persevere through difficulties and meet with success, they may be encouraged to attempt tasks with similar levels of challenge. They may also be inspired to become agents of their lives and create opportunities for themselves to meet with successes which further enhance their sense of self-efficacy.

iii. Verbal persuasion and allied types of social influences

Social persuasion is only useful in enhancing a youth’s sense of self-efficacy if he or she really possesses the capability needed. A young person who has been persuaded to attempt a task without the knowledge or skills required may face a further blow to his or her sense of self-efficacy if the attempt to complete the task fails. Verbal persuasion that stems from
a person who is respected or shares a significant relationship with the youth will enhance the individual’s self-efficacy if there is sufficient capability for task completion.

iv. Physiological states

Physiological states are important for young people’s development of self-efficacy as they point to a sense of readiness, which may include physical and/or mental capacities. This sense of readiness is dependent on how youth perceive the need for persistence when faced with emotional or physical challenges. The emotional and mental states may be adversely affected with the impending tests of their capabilities in task completion and thus lead to negative self-references and a low sense of self-efficacy.

Tsang et al. (2012) expanded on Bandura’s (1982) list of four factors to include imaginal experiences as the fifth factor affecting self-efficacy.

v. Imaginal experiences

Imaginal experiences refer to mental images of the eventual failures or successes of a task before the attempt. The ability to imagine the outcomes of an endeavour would benefit persons with high levels of self-efficacy as they are able to visualize potential obstacles and thus identify methods to help them circumvent or overcome the problems. However, in persons with low self-efficacy, imaginal experiences would serve as a
deterrent for them to pursue the task and the fear of imminent failure will negatively affect their self-efficacy.

It is essential to adopt a comprehensive approach when examining the factors affecting self-efficacy. None of these factors works in isolation as a separate entity from the others, and self-efficacy is influenced when two or more of the factors are present in an individual (Bandura, 1982). The co-relatedness between the five factors above affects a person’s sense of self-efficacy. Bandura (1982) highlights the connection with performance attainment and vicarious experiences. Vicarious experiences “contribute to self-efficacy through symbolic construction that serves as a guide to behaviour and opportunities for social comparison” (Buckworth, 2017, p. 41). When a youth watches the successful attempt to complete a task by a mentor or model he or she respects, that success becomes encoded in his or her personal belief in capabilities resulting in a heightened sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982). Buckworth (2017) agrees but cautions that vicarious experiences as a source of influence in self-efficacy are only effective if the model shares similarities with the individual in question. Participants in drama are engaged in a process of observation and imagination where they witness or experiment with the different perspectives and behaviours possible when approaching a particular issue or task (Ewing, 2013). The experience of watching peers or participants taking on a role to negotiate situations and issues within the drama becomes a valuable opportunity to learn and reflect vicariously. Taylor (1998) suggests that drama participants are
equipped with the abilities to transfer the skills and knowledge of the vicarious experiences in drama to real life. He explains that as participants examine issues and tasks from within the drama, they also learn to exercise the analytical and reflective skills in reality.

When a youth makes an attempt at a similar task as the role model’s, and is able to successfully navigate through the challenges, his or her sense of self-efficacy is further heightened through performance attainment. Buckworth (2017) claims that performance attainments “are the most influential because they provide authentic evidence of whether one has the ability to act successfully” (p. 40-41). However, self-efficacy associated with performance attainments can also be conversely affected when an individual meets with failure. The lack of success creates a negative impact on the way an individual views his/her level of competency which in turn affects the sense of self-efficacy (Gangloff & Mazilescu, 2017).

Verbal persuasion works in tandem with performance attainment as it has limited influence on self-efficacy on its own. A person may be persuaded to feel more efficacious to attempt an even more challenging task after he/she has met with some success at an earlier attempt. Buckworth (2017) suggests performance attainment experiences on their own are more effective than verbal persuasion in influencing self-efficacy levels as “feedback and comments from other people do not provide an authentic experiential base” (p. 41). Gangloff and Mazilescu
(2017) however recommend examining the relationship of verbal persuasion with an individual’s perception of competence and the reliability of the source of persuasion. Verbal persuasion is a weak source of influence from a person who does not share a strong or significant relationship with the individual attempting the task.

Physiological states assist in making judgments on the level of the inherent set of capabilities existing for task completion. Bandura (1993) states that when a person faces an adverse situation, he/she could interpret that as an “ominous sign of vulnerability to dysfunction” (p. 127). The negative self-referencing when accompanied by negative imaginal experiences would prove detrimental to an individual’s sense of self-efficacy as these two become powerful and apocalyptic to the unavoidable impending failure. The reverse is of course true when a person engages in positive imaginal experiences and his or her physiological states boost the sense of self-efficacy. In this situation it is likely that the individual would rise to the challenge and feel efficacious to meet the demands of the task.

The interconnectivity of the various sources of influence on self-efficacy does not adhere to a fixed structure. The way different sources of influence affect an individual’s sense of self-efficacy depends on the relationship he or she shares with others in the situation or environment, and also the individual’s personal construct. It is therefore important to understand how the experiences of the
individual interact with relationships he or she has with others when examining an individual’s sense of self-efficacy and its malleability.

2.1.2 Impacts of a low sense of self-efficacy

Bandura (1993) warns that a low sense of efficacy to exercise control may produce depression as well as anxiety in a young person. Muris (2001) agrees and further explains that young people with a low level of self-efficacy report a higher chance of suffering depression. He argues that a low sense of self-efficacy in youth is predictive of long-term depression. Although it is unclear the specific context for self-efficacy being discussed in his research, the finding has serious implications for studies conducted in the field of youth development. Young people who cope with stressful situations or events through maladaptive cognitions such as self-blaming, or becoming isolated may experience an increase in depressive symptoms (Brummert Lennings & Bussey, 2017). Should depression be predicated by a low sense of self-efficacy, it becomes crucial to further identify how self-efficacy contributes more to the development of depression, and also possible intervention programmes that schools, health and welfare organizations, and families may choose to engage for prevention.

Scott and Dearing (2012) engaged in an elaborate study focusing on American Indian youth to examine the correlation between self-efficacy levels and depressive symptoms. The study found that “youths with relatively high self-
efficacy have fewer depressive symptoms than other youths” (p. 617). Their research investigated “between youth” and “within youth” correlations for self-efficacy and depression, and they also attempted to study the correlation over a three-year period to determine if there could be a lagged effect when there are changes to self-efficacy levels in depressive symptoms. All their findings point to a negative relationship between self-efficacy and depressive symptoms, which means when self-efficacy levels rise, depressive symptoms decrease. Gangloff and Mazilescu (2017) assert that an efficacious individual will attribute a lack of success to poor planning and preparation, and attempt to find ways to negate the obstacles present. However, an inefficacious person will engage in depressive thoughts and these further lower confidence levels.

It is critical at this juncture to understand the impacts of self-efficacy on youth development, since the age-range of participants in this study was six to thirteen years old. Pajares (1996, cited in Tsang et al. 2011) has identified two major lines of self-efficacy studies over a twenty-year period “(a) connecting self-efficacy beliefs with college major and vocational choices and (b) surveying the connections amongst self-efficacy, other psychological constructs, and academic performance” (p. 4). In his review of research literature spanning twenty years, Pajares explains that a young person’s sense of self-efficacy has immediate and longitudinal impacts on his or her decisions to stay in school, learning attitudes and goal achievements and orientation. According to Brummert Lennings and Bussey (2017) an individual’s sense of self-efficacy will affect the way proactive
behaviour is adopted to elicit support and help to change the environment they are in. Youth rely on their sense of self-efficacy to make decisions on life choices as their beliefs in their capabilities and possible level of success achievable drive the motivation behind their decisions.

Bandura (1993) posits that in adolescence, a youth’s sense of self-efficacy is linked to his or her sense of academic and self-regulatory efficacy. Youth may be affected by academic failures or a lack of success and thus choose to adopt less prosocial behaviours and attitudes as a form of response to the “snubbing by peers that erode their sense of intellectual efficacy” (p. 138). Peers are important sources of influence and youth tend to gravitate towards peers who share similar values and life choices as they do. Thus, a lack of academic efficacy may lead to underperformance by a youth, which in turn has repercussions in his or her social and emotional efficacy.

A young person’s behaviour can be predicated by their sense of self-efficacy on their capabilities and the result of their efforts, and it could also be used as an indication of their long-term choices (Tsang et al., 2012). Bandura (1993) claims that with a stronger sense of self-efficacy, an adolescent is likely to demonstrate greater interest and preparation to meet the demands of the role within the choice of careers. Therefore, it can be understood that a youth with a healthy sense of self-efficacy will proactively ready himself or herself to meet the challenges in his
or her future and becomes an effective and proactive learner to find ways for performance attainments (Williams et al., 2017).

From the research discussed above, it can be seen that efficacy levels are malleable and can be influenced by a list of factors. Youth who have a low sense of self-efficacy perceive their future to be bleak and lacking in success while adolescents with high self-efficacy are sanguine in their outlooks about adulthood. To avoid counter-productive efforts, it is important to identify which factors are most influential with specific youth when trying to enhance their sense of self-efficacy. Engagement in drama facilitates the enabling of a positive sense of agency in individuals as they explore and invent new possibilities and meanings through the deconstruction and reconstruction of fictional contexts which can be applied in reality (Cahill, 2010; Prendergast & Saxton, 2015; Vettraino et al., 2017). In the next two sections, I examine how skills and knowledge learnt and experienced through drama may permeate into the participants’ lives outside of the theatre processes.

2.2 Understanding Participation in Drama

Young people who have engaged regularly in arts learning show evidence that they become individuals with a heightened sense of self-efficacy and abilities to cope with challenges and/or changes (Vettraino et al., 2017). Participation in the arts serve to engage youth in sensorial, cognitive and affective experiences which
Caldwell and Vaughan (2012) suggest help disengaged students to become more proactive learners. They also argue that the gap between high- and low-performing academic learners narrows as a result of the young people’s transformation to become more active learners. When young people participate in drama, a mental space is created that “strikes a balance between the freedom of the imagination and the constraints of the real world” (Kukla, 1987, p. 76). Young people are offered the opportunities to engage within a multi-perspectives and multi-modal dimension in drama which curriculum-driven classrooms, like the Singaporean classrooms, may not offer.

Peter (2009) citing evidence from neuroscience research draws attention to the links between drama participation and cognition. She argues that engagement in drama provides the participants “with memorable learning contexts (that are) more likely to be favourably edited and etched on the brain” (p. 10). In drama, participants take on different roles to delve into situations and challenges that the characters they are playing face. The embodied and oftentimes empathetic learning and performance of the characters open the space for the participants to perform from the perspectives of the roles they have adopted. Through drama, participants practice empathy and reciprocity in relationships that may be missing in real life (Bruun, 2017; Heikkinen, 2016).

In this section, I discuss the impacts of participation in drama programmes and how the development of children and youth could be affected by engagement in
the arts. Discussion in this section starts by examining the role of arts in complementing the place of the family and school in a youth’s development. Attention then shifts to examine how participation in drama facilitates and fulfills the needs of risk taking and identity formation for young people in their developmental years. The section concludes by linking the effects of participation in drama with the enhancement of self-efficacy in youth.

2.2.1 Drama as the third member of family and school duo

The Singapore education system produces students who regularly gain top scores in the international test: Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in math, science and reading (Davie, 2016). Students in Singapore government primary schools are streamed according to their academic results and capabilities by the time they complete Primary Four at ten years old. Thereafter, the emphasis on producing students with stellar results means that “teaching tends to be instructional and didactic, and enormous pressure is placed on young students’ academic success” (Wales, 2012). Assessment-oriented and outcome-based education systems around the world are similarly concerned with producing students who are adept at passing standardized national or international examinations. Caldwell and Vaughan (2012) warn that schools which focus on examinations and the results students produce run the risk of disengaging the youth who have been enrolled in these institutions. The pair elaborates that “disengagement occurs across all strata of society but is acute in
highly disadvantaged settings where there is often a risk of involvement in juvenile crime” (p. 2). Hughes and Wilson (2004) suggest that “young people who have experienced difficulties in childhood such as family break up, deprivation, discrimination, exclusion from school – risk becoming permanently marginalised in the current social climate” (p. 68). When youth from disadvantaged backgrounds are disengaged from the education provided by the schools they are enrolled in, the motivation for them to remain in school or to pursue higher education which promises improved economies of living through better paying jobs in the future is low (Caldwell & Vaughan, 2012).

The classroom that is focused on pursuing academic excellence evidenced by the results students produce rarely provides time and space for development of skills and knowledge outside the subjects for national and international examinations. Brice Heath (2001) suggests that the “duo of school and family, central to the life of every young learner, needs a third member that can complement and supplement what this duo offers” (p. 10). The third member, according to Brice Heath (2001) “fosters a sense of self-worth and a host of talents – particularly linguistic and creative – that classrooms have neither time nor legal permission to foster” (p. 10). Engagement in the arts assumes the role of the third member as it creates the space for young people to find alternative talents in themselves in a non-academic, stressful environment. Kukla (1987) states that participation in drama programmes in particular “gives children the opportunity to explore ways of thinking not available to them in the usual
classroom situation” (p. 77). It also creates the time and space for young people, especially those who are in trouble, to have access to people and space unrelated to the problems they are facing. The membership in an arts programme outside of school and family connections and limitations provides an opportunity for young people to build new relationships and identities with peers and adults who do not subscribe to the culture in which they may be facing problems (Hughes & Wilson, 2004).

Taylor (1998) explains that participation in drama allows us to see things from another person’s perspective to seek possibilities and meanings for the events we experienced. O’Connor (2009) relates this to infusing the participants “within the emotional maelstrom of personal story” (p. 591) where they find ways to deeply understand the emotions confronting them. The participation in the arts thus encourages young people to find a way to express themselves through an artistic medium and this provides an insulation from the daily stresses, especially in an urban environment (Caldwell & Vaughan, 2012).

Greenberg’s (2010) experiment on the social and academic benefits of an after-school theatre programme for adolescents from low-income families echoes the need for the ‘third member’. The experiment, involving twenty-six teenagers, aimed to take its participants off the street and engaged their energies in healthy out-of-school activities. Using a mixed-methods approach, the findings revealed that all participants who had completed the programme reported an improvement
in their social, personal and academic growth. When interviewed, the youth explained that they had achieved personal growth “including making new friends, building self-esteem and increased overall confidence” (p. 16). Heathcote (2013) expounds that “(the) most important manifestation about this thing called drama is that it must show change” (p. 200). Change in this instance is facilitated by the examination of problems and issues within the drama that propels the transformation of attitudes and behaviours (Prentki & Preston, 2013). Greenberg (2010) further claims that such growth extends into the youth’s academic lives. Many of the young people in her study reported developing a deeper commitment to teamwork as well as public speaking skills.

Burton’s (2002) research into recreational youth theatre involvement has offered evidence of a “greater sense of autonomy, status, self-awareness and competence in the participants” (p. 68) who were participating in youth theatre across two states in Australia. His claim echoes Hughes and Wilson’s (2004) findings about the impact of youth theatres where young people clearly articulated that “they feel the skills and capacities developed within youth theatre transfer to an increased competence in other areas of their lives” (p. 63). The positive changes in the youth extended into “their ability to successfully interact with peers, teachers and other adults and their ability to perform comfortably and effectively in a range of unfamiliar and familiar environments” (p. 63). Bruun (2017) reports that when participants engage in a regular drama programme over a period of time, they exhibit an increase in confidence and spontaneity as they
are being challenged through the drama processes to examine their “mono-cultural thinking and attitudes” (p. 233). Greenberg’s (2010) after-school theatre programme also demonstrated the capacity of the arts to bridge the gap between the youth, their personal development and their academic engagement. Etherton and Prentki (2006) however, warn that it is important to assess the positive impacts of drama participation over an extended period of time, especially after the duration of the drama engagement concludes, to fully understand the impact of drama on its participants. It is thus critical for practitioners who are working with communities, especially ones that are marginalized or vulnerable, to examine the impact of their work honestly and with crucial contextual evidence without overinflating the benefits of participation in the arts.

2.2.2 Risk taking and identity making

In *The Risky Business Project* (2008), researchers Donelan and O’Brien engaged marginalized youth in ten different art forms over a four-year period. The youth were known to engage in risky behaviours that challenged the law and they were disengaged from the education institutions in which they were enrolled. These young participants in the research became collaborators in the art creation process where they were given a safe space to take risks in the forms of independent decisions and assuming ownership for the art that they created. Risk taking in the arts could take the form of engaging with sensitive or challenging topics that requires young people to examine their own attitudes and
behaviours, and demonstrate maturity and responsibility in the art creation process (Hughes & Wilson, 2004; Prendergast & Saxton, 2013).

Donelan and O’Brien (2008) noted that the youth in their project had a desire for risk taking and their engagement in the art making process fed that need for risk through their sensorial, mental and affective domains. The completed artworks, either shown in the form of an exhibition or performances, were finished in a collaboration between the artist-mentors and the youth. The casting of the public eye on the finished products placed the young artists in situations of high risk. Hughes and Wilson (2004) explain that young people are put to the test when they subject themselves and their art to the scrutiny of their “peers, significant adults and the wider community” (p. 64). This form of risk taking strengthens a young person’s confidence and commitment to the art creation process and product, and boosts a youth’s sense of identity by understanding how the finished work is a representation of his or her journey in art making.

Hughes and Wilson (2004) assert that “young people look outside the family and school to explore and form identities and many rely on their peers for support” (p. 59). Kelly (2015) extends this view and posits that when youth participate in playbuilding, “the community-based devised method of creating and performing a theatrical piece can function as a rite of passage into their larger community” (p. 95). The relationship the youth shared with their artist-mentor in The Risky Business Project served as the important and positive peer influence needed in
the formation of the adolescent’s sense of identity and independence. Participation in the arts programme fostered a new circle of influence between the youth and the artist-mentor. In this newly formed relationship where they shared risks and sense of achievements, the youth were supported to mould a new identity for themselves, one that is disassociated with unlawful behaviours and disengagement with the mainstream society. Heikkinen (2016) suggests that positive relationships with a larger community could be formed because the participants experienced a transformative process through the artistic journey. They are then enabled to create new meanings for themselves and foster new perspectives in their interaction with other people.

Through drama, participants can experiment with performing different identities (Nicholson, 2005). A new identity that is built based on the involvement in the arts can signal a dramatic and positive change to the self-esteem, self-worth and sense of agency youth experience. Burton (2002) explains that drama enables an “enhancement of a sense of identity and the development of talent” (p. 68) in adolescents which have been deemed important motivating factors to their participation in the arts. Participation in drama provides the platform for youth to explore possibilities in their lives and encourage a sense of agency in them to make changes to improve circumstances (Taylor, 1998). Young people thus feel a shift in their identities, from being helpless to someone who has power to make changes and take action. Hughes and Wilson (2004) agree and explain that engagement in theatre making allows adolescents to explore the world through
the creative process and it “widens the young people’s frame of reference and provides new perspectives and knowledge about themselves” (p. 65) which in turn fosters a new identity.

### 2.2.3 Enabling agency

Participation in drama requires participants to examine an issue or story from multiple perspectives. Sometimes, the participants discuss and investigate issues and experiences that are difficult and challenging. Through the different roles they play in the drama, opportunities are created to allow the participants to consider the attitudes and dispositions of these characters when faced with the challenging and difficult circumstances. Youth who regularly participate in drama programmes may also be more attuned to, or critical of, the consequences their performed identities have on the community to which they subscribe. The result could be young people feeling limited in the roles and identities they perform in real life because of the circumstances they face (Bundy, 2013). However, through the process of sharing stories in drama, the participants can become aware that they are active agents in their lives and they can change their perspectives towards particular issues and situations. Hughes and Ruding (2013) assert that participation in drama processes “can help young people build the capacities and resources – the ability to respond flexibly and fluidly – needed to survive and prosper in an uncertain world” (p. 222). The process of enjoyment and
engagement in artistic processes will encourage young people to create new identities and re-examine relationships with people.

Cahill (2010) explains that drama makes visible the discourses that are confronting the lives of the people. When participants of drama share stories of their lives, and they perform it to their peers, a visual connection is being made for both the story teller and its audience. Coupled with the ability to pause the drama creation process to replay or recreate certain scenes, drama becomes a very powerful tool to build a sense of agency in its participants. Through membership in a drama group and participation in drama work, young people learn the importance of building a supportive community to “imagine and look for new ways of living together rather than against each other; to find solidarity in their common disadvantage; to create new models of pluralist community” (Neelands, 2009, p. 176). The awareness that they are not alone but can be interdependent further builds the sense of agency in the young people as they find support in each other.

Mckinnon (2016) embarked on a research project to challenge his university students to become active agents in their learning. He describes how a group of undergraduate students involved in his research became aware of themselves possessing “passive, reactive disposition, dependent on others to initiate and direct their work” (p. 540). In his research, Mckinnon (2016) used devising as a methodology to investigate university students’ perceptions of ‘student habitus’;
a set of ‘habituated’ behaviours that have been developed over a period of time due to the educational settings the students were accustomed to. During devising, the undergraduates realized that they had to become responsible for making decisions about their creative process, taking risks and meeting challenges head-on. They could not rely on a teacher to instruct them on how their performance text should be created, a reliance that had developed over time as they depended on instructions and feedback from their teachers throughout their education.

At the end of the research, the undergraduate students reflected that the devising process had made them active agents (McKinnon, 2016). The young people were propelled out of their comfort zones to actively offer and present ideas in front of their peers, collaborate with the other team members to create an original performance, and provide constructive feedback to each other to further the creation process. These were new ‘habits’ that the students had to adopt but the sense of achievement was immense after they had almost sold out public performances which affected their sense of self-worth and self-esteem. Cahill (2010) suggests that participants build a sense of agency through drama by means of “deconstruction, and re-construction, and through invention and sharing of new possibilities” (p. 171) during the drama process.

This section concludes that participation in drama offers the time and space for its participants, particularly young people, to engage in a multi-perspective
learning through their cognitive, sensorial and affective domains. The membership in a drama programme also supports the young people’s development and enables a process for re-examination of self and communal identities which bears weight on their sense of agency as individuals or as a community. Lastly, involvement in youth theatre could result in the participants exhibiting an improved sense of autonomy, self-awareness and agency (Burton, 2002).

2.3 Playbuilding

Tarlington and Michaels (1995) liken the initial stages of playbuilding to the process of explorers charting new grounds, employing all their sensory capabilities to get acquainted with the new place. At the end of all the observations and sensing, the explorer will form his or her own opinions about the discoveries and construct meanings personal to themselves. This section examines playbuilding as a participatory drama form that engages a community in the creation of an original product. It further discusses the process of playbuilding and the behaviours and attitudes it builds in the participants.

Playbuilding, or playmaking and devising, as it is also known, is a process where a group of people work together and use drama activities, conventions and improvisations to create an original performance. An external invited audience is sometimes invited to watch the performance and dialogue with the actors.
regarding the playbuilding process or the issues presented in the performance. Prendergast and Saxton (2013) term playbuilding as “devising” and “collective creation” (p. 139) and explain that “it is a process with a product in mind...(with)...some kind of shared performance as an outcome” (p. 139).

The process of making theatre may be inspired by an indefinite range of stimuli (Oddey, 1994; Tarlington & Michaels, 1995) to initiate the devising process. The main purpose of the stimuli is to spark physical, practical and intellectual discussions amongst its participants to activate the improvisatory process for the exploration of roles and perspectives to build a common story. Heikkinen (2016) argues that “it is very hard to pin down exact methods for devising as every group of collaborators may have different ways of approaching the creative process” (p. 34). Instead, he advises the playbuilding group to identify a common theme to kickstart the play making process and then “utilize it to make a form that makes sense, and then extract deeper thematic ideas and work with them retrospectively” (Heikkinen, 2016, p. 34). During the playbuilding process, participants experiment with taking on different roles and different perspectives to examine a phenomenon critically. Peter (2009) explains that participation in drama exposes children to “different perspectives, motivations, intentions and consequences, to create increasingly complex social narratives” (p. 10). Children engage in a process that makes use of their diverse and varied literacy skills to question and investigate issues and experiences during the drama that do not subscribe to a standard playscript (Perry, Wessels, & Wager, 2013).
Hatton and Lovesy suggest that playbuilding is an “interplay between the actual and fictitious in the drama” (2008, p. 12). Prendergast and Saxton (2013) explain that participants in the process “operate in the dramatic ‘as-if’ world, to relate to others in that imagined world” (p. 28). The fluid transition between reality and fiction facilitates the process for the participants to draw on their personal knowledge and lived experiences to create the imagined world. Through debating about and analysing the situation(s) within the drama, participants are engaged with some intense cerebral and emotional investigation to understand the motivations and intentions of the characters in the story they are building collectively.

In the following sub-sections, I discuss the considerations practitioners need to make when working in playbuilding to ensure the process offers emotional and mental safety for the participants. The attention then shifts to examine the development of specific positive behaviours and attitudes in participants and changes in their sense of personal and collective identities.

**2.3.1 Safety and distancing**

Participants in playbuilding draw on their lived experiences and attitudes to examine and discuss situations by using drama processes to create an original product or performance. There is a consistent need to oscillate between the
fictional drama world and the real world when engaging in playbuilding processes. Vettraino, Linds, and Jindal-Snape (2017), drawing on Boal’s definition of ‘metaxis’, explain that it is an “experience of belonging to two worlds simultaneously; the real, physical world and an alternative and fictive reality created by being able to see oneself as both character and actor” (p. 82-83). This state of metaxis provides a sense of safety for the participants while they negotiate difficult and challenging issues through the distance of working in a dramatic context. Participation in drama thus offers its participants the benefit of “embodying the possible, which is not yet part of reality” (Cahill, 2010, p. 167). Through the ritual of performing what is not yet happening, participants are offered the opportunity to examine or practice what has been enacted in the drama.

Prendergast and Saxton (2013) remind us that safety within drama participation is crucial for its members. They assert that drama as an artform “works through the language of metaphor that allows participants the necessary ‘aesthetic distance’ to deal with issues that may otherwise feel too close” (p. 3). Within the playbuilding community, the sense of trust and belonging may encourage its participants to share personal experiences which supports the offering of different perspectives to a situation. This in turn will facilitate the transfer of understanding and values from the playmaking process to the participants’ everyday lives (Bruun, 2017). Playbuilding, thus provides a space for its participants to be
engaged in an artistic process to understand themselves and events in their lives physically, emotionally and mentally (Oddey, 1994).

Cahill (2010) however, challenges the notion that working in drama creates the state of metaxis, as discussed earlier. She argues that the participants may not be completely protected when working within the dramatic boundary. Instead she cautions that “the norms and expectations of the society direct the world of the character” (Cahill, 2010a, p. 161). When participants adopt roles that are realistic to the culture and society they are living in, it may further engender stereotypes or culturally acceptable codes of conduct. She further cautions that the “fiction-reality boundary is porous” in drama (p. 171). This notion defies the above belief that drama provides that safe platform to explore challenging or difficult issues. Instead, she recommends that, besides examining the rules of the genre of the drama we are engaging in, we need to be sensitive to the rules of the societal discourse that bolts the participants into a fixed performance of roles and thoughts which even when framed within a drama context, will not differ far from the narrative of the community. It is paramount that the facilitator leading the playbuilding process is aware of the permeability of the fiction-reality boundary and makes deliberate plans to ensure that participants in the programme are not further typecast into a particular role or category. Instead, the planning and framing of the drama must ensure participants are offered doorways to possibilities or opportunities to challenge the stereotypes.
Prendergast and Saxton (2013) explain that an additional level of protection may be offered to participants within a drama process by fictionalizing the characters, “endowing them with their own life stories and sets of given circumstances” (p. 48). Kukla (1987) posits that when children engage in role play, they have the opportunity to take on roles to explore situations different from their own. Role play thus offers children a platform to “(deepen) identification with the fictitious situation through the power of imagination” (p. 75). Peter (2009) agrees and extends this argument to suggest that children will consciously adjust their behaviour during their engagement in the drama. She states that children will employ “more creative and flexible thought, and thus deeper social understanding” (p. 11) when they become emotionally invested in the dramatic tension. They are also “enabled afterwards to make links between the fictitious drama and real-life situations” (p. 11). The oscillation between the real and imagined world facilitates the transfer of skills and understanding acquired through the engagement in the drama into real life.

2.3.2 Developing voice and perspectives

Playbuilt performance texts may be made up of collages of individual stories that have been assembled into one single narrative. When working with personal stories of the participants in playbuilding, individual stories may refract the participants’ life circumstances and beliefs about the central theme. The contributing fragments are then assimilated into the structure of the playtexts for
performance (Oddey, 1994; Prendergast & Saxton, 2013; Tarlington & Michaels, 1995). Devised performances may not follow a traditional narrative structure that consists of expositions, story development and resolution. Instead, depending on the devising process and the members in the groups, the product may often bring out the different skill sets present amongst the participants and be layered in its meanings (Perry et al., 2013). Kandil (2016) reminds us that the participants have the rights to “adjust, reshape, or even pull out a story if they no longer want it as part of the performance” (p. 203). It is therefore critical that the stories that have been offered through the playmaking process be treated with utmost respect as it represents the individual and collective voice of the playbuilding group.

Cahill (2010) advises that it is important “a crack must be made in the dominant story” (p. 157) when working with the narratives of the participants in the drama process. Facilitators who are working with groups in role plays and improvisations must be careful not to recreate replicas of the hopeless or depressing situations confronting the very community that is facing it in their lives. While it may serve as a means for them to make sense of why these events are happening, it may also promote the idea that change or improvement is impossible if there is a lack of subversion to the norm. Kandil (2016) concurs and elaborates that participants in the process must have agency over the performance of the stories they have shared. She suggests that the power to decide how and what to perform in the shared narratives may result in “new discoveries about the piece and the implications of staging it once they have a
better sense of what type of project this might turn out to be” (Kandil, 2016, p. 211).

The playbuilding process reflects multi-perspectives and voices as it involves sharing of ideas and opinions from each member of the group based on the stimulus offered. Perry et al. (2013) posit that participating in devising offers young people a platform to “draw on multiple and out-of-school literacies, to inquire into and express multiple knowledges and perspectives” (p. 655). Neelands and Nelson (2013) further explain that playbuilding work conducted with young people “emphasizes the exploration of their ideas with the goal of developing their voices and visions of the world and bring them to a broader audience” (p.18). Depending on the life experiences and cultural backgrounds of each contributor, a myriad of stories, both personal and political could be brought to the sharing circle and this has great impact on the process of creating the play and the resulting product (Oddey, 1994).

The creative process demands an analysis of the different viewpoints presented and it encourages those involved to further explore their personal attitudes and how it is positioned in the larger scheme of ideas. Tarlington and Michaels (1995) suggest that when a group of individuals participate in exploration of selves and others’ attitudes and viewpoints, it leads them to “new understandings regarding human behavior” (p. 11). Through the process of gifting stories during playbuilding, the participants open themselves up to opportunities to learn more
about who they are and for others to respond to the stories with empathy (Bundy, 2013; Prendergast & Saxton, 2013). Nicholson (2005) explains it plainly as a means to travel “into another world, often fictional, which offers both new ways of seeing and different ways of looking at the familiar” (p.13).

2.3.3 Building collaboration, trust and ownership

Tarlington and Michaels (1995) advocate that, “Playbuilding, in order to be successful, must be a co-operative and collaborative process” (p. 12). Oddey (1994) refers to this need for co-operation and collaboration as an “eclectic process requiring innovation, invention, imagination, risk, and above all, an overall group commitment to the developing work” (p. 2). The process through which the participants of playbuilding find ways to work alongside each other in an artistic journey is complex and sometimes challenging. Peter (2009) explains that “children collaborate on two levels, the real and the fictional, as they explore social meanings such as different social roles and perspectives” (p. 10). They need to negotiate the different personalities involved in the group and integrate “various viewpoints, beliefs, life experiences, and attitudes to changing world events” (Oddey, 1994, p. 3) to build an artistic product for an audience.

Collaboration within the team means it is important to celebrate the diversity within the group. Prendergast and Saxton (2013) expound the importance of the group to focus and “value what is being offered and to build constructive ideas
that can move the scene forward” (p. 167). The differences in skills, knowledge, capabilities and personalities in the group encourage a method of working that builds on the strengths of the members. Participants in devising processes wear many hats as they have to play multiple roles when they collaborate to put together a performance. They have to collaborate as actors, directors, designers and playwrights to achieve the desired effects in their intended performance (Prendergast & Saxton, 2013) which demands a wide array of skills and knowledge.

Additionally, as a result of the diversity in expectations, lived experiences and skills amongst the participants, it is important to agree right at the beginning of a playbuilding process how participants in this artistic venture will negotiate conflicts. Members of the playbuilding group must learn to listen and negotiate a manner of working together that honours the opinions of the team and find ways to consider the offerings to be developed into part of the final performance (Tarlington & Michaels, 1995). During this process, the young participants become conscious that what they say will have an impact in the play and they need to listen to their peers in order to provide appropriate responses in the negotiation (Kukla, 1987). Prendergast and Saxton (2015) conclude that the nature of participating in theatre means that the community that is involved in the process will share stories that have emerged from themselves and their experiences. In that way, the participants learn not only to be narrators but also
“listeners to understand better what has happened” (Prendergast & Saxton, 2015, p. 280).

However, Gallagher and Ntelioglou (2013) question what would happen in a drama classroom when the need for listening and discussion bring the possibility that “we hear things we don’t like? When we hear views that disturb us, or challenge us, or call into question the things we hold dearest? Or interrupt our easy judgments about who our classmates are?” (2013, p. 96). They further question how safety and protection could be offered to the playbuilding group when information offered during the playbuilding process might be disturbing or offensive to some members. Their comments suggest that the act of listening during playbuilding processes requires the development of a high level of trust within the group. A common understanding must be reached within the group to ensure that each offering of story, opinion or question must be met with objectivity and not judgment.

In order to build a high level of trust within the team, there needs to be a sense of ownership of the playbuilding process and its eventual product. Oddey (1994) suggests that the sense of ownership will emerge when the team forms “a group statement or policy (which) identifies a particular style, a unique language or vocabulary, shared beliefs, or a commitment to why a company wishes to make a specific theatrical product” (Oddey, 1994, p. 9). However, the collective vision and agreement to advance the playbuilding process demands for a group of
people with a level of confidence and maturity to work in an egalitarian way. Neelands (2009) argues that participation in the theatre making experience provides “the social and egalitarian conditions of ensemble-based drama, (where) young people have the opportunity to struggle with the demands of becoming a self-managing, self-governing, self-regulating social group” (p. 182). In order to arrive at the state Neelands (2009) proposes, it might be critical for the participants of playbuilding to have a vested interest in what they are doing. As a result of that common goal and the stakes involved in creating the performance, the participants might work towards collaboration and trust with their team mates. Gallagher, Freeman and Wessells (2010) also suggest that a performance of the original product to an invited audience outside of the creation process will improve the sense of ownership and achievement for its participants as it increases the stake each member feels. The audience therefore becomes a motivating factor for the group to strive for better quality artistic work (Neelands, 2009).

2.3.4 Creating a community identity

Cecily O’Neill explains that “drama is essentially a social and inclusive art, it creates a sense of community” (Taylor, 1998, p. vii). Neelands and Nelson (2013) expound that a community can be formed through the playbuilding experience when the level of trust grows within the group of theatre makers. They argue that the sense of community that forms promotes the feeling that “one is part of a
readily available and supportive structure characterized by belonging, connectedness, influence, and fulfilment of needs” (p. 20). The membership into a community fosters a sense of agency and identity when the group is offered opportunities to share their voices and be affirmed (Nelson, 2011; Sinclair & Kelman, 2013). Kandil (2016) further suggests a bond is formed when the playbuilding group listens to the narratives emerging from its members and become aware of the differences and similarities of their lived experiences.

At this point, I would like to highlight that the definition of ‘community’ is diverse and the interpretations of ‘community’ differ. Mulligan et al. (2006) argue that definitions of ‘community’ can be fluid and subjective, depending on the situation and philosophical underpinnings attached to the interpretations. For the purpose of this study, I am drawing on the definitions of community of interest (Williams, 1988) to examine the formation of the playbuilding community based on Mulligan et al.’s (2006) definition denoted by common attitudes and practices of the people. Participation in theatre-making process fosters the act of bringing people together with a common goal, and in some circumstances, it creates a sense of community because of the shared agency and power (Neelands & Nelson, 2013).

Brice Heath (2001) proposes that there is value in being part of a community, and that this is heightened through “feelings of uniqueness or special qualities that set them apart from other such entities” (p. 142). The common experiences within the playbuilding community, and the shared personal stories strengthen the
feeling of a unique collective identity for the people involved. The group that is working on a common topic will not have the same sense of belonging as another group that is working on a different theme simply because, even though they are working in a similar drama form, the experiences shared and the stories told within the group resulting in trust and ownership of the process is different from another community’s.

Participation in drama processes has the ability to support the building of a community identity and encourage a sense of agency amongst its participants. Bruun (2017) explains that being a part of a community encourages the sharing of authentic and personal material during drama when a suitable level of trust is built within the group. During the process, participants are provided an opportunity to relook at the circumstances within their lives, and also to exhibit empathetic behaviours to others who might be in similar situations. She further explains the investment made by the participants in a drama process would strengthen the sense of the community created as they believe in the worth and relevance of their contribution to the drama work. Kandil’s (2016) experience in her drama project was similar; she states the participants’ “initial investment was to build community with one another, and to find a place where they could feel accepted and their experiences valued” (p. 203).

Neelands (2009) argues that the formation of a community through participation in drama facilitates the process for young people “to model the conditions for a
future society based in the necessity of learning how to live with the *grave importance of our interdependence as humans*” (p. 176, italics in original). Drama as a collaborative art form requires its participants to work together to advance the work they are doing. At the same time, there is a strong need to celebrate the diversity inherent in the work as participants bring to the process perspectives and experiences that are unique to their circumstances and culture. Therefore, the building of a community through drama processes enables young people to find “new ways of living together rather than against each other; to find solidarity in their common disadvantage; to create new models of pluralist community” (Neelands, 2009, p. 176).

It is important, however, to be aware that ‘community’ as a construct can be problematic. Sinclair and Kelman (2013) warn that this sense of uniqueness within the community can act as a limiting factor especially if the community itself has been marginalized. They explain that if the community originally has enjoyed little access to having their voices heard, by being further engaged “in an act of community such as a community theatre event can be compelling and affirming, but can also raise issues of power and cultural dominance” (p. 33). The community would then be more entrenched into believing in their disadvantaged position within the larger community, and that they would always be viewed as ‘the other’. Therefore, it is crucial for the team involved in playbuilding to find opportunities to define themselves through their shared experiences and sense
of belonging, but not allow the definition of what their community means to limit them.

2.4 Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this chapter has guided me in the planning of the research and playbuilding processes. It supported my understanding of self-efficacy and the way it can be affected by different sources which are crucial aspects for this study. I was able to clearly identify the sources of influence that were effective or ineffective in affecting the children’s sense of self-efficacy in the playbuilding process. In addition, I was able to critically examine in my study the benefits of participation in drama programmes based on the literature in this chapter and analyse the similarities and differences in the benefits I observed through the playbuilding process.

Within this comprehensive examination of literature that spanned across three main aspects of my research question, namely: self-efficacy; impacts of participation in drama; and playbuilding, it is unclear the specific role improvisatory and collaborative playbuilding process play in enhancing self-efficacy. This study attempts to explore this gap in the literature, seeking to explain how improvisatory and collaborative playbuilding processes contribute to the development of self-efficacy in a particular group of children from low-income homes in Singapore. The culture and challenges of the children in the study differ
greatly from the youth discussed in the literature in this chapter. This research study is intended to shed light on how playbuilding may work to enhance self-efficacy in the Singaporean context. I recognize that a study of this nature may not produce generalizable outcomes and hope, instead, to provide a rich and detailed analysis of the process to inform other practitioners working with playbuilding processes and young people, elsewhere. My desire is that other facilitators of playbuilding will be able to find resonances and connections in their own practice and that this will lead to a deeper understanding of the potential for playbuilding to enhance self-efficacy in young participants.
Chapter 3
Methodology

This research study was the second time RSC and I were collaborating together using playbuilding as the method of working in drama. The first time was in 2014 as mentioned in Chapter One. From the first experience, I learnt important lessons both in facilitating the playbuilding process for the children and also about using appropriate methods to collect data that informed my work. The first playbuilding programme in 2014 with the children presented issues and challenges that were connected to the pre-adolescents’ senses of identities and dispositions. The children were eager to participate in playbuilding and demonstrated great interest in wanting to create a performance for an invited audience. However, during the programme, they were uncooperative, highly critical of themselves and demonstrated a low sense of self-esteem. Some of the children openly berated themselves for their lack of abilities and declared that they were incapable of performing. They often articulated statements of self-doubt but their attitudes and behaviours changed as they became more engaged in the playbuilding process. At the end of the playbuilding programme, the children proudly performed their original performance to a room full of family and friends from the public rental estate. The young people explained during the post-performance dialogue session that they enjoyed the playbuilding process as they could share their stories with the audience.
The experience with the children in that programme reaffirmed much of what I had learnt about drama when I was pursuing my Master of Education degree specialising in Drama Education. It confirmed that drama builds confidence, enables a more positive sense of identity, and encourages collaboration amongst its participants. However, I did not understand what I had done or what exactly about the children’s membership in the drama programme enabled the eventual positive dispositions and behaviours. There were obvious gaps and questions in my knowledge and understanding.

This research study was inspired by the gaps and questions I had at the conclusion of the drama programme in 2014. My foray into the extensive body of literature examining the impacts and effects of participation in drama further illuminated the benefits of drama in child and youth development (Bruun, 2017; Burton, 2010; Burton & O'Toole, 2009; Carson, 2012; Gallagher et al., 2010; Gallagher & Lortie, 2007; Gallagher et al., 2017; Hughes & Ruding, 2013; Hughes & Wilson, 2004; Neelands, 2012; Neelands & Nelson, 2013; O’Connor, 2009, 2016) but there were still questions left unanswered. There was a gap between the benefits of drama and the role it plays in enabling positive efficacy in children from economically marginalized homes. My review of the literature further revealed that one of the areas that warranted investigation, as mentioned earlier, was how playbuilding processes contributed to enhancing the self-efficacy of young people.
Thus, the central question for this research study is:

‘How does participating in collaborative and improvisatory drama playbuilding processes enable a positive sense of self-efficacy in children from low-income families in Singapore?’

Bandura’s (1982) seminal research in self-efficacy suggests that it is the central mechanism to human agency, and that self-efficacy correlates with a person’s sense of confidence and identity. This study was designed to investigate how participation in playbuilding enabled a more positive sense of self-efficacy in children from economically impoverished homes in Singapore, and in turn, how their sense of identity and agency became affected.

The research methods employed in this study were carefully deliberated based on my experiences in 2014. It was critical that the research methods captured the rich and complex stories offered by the children during the playbuilding process. The narratives and voices that arose from the drama processes allow us to understand at a deeper level the young people’s challenges and difficulties as children from economically impoverished homes and neighbourhood, and how these affected their sense of self-efficacy and identities. The methods employed in this research also aimed to facilitate a wide-angled lens approach (Ackroyd, 2006; O’Toole, 2006; Punch & Oancea, 2014; Stake, 1995) towards studying the
nuances in the children’s behaviours and how their dispositions were affected through the playbuilding journey.

### 3.1 Qualitative Research: Telling the Story of Their Stories

This study sits within the paradigm of qualitative research. Taylor (1998) claims that “the qualitative researcher is interested in probing the moment” (p. 131) while Stake (1995) suggests “qualitative researchers have pressed for understanding the complex interrelationships among all that exists” (p. 37). The playbuilding programme presented many moments for further probing and digging to fully understand the complexities present in the lives of the children. The relationships between the children and the impacts of the social identities on their personal identities called for a qualitative research design that was able to tell as complete a story as possible of the children’s narratives. Qualitative research enables the study of the multifactorial influences (Tsang et al., 2012) that affected the children’s sense of self-efficacy by empathetically looking at the stories that unfolded during the playbuilding processes. I agree with Creswell (2012) that the qualitative research methodology creates the space to harness and represent the voices of the participants within the research process. O’Toole (2006) suggests that research “is qualitative when they need to collect, interpret and make judgements about data that cannot be measured – such as what people say and do, and why” (p. 31, italics in original). The experience of working with children from the same rental estate in 2014 informed me that a qualitative research
methodology would potentially encapsulate the richness of the narratives that illuminate through the playmaking processes. The qualitative research approach enabled me to look at the children’s narratives from their perspectives, uncovering the stories they wished to tell and then retelling them through the research.

The playbuilding programme spanned over thirty-two contact hours, broken into two phases of sixteen hours each, with a total of sixteen children from Sen Ling estate in Singapore. As mentioned above, the narratives that emerged from the playbuilding process offered valuable information and insights into the lives of the children and their sense of identities, agency and efficacy. The method of working in drama required the children and I to dialogue and critically examine the narratives that were presented through the improvisatory and collaborative processes within playbuilding in order to make sense of the events in their lives. As the researcher, I was interested in drawing connections between the children’s work, impacts of their participation in the drama process and my praxis to understand how their sense of self-efficacy had been affected. Tsang et al. (2012) recommended studying self-efficacy using a methodology other than quantitative studies to allow for the study of the “full interplay amongst the person, their behaviour, and the environment in human functioning” (p. 5).

According to Stake (1995) “standard qualitative designs call for the persons most responsible for interpretations to be in the field, making observations, exercising
subjective judgment” (p. 41). However, the same person needs to be highly aware of his or her biases and values that may influence the analysis process. In this study, I performed the roles of the researcher and facilitator of the drama workshops simultaneously. My reflection notes after each playbuilding session became a main source of data that supported the planning for the subsequent drama sessions and as a means of understanding the methods of working within the playbuilding processes. A detailed discussion of the reflective practice is presented in section 3.3 in this chapter.

The thirty-two-hour playbuilding programme meant that the children and I spent a considerable amount of time together to examine and dialogue about issues and events that were of importance to them. The time spent together doing drama work presented intimate details and insights into the children’s lives and environments which they made accessible to me as both the facilitator and researcher. The children’s narratives and the chance to further investigate these stories permitted me to fully understand the “particularity of the case” (Stake, 1995, p. 39). It further crystalised the fact that the children’s construct and their circumstances were unique from other social groups even if they had shared similar socio-economic backgrounds due to the environment they lived in and the social relationships they shared with each other. This qualitative research study therefore enabled me to look deeply into the particularity of the children’s construct of self-efficacy from multiple angles and through the different roles I play.
3.2 Case Study

Stake (2005) argues that a case study could be both an approach to doing research and an entity on its own, meaning it acts as a report of the case under study. In this research, the focus is fixed on the playbuilding processes used which affected the sense of self-efficacy in the children. The playbuilding programme was examined as an entity in the form of a case study where I investigated and examined critically the nuances of shifts in the children’s senses of identities and agency that affected the young people’s efficacy. The research process followed O’Toole’s (2006) recommendation of “identifying, then observing, and documenting a ‘typical’ or an ‘untypical’ or ‘deviant’ example, and then analyse the data, looking for its special characteristics” (p. 44) in the case study. Stake (1995) shares the same view as O’Toole and explains that a case study offers the opportunity for a researcher to “know extensively and intensively about a single case” (p. 36). Yin (2014) further suggests that a case study approach “allows the investigators to focus on a ‘case’ and retain a holistic and real-world perspective – such as studying individual life cycles, small group behavior” (p. 4). The study of the role improvisatory and collaborative playbuilding processes played in enabling the sense of self-efficacy in the children required a highly focused approach to examining the multiple internal and external factors that influenced the children’s construct.
This research adopted a descriptive case study approach and examined the bounded system (Stake, 1995) within which the playbuilding project took place. Here, the case was bounded by:

i. Location: the children lived in one of the four apartment blocks in Sen Ling estate and they frequented the same playground within the estate

ii. Socio-economic status: the children and their families came from households with combined family incomes of SGD1500 or lower in Singapore

iii. Time: the playbuilding project took place for thirty-two hours over three months between March and May 2015

iv. Participants: the young people in the project were aged between six and twelve. They were able to access the programme because of their location in the Sen Ling estate.

Furthermore, I identified this research as a descriptive case study as it provides narrative accounts (Yin, 2014) from the participants’ and my perspective.

The narratives that had emerged through the playbuilding process painted a collective picture of the children’s struggles against the obstacles and issues inherent in the community they lived in and how the young people’s sense of identities and self-efficacy were affected. Hancock and Algozzine (2016) claim that “case study research is richly descriptive because it is grounded in deep and varied sources of information” (p. 16) as evidenced in this case study. The result
was an intensive examination of the data that emerged in a process which O’Toole (2006) explains as the interpretation of “the nature of the power structures and the interaction of the participants within them” (p. 46).

The focus on the single case allowed for an intimate investigation to make meaningful interpretations and construction of understanding (O’Toole, 2006). The narratives presented by the children and the collaborative process of contributing personal experiences to the shared narratives of the community meant there were multiple pathways for me to make sense of the data emerging. The study of the multiple factors affecting the children and the way they viewed and met challenges formed a rich backdrop to my understanding of how their membership in the drama programme enabled their sense of self-efficacy and created alternative identities that were separate from the ones they held in the playground.

3.3 A Reflective Practitioner Approach

The reflective practitioner approach in this qualitative case study formed an important method of working for me as the facilitator of the playbuilding programme. At the same time, it provided a rich source of data that explained the use of playbuilding processes discussed in Chapter Four. As the reflective practitioner, I engaged constantly in reflections-in-action (Schön, 1983) as I worked with the children in playbuilding. These were thoughts and actions that
occurred in response to the events in the workshops and very often, I was not conscious of such thought processes until I pondered over them after the playbuilding sessions. O'Mara (1999) suggests that these instinctive responses and actions are “Tacit knowledge… (that is) not a part of conscious decision making when working in action” (p. 39). The years I spent as a classroom teacher and then as an applied theatre practitioner have built a body of knowledge in me and the ability to respond instinctively to a situation when I feel something was working or not. The instinct became my reflections-in-action when I conducted this playbuilding programme with the children in the study. The reflections-on-action (Schön, 1983) were the records and notes I made of the thoughts that had occurred during the playbuilding process and decisions I made in response to the situations that arose. The recorded reflections read like a constant dialogue I had with myself throughout the playbuilding programme, raising questions and sometimes answering those questions.

The reflections-on-action notes together with the conversations and debrief sessions with Zaty after each workshop informed my planning process for subsequent playbuilding sessions. However, unexpected situations would arise during the workshops that required an immediate response and sometimes, a complete change of plans on my part. I responded to these situations with my ‘in-action’ reflections. For example, in Phase One, sensing the social hierarchy present amongst the children in the room when we started the playbuilding session, I immediately devised the method of working in tableaux where the
children formed the collective image individually and independently. This method of working in tableaux is discussed in Chapter Four. The original plan was to place the children in random groups and have them work collaboratively through discussion and rehearsal before they presented their collective images. The low levels of English abilities within the group of children further prompted me to make decisions to change the way I had intended to work spontaneously. After the workshop ended that evening, I recorded my reflections-on-action that discussed and questioned my method of working with the children that afternoon, and the behaviours and narratives of the children that had been presented as a result.

The large body of data collected through the reflection log meant I acted as the primary data collection instrument (Merriam, 2002). I studied and observed the events in the playbuilding process and documented the research process through a written and annotated reflection journal. The reflections became a valuable record which I referred to during the analysis phase to understand how the data collected contradicted or corroborated to form distinct pictures of the children’s behaviours and dispositions during the playbuilding process. The reflective practitioner approach in this study resonated with Taylor’s (1998) suggestion of how professionals find solutions to the problems we face on a regular basis.

The data from my log book enabled me to establish “an empathetic understanding for the reader, through description, sometimes thick description” (Stake, 1995, p. 39 italics in original) when telling the story of the research. The voice used in the
reporting of this study was located within my identities as the drama facilitator, the researcher and also the reflective practitioner. The reflections represented my thoughts relating to the different roles that I undertook within this single research project and illustrated as complete a picture as possible of my perceptions of the participants’ construct of self-efficacy through drama. Punch and Oancea (2014) suggest that a researcher needs to have empathy towards the community being researched and at the same time check that the researcher’s personal values do not unintentionally marginalise or silence the concerns of the community.

My recorded reflections through the different roles I played in the study became a means for me to clearly see the contributions of each identity. As the drama teacher, I considered how the drama conventions and activities I employed supported and enabled their sense of self-efficacy. As the researcher, I interrogated how the children built their social capital both inside and outside of the playbuilding community and how those relationships affected their construct of self-efficacy. Lastly, as the reflective practitioner, I sought clarity in my understanding of the decisions I made before, during and after each drama session to enable their construct of a positive sense of self-efficacy. The final picture that emerged in this thesis was holographic; depending on the angle of the viewer, a different story is told, but yet these are the stories that make up a single picture. The ‘thick description’ of each angle in this study presents the
readers with an embodied and empathetic understanding of the children’s world of efficacy construction.

3.4 The Partner: Rainbow Service Center

RSC was the official host for this research study while NAC partially funded this project. As the host, RSC provided the space for the drama work and the community worker, Zaty, was the main contact point between the children and myself for all correspondences and communication outside of the playbuilding work. Zaty also attended most of the playbuilding sessions in Phase One as a participant in the playbuilding process and to facilitate classroom management when that was required. Gee, RSC’s Chief Executive Officer, and I met in early March 2015 to discuss the objectives of the research. At the same time, he agreed and supported the request to have Zaty attend all the playbuilding sessions. Gee recognized that Zaty shared a very close relationship with the children in the rental estate and he felt that she might be able to provide support to me in the form of an inside eye to the circumstances confronting the children. Recruitment of the children into the playbuilding programme began immediately when Zaty conducted her home visits and she introduced the research study to

4 Pseudonym used for the youth worker

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the parents and caregivers in the rental estate. She also publicized the programme to the children who were enrolled into some of the other after-school activities organized by RSC.

3.5 Participants in the Research Study

A group of sixteen children aged between six and twelve years old eventually completed the thirty-two-hour playbuilding programme. Only one child – a twelve-year-old girl belonged to the Chinese ethnic group, the other children belonged to the Malay ethnic group. The age and ethnic composition of the participants in the playbuilding programme were formed randomly as participation was completely voluntary and membership in the playbuilding programme was offered to all the children in the estate. The children understood that they were free to leave the playbuilding programme whenever they wished.

Zaty informed me that many families in the public rental estate where the children lived experienced long periods of poverty and for some families, the situation spanned across generations. Substance dependency, incarceration and unemployment plagued many of the adults in the community and many amongst those who worked struggled to support as many as five to eight children. The children in the research study were in similar situations as Ewing’s (2013) description of those who “fall into inter-generational cycle of poverty” (p. 84). Several of the participants in the study were suspected to be suffering from
malnutrition as they were much smaller than most children of the same age. A few of them did not attend school regularly.

3.6 The Research Process and Timeline

The initial meeting in with Gee and Zaty before the research study established the parameters of the playbuilding programme and the support RSC was committed to offer. The thirty-two-hour playbuilding took place over two phases. Phase One happened daily during the one-week March school holidays and each session was four hours in duration. Phase Two started in April and was planned for weekly sessions of three-hours each. The Singapore academic calendar for primary schools ran from mid-March after the short term break to the last week of May. It was therefore impossible to arrange for a second round of intensive sessions immediately after Phase One. At the same time, we did not want to wait for the mid-year school holidays to offer Phase Two of the playbuilding programme as we had both decided that the period of time between the two phases was too long. Appendix A shows the dates and times of the workshops.

The experience in 2014 had also taught me that an independent observer, someone else besides me recording observations of the playbuilding processes would provide an additional layer to the data collection. I employed the reflective practitioner method in examining my praxis in the playbuilding programme in 2014. However, I realized that even when supported by video recordings,
were gaps in the data collected which were crucial in understanding specific events that had happened during the workshops. The use of an independent observer in this research study greatly filled the gaps in the data collection process. The observation notes provided information to aspects of the playbuilding process that I had missed in my reflections and the video recordings had failed to capture sufficiently due to poor audio and visual qualities when the children were far away from the camera.

3.7 Ethics

Ethics approval for this study was granted by Griffith University’s Institutional Review Board on 16 October 2014 (Ref: EDN/08/14/HREC).

Zaty visited the children’s homes with the consent forms to explain the research and playbuilding processes to the young people’s parents and caregivers. That helped greatly to ensure we had the informed consent to collect data from the children. At the same time, I explained in simple English to the children when they attended the first playbuilding workshop to ensure that they understood their rights and what their participation entailed in this research project. Consent forms were provided in English, Chinese and Malay (See Appendix B).

The second ethical consideration I had prior to the start of the project was my position as the facilitator and researcher working intensively and closely with the
children. My background and the roles I played in the project continued to produce some sensitivities on my part about the way I was working and my relationship with the children. I was sensitive to the fact that I was an ethnic Chinese female from a middle-class background who was well-educated. I was working with a predominantly ethnic Malay group of children with the exception of Pris who was ethnic Chinese and all were residents in the subsidized low-income estate. Many of the children did not speak much English and several of them did not attend school regularly. The way I spoke English language had immediately drawn a clear distinction between them and me, I spoke fluent English while the children spoke very little of the language. The common language between us was Singlish, a colloquial form of the English language. However, I was made aware that even when I attempted to connect with them by speaking in Singlish, my version of the language was too proper and lacked ‘street credibility’. Furthermore, my position as the outsider in the community had presented some ethical considerations throughout the project as I examined the narratives that emerged through the playbuilding process.

3.7.1 Consent and Assent

A consent form with a letter in English clearly explaining the research project and its aims and reporting manner was given to parents or caregivers when Zaty did her home visits. The letter was translated into two other languages - Malay and Chinese, the two commonly used languages in Singapore. I was aware that
some of the children’s parents and caregivers were illiterate and were unable to read the letters given to them in any language. Since I did not have access to the contact information of the children, Zaty took on the task to explain the contents of the letters to the parents or caregivers.

The inconsistent attendance and the absent-mindedness of the children caused some problems to the collection of the signed consent and assent forms. I eventually managed to collect the consent and assent forms from all the children by the start of Phase Two of the playbuilding programme. This meant that throughout the playbuilding programme, data collection from the children began at different junctures depending on the date they returned the forms to me.

In this report the names of all children, the community workers and the partnering organisation have been replaced by pseudonyms to protect their identities and to prevent them from being identified. In addition, any research outputs in the forms of publications, conference presentations and the thesis will not contain information that would make the children identifiable, a deliberate consideration which Punch and Oancea (2014) describe as a process of anonymization. However, I struggled with anonymization as a way of protecting the children because it was important to describe the unique characteristics of their environment which had significant meanings in the children’s narratives. In the end, I had to be highly selective in the amount of contextual information and description of the residential estate I chose to include in the reporting without
compromising the relationship between the children’s narratives and the environments.

I was conscious of my position as an outsider to the community and at the same time, I was an insider in the project. It was critical that in my reporting of the research, I honoured and respected the narratives and voices of the children. Kandil (2016) reminds us that “The process in which we elicited these personal narratives respected their preciousness” (pg. 203) but the process of retelling these stories was equally important. My thesis thus tried to recount these stories and situate them within contexts whereby the audience understood the reasons for the narratives and their meanings. At the same time, I had to be careful that the contextual information would not allow the children to be identified.

3.8 Data Collection

The data collection tools used in this study were informed by the experience I had in 2014. Punch and Oancea (2014) suggest allowing the events in the research to determine which data collection tool was most suitable in capturing the voices of the participants. They termed this as the “structure-after” (p. 114) approach and explained that such a method allowed for flexibility in the data collection process that was not restricted to a fixed plan which might rigidly follow a schedule. Yin (2014) offered similar recommendations and explains that a researcher needs to make “intelligent decisions throughout the data collection
process” (p. 79) once it had started. He cautioned against using a “rigid formula” to seek for answers to the research questions but instead, the researcher should be led by the emerging data to guide him or her in the quest for further clarity and knowledge. Therefore, in this research study, I chose to be ready with my bag of data collections tools at all times and deployed them at the appropriate moments so as to capture the data whenever opportunities arose. The interviews, focus group discussions and debrief sessions were conducted when the need arose. However, video recording, observation notes by an independent observer, my reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action notes were a staple at every playbuilding session. The full set of data included:

- My own written reflections
- Observation notes written by a student of mine from Singapore Polytechnic
- Videos of all workshops and presentations
- Interviews (individual with Zaty and five children) audio-recorded. Each interview lasted between five to thirty minutes
- Debrief sessions with Zaty video-recorded. Each session lasted between thirty minutes to one hour.
- Drawings and writings by the children during the playbuilding process
3.8.1 Reflection journal

Etherton and Prentki (2006) advise drama practitioners to “have ideas of how to reform our praxis in order to contribute to long-term solutions” (p. 143) without having the false confidence that we are doing good work when it is actually ineffective. It was of great importance to me to examine my praxis and understand how my method of working in playbuilding could facilitate the process of enhancing self-efficacy for the children. Therefore, my reflection journal became an important resource that I turned to each time I was planning the playbuilding workshops. On one hand, it served the primary role as a record for my thought processes and choice of playbuilding methods used in the workshops. On the other hand, it was also reflected the dispositions, behaviours and creative process of the children that had an impact in my planning. The reflection journal documented the honest dialogue I was having with myself and provided evidence to explain my efficacy as the facilitator in the playbuilding programme.

The reflection journal further reflected my on-action thoughts when I was working with the children to build the performance. Some of the on-action notes were scribbled hurriedly during the playbuilding process to record an interesting event, thought or verbal articulation from the children before I returned my attention to the playbuilding process with the children again. Many of the notes contained questions of why a particular incident was happening, or why a child was behaving or responding differently or indifferently. They also contained many
instances which Fels (2012) termed as the “ah ha” moments when something suddenly made sense to me and had prompted me to pursue a particular direction in the playbuilding process. These moments were more instinctual responses based on my reading of the situation and my understanding of the children thus far in the programme. I also challenged myself to consider whether I was allowing pre-conceptions to creep into my reading of the data, rather than allowing the data to speak. Appendix C shows an example of my reflection notes.

The post event reflections were ways for me to re-look and re-examine what had happened in the playbuilding process, and to critically examine how I responded in my method of working with the children. The reflection notes were usually made within three hours after each workshop, and they were recorded with the benefit of the distance of time after each playbuilding session. I found my reflections-on-action to be calmer in tone and truly more thoughtful as compared to the reflections I made in-action which were often spontaneous and instinctive responses. However, both the in-action and on-action reflections informed the data analysis as they provided another layer to explain how the data corroborated or refuted each other.

3.8.2 Observation notes

Phyllis, a second-year student in Singapore Polytechnic reading applied drama and psychology, acted as the observer for the playbuilding workshops. I had
taught Phyllis when she was a first-year student in the Polytechnic and felt that she had both the skills and disposition to undertake this role. The young woman’s task was, as Stake (1995) recommends, to look, observe and record the events objectively.

Observation notes are crucial in research because they provide information through the eyes of the observer which could help to answer some of the questions that arose through the research process (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016; Yin, 2014). In my research, I had made the decision that the observation notes were recorded without “predetermined categories and classifications… (but) in a more natural open-ended way” (Punch & Oancea, 2014, p. 196) with an ethnographic slant. Phyllis sat in a corner of the room which gave her unrestricted view and immersed herself in the events taking place. There were moments when an intense discussion was going on with one group, or a fight had broken out in a separate part of the room, Phyllis took the initiative to shift her seat nearer so that she could capture what was going on without interrupting or being intrusive. It was also interesting for me to note that the children had ignored her presence most of the time. It was as though they knew she was in the room, but they would not acknowledge her existence unless they had to, which often involved asking her to help them get a drink or a snack during the break time.

Observation of the events and the children’s behaviour were recorded as they unfolded during the drama sessions, and notes taken remained as factual
accounts of what had happened without an attempt to interpret or explain the events. I insisted that it was important to record entirely what was happening in each drama session without looking for, or being restricted by the identification of some patterns of behaviour only to satisfy certain predetermined criteria set out by the observer or the researcher (Punch & Oancea, 2014). However, I did include a column in the observation sheet for Phyllis to pen questions or thoughts down, and she would raise them after the drama workshops when we had debriefing sessions. Appendix D shows an example of the observation notes.

The observations became an important source of data when the camera, fixed at a corner of the room with a wide angled lens, failed to capture certain events that happened at the device’s blind spot. It was also another source of information when my reflection journals raised questions about how a child was behaving or responding, I would check Phyllis’ notes to see if she had observed the event and what had happened from her perspective. The observation notes were the ‘third eye’ in the room that offered me another perspective that was crucial during the data analysis.

3.8.3 Interviews and debriefs

According to Stake (1995), semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions capture the individual voices of the participants involved, the stakeholders and gatekeepers of the research site. Tsang et al. (2012) echoed
and further advocated in their conceptual review of self-efficacy as a positive youth construct that "semi-structured interview is most useful for capturing both the objective and subjective aspects of self-efficacy beliefs, and the nature and processes of the influence of these beliefs on performance" (p. 2). O’Toole (2006) shares the same view and claims that the “semi-structured interview gives the opportunity for the unexpected insight to be collected” (p. 115, italics in original).

I had adopted both semi-structured and unstructured individual interviews and focus group discussions with the children and youth worker throughout the research study. This allowed the opportunity to pursue a different trajectory during the interview or focus group process to pursue an interesting point the interviewee(s) had brought up for further clarification or discussion. The interviews and focus group discussions with the children and youth worker were informal and unplanned. They were triggered by something that had just happened in the playbuilding, or as a result of the playbuilding process and I felt the need to pursue a deeper level of understanding about what was happening. The questions I asked at the interview or focus group discussions were influenced by what I had seen or heard just minutes earlier. For example, in Phase One of the programme, I sat with Rut during the break and interviewed him after he had contributed to the playground tableau of bullying. He stood rigid to the ground with his fists clenched so tightly by his side that his entire body shook. His eyes were fixed with great intensity at the bully in the frozen image. This incident is
discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four. My questions were driven by his response to the bullying image created and I wanted to find out what had inspired his response and how he was feeling at that moment.

Punch and Oancea (2014) explain that group interactions, in the form of focus group discussions, can “surface aspects of a situation that might not otherwise be exposed” (p. 186). They also suggest that the group interaction may encourage the participants to clarify their views and perceptions for the benefit of everyone involved, and it may also stimulate further conversation amongst the group. The children’s behaviours resonated with Punch and Oancea’s explanation. The children were more willing to speak and respond when I approached them as a group. With the focus group interactions, the children, especially the older boys, became less inhibited to speak. Most were eager to build on what another child had said and agreed or disagreed enthusiastically, before giving their views on the matter. I noted a sharp contrast in the older boys’ responses to focus group discussions and one-to-one interviews. My attempts to engage them in individual interviews were not successful. Zaty explained that the children might have associated one-to-one conversations as ‘they were in trouble’ (Personal communication, 17 April 2015). Tin remarked when I sat next to him for a chat, ‘Eh, cher (colloquial term for ‘Teacher’), why you sit here talk to me? I scared. Like you want scold me like that’ (Video Transcription - Phase Two, 10 June 2015). The children were isolated and spoken to when they
misbehaved at the RSC and thus, Zaty suspected the children drew the association that they were in trouble when I sat next to them.

3.8.4 Children's writing and drawings

Punch and Oancea (2014) propose that visual images are used and analysed “as data in their own right … (and) as prompts, in support of other methods” (p. 208). The children’s drawings and writings were not self-explanatory and could not be analysed as entities on their own. The drawings were interpreted and analysed together with the playbuilding work, one-to-one conversations and group interactions. Discussion sessions between myself and Zaty further helped to crystalised or clarified the interpretations I made to create a deeper meaning to the analysis. The drawings and writing were useful sources of data that supported or contradicted the information gathered through other data collection methods to produce a rich and intense picture to help answer the research question.

During the playbuilding process, the children produced short pieces of writing and drawings. The children in the drama programme struggled with the English language and they were not highly literate. They had difficulties expressing themselves and therefore drawing became an alternative way of expression and at the same time, contributed as another form of data and a tool in playbuilding to substantiate the discussions and sharing during the theatre making process.
The writings and drawings “provide(d) a particularly fertile field for more subtle and indirect forms of data collection” (O’Toole, 2006). The drawings became valuable data for interpretation and understanding the children’s view of the world, and how they thought others saw their world and them. Rut’s response to the topic of aspirations was a picture of a monster. The boy could not write but when he did his show-and-tell of the picture, he said he was a monster (See Appendix E). The drawings and writing provided an avenue for the children to share stories about particular situations or feelings that they had, which they otherwise had difficulties and limited opportunities to articulate.

3.8.5 Video recording

All drama sessions were video recorded using a camera set with a wide-angled lens in the corner of the room. The video recordings served as a visual documentation of the events during the playbuilding programme. The videos were most helpful in situations when details were missing or vague in my reflection journal, and they provided another angle to what I thought was really happening in the room. During reflective viewings, the video recordings proved to be an important source of re-immersing myself back into the drama process, reminding me of the situations and events that took place over the thirty-two hours of drama work. When analysed together with the children’s artwork, writings, the observation notes and my journal, highly emotive and intriguing pictures are formed. The videos showed up nuances and subtleties which were missed when
I watched and re-watched them again during the transcription phase and eventually, in their entirety for analysis.

3.9 Analysis

The playbuilding community formed the main case study unit but at the same time, I have highlighted four children in my analysis as they demonstrated behaviours and elements of efficacy that were evident in many of the other children. I recognized that although the children shared similar backgrounds and were enrolled in the same process, each child responded to the process differently. My experience in the playbuilding programme in 2014 informed me that there was a need to investigate the contextual factors that framed the lived experiences of the participating children. The children in this study shared similar socio-economic statuses and were engaged in similar social groups. There was therefore, a crucial need to also focus on interaction and influence of the factors that affected efficacy between the children in the study to understand deeply and intimately how their construct of self-efficacy and identities were affected by the playbuilding process.

The data analysis process reminded me of a little game my grandmother used to play with me when I was in preschool. It was a simple game of sorting out the coloured beans; she would put into a bowl different coloured beans and get me to sort them out according to types or colours. The game kept me occupied for
hours on end, and my grandmother who was my main caregiver would be able to get on with her chores at home. I would invent new ways to sort the beans, using chopsticks to pick out the beans and dropping them into the different bowls for sorting, or using a spoon to scoop up a handful of beans and just focusing on that lot first before scooping up another lot for sorting, and many other different ways. But regardless of what methods I had invented, I always had to go through the sorting bowls of beans repeatedly to make sure that they contained the correct coloured beans and had not been mixed with a bean of a different colour.

Analysing the data for my research work at Sen Ling seemed to follow a similar process. The external hard drive, where I stored all the data collected in carefully labelled folders, was the big bowl that contained all the different coloured beans. Just as the beans were used for different culinary purposes, some sweet and some savoury, these data served different purposes to inform me, the researcher, of the multiple angles and lenses available to look at a single issue or topic that had arisen. Some of the beans could complement each other and be used in a single pot of soup, just as some of the data corroborates to tell a richer and more robust story.

Yin (2014) suggests the framework for data analysis arises from the initial literature review conducted. The literature review “revealed gaps or topics of interest to (me), spurring (my) interest in doing a case study” (p. 140). From the
literature review conducted, the following topics were identified to guide the data analysis process:

- the sources of information which affect the sense of self-efficacy in children and youth; namely:
  - Performance attainments
  - Vicarious experiences of observing others
  - Verbal persuasion and allied types of social influences
  - Physiological states
  - Imaginal experiences

- engagement in the drama affects its participants, particularly children and youth in their:
  - identity formation
  - sense of agency
  - ability to adopt/empathise with multiple/different perspectives
  - desire to take risks in a safe and controlled environment
  - ability to collaborate with others
  - sense of ownership and control over a task

I examined data gathered from the playbuilding process guided by the themes identified in the literature review together with my experience in the 2014 playbuilding project. My prior experience and the review of literature allowed me
to establish initial categories before the analysis started. However, I kept a keen eye for new sorting bowls, in the forms of themes, questions or behaviours that were previously not observed in the 2014 project nor discussed in the literature review. The new sorting bowls were examined closely during the data analysis and again at the reporting phase to ensure that these were new themes that had emerged from the research and not preexisting ones that masqueraded as new findings. For example, categories such as ‘Identity’, ‘Collaboration’ and ‘Ownership’ were decided in advance, as a result of the literature reviewed and the project in 2014. New categories, such as ‘Role of facilitator’, ‘Relationship with Zaty’ and ‘Enablers to Self-efficacy’ in the study, were added when the emerging data did not fit into the existing ones (Stake, 1995).

The data collected in this study were organised after each drama session into digital folders in the external hard drive and analysis began concurrently. Stake (1995) advised that analysis of data can begin at any time after data collection has started and the process involves “taking something apart” (p. 71) and then putting it back together to paint a picture for deeper understanding through from the first impressions to the final compilation of events that were being studied. After each drama session, the data collected via observation notes, video recordings, recorded interviews, researcher’s reflection notes during and after the drama session, and the debrief conducted with the youth worker were carefully and meticulously organized into the different categories. Punch and Oancea (2014) advised that it is important to visit and revisit the data constantly to identify
the “emerging insights” (p. 219) and also to ensure that none of the data had escaped the necessary attention that was due to it. It later resulted in an elaborate mindmap that was recorded on the mindmap application ‘Mindomo’ and served as an important tool for analysis (See Appendix F).

The treatment of the data immediately after each drama session allowed “the gradual building of an explanation (that) is similar to the process of refining a set of ideas, in which an important aspect is again to entertain other plausible or rival explanations” (Yin, 2014, p. 150 italics in original). Yin (2014) elaborates that in case studies, using a pattern-matching logic in the analysis framework is “one of the most desirable techniques” (p. 143) as the empirical studies formed the basis for the inquiries while the emerging data might reveal differing explanations.

3.10 Reporting in this Study: Language

This thesis draws extensively on the children’s narratives that emerged during the playbuilding process. From the young people’s stories and voices, I make connections and interpretations to explain how the playbuilding process facilitated their re-examination of selves and futures which impacted their sense of agency and self-efficacy. I feel strongly that the children’s voices must be represented accurately to reflect their true selves, and in this thesis, I have chosen to use the young people’s original words recorded in interviews, debriefs and videos.
Many of the children were not proficient in the English language despite attending Singapore schools where English is taught as a first language. The young people mostly communicated with each other in Malay, and with me, they used *Singlish*, a colloquial form of the English language peppered with a mixture of local Chinese dialects, Chinese, Malay and Tamil. The sentence structures and choice of vocabulary words used in the children's language might not resonate with a native English speaker but they are not grammatically or syntactically incorrect according to the way *Singlish* is spoken.

### 3.11 Limitations of the Study

This research study with sixteen children in a low-income rental estate in Singapore is unique in its contexts and parameters. While the findings of this research are non-transferrable I hope they may resonate and inform other practitioner who are interested in undertaking projects of this nature. Furthermore, this thirty-two-hour study spanning over three months did not consider the impacts of the playbuilding processes on the children after the conclusion of the programme. The lack of opportunity for follow-up with the participants after the playbuilding programme ended made it impossible to examine if the demonstration of positive self-efficacy by some of the children during the playbuilding programme had transferred into other aspects of their lives.
In the ensuing chapters, I share the analysis of this descriptive case study. I provide detailed accounts of the methods used in the playbuilding process and the shifts in the children's identities and efficacy levels during their membership in the programme. I also discuss the role of the facilitator in the programme and the impact of a close working relationship with the community worker from the social service organization. The final chapter of this thesis concludes the findings of this study and completes the story of this research.
Chapter 4

Playbuilding: Developing a Way Forward

This chapter analyses specifically two improvisatory and collaborative techniques I used throughout the thirty-two hours of playbuilding in the research study. It also considers my role as the facilitator and the working relationship I shared with Zaty across the length of the project. Due to the heavy reflective practitioner approach adopted in this research, the techniques employed and devised in this playbuilding programme were results of my reflections during and after each drama session with the children. My conversations with Zaty also contributed to the reflective and planning process as we considered and dialogued over the workshop events and drama work presented, and I trialled different ways of approaching the playbuilding process. To this end I examine my position as an outsider to the community and how the combination of insider (Zaty) and outsider (myself) assisted in the construction of an intricate bridge to enable personal narratives from the children to emerge.

Relying predominantly on the reflections documented as the playbuilding workshops were happening and post-workshops discussions, I discuss the development of different ways of working in tableaux to facilitate the playbuilding process. The different ways of working in tableaux are discussed in greater details in sections 4.1 and 4.2 in this chapter. At this juncture, I think it is important
to note that I did not always have a pre-determined plan of what I was going to do during the playbuilding process. Each playbuilding session was very much led by the reflection-in-action moments that Fels (2012) described as “interruption, tugs on the sleeves” (p. 51) when I decided to use a particular drama convention or technique to advance the playbuilding work we were doing. The reason for doing so was the result of the volatile circumstances on which the entire playbuilding programme hinged. The children came into the playbuilding sessions with many different concerns or emotional stresses at different times. The playbuilding process became a way to discuss and refract these matters outside of where the issues were located, and the workshop activities generated new or alternative perspectives and ways of managing some of the emotions the children were experiencing.

This research study aimed to examine how playbuilding processes enabled positive self-efficacy in these children from the public rental estate. It was therefore important to facilitate a process where the children were able use the drama processes to explore and gain new perspectives about the issues they faced. Heathcote (2013) reminds us that teachers need to be critically aware if the students required a sense of conclusion, easement or simply a new perspective on the situation they were facing in the drama. My response to Heathcote’s reminder was to allow the children in the project to decide through the playbuilding processes if they required a conclusion, an easement or a new perspective. The children in the playbuilding project made decisions about the
types of narratives and the trajectories of these narratives they wished to pursue. I restricted my role to that of a facilitator who dug deep into my bag of theory, knowledge and practical drama tools to construct pathways for the children to investigate the narratives that surfaced and presented their stories in an aesthetically engaging format. However, Zaty who shared a close relationship and bond with the children and their families served as a conduit between the children and me. The young woman was able to fill in the gaps for my understanding of the children’s narratives by illuminating the circumstances confronting the young people outside of the playbuilding process. She also cast a special spot light on my praxis by asking questions and giving me feedback during casual chats or the debrief sessions conducted after each workshop. My identity as the outsider to the community however attracted some stories from the children which they had intended for an audience who was not a member of the public rental estate.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the children enrolled in the playbuilding programme were not completely fluent in the English language. Throughout the workshops, we communicated in a mixture of Singlish and Malay. There was an urgent need to develop methods of working within the playbuilding group that reduced the reliance on language and yet encouraged an egalitarian atmosphere. In the following sections, I analyse the methods of working in the playbuilding programme and the roles Zaty and I maintained to plug the gaps to understand and embrace the children’s worlds.
4.1 Tableaux: Sculpting and Re-imaging

In this section, I focus the discussion on the use of tableaux during the playbuilding process. The limited English language abilities amongst the children and the social hierarchy present within the group demanded a way of working that allowed the children to participate and contribute to playbuilding in an egalitarian environment. Tableaux used as the main playbuilding tool throughout the project enabled the children to present their stories physically and negated the language difficulties they faced. Prendergast and Saxton (2013) explain that “Tableaux work is very safe work for generally unskilled participants, as it only requires holding still, although there is a significant challenge in this in regard to physicality and concentration” (p. 110). Through the tableaux, the children were able to share personal stories that highlighted challenges they faced as young residents in the tough neighbourhood. I saw the need to develop a method of working in the process for the children to examine the stories shared to make sense of what was happening in their lives. It was equally important that the method of working in the drama enabled an element of conclusion, easement or understanding as Heathcote (2013) suggested.

Following, I analyse my reflections during the playbuilding process which resulted in the development of a model of working in tableaux with the children to create two original performances in both phases of the project. The reflections
discussed in this section subscribe to Schön’s (1983) theories of in-action and on-action thoughts that occurred when practitioners became reflective in, and about, their practice.

4.1.1 Tableaux as an egalitarian and collaborative way of working

On the first day of Phase One in the playbuilding project, the children were invited to present a collective tableau to show what they usually did in the playground. The intention was to familiarise the children with presenting their stories aesthetically rather than verbally. However, due to the hierarchy present within the group, I refrained from offering the children time to discuss and create the images collaboratively as I wanted to prevent the process from being dominated by a few children. The children were instructed to consider what they wanted to show about the playground and when any one of the children was ready, he or she then stepped into the performance area and offered the first image. Another child who became inspired by what was presented would then contribute contextually to the image by responding to the tableau offered. This process continued until no one else wanted to join the image created and everyone agreed that the picture formed represented the story they wished to tell collaboratively.

In that workshop, four children stepped into the performance space one after another and offered an image of a bullying scene in the playground. Ash
responded to the theme of the playground first by entering the performance space and froze into an image of someone crouching with her hands shielding her face. Her peers responded by expanding the context to include a bully and two bystanders. The final picture was a refraction of the children’s lived experiences of the playground. According to Oddey (1994) the collective narrative from members of a playbuilding community is the result of the multi-vision of the group and interpreted to form a unifying image of their world. The children had physicalised a bullying scene at the playground through their personal understanding of what happened at the communal space.

The image presented the common rhetoric of the playground, a phenomenon that spilled into the playbuilding workshops as we worked together. The older boys, specifically Tin and Sha, had shown during the first workshop that they would get rough with the other children when conflicts arose. The tableau corresponds with Cahill’s (2010) argument that the “norms and expectations of the society direct the world of the character” (p. 161). The children collaboratively created an image that resembled a scene in the playground that was familiar to them without prior discussion. They acted because they understood what another child had offered in the image and continued to build on the story presented pictorially. The young people had demonstrated, through the improvisation exercise, what Oddey (1994) describes as fragmentary experiences of their lives; where they took inspiration from people and events happening within their environment and sphere of influence.
The process of creating the collective tableau in this playbuilding project deviated from the common practice of having the participants work independently in smaller groups to discuss and rehearse the image before presenting it to the other participants for discussion. Due to the hierarchy present amongst the children, I reflected that I needed to find another way to provide every child opportunities to contribute to the playbuilding processes without being censured by the older boys or their peers. The tableaux creation exercise where only one child entered the performance space to offer an image which was then built on by another child to deepen the contextual meaning negated the challenge of the older children dominating discussions and giving directions. The method of creating a collective tableau provided an egalitarian environment as the children focused on interpreting the images presented by a peer and offering responses to further the pictorial narrative independently. However, the product was a collaborative effort by the group of actors who chose to work towards a common storyline. If a child had chosen to offer an image that was contradistinctive to what had been presented, then this method would have failed. However, throughout the two phases of the playbuilding project, the children remained focused on extending the storylines offered because it was important to them that the narratives of the estate they lived in were presented honestly. I discuss the children’s insistence in performing only authentic stories from the community in Chapter Six when the analysis moves to examining the narratives that had emerged through the playbuilding process.
4.1.2 A failed attempt at encouraging alternative perspectives through tableaux

The children’s responses to the next activity after the tableau of bullying resonated with Ewing’s (2013) argument that a person’s interpretation of the world depends on a multitude of factors ranging from religion to socio-economic backgrounds to gender and upbringing. I raised the question with the children if they thought the negative situation could improve. The exact question I posed was, “Can we stop bullying from happening?” (Video transcription – Phase One, 16 March 2015). There was immediately a unanimous and resounding ‘No!’ from the children. Tin shouted, “Cannot change la! Always like that one la!’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 16 March 2015). Through their responses, the children demonstrated an acceptance that bullying was a natural phenomenon in the neighbourhood. The young people did not think they could effect positive changes to the situation and I did not witness signs of desires for change.

The children’s rejection of an alternative narrative to the playground bullying prompted me to reflect on developing an improvisatory process that facilitated agency and different perspectives in the children. Tin’s response was the “tugs on the sleeves” (Fels, 2012, p. 51) and caused me to pause. I realised that I could have simply accepted the children’s rejection of a possible alternative and moved on to creating more tableaux showing life in the public rental estate.
However, ignoring the children’s response would signal to the young people I agreed that they were helpless individuals. Cahill (2010) argues that performance of realistic storylines could engender participants “into replications of dominant storylines, and further, because it portrays these storylines as natural and inevitable” (p. 161).

My reflection-in-action resulted in the experiment to use sculpting and re-imaging as techniques to create new tableaux. I asked for volunteers to make changes to the image offered. I asked if someone could sculpt the characters in the tableau to show what the victim or bystanders could do to stop the bullying. I had again chosen to work through creating tableaux to build the narrative instead of according time for discussion. Heathcote (2013) advises “All it demands is that children shall think from within a dilemma instead of talking about the dilemma” (p. 204) and that resonated with the way I was working in the project. I intended for the children to think empathetically about what the characters could do in the bullying scene to encourage a way of thinking that departed from common rhetoric of the playground. The invitation to sculpt and create a new image was meant to spur the young people to place themselves in the heart of the problem and seriously contemplated the options available. However, that attempt to sculpt and re-image a new tableau demonstrating an alternative narrative of the playground failed. A few children attempted to sculpt the existing images of the bystanders and victim but each change led to further confirmation that it was impossible to negate the bullying issue in the playground. The children had not
witnessed solutions to the bullying that took place in the playground and they could not imagine ways of helping themselves or others in similar situations. Instead, my attempt to encourage the young people to look at the problem from different angles hinged dangerously on confirming they were right to believe there was no resolution available. I had plunged into a deep hole and was desperate to redeem myself from the crime of engendering the dominant storyline of the community. The opportunity to further develop the method of working through sculpting and re-imaging tableaux to explore deviation and alternative perspectives from common storylines arose on the second day of the workshops.

4.1.3 Sculpting and re-imaging to explore alternatives ways of thinking and looking

On the second day of the workshop, the children were presented with the task of introducing Sen Ling estate to the President of Singapore if he were to visit. The children were given some time to think before the first person stepped up and offered an image. The other children added to what had been offered and created a tableau collectively of the arrest of illegal money lenders in the neighbourhood. We discussed what the loan sharks did in the neighbourhood when attempting to coerce payments from their debtors. Subsequently, we discussed why people borrowed from loan sharks. The children offered reasons such as lack of money due to gambling, joblessness and need to buy food. The children also said it was
not safe for them to go out at night because there were ‘bad guys around the neighbourhood’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 17 March 2015).

The loan shark problem cited by the children did not seem to be something they could resolve at their age or with their abilities. However, again I reflected that it was not right to move on to the next activity or image. I was wearing both the teacher and applied theatre facilitator hats simultaneously and felt that it was my responsibility to explore together with the children why the loan shark problem was prevalent in their estate. I reflected while in-action that I had to find a way very quickly to facilitate the playbuilding process that would enable the children to examine the loan shark problem. I recognised that the loan shark narrative presented was a refraction of the children’s life circumstances but it should not be assimilated into the structure of the performance just to make the play more exciting and sensational for an external audience. I was deeply concerned that an original performance created by the children only served to depict the young people as victims of violence and poverty when viewed by an external audience outside of the rental estate community. The lens used to watch such a performance could also be laced with a sense of voyeuristic charity as Smith et al. (2015) argued that the poor in Singapore remained largely unseen in this rich global city state. However, that was not the intention of this research study. I remained committed to devising a pathway to facilitate a positive sense of self-efficacy through the playbuilding processes.
The improvisatory activities that followed the creation of the loan shark tableau were driven by Hughes and Wilson’s (2004) argument that adolescents are able to explore the world through drama as it helps to provide new perspectives for them. The children in the drama programme had offered the loan shark story as an immediate and natural response to my proposition of showing a slice of life in the estate to the President. The image that resulted was what Cahill (2010) contends as “replications of dominant storylines” (p. 161), a realistic display of bona fide experiences. I decided to facilitate an examination of the realistic issue through an artistic lens by leading the children into the fictional world. Nicholson (2014) states that working through drama offers its participants “new ways of seeing and different ways of looking at the familiar” (p. 13). Vettraino et al. (2017) concur and explain participating in drama as “an experience of belonging to two worlds simultaneously, the real, physical world and an alternative and fictive reality” (p. 82).

I made the decision to take the narrative off to a different trajectory – we examined the circumstances that led to borrowing from loan sharks, instead of dwelling on the loan shark’s activities. Kha offered an image of a man squatting and smoking when I asked who had borrowed money from the loan sharks. He explained that the man was unemployed, so he was sitting at the coffee shop. In the end, he borrowed from the loan sharks because he needed to feed his family. I asked the children what the man could do to change his jobless status. Someone suggested that he could work at the coffee shop. I asked for a volunteer to sculpt
the image that Kha had offered into one that showed the man working. Tin came forward and changed Kha’s image to one that was standing but bent over at a table. The children immediately understood the context of the new image. Ash said excitedly, ‘He cleaning tables at the coffee shop!’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 17 March 2015). The children agreed enthusiastically.

It was not my intention to make light of the jobless situation confronting many of the adult residents in the rental community. It was a problem that RSC had been trying to tackle through their various job placement and skills re-training programmes. There had been attempts to link the jobless residents with government employment agencies and social workers, and there had been support by the VWO to encourage entrepreneurial efforts amongst the residents in the neighbourhood. However, the rental estate’s residents’ lack of, and/or inability to gain employment remained one of the key challenges RSC was facing. I did not intend to create an impression in the children that it was easy to get employment or that there was a magic wand in life that could dramatically and conveniently change a person’s circumstance from a less desirable position into one that was preferred. Instead, the improvisatory process illuminated the ‘what if’ and ‘as if’ in Peter’s (2009) description of how children’s understanding could be extended beyond re-enactment of the realistic and inevitable in drama work. She expounds that participants could be challenged to “resolve problems in analogous real-life situations in drama” (p. 10). Kha’s image of a man squatting on a chair at the coffee shop represented a lack of agency and to some degree,
helplessness. Tin sculpted and re-imaged Kha’s still image into a man who took an active role in solving a problem he had.

4.1.4 Sculpting and re-imaging imaginal experiences

According to Tsang et al. (2012), the fifth factor that affects self-efficacy is imaginal experiences. An individual who imagines and visualizes possible outcomes to a task could identify methods that would assist in negating challenges that hinder success. The process triggered the imagination of the children when they considered possible ways the man could help himself. Tin represented his imagination and visualisation through the image he sculpted. The young person identified seeking employment as a way to prevent the outcome of borrowing from loan sharks. Three other children offered to sculpt Kha’s initial image of the man squatting at the coffee shop into images of the character working behind the counter at MacDonald’s, being a cleaner and a security guard. The re-imaging of the character showed realistic jobs that commensurated with the educational and skills levels of many of the adult males in their public rental estate. I understood from Zaty that many of the residents in the estate were not educated beyond lower secondary levels.

The process of imagining possible pathways and then re-imaging the character dislodged the children from the common rhetoric of the rental estate. The young people had to distance themselves from the inevitable but realistic outcome of
borrowing and subsequently being pursued by an illegal moneylender. Instead, they were engaged in the drama to imagine and critically analyse the circumstances leading to the economic crisis confronting the jobless man. I agree with Nicholson (2016) that the distance held in the drama permitted the participants to remove themselves from the world they were familiar with so as to re-understand it. Once the children were distanced from their preconceived notions that illegal borrowing was inevitable, they were able to reconstruct the social reality the character was facing prior to borrowing. The experience of imagining and recreating the image, compounded with the ability to vicariously identify with the character in the drama facilitated a new level of understanding for the children. The sculpting and reimagining replaced the lens the children had previously and unconsciously used to view issues. The performance of the new tableaux aligns with Bundy’s (2000) argument that drama becomes the permeable sheath between fiction and real life where its participants could explore “ways of being in the world” (p. 265).

The shared process of imagining, sculpting and re-imaging provided the space and time for the children to witness the different perspectives available for looking at an issue. Peter (2009) expounds drama is a platform for participants to explore perspectives, motivations and consequences through the process of being engaged in the fiction. Bruun (2017) adds that the perspectives generated through drama participation could facilitate a transfer of understanding and values from the artistic process into reality. While I witnessed the children
participating in the exchange of different perspectives during the playbuilding process, I did not observe the young people transferring the understanding or values learnt in the creative process to the reality till Phase Two of the project. The links the children made between the fiction and their lived experiences are discussed in Chapter 5, section 5.1.

The method of sculpting and re-imaging was my response to the initial difficulties in working with the children to explore different ways of negating challenges. It provided a means to support the children in analysing and visualising possible pathways to overcome issues which they had thought were unavoidable or inevitable. I continued to use this method throughout the playbuilding process in both phases and it formed the bedrock of my praxis in this project. However, it became inadequate towards the end of Phase One. It was no longer sufficient for the children to sculpt and re-image existing tableaux to present alternatives as the young people explored more complex narratives of the neighbourhood. I needed to supplement this method of working to facilitate a collective multi-perspective response to the issues that emerged through the playbuilding process at the end of Phase One. The result was the development of the five-count improvisatory image making technique discussed in the next section.
4.2 Five-Count Improvisatory Image Making

The use of tableaux and then the development of the sculpting and re-imaging exercises were my responses to finding a way of working with the children due to the low English language abilities and the social hierarchy present. The children engaged in a cerebral process of reading and analysing the images presented and then imagined possible alternative outcomes to the problems presented through the images. There was an element of detachment, which was useful to facilitate the distance the young people needed to examine and respond to issues that corresponded with the narratives of the public rental community. However, the method of sculpting and re-imaging did not aid in creating an empathetic association for the children to the characters performed in the tableaux. The sense of agency and power the re-imaged characters represented did not resonate with the children strongly. The young people continued to suggest what the characters could do to make positive changes to their circumstances from a detached and cerebral angle. The children were analysing the tableaux with statements like ‘He can go work’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 17 March 2015), ‘They need find help’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 18 March 2015).

The reading and analysing of the tableaux with aesthetic distance provided the sense of safety required in applied theatre practice. Prendergast and Saxton (2013) recommend working through “the language of metaphor that allows participants the necessary ‘aesthetic distance’ to deal with issues that may
otherwise feel too close” (p. 3). I reflected that a balance was needed between the use of aesthetic distancing to ensure safety in the exploration of issues and the level of connection the participants might feel between themselves and the problems that emerged through the drama. Towards the end of Phase One, the children were adept at viewing the difficult issues that had emerged through the tableaux. However, there was no evidence that suggested the young people were aware that they could transfer the knowledge and skills learnt from the drama exercises into their personal lives when examining problems. The children struggled to explain their thoughts when they shared how the characters in the tableaux resonated with some of the residents in the estate. On the other hand, I reflected that I was reluctant to explain the link between the agency and power the re-imaged characters possessed and how it could serve as examples for the children when viewing the issues confronting them. I resisted doing the teacher talk and imposing my understanding and values onto the children. My post workshop reflection recorded a desire to use the improvisatory processes within playbuilding to facilitate an empathetic investigation into the issues that had emerged.

4.2.1 Testing out future identities through image making

After studying the recommendations by practitioners and theorists (Boal & Jackson, 2002; Bowell & Heap, 2001; Burton, 2010; Burton & O’Toole, 2009; Cahill, 2006, 2010, 2014; Oddey, 1994; Tarlington & Michaels, 1995; Wales, 2012)
on the use of conventions and techniques to create drama or build narratives, I ventured to develop a method of working that would facilitate empathy and resonance explicitly. The five-count improvisatory image making technique provided the platform for the children to witness the multiplicity in perspectives while maintaining the safety that is required in applied theatre work as stressed by researchers and practitioners in the field (Aitken, 2009; Bundy, 2000, 2013; Cahill, 2010, 2014; Dunn et al., 2015; O'Connor, 2016; Prendergast & Saxton, 2013, 2015).

Reusing the example of the stimulus to create a performance if the President of Singapore came to visit the estate, I illustrate how the five-count improvisatory image making exercise facilitated expressions of agency in the children. Having had the experience of creating frozen images the day before, the children were quick to spring into action. One by one, without prior discussion, the children watched what had been offered and then built onto the given image to further the context and narrative. A tableau showing the confrontation between two runners for loan sharks and a police officer was performed. *Ah Long* (the colloquial name for loan shark) activities in the neighbourhood were common occurrences. Prendergast and Saxton (2015) explain that participation in theatre results in the community’s lived experiences being reflected through the narratives performed or created. The children’s instinctive offer of the *Ah Long* image collectively might be the result of a choice to show what they deemed as exciting or controversial to me as an outsider. However, I did not think that was likely to be the reason as
the young people did not display signs of wanting to shock me or of watching my expression for indications of surprise or disturbance. Instead, I truly believe the image was offered as an honest response to my question; a walk around the rental public estate would provide ample evidence to explain the frequency of loan shark activities.

Sha and Tin performed the roles of Ah Longs in the tableau. The duo adopted convincing facial expressions and threatening body language. The two older boys held significant status as leaders amongst the children in the playground community. Sha and Tin frequently used force and violence on the smaller boys when disagreements arose between the children. I was conscious of Cahill’s (2010) warning that fixed performances of roles and thoughts, even when framed within a drama context, would not differ far from the narrative of the community. This argument was shared by other practitioners and theorists (Oddey, 1994; Prendergast & Saxton, 2013; Tarlington & Michaels, 1995) to explain that playbuilt performance texts consist of a myriad of stories contributed by the participants to refract the way they saw their life circumstances. I reflected that I needed to find a way for our playbuilding process to “widen the young people’s frame of reference and provide new perspectives and knowledge about themselves” (Hughes & Wilson, 2004, p. 65). Sha and Tin’s performance of loan sharks in the improvised image was problematic as their fictional roles reverberated with their playground identities and I was in danger of reinforcing the power they held over the other children.
Kha was the other loan shark in the tableau but his performance was less convincing compared to Sha and Tin. Kha looked awkward and his attempts to look menacing like the other two boys was highly unsuccessful – Kha had a wide grin plastered on his face. Shad was a police officer in the tableau and he shaped his hand into a gun and pointed it at the trio. In order to “rupture the assumed and reimagine what is possible” (Cahill, 2010, p. 155), I employed the five-count improvisatory image making technique to explore the immediate outcomes to the tableau. I told the children that I was going to count to five very slowly, and with each count, all the characters in the frozen image would make one movement or action without prior discussion with the others in the tableau. At the end of the fifth count, the group would show the final outcome of this story. The first count showed Shad pinning Sha onto the ground. Next, he held Tin in an armlock. At that point, Kha was again at a loss and did not know what he should do. Sha shouted at him to run. When I watched the video again, I heard Sha say, ‘Run la! Where got so stupid? Stand there and wait for Police? You bodoh (Malay for ‘stupid’) or what?’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 17 March 2015). So Kha changed his image to one that was attempting to run away. At the end of the fifth count, both Sha and Tin were captured by Shad the police officer and they were kneeling on the floor. Kha’s image showed him running away but Shad was after him.
The purpose of the five counts to effect changes and transitions between each image was to facilitate the visualisation process for the children. The images as they were evolving demonstrated how the final outcome was achieved and what the process of change looked like. Cahill, Coffey and Smith (2016) explain “Theatre is a medium which presumes that communication will occur through the body” (p. 84). In the five-count image making exercise, the young people used physical actions in staccato motions to communicate independently yet collectively, demonstrating a multi-perspectives approach to constructing their narrative.

The attempt to use the five-count improvisatory image making technique was not completely successful but it yielded some unexpected results. Empathetic understanding through taking on a role in drama first required some level of understanding of the character one is playing. Kha who performed as one of the loan sharks was at a loss during the five counts. The twelve-year-old wavered between Sha and Tin and at one point, he panicked and asked for instructions from the two boys. Kha was unsure what he should do when I was counting because he could not imagine what a loan shark would do when faced with the police. The role of the loan shark proved to be remote to him but it was something he wished to explore through the tableaux. The facilitation of the five-count improvisatory image making process revealed my naivete as I had undermined the importance of resonance between the actor and the character being performed.
Hughes and Wilson (2004) and Taylor (1998) agree that participation in drama provides a platform for young people to explore their world with new ways to look at themselves and their sense of agency to make changes to their circumstances. In this example, the role of the loan sharks did not resonate with Kha but reinforced his artlessness in performing such identities. Although loan shark activities were not uncommon to the children in the neighbourhood, Kha could not place himself within the dilemma of the situation and think critically what his character would do. Unlike Sha and Tin, the young man was not recognised as one of the leaders in the playground community and he did not enjoy the same high status. Kha might have demonstrated some desire to become powerful like Sha and Tin with the playground community but he was mostly ignored. The five-count improvisatory image making exercise had made obvious that Kha did not understand how to perform the role of the loan sharks. Tin and Sha on the other hand demonstrated that they had good understanding of the dispositions of the negative characters. When I spoke with Kha during the break that afternoon, he mentioned that he thought it was ‘cool to be bad guys’ (Personal communication, 17 March 2015). However, in that conversation, he also admitted that he ‘don’t know how to be bad guy’ (Personal communication, 17 March 2015). My original intention of using this method was to facilitate an empathetic approach towards creating a sense of efficacy in the children when they performed roles through the tableaux. However, Kha’s display of ignorance further reiterated his lack of efficacy as a ‘bad guy’ and made clear his lack of propensity for the identity. Sha
and Tin’s characters were under arrest by the fifth count and the last image created by that process showed the two boys pinned to the ground with their hands behind their backs.

The drama programme provided the four boys an opportunity to engage vicariously with characters they were familiar with as residents in the low-income estate. Cahill (2010) states that drama offers the option of “embodying the possible, which is not yet part of reality” (p. 167). The boys’ engagement in the tableaux offered an opportunity for the young people to imagine plausible outcomes of engaging in illegal activities. During the workshop process, I reflected that I might have further engendered Sha and Tin through the negative roles they played.

Although their positions as leaders of the playground children community did not necessarily mean that they were performing or leading criminal activities, the two boys did show a leaning toward risky activities and behaviours. I could not be certain that in this instance, the drama activity had achieved its aims. I had in my mind that the children would learn empathetically and transfer the knowledge and skills learnt through the five-count improvisatory image making exercise into events they could apply in their lives. My narrow and restricted idea of how this exercise should work did not fit with the outcome in the loan shark tableaux. While it allowed the boys to imagine and perform the negative outcomes of criminal activities, it also had at the same time provided the space for them to
rehearse being a criminal. Tsang et al. (2012) suggested that imaginal experiences allow a person to visualize potential failures or successes. Bruun’s (2017) research showed that using authentic material from the participants’ everyday lives contributed to a transfer of knowledge and skills between the artistic process and life outside theatre making. At the end of that workshop, I questioned if I had indeed protected my participants from the “replications of dominant storylines, and further, because it portrays these storylines as natural and inevitable” (Cahill, 2010, p. 161). It was and still remained a great ethical concern to me if I had facilitated a process for Sha and Tin to rehearse being a criminal and come to the realization that they enjoyed the power that came along with such roles. Even though the tableaux ended with the loan sharks being arrested, the in-action reflections showed my intense discomfort at the possibility of reinforcing the negative narrative. Kha did not attempt any other bad boy roles subsequently although the group did work on two more sets of images containing bullying.

4.2.2 Challenging the community’s rhetoric through image making

The second time I attempted the five-count improvisatory image making exercise was toward the end of Phase One. The boys created a tableau showing a collective picture of a game of soccer, one of their favourite sports. However, in that picture, Man looked like he had issued a nasty tackle to Rut, who was at best, two-thirds as tall. This image again conformed to the dominant culture the pre-
adolescents were accustomed to; the bigger boys would dominate over the smaller ones and rough play was a given. I reflected I needed to challenge the common rhetoric of the playground community. The five-count improvisatory image making exercise was employed in this instance to facilitate a process for the children to “question, imagine and innovate” (Saxton & Miller, 2013, p. 112). The intention was to dislocate the children from the inevitable and enabled a dialogical process of becoming agents in constructing an alternative in their social narratives. With the experience of the loan shark tableaux created using the same method, my awareness of potential ethical misstep was heightened in this attempt. I was at the same time conscious not to reinforce the hopelessness presented through the tableau. O’Connor’s (2016) caution against the efficacy of using role-play techniques that could “retraumatise communities rather than provide a space for dialogue” (p. 181) served as directive in my planning.

I challenged the group to a five-count transition of the image they had formed collectively. I explained that with every clap, they had to transform the image into the next stage of movement, and in five claps, they had to show me what eventually happened in this story where the older children were rough with the younger ones. It is important to remember that the images created subsequently were completely improvised independently and yet they contributed to the overall narrative collectively.
At the end of the fifth clap, Rut was on the ground after the nasty tackle by Man and the older boys were running in the same direction as Man, leaving the younger boys looking lost. When given the opportunity to tell the story of their collective image, Tin and Kha enthusiastically explained the new narrative that was improvised - Man had ‘snatched the ball from Rut and then Rut fell down and then (all the older boys) ran after the ball (which was now with Man)’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 19 March 2015). The two boys also quickly substantiated that all the older boys were in the same team and the younger ones in another team. Ash and Fin who were seated and watching the frozen images unfold started shouting, ‘Not fair! Not fair!’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 19 March 2015).

The boys’ newly constructed collective images at the end of the fifth count were again realistic reflections of how the children played in the playground. Ewing (2013) explained that storytellers shaped their narratives according to the audience present. In this playbuilding project, the children’s audience were firstly their fellow playmates who engaged in similar play politics and later the residents in the neighbourhood. In the communal playground, the older boys dominated the play space and the younger children had to defer to the social hegemony present.

When the children who were not in the tableaux witnessed the final picture created at the end of the fifth count, they decided they wanted to ‘make things
fair’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 19 March 2015). At that time, the children desired positive changes but they did not know what the alternatives were. The children’s behaviour corresponded to Bandura’s (1982) and Buckworth’s (2017) notion of self-efficacy where they felt motivated to take on the challenge despite not possessing the knowledge. However, the children demonstrated their physiological states were primed to assist them to navigate any potential challenges.

The children insisted on retaining the set of images depicting bullying at the playground but they suggested including another two images of friends coming to help and support the children who had been injured due to the rough play. The subsequent images were devised from the last tableau formed. I asked the children, still frozen in the image, ‘We have friends hurt because of the rough play by the bullies, what do we do next?’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 19 March 2015).

I extended the five-count improvisatory image making exercise and broke the process down further. The children were instructed to remain in their last image and only one person was allowed to move and take on a new position at one time. The final image was a result of the children offering and accepting each other’s contribution to the creation of a new picture. Dan took the first step, unfroze from his position and offered his hand to Tin who was on the floor grimacing in pain. Tin accepted the offer and grabbed Dan’s hand. Kha unfroze
and put Tin’s arm around his shoulders as though to help him up. Ash unfroze from her position and walked over to examine Wiy’s leg which was supposed to be hurt. Pris took inspiration from Kha and did the same to Wiy. Sha and Dana, the two ‘bullies’ in the scene remained in the same position.

When every child had the opportunity to make the single change in their image, I told the children that in the next five counts, they would move the image forward slowly. The children moved the tableau collectively with every count to show what would happen after the friends offered help to the bullied. At the end of the fifth count, we arrived at our final picture. The process was again completed without discussion amongst the children and each child improvised according to what was right to them.

The final tableau showed the two children helped up by their friends with the bullies left behind in the space watching the backs of the children leaving. It was a powerful image showing unity and solidarity amongst the children. I conducted an ‘after-thought’ interview with the children still frozen in the image by tapping them on the shoulder and asking them what thoughts were running through their minds. Prendergast and Saxton (2013) explain this tapping in for after-thought as a means to “build roles within a still depiction, and a deeper understanding of what is going on” (p. 110). I started with Sha and Dana the two bullies in the tableau asking what the characters they were playing were thinking. Dana made a poignant reflection. She said, ‘It is a funny thing. At first I bully, I knock Wiy
then I feel very, like, very powerful. But when the people help her and they walk away, I feel, funny, like I am alone, I have no friends’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 19 March 2015). Sha agreed, he added, “Yah, like at first I strong because I kick in then he fall down. But later only I stand there and everyone go away. I, like, a bit stupid” (Video transcription – Phase One, 19 March 2015).

The five-count improvisatory image making exercise was a means of going beyond just pure role-playing or re-enactment. O’Connor (2016) encourages practitioners of applied theatre to extend “children’s understanding and use of make-believe” to support these young people to “resolve problems in analogous real-life situations in the drama” (p. 10). Taylor (1998) and Bruun (2017) agree and suggest that values and understanding acquired through the drama process can be transferred into the participants’ real lives. The adoption of role through the tableaux making process thus becomes a means of imagining and visualizing for the young people. Tsang et al. (2012) argue that imaginal experiences are one of the critical influences on a person’s sense of self-efficacy. When the children performed what they had imagined in the tableaux making and saw how individual actions affected another child’s responses and eventual outcomes to the situation, it became a powerful way for the children to understand agency and efficacy.

The children who helped the victims did not realise that their unity had beaten the bullies. However, that was the needed ‘crack’, as Cahill (2010) had called it, in a
dominant storyline to challenge the inevitability of a common ending. After the children had heard what Sha and Dana said, Kha exclaimed, ‘Teacher, now I know. Next time, got people bully us, we just all walk away, no need fight. If all walk away, then we are stronger than the bullies’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 19 March 2015).

Through the five-count improvisatory image making exercise Kha saw resonance between the make-believe events in the playbuilding process with reality, a skill which Bruun (2017) and Taylor (1998) claim is acquired through participation in drama. Buckworth (2017) argues that there was a symbolic connection during role play which then “serves as a guide to behavior and opportunities for social comparison” (p. 41). Hughes and Ruding (2013) further suggest that participation in drama builds the “ability to respond flexibly and fluidly” (p. 222), two essential skills the children in this study required to survive in the tough neighbourhood and to navigate the social hierarchy present. Kha’s new awareness of how he could use the method of walking away from the bullies as a counter measure to the common bullying in the playground was an example of the symbolic connection. The children were proud that they had found a plausible solution to a real and perpetual problem they were facing through drama and they wanted to educate the other children in the neighbourhood. The young people decided they wanted to include the tableaux created from the five-count improvisatory image making exercise into the storyline of playing in the playground.
The improvisation exercise helped the children to see the contradictions in the possible behaviours (what had just happened in the drama) and actual behaviours (what usually happened in the community). Gallagher (2016) explains that awareness of such contradictions facilitates deeper dialogues and understanding amongst the participants involved in theatre making, and offered a variety of perspectives to a common outcome or situation. However, Cahill (2010) cautions that “naturalism becomes the enemy of empowerment… and it locks us into replication of dominant storylines and further” (p. 161). The children insisted on working with narratives about themselves and I had chosen to take the risk of the “replication of dominant storylines” to make visible particular outcomes for the participants. The young participants demonstrated that they were able to transfer the understanding of agency and self-efficacy from the fictional contexts into reality. The use of tableaux and role-playing enabled a process for the children to adopt particular identities they were interested in and played out the events and situations visually to explore the various outcomes. In this manner, the children examined and analysed the similarities and differences between themselves and the characters they were playing as a way of understanding if the outcomes were relevant to them. Collins (2015) explains that participation in theatre thus enables a dialogue that encourages the participants to “make meaning together, foster understanding and recognise that there were many truths” (p. 119). Therefore, when working with children and youth who aspire to adopt risky behaviours and identities, drama that replicates stark reality can become an avenue to make visible potential traps and
consequences. This important imagination-visualization process made possible through the tableaux and five-count improvisatory image creation process reproduced the dominant storyline and at the same time, afforded children the time and space to contemplate the possible outcomes of the identities they chose to adopt. Theatre making thus is a viable method to prevent risky behaviours amongst children and youth as it presents reality through fiction that is suggested and imagined by the young participants themselves.

4.3 Partnership with Zaty

In this section, I examine my partnership with Zaty in the playbuilding project through critical, reflective lenses. I discuss how Zaty’s intimate knowledge of the children and their circumstances informed the analysis process when we were drawing connections between the creative work done and the children’s realities. In this project, Zaty contributed to my reflective practice by questioning and providing feedback to my praxis. As an applied theatre practitioner herself, Zaty’s eyes were tuned to the nuances of the participants’ narratives that emerged during the process and her readings of the meanings behind their work added another layer to my data analysis.

During the meeting with Gee, the CEO of RSC before the start of the research, we both agreed that Zaty would be my partner for the playbuilding project. This arrangement is similar to Prendergast and Saxton’s (2013) description of how
applied theatre projects usually worked. A drama practitioner “most often comes from outside the locations into which he or she enters to work, often in partnership with non-government organizations, businesses, social agencies or institutions” (p. xii). Zaty was the community worker in RSC and the only member in the VWO who had applied theatre training. Zaty was a fresh graduate from the Central School of Speech and Drama in London, United Kingdom when the project started and she had joined RSC for just over a year. Zaty’s role in the organization was to engage the youth in theatre programmes and her main interest was in Forum Theatre. However, Zaty’s applied theatre work was focused in a different low-income estate which was also under the care of RSC. RSC was looking to engage the youth and children in Sen Ling estate in Arts programmes and Zaty at that point in time was heavily involved in administrative work in addition to the forum theatre projects she was helming at the other estate. When I got in touch with Zaty about the possibility of starting a playbuilding programme under my research study, she put me in touch with Gee very quickly and we had the details sorted out in one meeting.

Zaty’s central role in the playbuilding project at Sen Ling estate was originally to help with classroom management. I had been inducted and warned that Sen Ling was a very rough estate and the children were difficult to manage. My experience in 2014 resonated with the advice offered by Gee and Zaty. During the meeting and subsequently when Zaty and I held a separate meeting to discuss the stimulus for the playbuilding project, I was informed that some of the children had
anger management issues and they tended to fight. However, when the playbuilding project started, Zaty’s role in the study broadened its scope to extend beyond classroom management during the sessions.

All the children with the exception of Pris in the playbuilding project were of Malay ethnicity. The children spoke to each other in Malay although they tried to speak to me in a mixture of Singlish and Malay. Being an outsider to the community, I was not only a person who came from outside of the estate to work with the children, I was also someone from a different ethnic and social-economic group. My identity as an outsider is discussed in greater detail in section 4.4 of this chapter where I analysed the implications of my position and relationship with the children in the project. Zaty therefore served as a conduit between the children and me. Zaty was of Malay ethnicity and she was completely conversant in the Malay language although she conversed with the children partly in English most of the time. Zaty was very familiar with the children’s families. On two separate occasions during the playbuilding programme, Rut’s and Kha’s mothers came to the room where we were having our drama sessions to look for Zaty. They had wanted to apply for financial assistance. When they were told that Zaty had left for her clowning duty in one of the local hospitals and would only return much later, the two women insisted that they would wait for the community worker to return and rejected the help from other social workers present. The implicit trust that the children and their families had in Zaty was evident.
4.3.1 Tapping onto Zaty’s knowledge

In Phase One of the playbuilding programme, Zaty was present during every session of the workshops. She was a silent observer and when she noticed that a child was behaving poorly, she would step in to break up fights or speak with the child. However, due to Zaty’s knowledge and understanding of theatre making processes, she became an accidental observer and critic of my praxis. Debrief sessions were held at the end of every workshop to discuss the playbuilding progress. I had originally planned for the debrief sessions to involve Phyllis and myself, and we would discuss her observations for that day. However, Zaty and I always found the need to discuss some of the children’s negative behaviours or conflicts that arose during the workshops and thus I invited Zaty to join us at the debrief sessions.

Zaty’s knowledge of the children coupled with her role as a community theatre practitioner within RSC meant that she had ideas about the way the playbuilding project could progress. Therefore, throughout the playbuilding programme, the community worker challenged and questioned my way of facilitating the process which propelled me to consider and articulate my intentions clearly. Zaty had initially suggested that I offered the children the stimulus of creating a play about aliens or robots’ invasion to earth. She had previously engaged the children in one session of drama where she worked with them to create a robot dance. The children performed staccato movements to each beat on the tabla and Zaty had
observed that the young people enjoyed the imaginative work very much. However, when I started the playbuilding process, I found that the children did not see any resonance with fantastical themes and they became disinterested very quickly when I suggested we created a play about robots or aliens. The young people wanted to make a play about themselves. Zaty and I had a long discussion after the first day of the playbuilding programme in Phase One when she insisted that the children might enjoy the theme of aliens or robots better. She felt that it would allow the children to be engaged in an imaginative process and be removed from the issues they were facing. Zaty’s opinions and feedback on the playbuilding processes created the opportunities and later on motivated the habit for me to rationalize and articulate the decisions I was making through my reflections or in the debrief sessions. These reflections or verbal articulations provided another layer to my data collection and injected further clarity or raised questions about the role of playbuilding in enabling self-efficacy in the children. Zaty accepted and understood my rationale for wanting to work on images closely related to the children’s realities when she witnessed how the five-count improvisatory image making exercises described in section 4.2 in this chapter created the awareness of a sense of agency in the children. Zaty commented that the five-count improvisatory exercise ‘gave the children a chance to try different things…as practice how to solve problems’ (Video Transcriptions – Phase One, 17 March 2015).
Zaty’s familiarity with the children’s domestic and academic environments provided crucial insights to the tableaux work created by the children. On the first day of the workshops, I asked the children to show through still images what they would be doing at different times of the day. It was in response to the children’s request to do a play about them and a way for me to find an entry point into creating a play based on the young people’s stories. All the children were to perform their images together so as to impress upon the children that performing was not threatening and everyone shared equal status in the playbuilding process.

The children were asked what they might be doing at 9am, 3pm and 7pm on a given Saturday. The timings and day were randomly chosen and I had not put much thought into it when I made the suggestion. Rut performed three images of suicide as responses to my suggestions. At 9am, he shaped his hand and fingers into a gun and pointed it at his temple. At 3pm, he dropped his head and his hand clenched into a fist next to his head as though he was holding the rope linked to a noose around his neck. The last image at 7pm, showed an image of him pushing a knife into his throat. Zaty and I made eye contact for each of his images, and while our facial expressions did not betray any emotion or questions, we had tacit understanding that Rut’s images warranted discussion and explanation.

During the debrief, Zaty explained that Rut’s family was going through a period of difficulties. The young boy’s mother was about to return home from the drug rehabilitation centre. He lived in the public rental apartment with his younger
sister, cousins, grandmother and a step-uncle who had slight mental disabilities. A few days prior to the start of the playbuilding workshop, the step-uncle who was annoyed with Rut’s sister’s incessant crying, poured a pot of hot soup on the young girl. The toddler suffered burns on the lower half of the body and officers from the Child Protection Department had taken over the case. Rut was witness to the entire incident and the matter was made worse by the fact that Rut shared a very close relationship with the step-uncle. Zaty revealed that Rut had since become withdrawn from the family after the incident and he had stopped speaking with the step-uncle. We were unable to ascertain if Rut’s images were linked to the events at home but we speculated that the seven-year-old was finding it difficult to make sense of what had happened.

My attempt to engage Rut in a conversation to understand his images was futile. In a small group during the water break, I asked the children to explain the images they had created earlier. Rut did not speak although he remained in the group. When I tried to speak with him privately, he smiled at me and ran away. Later that afternoon, Rut offered the image of a bystander to a bullying situation in the playground during the collective tableau making. In order to understand the children’s perspectives about what was happening in the pictorial story, I tapped the shoulders of the children in the tableau and they were supposed to say a line of what was going through their minds then. Rut said, ‘Why you do like this to me?’ (Video transcription – Phase One 16 March 2015). Rut’s response caught us by surprise. In the picture, he looked like he was witness to the bullying and
it did not look like he was going to be hurt. The boy was standing rigid to the ground and his hands clenched into tight fists at the sides of his body. Rut glared at the bully in the image with great intensity in his eyes and his body shook with tension throughout the period the group was frozen in their tableau. I decided to pursue it further and at the end of the workshop, I held Rut back. I asked why he had said that. He explained that the bully had betrayed them but he could not elaborate further. Prendergast and Saxton (2015) posit that stories from a community participating in drama would have emerged out of their own lived experiences and lives. Zaty and I speculated during the debrief that Rut’s question to the bully was in fact a question he was seeking answers for in reality. The boy might have needed an outlet, and participating in the tableau could be his way of being immersed in the “emotional maelstrom of personal story” (O’Connor, 2009, p. 591) so as to make sense of what had happened.

Zaty’s intimate understanding of the children’s personal lives shed light onto the behaviours and responses of the children during the playbuilding project. It explained the dynamics between the children and she became an avenue for me to investigate the causes and sources of the children’s perceptions at a deeper level. Although I ensured that the children were offered the opportunities to explain and elaborate their views, Zaty provided an additional layer by injecting her personal perspectives about the stories or situations that emerged during the playbuilding process. However, the children’s explanations remained the main sources of substantiation to the data collected. Zaty contributed to my data
collection in the forms of the debrief sessions, personal conversations and planning discussions, and these supported my role as a reflective practitioner. I became more conscious and alert to the added lens that was cast on my work and in turn compelled me to examine my practice more critically in order to explain the decisions I was making in the process.

4.3.2 Zaty’s absence and the gap left open

In Phase Two of the playbuilding programme, Zaty was absent except for two sessions. Andie, an intern to RSC was assigned to assist me in every playbuilding session instead. Andie was to support my work by being physically present as an observer and managing the children if they behaved poorly. While Andie was earnest and helpful, she was unable to manage the children. The children did not respect her the same way they showed respect to Zaty. When Zaty spoke, the children quietened down and listened. When the children behaved poorly and Zaty reprimanded them, the children looked remorseful and they complied with punishments of time out. However, while Andie tried to be assertive, she had not built up a relationship with the children to be able command their attention or respect.

In session five of Phase Two, with the inclusion of Jole into the playbuilding community, the dynamics and routine that had been established earlier were disrupted. Jole joined the playbuilding programme five sessions after Phase Two
started. She was unpopular with the other children and she was particularly uncooperative and rude. It made whole group collaborative efforts extremely difficult. Phyllis noted that I was struggling to get through the playbuilding activities and I was slowly losing my patience. She recorded, ‘Jole was interrupting almost every sentence Ms Wong said and she had to repeat her instructions many times. Jole refused to listen and even after repeated warnings, continue to be disruptive’ (Observation notes, 10 June 2015). Phyllis was right to have made that observation as after battling with being interrupted all the time, and the other children losing focus and becoming impatient to get on with the activity, I gave up trying to devise the opening scene of our second performance. I dismissed the group and told them I could not continue the session anymore that day. Gallagher and Ntelioglou (2013) questioned what would happen when participants in the drama refused to listen. Prendergast and Saxton (2013) insisted that a group involved in drama must be focused and value the contributions of the team members in order to move the drama forward. Jole had made the collaborative process very challenging for everyone and I reflected that the responsibility of playing disciplinarian fell squarely onto my shoulders in Phase Two because Zaty was not there. Andie was unable to replace Zaty in her management of the children and with that crucial role left poorly filled, I was unable to do what I was meant to do as the drama facilitator.

The partnership between Zaty and me was intended to fulfill the basic needs of an arts programme in partnership with a VWO. However, Zaty’s role in the
playbuilding project extended beyond the basic functions of a disciplinarian or an administrative support. She acted as an extra voice in my reflective thoughts and an added lens to the events in the playbuilding sessions. Zaty’s observations of the playbuilding process filled critical gaps in the data by (i) providing information that explained the tableaux created, and (ii) challenging and questioning my ethos in facilitating the theatre making with the children.

4.4 Responsibility of the Outsider

In the previous section, I discussed the working relationship I shared with Zaty the community worker from RSC and how she served as a conduit between the children and me in this project. Zaty’s presence during some of the workshops and the unique relationships she shared with the children and their families affected the playbuilding process and tipped the dynamics of the group. In this section, I concentrate on the analysis of my identity as an outsider to the community. I highlight the complex relationship I shared with the children as a result of my identity and how it has illuminated the children’s relationships with the adult figures in their lives. At the end of the playbuilding project, the closure of the programme signalled an end to my relationship with the children and I was again viewed as an outsider to the community. The physical and emotional distance the children maintained when we met again a year later resulted in an awkward yet familiar recognition between us. It was also highly revealing of the young people’s view of outsiders and visitors to the space they lived in.
Hughes and Wilson (2004) assert the need for positive and proper structures to support the transition of adolescence into adulthood. The children in the playbuilding programme had been prematurely inducted into the adolescent phase of their lives because of the circumstances that formed their social and environmental fabrics. The children had to exhibit behaviours that were beyond their age and innocence so as to protect themselves in the community. Sha and Tin’s swaggers when they walked and their propensity to engage anyone in a physical fight were just two examples of how the two pre-adolescents wanted to impress upon the other children in the community that they were more capable and much bigger beings than their peers of the same age. The children’s relationships with the adults in the neighbourhood and in their lives did not appear to support their transition into adolescence and this is discussed in greater detail when I analyse the children’s narratives in Chapter Six. Their perception of me as the drama teacher in this playbuilding project filled the gap temporarily in the children’s need for an adult figure who was audience to their thoughts and perspectives and at the same time provided guidance when requested.

4.4.1 Recognising the differences between us and building the relationship

Hughes and Wilson (2004) explain that participation in out-of-school youth theatre activities provides a physical and social-emotional space for adolescents
to “feel known, accepted and supported; a means of establishing positive identity and relationships with peers and adults outside of their day-to-day lives” (p. 65). As an outsider, I had entered the community with a task and it had made me very aware that I could have appeared to be the coloniser coming to improve the lives of these unfortunate people. At the start of the playbuilding project, Zaty introduced me as ‘Ms Jennifer’ and she explained to the children that I was a drama teacher. She further informed them that I was her drama teacher when she was at the polytechnic. The introduction by Zaty elevated my status at the start of the playbuilding project significantly. The children looked visibly guarded when they heard about my connection with Zaty and they exclaimed that I must be very clever because I taught Zaty. I was keenly aware that I spoke fluent English although I could understand the children’s use of Singlish with a heavy reliance on Malay language most of the time. The children had on several occasions met me at the carpark behind RSC’s office just as I was parking my car so they drew the conclusion that I did not belong to the lower-income strata since cars were extremely expensive in Singapore. All of the above conditions could have negatively impacted my relationship with the children as the identities I carried with me into the community signalled I had a far more privileged life and education. However, I maintained an acute awareness of the differences between the children and me, and being constantly reflective about my praxis throughout the playbuilding process. I was conscious that I needed to build a working relationship with the children that was based on trust and equal status.
Blight (2015) expounds the importance of “the building of trust and understanding within the partnership” (p. 22) between the facilitator of a drama programme and the participants. I understood clearly from the beginning of the study that my position as an outsider to the community meant that I had to work on building trust within the playbuilding group. It was imperative that they trusted me as the facilitator of the programme to lead them in the journey to achieve the artistic objectives. It was equally crucial that they built trust with each other as they were going to be working together very closely. There was also the element of understanding each other and respecting the perspectives offered through the process that had to be negotiated from the start of the project. A constructive and trusting relationship with the children was forged quickly when we acknowledged and made use of the differences between us to advance our goal in creating performances for the audience. Throughout the playbuilding process, I had deliberately adopted roles that were either of equal or a lower status than the children. I constantly reminded the young people and myself that I was there to facilitate the process of putting the performance together but the decision-making and ownership of the product remained in their hands.

I reflected that I needed to enable through the process of theatre making for the children to gain agency in determining how they wanted to shape the narratives they intended to perform. I used questions extensively throughout the playbuilding process to motivate the young people to think deeper about the choices they were making and analysed the rationales behind their decisions.
When I asked questions, I aimed to “bring them to a point where they think from within the framework of choices instead of talking coolly about the framework of choices” (Heathcote, 2013, p. 204). The questions used in conjunction with the tableaux work and the five-count improvisatory image making exercise became powerful tools in making visible the cultural discourse within the community. My identity as the outsider aided and justified the use of questions as a way to advance the playbuilding process and the children were eager to educate me in the ways of the community as they empathised that I genuinely did not understand. The young people saw the need to make explicit the intricacies of the narratives so that I could understand the nuances which would otherwise be unnoticed by external eyes.

Wilkinson and Kitzinger (2013) suggest that “Instead of speaking for Others, we maintain a respectful silence, and work to create the social and political conditions which might enable Others to speak (and be heard) on their own terms” (p. 86). I took on the role of a teacher as the children either addressed me as ‘cikgu’ (pronounced ‘chek-ku’ in Malay) when they spoke with each other in Malay or they called me ‘Ms Jennifer’. The younger ones simply called me ‘Teacher’. I reflected that my position as an outsider to the rental estate benefitted my role as the facilitator in the playbuilding programme. I had no links or history with the residents and therefore my relationship with the children was confined to the drama programme. I was an adult who was always asking them questions and being interested in the ways they viewed the world around us. I was an adult who
had time to listen and was not linked to the problems they were facing in their lives. Therefore, I am not certain who was considered as the ‘Other’ in the playbuilding project. I was certainly the outsider who had entered the community to do drama work with the children. The children’s backgrounds and their circumstances were outside of my social-economic strata although it was not completely unfamiliar to me. However, it was interesting to note that the children and I co-created two pieces of theatre together with the same respectfulness accorded to each other. As I watched the video recordings, first for the transcriptions, then for analysis and finally in its entirety, I observed the children being patient with me when I clarified my interpretations of the tableaux work they had created. They pursued the refinement of their images in order to help explain to this outsider what they really wanted to communicate through the tableaux. On the other hand, I was conscious throughout the playbuilding process that I would not suggest or direct the tableaux creation. The commitment to facilitate and not dictate the trajectory of the plots was observed even till the final rehearsals for both performances at the end of each phase. Therefore, despite the awareness that I was a drama teacher, the children were empowered throughout the playbuilding process to make decisions for the creation of their performance.

The children’s heightened sense of self-efficacy and agency during the debrief at the end of the performance were evidence of this respectful relationship we shared. Qid explained that making performance was special to him because ‘I do the story I tell’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 19 March 2015). Sha shared
the same sentiments as Qid and he further explained that the children owned the narratives and the final performance and they were thankful to me because I had helped to string the individual narratives together. Sha’s speech to show his gratitude also reminded me that ‘the stories is ours and we make it. But you teach us how to make and show’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 19 March 2015). Wales (2012) concludes that drama itself does not foster the positive changes in identity and agency construction. Instead she posits that it is the “facilitation of, and interactions within, the drama experience” (p. 540) that contributes to the changes in the relationships and personal identities of the participants. If there had been consciousness during the process that we were other-ing each other, it was not intended to demonstrate the differences between us but instead to bridge the gap so that we were able to see into each other’s worlds. I saw the children’s lived experiences and aspirations through their lenses while they saw my journey as a drama practitioner through their playbuilding process. It was not an equal relationship, but it was not something that was conscious to us.

4.4.2 The importance of the outsider

My position as an outsider to the rental estate meant that I did not subscribe to the cultural rules of the community and there was no need to refrain from topics that were considered taboo. Ins brought up the topic of sex and puberty in Phase Two when attendance for that session was low and the only boy present was eight-year-old Ros. The young boy had retreated to the sofa at the end of the
room that afternoon and proclaimed that he was tired. Ins and then followed by Dana took the opportunity to ask questions about physical changes they were experiencing due to puberty. The topic changed very quickly to premarital sex and the two girls explained they felt pressured to conform to the culture established in the playground. Ins and Dana explained that they knew girls who were sexually active with some of the boys in the community and amongst the adolescent group, there was covert pressure for teenage girls to use sex as an initiation ritual to grow up. The girls asked why some parts of their bodies hurt as they underwent changes and if sex was painful. According to the girls, these were not topics they could broach easily with an adult figure in the community. Ins’ declaration that her mother would not address such issues further crystallised the pre-adolescents’ need for an adult figure to speak with and seek guidance from. I was at that time curious why they did not speak with Zaty as she was a trusted figure amongst the children. The responses from the girls plainly explain that Zaty’s close relationship with the community which included the girls’ parents and caregivers meant that she was not an option with whom to discuss sex. Instead, my position as an outsider meant that I had no access to their parents or caregivers and I did not know any of the adolescents girls they were discussing making me a safe option.

The young people’s participation in the drama programme had provided them the platform to reflect and debate on their roles in the social world and the rights they owned as individuals to decide the possible pathways ahead. As the facilitator of
the programme, I was an adult figure with whom they had built a relationship based on trust and respect. Hughes and Wilson (2004) claim the affordance of time and space in drama for participants to investigate issues that were otherwise not discussed as a pertinent resource to “establishing positive identity and relationships with peers and adults outside of their day-to-day lives” (p. 65). However, I reflected that both were not permanent supporting structures the young people could rely on indefinitely.

The conversation with the girls about puberty and sex was also a “stop” (Fels, 2012) moment in the playbuilding process. I had to pause and consider my role as an outsider facilitating a process that resulted in the participants peering into their own lives and contemplating their futures. I became even more keenly aware of the warning issued by Etherton and Prentki (2006) about applied theatre practitioners being visitors to the site of the participatory work in which we engage. They suggest that “the benefits of critical distance and innovative vision have to be set against the disadvantages of restricted knowledge and limited time” (p. 144). It is further suggested that one way to circumvent this stricture was to engage persons who would have continued access to the participants to move the work forward after the ‘visitor’ has left. While I was encouraged by the trust the children had in me and the drama process to raise sensitive issues for exploration and dialogue, I was deeply concerned about the lack of support they would feel when the playbuilding programme came to an end. The children’s attitudes towards sex and the pressure they felt required more intense
examination and careful facilitation on my part but I was limited by the time I had with them. The agreement with RSC to have a social/community worker present at every drama session was not completely fulfilled in Phase Two of the study due to compelling work reasons cited by the staff. My ethos as a drama practitioner was challenged when the programme came to an end: there were issues which remained unresolved; and there were children who expected and needed continual support. Muris (2017) highlighted that girls who have lower self-efficacy levels are more prone to depression than boys. Brummert Lennings and Bussey (2017) further this claim to explain that when young people cope with stressful situations through self-blaming and isolation, they experience an increase in depressive symptoms. It was evident that the children, especially the girls were needing support in ways that the thirty-two hours of playbuilding could not provide. However, their membership in the programme had provided the space and time for them to articulate fears and concerns which might have otherwise gone unheard. I was particularly concerned with what would happen after the study ended, but at the same time, I was conscious that the stories told to me were in confidence and not meant to be shared with persons related to the community. When I left the community at the end of the project, my identity reverted back to that of a stranger. When I met two of the children one year later, the distance and awkwardness between us made it hard to imagine that we had spent about three months building two performances together. However, I speculated that it was also the knowledge that I would one day leave the community that made it safe for the children to share intimate personal stories
with me. My induction into the rental estate and its events would have no impact on the ecology of the community once I left.
Chapter 5
Challenging the Status Quo

This chapter discusses the observations made about the children’s personal identities and sense of efficacy as the playbuilding programme progressed. The shifts in the children’s identities and their sense of efficacy were noted as the young people navigated the issues and stories that emerged during the playbuilding processes. In turn, the changes in personal identities resulted in the way the children viewed their environments and world, and further affected the way they viewed themselves and the identities they embodied.

The data from the observation notes, conversations with Zaty in the forms of debrief discussions and ad hoc chats, my reflection log and the video recordings formed the core material for interpretation and analysis in this chapter. The shifts in the identities of the children were observed and documented both in the observation notes and the reflective journal in which I recorded my reflections-on-action. The video recordings were then watched to fill in the gaps left open by the observation notes and reflection journal, or to provide an added angle to data analysed using the two sources. The dialogues and interviews with the children either individually or in groups, and the conversations and debrief sessions with Zaty provided important corroborative or refutable layers to the data when interpreting the changes in the young people’s identities.
The first section in this chapter discusses the changes in the children’s identities and how the shifts were noticed. The children’s changes in their perceptions of self were analysed in conjunction with the activities within the playbuilding processes. The discussion moves toward the changes in the level of collaboration in the second section. The collaborative efforts amongst the children were results from the shifts in the personal identities and it further affected the group identity the young people forged during the playbuilding process which is discussed in the last section in the chapter. The three sections are segregated to present the findings clearly and coherently but in reality, the sheath that divides the three sections is thin and highly permeable. The shifts in the personal identities, collaborative efforts and the formation of collective identity were three inter-related and inter-dependent results of the playbuilding processes.

5.1 Shifting identities

The shifts in the children’s identities were not observed in a linear, chronological fashion. Instead, the changes were visible due to specific events that had happened through the playbuilding processes. The evidence of shifts in their identities emerged sporadically and at different junctures of the playbuilding programme for different children. This section highlights examples from 3 children to illustrate the shifts in the identities that had taken place. The 3 children,
twelve-year-old Sha, ten-year-old Ned and eight-year-old Ros, were chosen because the changes in their identities best represented the general cohort of the playbuilding group. I have also included the example of one child whose sense of identity and efficacy observably remained unchanged at the end of the playbuilding programme. However, it was noted that her self-reports during the interviews and her exhibited dispositions and behaviours showed contradictions. Eleven-year-old Dana remained engaged throughout the playbuilding programme but she was reticent and expressed that she had a low sense of self-efficacy in the three months we worked together. The sub-section thus discusses and questions the disparity in her behaviours and her perceptions of self.

5.1.1 Sha and his unsettling identities

My first encounter with Sha took place half an hour into the first playbuilding workshop in Phase One. The pre-adolescent swaggered in together with Tin who was a year younger. The boys came into the room we were using for the playbuilding workshops and saw that we were seated in a circle on the floor. Sha walked across the circle and waved his hand at two children as if to dismiss them. Immediately Tas, the older of the two children, grabbed her younger brother, Ni, towards her and made a space for Sha. I observed that the children in the playbuilding programme accorded a certain amount of deference to Sha and Tin. Regardless of their age, the children unquestioningly acceded to the commands given out by the duo. There was no visible sign that showed the
children feared the two boys. I had the sense that there was an air of respect and reverence instead.

Zaty explained to me during the debrief session two days later that Sha’s status amongst the children was built on his playground connections. Sha was well regarded by the adolescents in the community because he displayed an ‘appetite for risk’ (Zaty, Interview, 18 March 2015). The teenagers who dominated the playground after dusk formed a community that offered protection and at the same time intimidated the younger children. Some of these older boys engaged in petty crimes and some were being monitored by the police. These adolescent boys and their behaviours were synonymous with words like ‘guts’, ‘cool’, ‘loyalty’ and ‘brotherhood’ (Zaty, Interview, 18 March 2015). According to Zaty, the adolescents were especially attractive to the younger, pre-teen boys and girls, who aspired to be like them. There was a strong sense of admiration when the older boys in the drama programme talked about their adolescent peers. Hemming and Madge (2012) explain that pre-adolescents might have their social identities crafted to belong to the social group(s) that they wished to belong to and thus find commonalities between themselves and the teenagers in the community. Sha’s social identity was crafted to emulate the teens’ and that facilitated his acceptance and recognition by the adolescent community. Sha’s social identity bordered on being disengaged from school and its activities, and centred on exhibiting risky behaviours and participation in petty crimes, similar to
Caldwell and Vaughan’s (2012) claim of how youth in highly disadvantaged settings behaved.

Hughes and Wilson (2004) suggested that “young people look outside of the family and school to explore and form identities and many rely on their peers for support” (p. 59). Zaty explained that Sha came from a single parent family with little access to his father. Before the parents separated, Sha was very close to his father and they spent time regularly playing football together. I recalled that Sha had once mentioned he wanted to be a fireman because of his father. There was a sense of pride when the pre-teen spoke about his parent. However, as a result of the parents’ separation, Sha’s father had moved out of the family home and lived far away. They did not continue their weekly football sessions due to the distance between their homes.

Sha adopted the identity of a leader amongst the children in the drama programme unchallenged. The self-enrolled leadership identity was a spill-over from the social identity he adopted from the playground as he was better connected with the adolescent boys. Hemming and Madge (2012) suggest that there is a relational nature to identity. Individual identity and social identities are interdependent and we are “formed through interaction between our core self and others in society, shaping our identities through participation in social structures” (p. 40). In Phase Two, Sha clearly demonstrated how his individual identity corelated with social identity. At the start of Phase two, the children were tasked
to draw a picture to show what they wished they could do better. Sha drew a picture of *The Rock*, a celebrity wrestler who had defeated many of his opponents. According to the pre-teen, the fights often ended in a bloodied mess. Sha explained during his presentation of the drawing that it was glamourous to be a wrestler because they fought their opponents and they were tough people. There was a strong connection between Sha’s ambition and the tough and violent dispositions needed to survive in the playground community. It was the same persona he had put on and re-enacted in Phase One of the programme. Sha’s aspiration to become powerful like *The Rock* commensurated with his position amongst the adolescent community in the playground; he had to be tough with the courage to engage in risky behaviours to be accepted.

The changes in Sha’s identity were inconsistent. There were instances within the playbuilding process when it was highly evident that Sha had recognised variations of positive identities of himself. However, these demonstrations or awareness did not last long as he would very quickly recover himself and embodied the tough street boy persona again. On the first day of the playbuilding workshops, the children created a tableau showing bullying in the playground. Rut played the role of the bystander and he was standing rigid to the ground as described in Chapter Four. I invited the children to sculpt the tableau of the bystander to demonstrate what Rut could do in that situation to help his friend. Sha volunteered and as he swaggered towards Rut, he looked at me and said, ‘Easy la!’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 16 March 2015). He turned Rut
around and changed his position from one that was facing the perpetrator to one that was running away. Sha explained that Rut could run away and ‘get more gang to come and help’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 16 March 2015). Sha’s rationale was Rut could gather more children and beat the perpetrator up. He seemed very happy with his answer and offered me a lopsided smile.

Cahill (2010) and Ewing (2013) theorize that an individual’s views and understanding of the world shape the person’s perspectives and directions in life. Sha had demonstrated that he would respond to negative behaviour with violence. The drawing of The Rock, my written reflections recorded during the drama process and the observation notes corroborated to form the opinion that the pre-teen’s view of the world and problems revolved around the use of violence. I asked Sha if getting more people to join the fight would solve the bullying problem in the neighbourhood. He looked thoughtful for a while but did not respond. I pursued and asked, ‘Do you think the bullying problem will be solved if we get more people to fight the bully?’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 16 March 2015). Shazri turned abruptly and looked at me. He stared at me for a brief second before saying, ‘Nobody asked me what I think before’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 16 March 2015). As dramatically and quickly as that had happened, he regained himself, shifted his weight on one leg while shaking the other as he stood next to me. Sha said, ‘No. If people bully us, then we find more people to bully them back! Simple what!’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 16 March 2015). With that response, Sha had educated me about the survival
tactics of the playground but more importantly, I understood that any positive changes that emerged from participating in the playbuilding programme would be contending with the lure and influence of the dominant culture of the community in the estate.

The second time a clear shift in Sha’s identity was witnessed was on the last day of Phase One. It was three hours before the doors opened for our first performance to the residents in the estate. The group performing the tableaux that showed bullying in the playground requested to make changes to their set of images. The children felt that while the images were honest depictions of what had happened in the playground, they did not represent the changes the children hoped to see in that space. Sha and Tin led the group of children to speak with me. Sha convinced me that we had enough time to make changes and the new amendments resonated with them better, ‘Miss Jennifer, we want to show what is correct. Now, it’s just fight, fight, but we want to like, be peaceful, like friend-friend, not always fight, fight in the playground’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 19 March 2015). It was a request that was first raised by Sha but supported even by children who were not involved in the set of tableaux. The children argued that there was a need to reshape that story for the audience that was coming, and also a responsibility to demonstrate possible alternatives to the common narratives in the community. The children’s behaviour corresponded to Bandura’s (1982) and Buckworth’s (2017) theory of self-efficacy where the
motivation to act on a challenge surpassed the actual level of knowledge possessed.

The identity Sha performed on the last day of Phase One juxtaposed starkly with the identity observed in Phase Two. The second phase of the playbuilding workshops were conducted weekly and there was a three-week break due to the mid-year examinations in the local schools. As a result of the interruption and a number of other reasons which will be discussed in Chapter 7, attendance in the playbuilding workshops became highly erratic.

In the fifth session in Phase Two, the children were each given a plain white kite. They were instructed to draw a family portrait or their wishes for their families. The kites were intended to be exhibited in the room before their performance. Sha came to the session very late that day and the children were in the thick of drawing on their kites. He looked around the room and was disappointed that Tin was not there. Sha had forgotten that Tin was going out with his father.

Sha wanted to leave but I stopped him and passed him a kite, hoping to entice him to stay. I explained to him what he was supposed to do and left him alone while I looked at the other children’s drawings. From the video recording, I saw that Sha sat on a small arm chair near to the camera holding his kite and looked around the room for some time. From the video, he looked pensive and almost uncertain. He did not get started on the kite nor showed any intention to do so.
After about 10 minutes, I came back to Sha and sat with him. My reflection notes that afternoon showed that I was curious and slightly uncomfortable that Sha’s behaviour that day was a departure from the usual chatty and larger-than-life persona that he had adopted. I wondered if the absence of his friend had dislocated his social identity, and in turn shaken his individual identity. Hemming and Madge (2012) explain social identity as a “social location within society and how we interact with other people within social groups” (p. 40). They further elaborated that “the idea of a completely autonomous identity is a fallacy. Instead, we are formed through interaction between our core self and others in society, shaping our identities through participation in social structures” (p. 40). On that afternoon, Sha had demonstrated how his social identity was interlocked with his individual identity. The absence of his friends had dislocated the confident street boy persona Sha put up during the playbuilding sessions. In place of that identity was a muted character unsupported by his peer who gave him the confidence to take on the big role of a tough leader.

I took the opportunity to engage Sha in a conversation but he was reluctant to speak. I had wanted to find out from him why he was not interested in the kite drawing activity but he either kept quiet or smiled awkwardly while maintaining a low gaze throughout the ten minutes. Stokrocki (2010) claims that participation in arts activities will be able to help pre-adolescents “find and transform their identity and seek powers beyond only that of beauty” (p. 73). Sha had been a consistent participant in the drama programme starting from Phase One and the
playbuilding process had surfaced some of his struggles in identity, both personal and social. While there was some fleeting and superficial evidence to suggest that his sense of self that was performed at specific instances during the playbuilding programme showed a shift, there was no other sustainable indication. Instead, his participation in the drama had crystallised the identity he had molded for himself and it shielded him from engaging with his family struggles through the strength he had borrowed from his adopted identities.

I finally left him alone sensing that he was trying hard to wriggle out of the conversation with me without being openly rude. The video footage showed that he started working on the kite soon after I left. When he was finished, Sha left the kite on the small armchair and left the room. He did not return to the session after that nor appeared for the performance the next day. Sha had drawn the face of a monster on his kite and signed off his name. He had also put a huge X across the monster’s face. When I showed it to Zaty during the debrief, she explained that Sha’s mother was extremely strict with the preteen because she feared he would fall into the company of unsavoury characters in the rental estate. The tight rein his mother held over Sha had caused a strain in their relationship. Sha was responding to his mother’s tight rein with ‘rebellious behaviour like stealing and hanging out with the older boys more often.’ (Video Transcription – Phase Two, 10 June 2015).
Sha’s discomfort in sharing about his family and his sense of loss when his friend was not around made me reflect even more deeply about his construct of identity. I wondered what had motivated the drawing of a monster with a huge X across its face when asked to draw a family portrait, and then subsequently leaving the kite behind. Was it a result of his reluctance to dwell on the situation confronting his family or the absence of his friend? I reflected that evening that the kite might have little significance to Sha or it might have represented a topic that was hard for him to address at that moment. Sha had left the kite behind and did not bother to come back for it later while the other children were very protective of their kites. I recognised that the kite drawing activity had little or no impact on helping Shazri articulate or make sense of the situation he was facing at home. Instead, it might have forced him to confront situations he was unprepared to engage with yet.

The kite that was left behind was “a stop” (Fels, 2012, p. 53) that had disrupted the process and highlighted gaps in my praxis. It also challenged my assumption about the efficacy of the kite drawing activity to help the children express their desires for their families. Fels (2012) further explains that every “stop” in creative participatory work “hold within them possibility for new understanding of what we thought we knew” (p. 54) and becomes embodied data that must be studied carefully. I recognised that I had been presumptuous that the children would be able to represent the complex familial relationships and desires on the kites easily. Instead, in the case of Sha, I might have forced him to confront an issue which he was not ready to face and challenged the silence he was guarding about
the circumstances at home. Hughes and Wilson (2004) posit youth theatre as a safe creative outlet for risk taking and exploration of selves and aspects of life. However, Sha’s reluctance and reticence to discuss a personal topic connotes the limitations of the safe space I presumed activities within the playbuilding process offered. Even when framed in a positive light, like aspirations and desires for their families, the participants were required to dig into the depths of the existing relationships and the surrounding circumstances before they were able to articulate what they had hoped for in the future. Shazri’s response to the kite drawing activity made me question the way applied theatre in marginalized and vulnerable communities worked. On one spectrum, practitioners in the field have to work cautiously not to engender the participants into the negative stereotypes typical in their community and reinforce the dominant rhetoric without offering an alternative way to read the world (Cahill, 2010). On the other spectrum, my experience with Sha and the kite activity informed me that working within the artistic process to envision hopes for the future might be just as detrimental. It might further bolster hope as useless and dangerous and illuminate a future that was bleak.

After he left his kite on the small armchair that afternoon, I did not see Sha again. He did not participate in the final performance although he had worked to create the story with the other children. Anecdotally, Kha told me that Sha had been spending his time with the teenage boys from the playground community and he had been stealing from the minimart across the carpark from RSC. During my
meeting with Zaty one year after the playbuilding programme ended as I mentioned earlier, the youth worker told me that Sha was arrested for housebreaking six months ago. The pre-teen had broken into Pris’ home in the same neighbourhood to steal a handphone and some money. The shifts in Sha’s identity during the playbuilding process were real and noticeable. However, they were inconsistent and sustainability of the shifts were questionable. The data suggested that while the playbuilding activities revealed moments when Sha became aware that he could effect positive changes to the circumstances he was facing, the real environment he was steeped into and the identity he had chosen to embody proved overpowering.

5.1.2 Ned and her desire to succeed

Ned was a participant in the playbuilding programme in 2014 before the research study. I remembered this feisty young girl because she used to bring her youngest brother Nic to the playbuilding workshops and she was very protective over him. She explained that her sickly grandmother who was the main caregiver of eight grandchildren could not watch over Nic. Ned’s mother was in the drug rehabilitation center and nothing was known about her father.

Ned’s shift in her identity was gradual but highly evident. As an efficacious and confident young person, Ned needed little encouragement to take on leadership roles or play central characters in the performances. However, I realized she
needed opportunities to explore her own capabilities. Cahill (2010) reminds us that drama creates the platform for its participants to “embodying the possible, which is not yet part of the reality” (p. 167). Through the playbuilding processes, Ned experimented with a variety of roles and approaches to reading the world which supported different ways of being for her.

On the third day of the playbuilding programme in Phase One, I appointed Ned, Wiy and Shad as leaders to rehearse with their groups the tableaux we had created the day before. I had chosen the three children who were all nine years old to break the hierarchy present in the group and also to allow a chance for the younger children to experience leadership and responsibility. Wiy and Shad did not even get the chance to gather their team mates together. Wiy tried persuading her team to get together but they were dispersed and distracted by the random toys and furniture that were stored in the room we were using for the playbuilding programme. Shad’s leadership role was usurped by Sha who took over the task and instructed the children what they needed to do. Ned was the only one amongst the three who experienced marginal success in leading her group for their rehearsal. The small-sized girl yelled at her peers in Malay to gather around and she pulled them by their clothes or arms to keep them in the group for the rehearsal. It was no easy feat for her because the children in her group were mostly below nine-years-old with low levels of attention. Her challenge was further heightened because the children from Wiy’s group were distracting the other children by performing mischievous antics to attract attention.
At the end of fifteen minutes, Ned let out a loud and frustrated sigh and she gave up being the leader. She sat next to me and complained that I had given her a tough job to do.

I questioned myself later that night in my reflection log if I had actually set the three up to fail by appointing them as leaders without first creating the necessary conditions that could help them succeed. I had naively thought that by empowering them with leadership titles, they would gain the cooperation and respect of their peers. I had not considered the three children’s social identities which determined that they were not recognized in the community as leaders and perhaps even more importantly, their individual identities were not accustomed to playing the roles of leaders and thus they gave up very quickly. I had also overlooked the fact that outside of the drama sessions, I was not someone who possessed social standing amongst the playground community and thus, the leaders I had appointed would not be accorded the due respect the way Sha and Tin would. Buckworth (2017) argues that verbal persuasion is not effective in enhancing a person’s sense of efficacy as there is no “authentic experiential base” (p. 41). Ned ignored my verbal persuasion to try to lead her group because her experience informed her that it was far too challenging and she was likely to fail if she tried again.

Bandura (1982) explained that an individual’s sense of self-efficacy plays an important role in the thought patterns, actions and emotional arousal. Self-
efficacy beliefs affect self-referent thoughts “which mediates the relationship between knowledge and action” (p. 122). This explanation is further expanded to expound that an efficacious person will proactively find the means to elicit support and help in order to complete the task successfully (Brummert Lennings & Bussey, 2017; Gangloff & Mazilescu, 2017; Williams et al., 2017). Ned displayed a positive sense of self-efficacy when she took on the role of the leader for that rehearsal. She understood she needed to adopt a tough approach if she wanted to lead the group of children. Therefore, she yelled at them to gather and she physically manipulated them to ensure they were not scattered in the room.

Ned displayed the aptitude discussed in social cognitive research (Bandura, 1982, 1993; Gangloff & Mazilescu, 2017; Rudy, May, Matthews, & Davis lli, 2013) of an efficacious person who was primed to meet challenges. However, what eventually defeated the young girl was not a loss of efficacious beliefs but an unsupportive environment. Wiy’s group was not working on the rehearsal but instead they were distracting and taunting the other children who were trying to get started in their rehearsal. Seven-year-old Rut from Ned’s group was kicked by eight-year-old Ros from Wiy’s group and a tussle broke out quite immediately. Zaty stepped in to break up the commotion and to speak with the two boys. It was at the point that Ned gave up trying and came to sit with me. In my reflection that evening, I acknowledged that I had applied inappropriate methods to build leadership identities in the children. Labeling them as leaders did not help them attain the respect and cooperation from their peers.
The next attempt for Ned to experiment with the identity of a leader happened towards the end of the same day. We needed a narrator for our story and I had Ned in mind for the role. Amongst all the children, Ned’s English language capability was the highest. The performance had been structured in a series of tableaux to tell three different stories. Without narration, the audience would have to read the tableaux independently but they might not be able to grasp the nuances in the plot which were deliberate and important to the children. However, instead of appointing Ned, I asked for a volunteer amongst the children to take on the role of the narrator. No one except Ned volunteered for it. Once she was assigned to the role, Ned took on a very methodical approach to completing the task. She scouted for pencil and paper, sat next to me and scribbled furiously as I explained to her what information was needed in the script. She excused herself to work on the narrator’s script while I organised the other children to rehearse the tableaux.

Ned demonstrated an efficacious approach to taking on the challenge of being the narrator. Social cognitive researchers suggest an efficacious person will seek ways to ensure their success in a given task through careful planning and reflecting on the ways to negate challenges (Bandura, 1982, 1997; Buckworth, 2017; Gangloff & Mazilescu, 2017). Ned removed herself from the rest of the children to work quietly and did not reappear in the room again till she had completed her first draft of the script. As we rehearsed the entire performance using her draft, she conscientiously made changes to it, while suggesting ways
to integrate the script into the performance and how it could cue the children to take their positions in the different frozen images. Her behaviours resonated with efficacy theories to show her being highly reflective in the process of being successful in her task.

Ned understood that she needed a space away from the other children so that she could focus on her planning. She was also proactive in making changes to her script and sought ways to blend the script with the performance to ensure they were aligned in telling one single story. Ned might not possess the knowledge and skills to write a narrator’s script as the young girl said it was her first time being asked to do it. However, the lack of knowledge and skills did not prevent her from assuming the role or being challenged by a task which was shunned by the other children. Her sense of agency – seeking help to complete and improve the script, and her sense of efficacy – the readiness to meet the challenges were evident when she was given the opportunity. Ned was very successful as the narrator in the final performance and she inspired Tin to contest for the role in Phase Two. Tin explained that after watching Ned perform the role of the narrator, he understood how it was done and he felt he could also be successful. Ewing (2013) posits that drama provides the opportunity for its participants to “experience a process, or to observe a process modelled’ (p. 36) which proved advantageous to Tin as he gained a new level of confidence vicariously. It was also demonstrated that self-efficacy levels are malleable and influenced by a list of factors. However, these factors are inter-related and affect
efficacy differently in different individuals (Bandura, 1982, 1993; Brummert Lennings & Bussey, 2017; Buckworth, 2017; Gangloff & Mazilescu, 2017). Tin’s sense of self-efficacy was most affected by the vicarious experience of watching Ned successfully perform the task and his desire to attempt the role would have provided him the experience of mastery if he were to meet with the same success.

Bandura (1982) claims physiological states as one of the key influences to a person’s state of self-efficacy. Ned’s physiological states further enhanced her sense of readiness to accomplish this task successfully. When she met with challenges during the rehearsal, she confronted these problems with the intentions to solve them instead of giving up. Ni missing his cue repeatedly was swiftly met with a solution – Tas was tasked to remind the little boy when he needed to take his position in the freeze frame. Ned amended her script when the other children gave her feedback that they did not understand parts of her narration. She changed it so that it facilitated their understanding of the story she was telling, a story they had collectively built. According to Brummert Lenning & Bussey (2017), an efficacious individual will adopt proactive behaviour to help them succeed by eliciting support and making changes to the situation or environment. Ned, at that instance, was exhibiting a heightened sense of self-efficacy. The confidence and perseverance displayed for this role was different from how she gave up after some effort to manage her group in their rehearsal for the tableaux on day two.
Ned’s participation in the playbuilding programme provided the young girl the platform to experience roles unavailable to her in the family and social environments. Within Ned’s social environment, she was not recognised as a leader amongst the other children. In her family, she played the role of a caregiver to the youngest sibling occasionally but there was no platform for her to show her capabilities or talents other than child-minding. The playbuilding process might not have improved the level of efficacy Ned possessed as it was evident that she was a confident child who was ready for challenges. However, her participation in the playbuilding programme afforded the time and space for her to adopt roles which were unavailable previously and that fed her sense of self-efficacy. It would not be accurate and fair to attribute the change in her sense of efficacy solely as impacts of her participation in the drama programme. Her identity as the narrator and also leader of the performance presented the opportunity for her to enhance her sense of self-efficacy through a heightened physiological state and performance attainment, both were important influences on efficacy according to social cognitive research (Bandura, 1982; Brummert Lennings & Bussey, 2017; Buckworth, 2017; Gangloff & Mazilescu, 2017).

Ned’s example also highlighted how the perception of oneself has direct impact on the level of efficacy a child or youth had and this affected the amount of effort he or she would make to succeed. Ned did not identify as the leader of the children when she was given that role, and thus, she did not persevere to negate the difficulties of getting the group to work together with the right physiological
states. Hemming and Madge (2012) suggest that social identity depends on the person’s “social location within society” (p. 40) and in this case, Ned’s social identity found no commonality with the playground community. None of the other influences on efficacy posited by Bandura (1982, 1997) and Tsang et al. (2012) affected her positively. However, Ned wanted to be the narrator as she had volunteered for it. She identified with that role and the responsibilities that were attached to it, and when that happened, she was able to activate the different influences to enhance her sense of self-efficacy to help her imagine and prepare for the challenges that accompanied the role. Her success in playing the role of the narrator further enhanced her sense of efficacy as Buckworth (2017) explains that the performance attainment experienced through the completion of the task serves as authentic evidence to a person’s capability.

Burton (2002) explains that engagement in youth theatre activities could result in an enhanced sense of autonomy and agency in its participants which correlates to an “enhancement of a sense of identity and the development of talent” (p. 68). Burton’s explanation became evident when the final rehearsals started on the fourth day and I told Ned that the show was in her hands and she had power like the ‘traffic controller’. Through her narration, she was to cue the rest of the performers throughout the whole performance. Ned was proud of her role and she obviously enjoyed the control she had over the performance. Her exclamation of ‘Yes!’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 18 March 2015) when given the role of the storyteller was evidence of the elation she felt. She called
herself ‘The Boss’ of all the children and she understood how crucial her role was. She took the role of the narrator very seriously. However, it was the identity of the controller of the entire show that really seemed to weigh on her in a very positive manner.

She understood how important it was for every child to follow her cues so that every image could be formed accurately and in the most seamless manner possible. The example earlier about Ni missing his cue repeatedly when Ned narrated ‘we love to play’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 19 March 2015) was met with a swift solution. Ned instructed Tas to be attentive and to remind her younger brother during the actual performance. She demanded absolute compliance from the rest of the team, including Sha and Tin, and did not condone non-compliance to her instructions when the two boys tried to give suggestions to the children to look out for other cues before they took their place in the performance space. She almost appeared tyrannical. The observation notes recorded that ‘Ned made sure everyone was silent before she began, and the children obeyed. Even Sha and Tin or Ned would talk to them very sternly’ (Observation notes, 19 March 2015). Williams et al. (2017) explain that a healthy sense of self-efficacy propels an individual to be proactive in meeting challenges in the future. Ned’s sense of efficacy was enhanced as she led the children through the rehearsals, and this was made even more evident when she volunteered herself as the narrator again in Phase Two of the playbuilding
programme. She argued that she was the ideal choice because she had new plans to improve what a narrator could do in the show.

What was also interesting to note when I was re-watching the videos was, through Ned’s role as the narrator, the other girls seemed to have gained confidence vicariously simply by watching her assume an authoritative identity. Buckworth (2017) suggests that vicarious experiences can “contribute to self-efficacy through symbolic construction that serves as a guide to behaviour” (p.41). I saw in the videos Fin telling Tin to keep quiet and pay attention because Ned was about to start the rehearsal, and in another rehearsal, Ash demanded that Kha sat down as Ned had started the narration. Ash said Kha was ‘disturbing them’ by standing up (Video transcription – Phase One, 19 March 2015). Ash put a finger to her lips when Kha tried to retort. Ned’s assumption of an important leadership role in the drama offered the girls a glimpse into what power they could possibly possess as individuals and as a community within the playbuilding group.

Ned’s role as the leader in the performance did not translate into a shift in the playground politics. Just as Cahill (2010) explained that “identity and agency are central concepts to address in the drama as we are constantly at play with who we can be, and what we can cause to happen” (p. 162), Ned’s role presented the opportunity and possibility that any one of the children could become a leader even if they did not possess the same status in the playground.
5.1.3 Ros and the need for a chance

Ros was eight-years-old and he was Ash’s younger brother. The little boy attended every playbuilding session but he participated in the activities selectively. There were occasions when he chose to sit on the sofa and watched the rest of the children work. There were also situations when he would sit in the middle of the room and obstructed our work but refused to move away to allow us the space. Ros’ infrequent participation and apparent disengagement with the playbuilding process made him an unlikely candidate to be examined for shifts in his sense of identity and self-efficacy initially. However, I realised when I watched the video recordings again as I categorised the data collected according to the themes, I had mistaken Ros’s lack of participation as disengagement. The video recordings showed him paying close attention to the activities in the playbuilding process as he observed what the other children were doing on the first two days of the workshops. Ros had only started to participate actively and consistently in the programme from the third day of the workshop in Phase One.

We started the third day of the workshop with an exercise called The Blind Car (Boal, 2002). The children had no experience with this activity and they were excited when they saw me taking out strips of black cloth that I had cut for the blindfolds. This game required the participants to pair up, with one person blindfolded acting as the car in the front and the other person as the driver standing at
the back. The aim of the game was for the driver to bring his ‘car’ safely to a
designated spot in the room.

I had placed several chairs as obstacles around the room and brought each pair
to a different starting point, away from other drivers and their ‘cars’. Every pair
had to try to get to the other end of the room as quickly as possible with no
accidents, meaning the blindfolded partner did not walk into someone else or
knock into furniture. The driver would direct the blindfolded friend by tapping
specific parts of the back to indicate the direction the ‘car’ should be moving. The
whole activity did not rely on verbal instructions. We did two trial runs just to
ensure that everyone knew the signals well. The children were very nervous but
excited. Phyllis’ observation notes recorded the excitement in the room, ‘There
is a lot of laughing and saying “you do first” while the children try to get their
friends to be the one to drive the car first’ (Observation notes, 18 March 2015).
When I watched the video again, I noticed the children giggling nervously during
the trials and some of them being extremely apologetic to their friends when
accidents happened.

When the game started, there was an unusual silence and tension in the room. I
reflected in the log that evening that ‘the children were very serious about The
Blind Car’ (Reflection log, 18 March 2015). The children were very carefully
guiding their friends across the room and some of them tapped their friends’
backs gingerly. The gentle actions they were taking with their friends contrasted
sharply with the rough behaviour I had witnessed in the first two days of the workshops. Zaty sat with Phyllis and she was observing this activity from a corner of the room. During the water break, Zaty and I had a quick conversation. She said she ‘(could) not believe (her) eyes. The children are so focused and so careful not to hurt their friends’ (Personal communication, 18 March 2015). Zaty was interested in developing that activity further to build the children’s sense of responsibility and cooperation.

Ros did not participate in The Blind Car in the beginning. He was seated on the stack of aluminium chairs in the corner of the room. From the video recording, I observed that during the trial runs of the activity, he moved from the stack of chairs to stand nearer to where the children were. From the video, he was seen watching intently at what the children were doing and he was smiling. When we were just about to start the second round of the game, Ros came up to me and asked quietly if he could play. Everyone had a partner by then so I asked Zaty to partner with him. He offered to be the driver and Zaty was the ‘car’.

Ros gingerly guided Zaty across the many obstacles I had placed in the space and he cautiously and very slowly, avoided all human traffic that was maneuvering in the small tight space. I was constantly shifting the chairs to make it more challenging for the children but Ros remained focused and careful. When the other children exclaimed loudly, ‘TEACHER!’ in protest to my naughty antics
of shifting the obstacles, Ros kept very quiet and accepted the constant changes without any protest.

Ros displayed a strong sense of persistence in getting his partner across the room safely. I reflected in my notes during the game that Ros was calm and focused throughout the game and he did not seem affected by the noise or the excitement generated by the other children. This young person had demonstrated an enhanced physiological state which according to Bandura (1982), is crucial for the development of a positive sense of self-efficacy. Ros’ mental and physical states during the activity were tuned to completing the job well. While he could not anticipate the new positions of the chairs as I was constantly shifting them about, he anticipated that changes were going to happen. Unlike the other children who protested to the movements I was making with the furniture in the space, Ros accepted each challenge I threw in his way with a renewed sense of focus and thoughtfulness. The video footage showed Ros pausing each time he met with a new obstacle and his eyes looked around the room to assess the available routes before guiding his partner again in moving forward. The young boy had demonstrated that his sense of efficacy during the activity was heightened as he was proactive in finding solutions to the challenges and he planned how he was going to complete his task. Ros exhibited behaviours and dispositions that resonated with descriptions of efficacy in social cognitive research (Brummert Lennings & Bussey, 2017; Gangloff & Mazilescu, 2017).
We played the game a few more times and the children changed partners for each new round. Ros volunteered to be the driver for the entire game and his behaviour remained consistent. He treated every one of his blind cars the same way – carefully, protectively and with undivided attention. I interviewed Ros at the end of the workshop to understand the reasons for his commitment to the activity. Ros explained plainly that he felt he had great responsibility towards the person he was working with. He said, ‘Teacher, it is very important I be careful or my car crash’ (Interview, 18 March 2015). When I suggested that he did not participate in other playbuilding activities, he replied, ‘Teacher, this one different. This one I control. If I not careful, then my car die. But if I control properly, then my car not die’ (Interview, 18 March 2015). Ros also revealed through the interview that he felt he did not have good ideas in the playbuilding activities, he did not think that he had other stories to contribute and he did not like to perform in the tableaux. However, Ros felt challenged to participate in *The Blind Car* because he wanted to ‘try and play the game because (the other children made it look like) it’s so difficult’ (Interview, 18 March 2015). The young boy wanted to test his capability in moving his blindfolded partner across to the destination safely. Bandura (1982) and Buckworth (2017) explained that an efficacious individual would predict the level of success in the given task by engaging in self-referencing thoughts that mediates the relationship between possessing knowledge about the task and the actual performance of action. Ros had manifested a positive sense of self-efficacy which affected his sense of agency towards the activity. His mental frame was locked into negating challenges during
the drama game and his self-referencing thoughts were anchored in being responsible for the friend he was leading. There was no evidence of him engaging in negative thoughts or doubting his abilities. In that activity, he identified himself as a person who had to be responsible for his peers. It contrasted sharply with his perceptions that he had nothing to contribute in the playbuilding process.

Zaty suggested that Ros might have felt empowered in the activity. The community worker explained, ‘In this game, he is like the big brother, he has responsibility over someone else’ (Interview, 18 March 2015). Zaty’s observation of Ros coupled with her knowledge about the children and their families corroborated with what Ros had shared with me in very simple terms at the end of the day. Vettraino et al. (2017) highlighted motivation as one of the benefits of being engaged in the arts, and the participants possess a heightened sense of self-efficacy and abilities to manage challenges. Ros’ behaviour in the activity bore elements of the benefits Vettraino et al. (2017) discussed. Being empowered with the sense of responsibility and trust in a simple game had brought out a different person in Ros, he displayed efficacious dispositions and actively sought ways to negate the challenges in the game.

The next time Ros displayed a similar sense of responsibility and agency was during the rehearsal three hours before the doors opened on the fourth day. Ros’ group, which had formed organically due to their interest in the theme of playing
in the playground, was to perform tableaux of children playing badminton together. The first image showed four children playing badminton together, the second image showed two boys getting angry with each other over the game and the last image showed one of the boys teaching the two boys who were angry how to play the game correctly. Ros’ team explained that it was common for children to get into arguments when they played together because they did not know the rules to the games, and the children refused to listen to each other. Sometimes, these arguments escalated into physical fights. They suggested that they needed to show other children in the neighbourhood who were coming to watch their performance that the way to prevent fights was to learn the correct rules to the games.

I appointed Ros as the leader for his group. I wondered if he would enjoy this responsibility of ensuring his group was focused in their rehearsal and how he would lead them. Ros had no prior experience being a leader in the playbuilding process. His new identity as the leader for his group enabled me to examine Buckworth’s (2017) theory that a person’s behaviour can be predicted from the individual’s sense of self-efficacy which has little bearing on the actual competency level possessed.

There were three other younger boys in Ros’ group. While they were not as rowdy as the older boys, they were easily distracted and frequently wandered off. From the observation notes, my post workshop reflections and the video
recordings, Ros was observed to have taken his new identity as the leader very seriously. He was facilitating the rehearsal by directing his friends and reminding them what they had to do in the frozen images. From the corner of the room where Phyllis and I were seated to conduct the observation, we could see Ros physically moving his friends around in the images, as if to find the correct location where they were supposed to be in the tableaux we had created the day before. He also stepped in and out of the images to check if anyone was standing with their backs to the audience or if someone had blocked another person. These were performance techniques we had discussed in a session two days before when Ros appeared disinterested in our playbuilding exercises and preferred to sit on the sofa to watch us work. Phyllis wrote in her observation notes that ‘Ros took his leader role very seriously. He checked and rechecked the images during the rehearsal’ (Observation notes, 19 March 2015). Zaty was impressed by what she saw and said to me, ‘Look at Ros, so serious! He is really behaving like a leader. I never see him like that before!’ (Personal communication, 19 March 2014). Similar to The Blind Car, Ros was demonstrating how his physiological states were positively affecting his behaviour as posited by Bandura (1982) and Tsang et al. (2012). His mental capacities were fixated on how he was able to reproduce the frozen images accurately in an aesthetically pleasing form. There were no verbal complaints or physical signs that implied he was frustrated by the challenges he met and had wanted to give up. Instead, he took his role very seriously and appeared to be constantly making adjustments to the way he was managing his peers.
Buckworth (2017) stressed that self-efficacy levels will remain low for individuals who avoid undertaking tasks they deemed outside of their capabilities. Ros’ behaviours supported this proposition - he was proud to have been made the leader although he had no prior experience but he gamely took up the challenge. The young boy knew he did not possess the skills required but his assumption of the role and the subsequent success met when undertaking the task further enhanced his sense of self-efficacy as a leader.

When I watched the videos again, I saw that Ni, the youngest in the group, kept forgetting where he was supposed to stand in the first image and Ros patiently reminded him and guided him three times. When Ni forgot a fourth time, Ros displayed frustration uttering a loud “ARGH!”, but when he spoke with Ni, he contained that annoyance. Instead, he found a different way of helping Ni remember where he was supposed to be standing. He told Ni to look at the carpet on the floor. There was a stain at the spot where Ni was supposed to stand and Ros told him to move to the spot before he moved into the image. That advice worked and in the subsequent rehearsals, Ni did not go to the wrong place again. Ros’ behaviour and his commitment to the leadership role he was playing was a departure from the playground identity he held. According to Zaty, in the playground, he was one of the young children who were not often given attention by the pre-teens and adolescents.
The playbuilding process demanded that he stepped into a role which he had not previously experienced but he employed all the necessary mental and emotional capacities to accomplish the tasks. He further displayed traits of an efficacious person by adopting proactive behaviour in seeking support and ways to negate the challenges encountered during the rehearsal process, in accordance with theories discussing dispositions of an improved sense of self-efficacy (Brummert Lennings & Bussey, 2017; Williams et al., 2017). Moreover, that rehearsal process also provided the platform for him to explore different perspectives of a situation and understand himself better, opportunities which Kukla (1987) claims are not common in a regular classroom.

I praised Ros when the children were given time to change into the T-shirts provided for the performance. I told Ros that he had done a great job in helping his team rehearse and they were very focused. I asked if he had opportunities to be a leader in school or on other occasions. He smiled and said, “teacher, this is first time I be leader. I want to do good because I am leader’ (Personal communication, 19 March 2015). I tried to seek clarification to the ‘I want to do good’ and he sighed in mock exasperation. He said, “like you tell me do something so I make sure I do properly. When someone tell you, you do something, you just do properly, cannot anyhow anyhow do” (Personal communication, 19 March 2015). Nicholson (2005) explains that drama allows its participants to explore with different identities. Ros’ identity as a leader in the rehearsal process was unprecedented in his real life. The playbuilding
programme provided the opportunity for him to take risk in a safe environment to find out if he had the qualities or capabilities to become a leader.

The identity of a leader had empowered Ros with a sense of agency that was not witnessed previously. Participation in drama creates the opportunities for young people to explore the different roles they can play and in the process, they identify with new talents they have discovered about themselves (Burton, 2002; Hughes & Wilson, 2004; Nicholson, 2005). He enjoyed the trust and the responsibility that was offered to him and he was motivated to show he was answerable to the role given. He made decisions on how he was going to help his team rehearse and improve on the precision of image changes and the aesthetics of the pictures. He remained unaffected by what the other groups were doing even when the other two groups became distracted and started jumping on the sofa, an activity which Ros enjoyed tremendously. Bandura (1997) extended his study on self-efficacy and posits that a person’s perception of his or her actual abilities intercepted between the actual knowing and the final doing of the task. If an individual had no other option but to undertake the task, a person with low efficacy would dwell on the impending challenges and fail to identify methods to negate these challenges. According to Ros, he had not experienced being a leader prior to this programme but he was enthusiastic about the new responsibilities. Instead of focusing on his lack of experience and knowledge, Ros took on the challenges and proactively sought ways to resolve them.
5.1.4 Dana and her negative perceptions of self

At the first session in Phase One, I used drawing as a way to get to know everyone. The children were encouraged to display their completed drawings on the pillar in the middle of the room and they were given time to present their drawings to everyone. Eleven-year-old Dana was the first to complete her picture and she showed it to me. She was in a foul mood when we started the workshop and had refused to introduce herself. It was only after the introductions were done that I found out Tin had teased her earlier in the day and she was upset. Dana drew a few basketballs and she haphazardly added some colours on them. Din walked past us at that moment and he saw Dana’s drawing. He let out a loud ‘Sebok!’ (Malay for ‘show off’) into Dana’s ears before running away. Dana tried to hit him but missed. I handed Dana some sticky tape and asked her to put her drawing up on the wall as we were going to do a gallery walk later.

Dana let out a loud protest at my request. She shouted, “No! I don’t want!” (Video transcription – Phase One, 16 March 2015). Her outburst caught me by surprise. She went on to exclaim just as loudly, “They will laugh at me! What if they say it is ugly? They will call me stupid!” (Video transcription – Phase One, 16 March 2015). According to Rudy et al.’s (2013) definition of social efficacy, Dana’s outburst and her refusal to display her drawing could be an indication of her personal evaluation of how she was viewed in a social situation. It hinted at a low sense of self-efficacy as she had assumed that her drawing would attract
negative responses from her peers, and thus she responded negatively and emotionally to my request. Bandura (1982) explained that self-efficacy has a direct relationship with human agency and facilitates the execution of “action required to deal with prospective situations” (p. 122). Buckworth (2017) extended Bandura’s theory and states that self-efficacy remains low for some individuals because of the tendency to avoid tasks they deemed outside of their capabilities and therefore, there is little or no impetus to acquire the skills required to succeed. An individual’s self-efficacy beliefs also affect the way an individual seeks support to make changes to the situation or environment (Bandura, 1982; Brummert Lennings & Bussey, 2017; Williams et al., 2017). Dana had in this situation displayed little motivation to improve her art work if she had deemed it of poor quality. She was concerned and imagined that her peers would criticize her work so she had chosen to respond to the situation with negative self-referencing thoughts.

The next time I witnessed a similar display of negative self-referencing thoughts and low sense of self-efficacy from Dana was in session two of Phase One. As a warm up activity to the day, we played Follow the leader, a game which the children enjoyed tremendously. Seated in a circle, we identified someone to leave the group for a while as we discussed who the leader for that game cycle should be. The leader was to decide on an action and the rest of us would follow. The person who had left would then return and try to guess who the leader of the group was. The fun part of the game was of course for the leader to change the
actions and the rest of us to be observant enough to quickly replicate the same actions without giving clues to who the leader was. Phyllis noted in her observation notes that ‘Everyone wanted to be the leader. They were all fighting to be the one to lead the actions’ (Observation notes, 17 March 2015).

After a few cycles and most of the children having had a chance to be the leader, I asked for volunteers from those who had not had the chance to lead yet. Pris grabbed Dana’s arm and put it up while trying to get my attention. Dana pulled her arm back angrily and said, “I don’t want!” (Video transcription – Phase One, 17 March 2015). As I re-watched the videos, I saw that Pris was coaxing Dana to volunteer but she met with some fairly angry resistance from her good friend. At one point in the video, it looked like Dana got angry with Pris’s pestering and literally turned her back against her friend. Buckworth (2017) posits that verbal persuasion is not effective as an influence to an individual’s sense of self-efficacy because there is no authentic basis to raise the person’s confidence and belief that he/she truly possesses the capabilities needed to complete the task successfully. Furthermore, Bandura (1993, 1997) states that verbal persuasion would only be effective when it stems from someone who is important and shares a significant relationship with the actor. Pris’ persuasion to get her friend to be the leader in that activity had failed to encourage Dana and it had no positive influence on the girl’s sense of self-efficacy. I interpreted this lack of impact as a combination of both factors: (i) Dana had little belief in herself that she would be able to lead in the activity and she feared ridicule from the other children; (ii) while
Pris was a close friend, she was not someone Dana looked up to as a model whose judgements were credible and trusted.

After the break, the children asked if we could play *Simon Says*. Someone had found a sequined hat from amongst the wall of unused furniture and that sparked a small scuffle between the children. I confiscated the hat and suggested that the person playing Simon in the game would wear the hat and instead of ‘Simon says’, we changed it to ‘(name of the child) says’. I knew the children would enjoy having the added sense of power and authority when they wore the hat and also having their name as part of the instructions.

As usual, I asked for volunteers and the children fought for a chance to lead the game. After spending some time on the game, I decided it was time to return to the playbuilding process. The children begged to play the game for a few more turns and I relented. I asked who had not had the chance to wear the hat and be the leader. Pris who was the last one with the hat yelled, “Dana!” and she was again met with a loud “No!” (Video transcription – Phase One, 17 March 2015).

Pris who was standing next to Dana shoved the hat into her friend’s arm and Dana let the hat drop to the floor. Pris picked it up and tried putting it on Dana’s head. At that point, Dana started to run away and Pris gave chase. The two girls ended up running around the circle we had formed for a while before I stopped them. The hat was eventually passed to Rut again who loved the game and
wanted to play it for a long time more. I watched the video footage three more times subsequently and concluded that the chase between Pris and Dana was not friendly. Dana was not trying to be coy when she ran away from Pris, instead she appeared genuinely distressed.

Despite watching the children play the role of *Simon* in the game, Dana’s sense of self-efficacy in being able to lead the game did not improve. In this situation, vicarious experience had also failed to influence her efficacy level. Buckworth (2017) argues that vicarious experiences are effective as a source of influence to self-efficacy levels when the model shares similarities with the individual in question. Dana’s fear of being mocked and laughed at by the children in the programme connote her belief that she was not as good as her peers. Therefore, to Dana, the fact that the other children were enjoying the game and had successfully taken on the role of *Simon* as the leader in the game had no bearing on her capabilities as she deemed herself less capable. The lack of performance attainments on Dana’s part, because she avoided the tasks, kept her sense of self-efficacy at a low level which was in consonance with Gangloff and Mazilesco’s (2017) argument. The pair posits that a lack of performance attainments negatively impacts self-efficacy levels as it further emphasizes the individual’s low level of competency. Dana constantly imagined the other children would think poorly of her or judge her to be incapable. The stilted impression of herself affected her sense of self-efficacy and resulted in a negative cyclical relationship with her self-identity.
I interviewed Dana during the water break and asked why she was reluctant to take the hat during the game. The girl appeared ill at ease with the question. She shifted her feet uncomfortably but remained smiling. She eventually said, “Don’t want la. What if they laugh at me? I cannot. I don’t know what to say. I cannot do it.’ (Interview, 17 March 2015). An efficacious individual is proactive in seeking support to meet the challenges to achieve performance attainments (Brummert Lennings & Bussey, 2017; Williams et al., 2017) and this self-initiated problem-solving attitude was not observed in Dana. I pursued in the interview and asked if the main reason was her fear of being mocked or teased by the others. She frowned and said, “No la. But I don’t know what to do. I cannot do it” (Interview, 17 March 2015). Dana’s self-referencing thoughts had determined that she was unable to shoulder the task of being the leader in the game, a responsibility which the other children cherished and relished. Bandura (1982) defined this type of self-referencing behaviour as the pre-cursor to the in/ability to act in a given situation. The confessions of her beliefs at being incapable further curtailed Dana’s sense of efficacy and reinforced her negative self-references. My reflection log recorded ‘she would not take on a role that demands leadership or authority. She did not offer to be part of a tableau in the playbuilding process but she was willing to take part in open discussions’ (Reflection log, 17 March 2015).
Between the sixteen children ranging from four years old to twelve years old, Dana was the only participant in Phase One of the programme who did not initiate the offer of an image in tableaux creation. She was also the only one who did not volunteer to share a story or lead in a game. During the debrief session with Zaty at the end of the third day, the discussion centred on Dana. Zaty explained that Dana and nine-year-old Shad were siblings. The pair had a younger sibling and their elderly grandmother was the main caregiver. Their mother worked long hours and had little time for the children. Nothing was mentioned about their father. Dana was a student with below average performance in school and there were no known complaints or concerns from her mother or the school about her behaviour. There was no clue that could lead me to better understand why Dana had seen herself as an underachiever who was incapable of leading simple tasks.

During a casual chat on the third day of the workshop, I asked Dana if there was a secondary school she had in mind after her PSLE. She was due to sit for the national exam the next year and then, depending on her results, would be assigned a secondary school. Dana responded to my questions with a shrug of her shoulders. She said she did not know if she would pass the PSLE and that maybe she would go to Northlight School, a school for children who had done poorly in the PSLE. When I encouraged her to work hard and not think negatively, her reply was curt. She retorted, ‘But I am stupid, teacher’ (Personal communication, 18 March 2015). Dana seemed to judge situations concerning her negatively, and in turn, she viewed challenges as insurmountable tasks and
instantly deemed herself as a failure, or incapable of being successful. Bandura’s (1997) explanation for this type of behaviour suggests that it is the result of an individual feeling incompetent towards a given task and viewing all impending obstacles as roadblocks that were intended to pave the road for failure. Gangloff and Mazilescu (2017) add to this theory and explain that an individual’s sense of self-efficacy mediates the success attainable regardless of the level of competency possessed. Dana had, in her view, decided she did not possess the required capabilities and compounded by her strong beliefs that the challenges obstructing her were unsurpassable, displayed an immovably low sense of self-efficacy.

Earlier occasions of verbal encouragement by her peers and myself to take on leadership roles during the games, and then my verbal encouragement to work on her academic performance were swiftly rejected with negative declarations of her capability. Observations of her behaviour contradicted Bandura’s (1982) recommendation that verbal persuasion and allied types of social influences could affect self-efficacy. Bandura (1982) explains that encouragement and influences from persons of authority and close relationships serve as positive instruments that affect an individual’s sense of self-efficacy. I reflected my relationship with Dana was not well enough established for my words to carry weight that could impact her deeply. However, I wondered about her relationship with her peers: do they count as persons who were important to her since their opinions of her ability mattered enough for her to constantly conduct self-
censorship and restraint? It also begged the question if Dana was starting to display depressive symptoms as Bandura (1993) and Muris (2001) had warned in persons with a low sense of self-efficacy. Dana appeared to have carved for herself a self-defeating attitude and an identity of someone who was incompetent. It was difficult to understand why this fairly articulate and affable young person had such low opinions of herself. While it looked like she enjoyed the drama sessions and was punctual for every workshop, her participation in the playbuilding programme did not seem to have any positive impact in the display of her sense of agency and identity.

Dana’s team decided to showcase a dance item as their ‘talent show’ for the audience. The team selected the song *Feel this moment* by rapper Pitbull and pop star Christina Aguilera. Pris and Dana adapted the dance moves from the music video and taught it to two younger girls, Ash and Wiy. After spending some time coordinating their moves and practicing, all the teams gathered to show each other their ‘talent items’. Pris and Dana stood in the front while Wiy and Ash stood at the back even though the younger girls were significantly shorter.

In all the group rehearsal sessions and at the final performance, Dana turned her face to her side to look at Pris. It almost looked as though she was not sure of the dance moves and needed to take her friend’s cues. Despite teaching the younger ones the dance together with Pris, Dana looked uncomfortable performing the routine and her moves were uncommitted and restricted. At the
final performance, Dana either looked towards the floor constantly or turned her face to the back. When I watched the video again, I realized that Dana was constantly turning her face to the back while maintaining her gaze on the ground. It looked like she was trying to hide her face from the audience. Dana had clearly displayed what Bandura (1982) established as the disconnection between a person’s perception of ability and the possession of actual ability. Dana, without a doubt, was able to perform the dance routine as she had taught it to the younger girls. However, her perception of incapability coupled with her fear of criticism from her peers had constricted the capacity for her to perform at her best. There were a few other children who displayed the ‘I can’t do it’ attitude earlier in Phase One but none embodied it like Dana did till the end of the programme.

In Phase Two, Dana perpetuated the negative and insecure perception of herself. However, there was an added topic of peer pressure that deflected some light to help me understand Dana’s perception of self. As discussed in Chapter Four, the girls were discussing puberty and sexual relationships one afternoon while waiting for the rest of the children to turn up. They were worried that they would be pressured into having sex with boys because many of the adolescent girls in the neighbourhood were engaged in sexual relationships. Dana exclaimed it was difficult to ward off pressure from peers. She explained, ‘Other people do it but you don’t do, then they laugh at you. How?’ (Video transcription – Phase Two, 9 June 2015). In my reflection that evening, I recorded many questions I had about the dynamics of the children in the playground and in the greater community.
Peer pressure seemed to be a dominating factor driving the behaviours of the children who sought to find their identities and footing in the community. I asked, ‘where is the adult influence amongst the children and if it is even available’ (Reflection log, 9 June 2015).

Dana did not complete Phase Two of the playbuilding programme. She had moved to live with her father on the weekends and it was too far away from RSC. Throughout the time she was enrolled in the project, Dana demonstrated a lack of belief in herself and the identities performed remained as an individual with low efficacy and confidence. Muris (2001) highlighted that girls who have lower self-efficacy levels are more prone to depression than boys, and Brummert Lennings and Bussey (2017) further this claim to explain that when young people cope with stressful situations through self-blaming and isolation, they will experience an increase in depressive symptoms. Dana’s negative self-referencing behaviours and her perception of how her peers judged her constricted her sense of identity. It formed a vicious cycle to her identity formation and development of efficacious behaviours as she persisted in believing that she was inferior to everyone else.

5.2 Collaborative efforts

Collaboration within drama participation is core to the development of an artistic process and product (Heikkinen, 2016; Oddey, 1994; Peter, 2009; Prendergast & Saxton, 2013; Tarlington & Michaels, 1995). Participants in drama processes
work together to build meaning in the work they were creating collectively and they learn to listen and respect each other’s perspectives resulting in a multiplicity of views and critical thinking abilities (Peter, 2009; Prendergast & Saxton, 2013; Tarlington & Michaels, 1995). In this playbuilding project, I was fully aware that the children needed to learn to collaborate with each other and work towards the common goal of creating a product for their performance at the end of each phase.

This section discusses the challenges I encountered when encouraging collaborative efforts amongst the children and examines the circumstances that led to concerted attempts to work cohesively. The section starts by examining the social relationships of the children and how that prevented and complicated the attempts to collaborate during the playbuilding process. The discussion moves on to analyse the circumstances when collaborative efforts between the children were observed and then finally closes with a reflection about the role of drama in fostering collaborative efforts amongst young people.

5.2.1 Together but not together

The children in the playbuilding programme identified themselves as a community within Sen Ling estate. The residential address signaled an affinity in the sense of belonging due to location but not by interest or motivation. Despite the long periods of time spent co-existing in a small estate together, and many of the
children attended the same schools, and their families knew each other fairly well, the children displayed hostilities towards each other. This sub-section discusses the relationships between the children and how that confounded the collaborative process of playbuilding.

Kha’s title of the collective drawing in Phase Two best crystalized the sense of group identity formed through the residential address. The children were engaged in a collective drawing activity and they were to illustrate the map of the neighbourhood where the stories originated. When the drawing was almost completed, Kha asked if he could draw a banner at the corner of the paper with the words ‘Sen Ling Kids, Block 20’ (Video transcription – Phase Two, 10 April 2015). He was very proud that the drawing was a representation of the neighbourhood he lived in. The other children chipped in to decorate it with more rainbows and frills. The pride the children displayed as they contributed to the decoration of the banner was a hazy indication of the level of collaboration between the children based on their identities as residents in the same estate. Their identities as young residents of the estate and the frequency they were in each other’s company as they shared communal spaces did not enable an easy way to foster collaboration between them in the playbuilding process.

The efforts to foster collaborative work through the playbuilding process was often hampered by the fights between the boys. There was no clarity to the root cause for the quarrels and fights except that it had been observed to be a display of
power by the older boys against the younger ones. Sha and Tin had once held Rut in a lock-down position, twisting both his arms and legs to the boy’s back while he lay chest down on the mat. The video recording showed Rut grunting in pain but he did not shout for help nor did he ask the older boys to let him go. At moments, Rut seemed to be struggling to get free. Pris and Dana saw what the boys were doing from a distance and they joined the boys on the floor and watched what was going on as though it were a performance.

Sha and Tin’s act of violence was deliberate. While there was no open aggression between the three boys, performances of animosity were common. Rut was not popular with the older boys as I had observed the young boy being shown the middle finger or had a fist raised at him when we were working to create tableaux. Sha described Rut as ‘irritating’ (Personal communication, 17 March 2015). He said the younger boy ‘is always disturbing (them)...he do nothing also irritating. He just look irritating’ (Personal communication, 17 March 2015).

The older boys’ hostility and biases against Rut did not limit the lack of collaboration between the three of them. The other children in the playbuilding project were affected either as allies or as nonchalant bystanders. I interpreted Pris and Dana’s reaction to Sha and Tin’s attack on Rut as nonchalance. The girls were unaffected by what they had witnessed and although they did not
participate or encourage the older boys further, their inaction reflected an acceptance to the non-cohesion of the playbuilding group.

Tarlington and Michaels (1995) and Oddey (1994) advocate collaboration as one of the key factors for successful playbuilding and I questioned how the process was able to encourage collaborative efforts amongst the children. In my reflection, I asked, “How can drama make them collaborate? What do I need to do to foster the team spirit in them to motivate them to work together?” (Reflection log, 16 March 2015). I interviewed three children during the first three days of Phase One and asked about the dynamics in the group and why no one intervened when some children got into conflicts. Pris explained, ‘Aiya! They always do that, always fight, fight and cry, cry. Very irritating la!’ (Interview, 18 March 2015). When I pursued and asked why she sat and watched Rut being bullied by the two older boys, her response summed up her attitude towards these common events, ‘Aiya! Not my problem what, I care for what?’ (Interview, 18 March 2015). I decided to ask Ash who was closer to Rut and Ros’ ages what she thought about the frequent arguments and ruckus. The nine-year-old looked thoughtful for a while and then she said, ‘Teacher, they always like that. Always fight. If I say anything, later they beat me also. If I help them, they also never thank me. So I don’t help la!’ (Interview, 17 March 2015). Shad smiled shyly at me when I posed the same questions to him. He shrugged his shoulders and walked away.
The children viewed intervention to these acts of violence as futile. The vicious cycles of fights between the boys had immunized the bystanders and such incidents hampered collaborative work in the playbuilding programme. Further observations and interviews with the children explained the apathy in the playbuilding group to the acts of hostility. Ash was Ros’ elder sister but she did not attempt to help him when the eight-year-old got into scuffles with the other boys. Fin was Rut’s cousin and they lived together. She had tried to interfere by yelling, “Eh! Stop it!” (Video transcription – Phase One, 17 March 2015) once when Sha and Tin sat on Rut’s back and punched him but she soon gave up after the older boys ignored her. Fin told me, “Later Rut will get in trouble again. Never mind la!” (Interview, 17 March 2015). The fighting and bullying between the children was an on-going affair and it seemed to matter very little if there was intervention by by-standers.

Zaty suggested it could be because there were cliques within the group of sixteen children. The older children, Sha, Tin, Pris and Dana belonged to one clique. Kha and Man belonged to the fringe of Sha’s clique as they were admitted into some of the activities occasionally. Ash, Fin and Wiy got along better with each other and they tended to stick with each other when given a chance. Ned joined this group of girls sometimes but she was usually on her own. The two groups did not have conflicts with each other, mainly because they had different interests and there was little contact between them during the spare time outside of the drama sessions. Rut, Ros, Qid and Shad were mostly on their own. I had
observed that during break time, these four boys would be left alone while the other children mingled with their friends. Occasionally, Qid and Kha got together and pretended that they were performing a lion dance. Dan, who was the latest addition to the drama group spent the spare time during drama sessions with Kha or Sha and his clique. Ni and Tas usually sat together to watch what the other children were doing.

Zaty thought that it could be the identity they had formed as a clique that had prevented the children from interfering in the scuffles between the children. She suggested that children without cliques were usually thought to be ‘irritating to the other children so no one wants to play with them or help them.’ (Interview, 18 March 2015). I explained to Zaty that I thought the issue was more complex than just ‘being or not being in the same clique’ (Interview, 18 March 2015) but it bordered on a sense of apathy amongst the children. Zaty smiled at me and said, ‘if you see this happening everyday, many times a day, you may also have apathy. How to care so much? If the one who is being bullied is annoying to the others, why would the other children want to interfere?’ (Interview, 18 March 2015).

In Phase Two, despite the collaborative experience of putting up a very successful performance for the residents in the neighbourhood, the children continued to remain as a disparate community of theatre makers. An attempt to randomly group the children into four teams to work on tableaux resulted in
concerted efforts amongst them to trick me in Phase Two. We were going to devise images of what was happening inside the apartments in block 20 in Sen Ling estate. The children were supposed to work with the members in the groups I had randomly formed to create a family portrait of the residents inside the apartment.

Most of the children sat where they were when it was time to get into the groups. Some had stood up but were looking around, as if unsure what to do. Fin and Ned got together but no one else joined them. I urged the children to quickly get into their groups so that we could start on our image making. Tin, Pris and Dana got together and Sha joined them very quickly. I knew something was amiss as I remembered that Tin was supposed to be in the same group as Rut, but the latter was now left stranded on his own without a group. The composition of members in the other groups also looked highly suspicious to me. They were now teamed up to reflect their cliques again. Phyllis observed in her notes that ‘the children just ignored the numbers they got, they just group with their friends’ (Observation notes, 17 April 2015). The video footage showed that there was hesitation on the younger children’s part and they were trying to identify which group they should belong to. However, the pre-teens had conveniently teamed up, leaving the younger members out and soon, everyone just gathered around with their friends.
The resistance to work cordially with each other, regardless if they were close in friendship or otherwise had been a problem since Phase One. The main difference I had noticed between the two phases was there was less open and vocal contention to the randomized grouping in Phase Two. In Phase One, the children would yell and object to working in a group with children they did not like or they were not close to. Often, it entailed some people walking away and refusing to participate completely in the activity. However, in Phase Two, the children, especially the older ones, would quietly defy the groups they had been placed in through the random selection by ignoring my instructions. There was no argument or protest but instead, in a sneaky manner, the older children would pretend that I had indeed put them together in a group. Tin and Dana nodded their heads enthusiastically when I queried the composition of members in their teams. Tin said to me, ‘Jennifer, you old already la so you cannot remember, you give us all same number so we all in same group’ (Video transcription – Phase two, 17 April 2015). Even though the children had collaborated and completed one phase of the playbuilding programme with a successful performance, the formation of the group identity remained polarized within the group itself. This contradicts Heikkinen’s (2016) claim that a positive relationship amongst the participants could be formed due to the transformation process of drama; the children were united when faced with external threats to their group identity, such as the inclusion of new members, but within the group itself, the group identity was weak due to their loyalty to the particular cliques.
I experimented and managed to circumvent this problem in Phase One by asking the children to form images one by one. The child who was ready would offer the first image and then the next child would be inspired by what was offered and added to the image. The process would continue until everyone agreed that the image was complete, and the children who had formed that image would inadvertently become one team to continue to work on the tableau created. I realized that I had managed to negate three different challenges altogether with this method of working:

i. I scaffolded the image creation process and made it less intimidating for the children.

ii. It promoted a sense of collaboration between them regardless if they saw each other as friends or otherwise. The compelling factor was the need to contribute to the image because they felt that it resonated with them, not dissimilar to how participation in drama puts healthy pressure on some children to speak because they felt they wanted to and had to on topics that were special to them.

iii. The children had the chance to work with people they were unfamiliar with, regardless if they eventually formed closer relationships with each other, it became an opportunity to share ideas with other children from the community through a meaningful and constructive platform.

I reflected that I could have continued to do that in Phase Two; it would have minimized the challenges I faced as a result of their reluctance to work with
children outside of their cliques and we could have formed the images very efficiently and then move on to building the play in a much more expedient way. However, I resisted employing the same methods again. Tarlington and Michaels (1995) insist that co-operation and collaboration are crucial to playbuilding and I recognised that the success in fostering those two behaviours in Phase One should build the foundation for more independent but guided team work in Phase Two. Moreover, it was pertinent to graduate the children to engage in creative work through collaborative efforts; the image creation work in Phase One was in essence individual response to a collective product. Peter (2009) encouraged the use of drama activities to promote and challenge “latent play potential and social understanding” (p. 10), and I felt convinced that Phase Two should encourage more collaborative work amongst the children; they needed to learn to listen to each other and respect the contributions of their peers when building the narrative.

I wondered in my reflection how the collaborative processes within playbuilding might effect changes to the way the children saw team work and group identity. The tableaux work discussed in Chapter Four demanded the children collaboratively create images that told or extended narratives for the playbuilding process. However, the children did not work together to create those images through verbal discussion and negotiation with each other. Instead they individually contributed to the collective tableaux through independent reading of the aesthetic work offered. I reflected that the process of individual contribution
to the collective image promoted an egalitarian atmosphere for working cohesively together and negated the challenge of low levels of language abilities. However, it did not create the space to foster collaborative work amongst the children. In the playbuilding process, the children did not collaborate in the traditional way of working together as Peter (2009) had suggested to work through the fictional context to explore social meanings and perspectives.

The children’s propensity to engage in socially hostile acts did not alter throughout the playbuilding programme despite the intensive investigation of the consequences confronting such behaviours during the devising process. The fights between Rut, Tin, Sha, Ros and sometimes Shad continued throughout the two phases of playbuilding work. The fight between Ned and Qid in Phase Two when the siblings got frustrated with each other and started a fist fight was evidence that acts of hostility were not limited to the boys. Despite the differences in age, the two of them were similar in size and they were throwing punches and kicks at each other. Nellie, their older sister sat by the fringe and watched her siblings without any intention to intervene. The other boys cheered for Qid while the girls yelled for them to stop. I broke the fight up by grabbing their arms and in my most teacherly voice told them to stop. The spectators who were initially cheering on the fight came and pulled the two children apart and Tin came up to me and told me to cool down.
5.2.2 Disruptive behaviours

Collaborative work in the playbuilding programme was also interrupted by children who chose to disrupt the flow of the work. Jole, a ten-year-old girl joined us on the third session in Phase Two. She was unpopular with the children and her appearance in the workshop met with open unhappiness from some of the girls. The girls’ resistance to including Jole in the membership of the playbuilding group is discussed in section 5.3 of this chapter. I highlight the session prior to the performance in Phase Two as an example of how whole group collaborative effort was disrupted because of individuals who chose to perform anti-social behaviours.

The children were devising the opening scene for the performance in Phase Two where they were all acting as cats. The narrative for Phase Two was told through a cat who lived in the neighbourhood and it revolved around the families in the estate. The children were working together to create the opening scene where it was a gathering of all the street cats in Sen Ling before they dispersed suddenly due to a loud sound coming from one of the apartment units. The scene was performed in arena theatre style and some of the actors would enter the stage from where the audience were seated. The devising process took more than forty-five minutes and ended without us creating the opening scene.
Jole was rowdy that afternoon and it was not unusual for her to behave that way. She yelled repeatedly at random children, often interrupting my facilitation and instructions as I tried to get everyone organized. Ros had joined Jole that afternoon to become highly disruptive and made it extremely challenging for me. Video recording of the devising segment corroborated with data collected in Phase Two to show Jole as a disruptive individual who hindered collaboration in the playbuilding programme. Below is an excerpt of the transcription of the video recording during the devising process:

Me: Alright, we need to think about…

Jole: (yelling) Eh! Cepat (Malay for ‘faster’) la! Why you move so slow?

Me: We need to think about what kind of cats we want to be…

Jole: (yelling) I am sleepy cat! Teacher look at me. Meow, meow. (lay on the floor, curled up)

Ros: (yelling) I don’t want be cat! (sits on the chair)

Me: Jole and Ros, please stop shouting. Now everyone, have you decided? What kind of a cat…

Jole: (yelling) You are fat cat! (pointing at someone across the room) So stupid!

Me: Jole, can you stop that please? Ok, think about what the cat might be doing and…

Jole: (laughing loudly) your cat so stupid. I am hungry cat.

Ros: (yelling) I want to kick this cat (proceeded to walk towards Rut)

Me: Ros! Stop!
While Jole’s behaviour was not unusual, it made whole group collaboration efforts extremely difficult. Phyllis noted that I was struggling to get through this exercise and I was slowly losing my patience. She wrote ‘Jole was interrupting almost every sentence Ms Wong said and she had to repeat her instructions many times. Jole refused to listen and even after repeated warnings, continue to be disruptive.’ (Observation notes, 10 June 2015). Phyllis observed that the other children were losing focus and becoming impatient to get on with the activity. Prendergast and Saxton (2013) insisted that a group involved in drama must be focused and value the contributions of the team members in order to move the drama forward. It was difficult getting Jole to cooperate and work as part of a team and the children exhibited signs of frustration as well. Collaborative efforts within the team were hampered by individuals, in this example by Jole, who refused to participate cohesively with the team.

It was difficult for me to explain why Jole insisted on displaying such challenging behaviours which caused her to be excluded and rejected as part of the community. Hughes and Wilson (2004) argue that “young people emphasize the importance of acceptance, tolerance, equality and team work in the process of making and performing theatre” (p. 65). Jole had refused to be a better team player to offer considerate and less disruptive behaviours during the playbuilding sessions she attended. The result was an obvious dissonance within the group and a lack of communal pride in the final performance they worked hard to
build. The children did not celebrate the entirety of the story they created collectively on performance day. Instead, they celebrated the parts they were personally involved in and maintained a distant disinterest to the parts of the narrative Jole was performing.

The social relationships and individual personalities of the children made collaboration within the playbuilding process highly challenging. The children’s display of pride as members of their neighbourhood did not translate into a cohesive relationship with whom they shared the space and the activities. Mackey (2016) explains “‘Places’ are locations that are significant, inhabited and meaningful because of these activities” (p. 110). She further argues that place connotes a locality but attachment to a place suggests an emotional and positive bond had been formed to the people or the events in the space. It was difficult for me to ascertain why the children were proud of their neighbourhood except that it was a space they spent most of their time in besides school. The social relationships formed as a result of the residential address did not facilitate a cohesive and supportive network outside of the drama programme. The negative relationships were carried into the drama programme which illuminated the limitations they imposed on themselves to band together as a community. In the next sub-section, I examine the sparks of collaborative and supportive acts by the children and the situations in which they happened.
5.2.3 Light shining through the cracks

The previous sub-section discusses the challenges of engaging the children in the collaborative process of playbuilding. The obstacles were mainly results of the pre-adolescents’ personalities or social relationship factors. In this sub-section, the attention is focused on the few and rare occasions when collaboration between the children happened. The collaborative efforts demonstrated by the children in this discussion were outcomes of events and situations in the playbuilding programme instead of a deliberate facilitated process. The analysis of the data showed evidence that collaboration amongst the children happened as a result of an urgency or importance of a task. The collective building of the shared narrative during the playbuilding process did not encourage collaboration in the group. Therefore, this sub-section examines the conditions when collaboration amongst the children took place and the factors that encouraged it.

In Phase One of the playbuilding programme, the children decided to include a talent show into the structure of their performance as mentioned earlier. The stimulus to create that performance was to devise a show for the President when he came to visit. The children had chosen to present stark realities of life in Sen Ling but the day before the performance, the children decided they wanted to show the talents of the young people in the rental estate community. Ned’s group consisting of Fin and Tas wanted to perform the song *Let it go* from the hit Disney cartoon movie *Frozen*. The girls watched the cartoon music video and
memorised the dance moves. When they were invited to perform their talent show item to the playbuilding group, all three were visibly nervous. Ned covered her face and said “Malu (Malay for 'embarrassing') la! Malu!” (Video transcription – Phase One, 18 March 2015). While they stood in front of the audience, the three girls kept turning their backs to hide their faces and let out nervous laughter.

In return for their nervousness, the other children cheered and clapped very loudly to encourage the girls without prompting from any of the adults present. Sha responded to Ned’s exclamation of embarrassment with “Tak malu (Malay for 'not embarrassed')! Tak malu!” (Video transcription – Phase One, 18 March 2015) before letting out wolf whistles as a form of encouragement. As the three girls sang and danced, the other children sang along, and at parts of the chorus, they joined in the dance movements from where they were seated. The girls began to sing loudly to rise above the children’s singing and it was easy to tell that they had started to enjoy the performance. The girls’ confidence in performing their talent item was at first shaken by their fear of being embarrassed in front of their peers, and the possible criticisms. However, the verbal persuasion, one of the key influences on an individual’s sense of self-efficacy according to Bandura (1982), from the other children in the audience enhanced their sense of confidence. Besides verbally encouraging them, the audience members sang along and danced from where they were seated to support their friends. The positive responses from the audience coupled with the verbal persuasion to complete the task bravely helped to raise the three girls’ morale.
and sense of efficacy. It is important to note that verbal persuasion as an influence on self-efficacy is only effective when it stems from someone of importance to the receiver (Bandura, 1982; Gangloff & Mazilescu, 2017). The audience’s encouragement, instead of offering negative feedback or judgement had encouraged a more positive sense of efficacy in the girls and it showed that the peer relationships within the preadolescent community held significant importance to the children.

Zaty and I discussed this spontaneous encouragement by the children towards Ned’s group later that day. She suggested that it signified the playbuilding group had come together to celebrate each other’s work and they had learnt to collaborate with one another to achieve success. I questioned the possibility if the same support would be made available if it were Rut or Ros standing up in front of the group to perform. Zaty, after some thought, said, “Maybe it will be different because the boys sometimes fight but at least now they have learnt to cheer (for) another group and support them to give them confidence” (Interview, 18 March 2015). I agreed with her that this demonstration of support to members of another group was rare and surprising. It probably did help that the three girls did not usually get into conflicts with children from the other cliques. To reciprocate the encouragement shown to them, Ned, Fin and Tas cheered very loudly when Sha’s group got up to perform their dance item. It seemed to suggest that the children were capable of working together and showing support to each other when they empathised with the situations their peers were facing. The
stress and pressure a child faced when standing in front of the peers who operated in similar social and residential environments could be overwhelmingly daunting. The judgment from persons who had access to these environments where a child spent a large portion of time meant that any negativity could be carried through from the playbuilding space into the personal and social space. Therefore, the encouragement they showed each other was a recognition that they understood the fear of judgment and pressure each child faced when taking the risk to perform.

A second example of the collaboration that was observed occurred when the children were devising a scene of the play to be included into the larger narrative. In Chapter Four, I described the example of the tableau showing a game of soccer. The image conformed to the dominant play culture of the rental estate community and the young people argued that they could not see any other way to play collaboratively in the communal space.

The boys’ collective images were reflections of how they played in the playground. Ewing (2013) explained that was a common phenomenon amongst story tellers; the narratives being shared are shaped according to the audience present. The children’s audience were fellow playmates who engaged in similar play politics. The older boys preferred to play together and often times, they did not allow the younger ones to share the space. In response to the tableau, the girls argued that changes needed to be made to the narrative. The girls felt
indignant for the younger boys that they were not given rights to a communal space but instead the young ones had been marginalized. Dana shouted, ‘Play together!’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 17 March 2015) and the rest of the girls agreed with loud ‘Yah! Yah!’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 17 March 2015). To demonstrate what they meant by playing together, Ash stood up and started to pull some of the boys, grouping them together. I noticed that she had grouped children of different ages and heights together. There was no visual indication, as I was observing and later re-watching the video several times, of her organising the boys according to their cliques or who liked whom. She moved quickly and seemed to be assessing their build when she shifted them physically around. She looked at me after she had grouped them and said, ‘Teacher, like that. Some tall, some short in one team. So all have tall and short, equal. Like that, is fair’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 17 March 2015). The boys let out a loud protest that they did not want the young ones in their teams because the younger ones could not play as well. Fin retorted, ‘Then teach la! Teach them then they know! Last time you small, you can play everything?’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 17 March 2015).

I was glad the girls had made that suggestion. It signified advancement in their mental re-creation of the reality; that it was not an inevitable outcome to have the smaller children subjugated to the rules of the older ones. It was also powerful for the playbuilding community to hear the suggestion of playing together from their peers and not from me, that internally, the group had started to recognize
that there was a need to accommodate diversity and be active partners in resolving differences. Tarlington and Michaels (1995) explain that participants in playbuilding engage in exploration of selves and others’ attitudes and this in turn leads to “new understandings regarding human behavior” (p. 11). I see resonance in Tarlington and Michael’s theory with what was happening in the playbuilding session that afternoon – the girls were empathetic towards the younger boys and deemed the older boys’ behaviours objectionable. The girls saw the marginalization of the younger children as an act they would not condone and therefore they insisted there was a need for acceptance and inclusion in the play politics of the community. The empathy from the girls signified an acknowledgment that there was a need to embrace differences instead of using it as a means to be divisive.

I asked if that suggestion was something the older boys would consider. Most of them looked at the floor and some started to murmur inaudibly. Sha broke the awkwardness of the situation and exclaimed loudly, ‘Ok la, can la can la!’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 17 March 2015). I took the opportunity to challenge the boys to show us another collective image. I gave them a few minutes to discuss and create an image of the older boys teaching the younger ones how to play soccer. Sha and Tin worked quickly and started barking orders at everyone to take their positions. The result was a picture of Sha teaching Ni how to kick a ball while the rest of the boys looked on. Sha had, in this role play, taken on an identity which was unusual for him. He grumbled that ‘it’s boring to teach the
babies, they so slow’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 17 March 2015) during the protest earlier. However, in the latest image created, he adopted the role of someone who looked nurturing and approachable while teaching Ni to play football. Kukla (1987) suggests that this form of role play allows its participants to “become other people in other places; it allows them to participate in the events of the story and explore situations different from their own lives” (p. 75). It had meant to me that Sha had the opportunity to try a role and identity of someone he could not identify with initially, and through that exercise, he saw a different way of doing something which normally might not have crossed his mind. Bruun (2017) and Heikkinen (2016) conclude that the opportunity to play different roles through the dramatic process creates the platform for participants to practice empathy and reciprocity that may be missing in their lives. While that may not translate directly as an example of working collaboratively, it provided a means for the children to visualize the possibility of playing together as long as the older boys were willing to exercise patience and kindness towards the younger ones. The girls were visibly proud that their suggestions were taken seriously, and a new image was created. Pris responded proudly ‘See! Can what! Can play together what!’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 17 March 2015).

5.2.4 Drama filling the gap of family and school

Through the playbuilding processes, the children explored and adopted identities that they might not be conscious of before their participation in the playbuilding
programme. The individual and collective narratives offered by the children in the process demonstrated that school, residential neighbourhood and family were the dominant cultures with which they were familiar. Within the three environments in which the pre-adolescents spent much of their time, the roles and identities performed by the children had remained largely similar. The young people were constrained in their roles as under-achievers and at times as trouble makers in the academic environments, and in the neighbourhood, they were children who wasted their time in the playground. In this sub-section, I examine the role drama played to fill the gaps between the environments the children operated in to offer the space for them to experiment with identities that were previously not available. I also draw certain conclusions from the behaviours and dispositions exhibited by the children in my analysis to suggest how membership in a drama programme that was external to academic and familial environments was crucial in allowing young people to develop positive identities that were not tied to ingrained cultural discourses.

On the performance day of the first phase, the children exhibited a heightened level of nervousness and excitement. They collaborated to set up the performance space, a huge store room in RSC’s office. About thirty chairs had been organized for the audience who were expected to come and watch the children. The young performers were seated in a straight-line right in front of the first row of chairs laid out for the guests about fifteen minutes before the doors opened for their audience. The performance for the residents in the public rental
neighbourhood was a means for the children to create new identities for themselves. The children were eager to demonstrate to and educate the audience new ways of being and living in the residential estate. On that afternoon, what was missing was the usual mischief and running around; Rut was seated on the floor and looking rather pensive, it was as though he was anticipating something. Ros was craning his head and kneeling up each time he heard noise from the doors. Sha and Tin were busy telling Ni and Ari to sit still and not stand up – they were taking their roles as the production managers very seriously.

The performance created the space for the children to adopt positive identities that were performed publicly. The roles of actors to a performance that had public audience, production managers to the show, wardrobe leaders, discipline managers, narrator and time keepers filled the children with a great sense of importance and affirmation. They were presented before the audience members as leaders in their own rights and they owned the plot to the show that was going to be performed. These were identities the children had not previously owned in academic or familial environments. The public performance of the new identities created a sense of pride in the young people which translated into a heightened sense of efficacy as they performed their roles and later their show with pronounced ownership.
The anxiety experienced by the children before the arrival of the audience was obvious. The young people worried about potential judgement and desired to impress. Ros’ excited introduction of his friend to me was evidence of his pride in his membership in the playbuilding group. He drew my attention to a girl seated in the second row of chairs, ‘Teacher! My best friend! This one! My best friend!’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 19 March 2014). As I waved at the girl, Ros said to her, which I confirmed again by watching the video footage, ‘Tunggu jap, nanti aku berlakon, tengok aku’ (translated literally from Malay, it means ‘Wait a while, later I act, watch me’) (Video transcription – Phase One, 19 March 2015).

Hughes and Wilson (2004) propose that when youth participate in high quality youth theatre programmes, they become invested in both the process and the product through the demands of the skills and capabilities developed. In turn, the young people will feel a great sense of achievement and also pride in the work they have done. Bruun (2017) furthers this proposition and reports that regular participation in a drama programme results in escalated levels of confidence and spontaneity. Ros’ spirited instruction which he yelled loudly across the room to his best friend signaled he was confident that the performance they were going to put up was of a quality of which he would be proud.

The drama programme had provided the platform, which Brice Health (2001) has called a “third space” for the children which bridged the family environment and the school. Through their participation in the playbuilding process, the children explored issues and also became more aware of themselves and their responses.
to the events in their lives. This finding is congruent with Hughes and Wilson’s (2004) theory that young people established a more positive sense of identity after they had negotiated difficult emotions through the playbuilding, and “Performances can be an important outlet that can help young people express and manage difficult feelings” (p. 64). Mackay (2009) agrees and explains engagement in the arts can help the participants negate issues of social isolation, depression and alienation. Therefore, participation in drama could facilitate a process of change for the young people as they experience transformation through the artistic journey and this helps them to connect with the larger society (Heathcote, 2013; Heikkinen, 2016). The third space, in this case taking the form of the playbuilding programme, provides the creative and exploratory avenue that is absent in academic settings which Brice Heath (2001) argues as essential to the lives of every young person.

When the performance ended, Zaty gave a short speech to the guests present and explained the process of the work for the last four days. She briefly reminded the audience of the tripartite relationship between RSC, the children and me – a researcher/drama practitioner and apprised them of the commitment and hardwork put in by the children. At that point, the children clapped loudly. Zaty and I looked at each other puzzled and then she asked the children why they were clapping. Ros yelled, “We worked very hard!” (Video transcription – Phase One, 19 March 2015), and Sha affirmed that with a loud “Yah!” The children had demonstrated a heightened sense of self-efficacy by the end of the performance,
and upon hearing the encouragement from Zaty, myself and the audience, they became even more pleased and proud of their work. Performance attainments are powerful sources of influence to an individual’s sense of self efficacy as they provide actual evidence of a person’s capabilities, and the increase in self-efficacy fuels more desire to attempt tasks at a more difficult level (Bandura, 1982; Buckworth, 2017; Gangloff & Mazilescu, 2017). The group of young theatre makers had just completed an artistic journey where they experienced hardship and perseverance, thus the sense of achievement after the performance was intensified and their belief in their capabilities became augmented. Furthermore, their performance was a risk they had taken to reintroduce themselves to the community they were familiar with through their stories and the subsequent acceptance and acknowledgement by the audience members bolstered their sense of accomplishment. Applied theatre researchers (Donelan & O’Brien, 2008; Hughes & Wilson, 2004) concur that risk taking for youth was essential in the process of art making and participants’ sense of self-worth became enhanced when they were appreciated for the outcomes they showed.

The playbuilding process afforded a physical and mental space for the children to think deeply and create a group identity and vision of how they wanted to present their narratives. On the performance day, the differences and the disagreements they had with each other became insignificant as they wanted to focus on presenting a high-quality performance for their audience. Oddey (1994) and Tarlington and Michaels (1995) agree that a playbuilt product encompasses
the voices of every individual involved in the process, and in turn, the collective voice becomes the unification of vision shared by the group. Prendergast and Saxton (2013) add that participants collaborate through the different roles they play in producing the performance in order to achieve the desired effects. The children displayed the collaborative behaviour when they were getting ready to perform for a second time as Kha’s mother came after the show was over. She had got the time of the performance wrong and Kha had requested for an encore performance. The children readily agreed and there was no hint of the discords or friction that had marked our daily sessions. The eventual show that was performed to an audience of familiar faces was reflective of the children’s understanding of their community, but more importantly, it depicted their desire for change and echoed their current sense of emotional and mental states – a positive sense of unsettlement that was seeking new ways of seeing their world. Kandil (2016) argues that the process and product (if any) of applied theatre must consider the changing needs of the participants. In this playbuilding programme, the children’s needs had shifted within the four days of the drama programme and they became aware of how they would like to challenge the status quo in their environments and lives. The constant changes made to the final narrative and the eventual product were testimony to the changing needs and how they were met.

After the second performance and while the audience were leaving the space, Zaty and I gathered the children together for a debrief. There was a sense of
euphoria and the children were tired but very happy. Zaty and I congratulated them for the successful performances and I affirmed their work by telling them that it was one of the best performances I had seen from them; they were committed to every frozen image and no one had missed their places or cues, they bore in mind the blocking and reminded each other quietly if someone had his or her back to the audience. The children cheered and clapped for themselves, and the girls hugged each other. When asked if they would like to share their thoughts, Sha spoke first. He said he was very proud of the performance because they had created the story. Several other boys agreed with ‘Yah! Yah!’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 19 March 2015). Rut put up his hand to speak and he said he liked the playbuilding part because he got to tell his story. Ros chimed in and yelled from the back that he liked “drama because I perform and my friend watch” (Video transcription – Phase One, 19 March 2015). Qid stood up and surprised both Zaty and me with what he said. When I watched the video again, I noticed that Qid took a deep breath before he spoke, as though to collect his thoughts and prepared himself. In an even tone, Qid said, ‘I want do drama again because I tell stories and I make performance with my stories. It is special because I do the story I tell’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 19 March 2015).

The performance had heightened the children’s sense of ownership and pride of the whole process but these feelings were not limited to the final day itself. The children first decided on the second day of the workshop that they wanted to show
stories of loan sharks and gang fights in their neighbourhood. These were real fragments in their lives which might appear to have added some thrill to the everyday events but imbued in the children some questions about why their neighbourhood was a fertile ground for violent acts. While the children maintained that these were authentic events and not uncommon thus they wanted to include them in their narrative, they changed their minds on the third day as they felt that they wanted to incorporate in the performance stories more related to them. Similar to Gallagher’s (2016) study of Project: Humanity where she and her team “used drama techniques to explore issues and experiences of spatial inequality in young people’s neighbourhoods” (p. 230), this playbuilding programme gave space to the young people to decide and debate the aspects of their lives they wanted to make visible through the final product. After some discussions during the devising process, they decided to exchange the ah long and gang fight stories for bullying stories.

Kandil (2016) and Prendergast and Saxton (2013) explain that participation in drama builds a sense of agency in the participants because, as a collective unit, the young people have to decide how they should present their narratives and what is the best way to move their performance forward. The children demonstrated this sense of agency on the fourth day, three hours before we opened our doors to the audience. The group that was presenting the images that showed bullying in the playground requested to make changes to their frozen pictures. The children felt that while the images were honest depictions of what
had happened in the playground, they did not represent what the children hoped to see in that space. Sha and Tin spoke up first before Dana and Kha echoed the sentiments. They convinced me the new amendments resonated with them better.

The children saw the need to reshape their story for the audience that was coming, and also a responsibility to demonstrate possible alternatives to the common narratives in the community. At that time, the children did not necessarily have a plan on how they wanted to devise their alternative narratives or what the alternatives were. In that way, the children’s behaviour corresponded to Bandura’s (1982) and Buckworth’s (2017) notion of self-efficacy where they felt motivated to take on the challenge despite not possessing the knowledge and their physiological states were primed to assist them to navigate any potential challenges. Membership in a drama process that was unrelated to academic and familial conditions provided distance for the young participants to the cultures in which they spent a large part of their time. The involvement with a group that was focused in a creative process and with a public output challenged the identities they performed as perceived by the community that watched them. It was a means for the pre-adolescents to change perceptions and present a clean slate which they could use to redevelop new identities for themselves that they gave back to the community in an artistic manner. They made known and available their talents and new understandings to the larger community as a way of re-being and re-introduction of selves.
5.3 Building community

The process of working together to build a performance and the exploration of roles and identities banded the children together as a community of interest. Nelson (2011) explains this formation of community as participants becoming “witness to each other’s lives …. and they recognised the significance of that shared understanding” (p. 165). At the start of the playbuilding programme, the children shared a collective identity as residents of Sen Ling estate, and they were users of the communal playground. According to Sinclair and Kelman (2013), “belonging to a community can give an individual a sense of agency and identity, especially when there are opportunities for the community to express itself and to be affirmed” (p. 33). Neelands and Nelson (2013) extended this theory and argue that the formation of a community identity and the ancillary benefits of agency and power are cyclical in nature. The feelings of agency and power will further entrench the participants into the new community identity. There is little evidence to suggest if the children had shared a sense of community as young people of the estate. From the start of the drama programme till its final performance on the fourth day in Phase One, with the exception of Sha and Tin, it was not observed that any of the other children displayed a sense of agency or their identities as a public rental estate community member had affirmed their individual identities. A sense of community was instead fostered over the four days of the playbuilding process in Phase One. Through the collective identity, the children displayed a new sense of pride in their capabilities, their contribution
to the neighbourhood, and they offered support to each other which was absent when they first became members of this playbuilding group.

The sense of community formed through the drama programme was unique to the participants, and it was isolated from the other identities formed outside of the drama space. Cecily O'Neill expounds that drama creates a sense of community amongst its participants because it is a socially inclusive art form (Taylor, 1998) and it resonated with the evidence in my research study. Regardless of their age, the clique they belonged to, or if they were the leaders in the playground, each child was given the platform to contribute stories, personal or imagined, that they wished to include in the larger story for the neighbourhood’s consumption. Each offer of story through the frozen images performed was examined, discussed and debated as a group during the playbuilding process. We pondered over how images and stories offered by individuals or groups would tell the story of life in Sen Ling and represented the symbolism of the narrative the children wished to illuminate for their audience in an aesthetic form. According to Neelands (2009), participation in drama fosters a new way of living together “to create new models of pluralist community” (p. 176) and this new identity is supported by a sense of “belonging, connectedness, influence, and fulfilment of needs” (Neelands & Nelson, 2013, p. 20). It was evident the process of playbuilding promoted the democratic nature of working together. The egalitarian working method disregarded the playground hierarchy which confined the children to an established line of power and agency to form a new collective identity as theatre
makers. Brice Heath (2001) explains that this is a phenomenon resulting from “feelings of uniqueness and special qualities” (p. 142) which I had witnessed amongst the children.

### 5.3.1 Building community through commonality

The frozen images offered on the first day of the drama programme were a jumble of experiences either in their personal lives or as collective users of a communal space. Cahill (2010) suggests that drama makes visible the discourses in the participants’ lives, and through the sharing and performances of stories, a connection is made between the storytellers and the audience. In the playbuilding programme, the children demonstrated this connection when they found commonality in the stories told. The young participants commiserated through narratives they had chosen to present to the group; vignettes of violence, bullying and disengagement from the school system. In the subsequent days of more image making and story building, more commonality between their ideas, desires and aspirations emerged in spite of the fighting and constant bullying between themselves during the drama sessions.

The children identified themselves as a unique community in the playbuilding programme that was separate from the community formed due to their residential addresses or the sharing of the common playground. Brice Heath (2001) suggests that a new identity builds on “feelings of uniqueness or special qualities
that set them apart from other such entities” (p. 142) while Heikkinnen (2016) alludes the formation of a new collective identity to the experience of a transformative process in the artistic journey. The children’s sense of belonging to the group that was doing something different from just hanging out at the void decks or the playground imbued in them a different sense of pride and identity.

Sinclair and Kelman (2013) however, warn that the feelings of “uniqueness” may also highlight the problematic nature of “community” as a construct. The children embraced the new community that they had formed doing drama and performing together, and it was unique because they had the opportunity which was previously missing to create and curate stories that they wished to share with the larger community. Sinclair and Kelman (2013) and Peter (2009) expound the positive relationship between a sense of agency and identity with a person’s sense of belonging to a community. Through their participation in the playbuilding process, the children situated themselves in a community of shared experiences and narratives, and that had formed a unique identity for the members of Phase One. The children recognised themselves as one social group that were connected through the stories they shared and the artistic process they experienced. Dunn, Bundy and Stinson (2015) suggest participants of applied theatre feel a sense of connection due to “recognition being triggered by aspects of the drama that are meaningful for the participants beyond the drama itself” (p. 9). The shared experience of creating a play together while overcoming
obstacles and challenges in Phase One had positively affected the group identity and their sense of self-efficacy.

5.3.2 Community building becomes ‘self-limiting’

Through the playbuilding process, the children became acquainted with the feelings of agency and power as they decided on the trajectory of the performance and actively confronted issues and challenges that arose. The new feelings drew a distinction between the children in the playbuilding programme and those who were outside. On the third day of the workshop, as I was unloading props for the drama workshop from my car, I met Kha and his friend in the carpark. Kha explained to his friend who I was in Malay. In between his rapid talking, I caught the words ‘drama’ and ‘cikgu’, meaning drama teacher. The boy smiled shyly at me and I asked him if he was going to join us for drama class that day. Kha was quick to reject my offer on his friend’s behalf. He said, ‘No la, teacher, he cannot join. He don’t know what we do already, how to perform?’ (Personal communication, 18 March 2015). Kha’s immediate and deliberate exclusion of his friend from the drama programme was a way he was protecting his identity as a member of this drama group. When I pursued this topic with Kha during the break, he explained that his friend would not understand the things we were doing in drama class, things like ‘how we sit in a circle, the freeze picture and the games we play’ (Interview, 18 March 2015). This reminded me of Kandil’s (2016) explanation that a bond would have been created in the
playbuilding community when participants “witnessed perspectives on the
difference and similarities of their collective lived experiences” (p. 202). Kha’s
friend did not share the process that he had gone through with the team and the
new boy was not privileged with an insight into the struggles the playbuilding
community faced.

While Kha dismissed his friend’s ignorance as the reason, there was also a clear
sense of protection and pride the twelve-year-old had in his association with the
drama group. Kha excluded his friend from his newly formed community by
telling his friend to ‘come and watch the performance la’ (Personal
communication, 18 March 2015) on Friday evening with everyone else. Being a
member of the drama programme had made him feel like he was involved in an
exclusive community, an ‘in’ group that did things children outside of the
programme were not privileged to know. Kha’s behaviour resonated with
Neelands and Nelson’s (2013) argument that a newly formed community through
an artistic process is supported by a level of trust and connectedness. The pre-
teen rejected my offer to explain to his friend what we had been doing in the
drama programme to allow him membership into the group. He told me, ‘no need,
no need. He come watch, he know. Don’t tell him. Our secret, cher (colloquial
advocated that “art can help (youth) find and transform their identity, and seek
powers beyond only that of beauty” (p. 73), and Kha had demonstrated how his
participation in the drama programme had helped him to find identity with a new community.

The exclusive playbuilding membership was however extended to a new child who did not threaten Kha’s opportunity of presenting a new identity for himself to the public rental community. Dan, a thirteen-year-old was welcomed into the playbuilding group by the children midway in Phase One. He was Kha’s friend in the primary school and according to Kha, had nothing to do during the holidays. Dan did not live in the rental estate and he was a friend Kha played with sometimes in primary school. A rather tall boy, he was readily accepted by the older boys in the group and was taught the special handshake that differentiated the older boys from the younger children. Kha’s explanation for including Dan into the playbuilding community was because the latter ‘don’t live here but he was (Kha’s) friend from school’ (Interview, 18 March 2015). Kha had made the distinction clear between the peers from the neighbourhood and ones who did not. Dan’s identity as an outsider to the neighbourhood benefitted him as it created a natural distance between him and Kha. The friendship between the two boys was at first limited to being friends at school, but because of Kha’s connections, Dan had been accepted into an exclusive community participating in activities for selected individuals only. The other boy who was rejected lacked the distance. He shared the same neighbourhood as Kha and they probably shared similar friends. By disallowing the boy’s participation in the drama programme, Kha had created distance between them, using rules he created as

Brice Heath (2001) cautions that the sense of belonging to a community could “be both ‘self-defining’ and ‘self-limiting’” (p. 33). Kha demonstrated how he had defined the criteria of the new membership by explaining that his friend’s ability was limited to only ‘catch spiders and fight’ (Interview, 18 March 2015). It sent a clear signal of what Kha thought were differentiating qualities between him and his friend after his involvement in the drama programme. At the same time, he had belittled his friend’s capabilities and sense of efficacy to frivolous activities while Kha and his newly formed community were engaged in more important tasks. While this new identity had allowed Kha a departure from the playground identity he held, one that was not good enough to be part of the adolescent gang, it also had become problematic. Kha had used a yardstick based on his judgement of capabilities to include or exclude a friend into the new community construct, in very much the same way as he had been denied membership in the playground. Kha’s sense of belonging to the new community and the opportunity to express himself in a contradistinctive manner and be affirmed ascribe to Sinclair and Kelman’s (2013) claim that membership of a new community could give participants in arts programmes a new sense of identity and agency.

The protection of the group identity was witnessed again on performance day in Phase One. The children arrived for the final rehearsals fifteen minutes before
schedule and they were dressed differently from their usual t-shirts and shorts. Ash brought along her cousin to the rehearsal and the other children protested. Sha insisted that the cousin had to leave the space as it was intended for the performers only. Tin said, ‘no outsiders allowed’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 19 March 2015). Phyllis’ observation notes for the rehearsal session noted the ruckus the children were making as ‘the children objected to having an outsider watch their rehearsal. They think she is an intruder’ (Observation notes, 19 March 2015). When I spoke with Ash, who was visibly hurt by the other children’s rejection of her cousin, she exclaimed loudly that her cousin was no stranger to the other children. Her cousin lived in the same neighbourhood and was known to the other children. She added that her cousin would not be joining in the performance, she just wanted to come and watch the rehearsal. Ash’s cousin was eventually permitted to stay through the rehearsals after I had negotiated with the children. However, it was clear that the children were reluctant. Some of them grunted and one of them shouted ‘Aiya! Stay la stay la!’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 19 March 2015).

Zaty and I analysed the children’s rejection of a visitor into the space for the rehearsals and we both concluded that the children had taken their involvement in the drama programme as an exclusive membership. Over the four days of working together, albeit through conflicts and clique-ish behaviours, the children had formed a group identity that distinguished them from the other children in the neighbourhood. It was an identity that was precious to them and gave them a
sense of pride. Gallagher et al. (2010) posit that a performance of an original product to an invited audience outside of the creation process will improve the sense of ownership and achievement for its participants. However, what was witnessed that afternoon was not merely an improved sense of accomplishment and pride but a shift in their identities similar to Neelands and Nelson’s (2013) explanation of how the shared experiences had “fostered a Sense of Community (SOC)…characterized by belonging, connectedness, influence, and fulfilment of needs” (p. 20). The performance was a chance for the community to see them in new light and for the children to be affirmed for the positive change in exchange for the four days of work they had put in to the playbuilding process. It was also an avenue for the children to demonstrate and educate the residents of the public rental estate new ways to look at the challenges they encountered and plausible ways of negating these issues. The children were protective over their identities as members of the playbuilding programme. Kha’s example earlier showed that he had crafted a set of criteria for allowing new members into the new community. The children’s rejection of Ash’s cousin in the space reserved for performers only signalled a similar protectiveness of the identities as members of the playbuilding group.

An hour before the performance started, I gave every child an orange t-shirt. I had purchased the t-shirts for the children as costumes for their performance. The children had often attended drama workshops in old and sometimes torn clothes. The new orange t-shirt was intended firstly to differentiate the children
in the playbuilding group from their peers who were coming to watch the show. It was secondly to increase the level of pride the children felt for the show – they had created an original performance which they were proud of and the new clothing was to ensure no child had to face the audience in clothing that might caused them to be embarrassed or conscious. The t-shirts were plain and even the smallest size was too big for many of the children. The children did not mind that the t-shirt was too big for many of them, nor were they fussy about the colour. In fact, many of them were happy that everyone was going to wear the same thing. The t-shirt acted as a uniform and connoted a symbol that separated them from the other children who might be coming. Wearing the t-shirt alluded to the community identity amongst the children that was formed through the playbuilding process which led to sharing of stories and forming of a bond within the group as Kandil (2016) had argued. The girls especially were focused on how to style their t-shirts to create a different look from each other. They wanted a uniform look with a touch of individuality. Dana said they would be ‘same, same but not same’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 19 March 2015) as a way to explain why they needed to differentiate themselves. Hemming and Madge (2012) explained this behaviour as an exhibition of both personal identity and social identity. The girls wanted to retain their distinct and unique sense of self while enjoying the commonalities they shared with the others in the group.

Oddey (1994) suggests that participants in a playbuilding project form a sense of ownership when they have “identif(ied) a particular style, a unique language or
vocabulary, shared beliefs, or a commitment to why a company wishes to make a specific theatrical product" (p. 9). In this research study, the children had formed the collective identity because they had the shared understanding that the story they wanted to perform reflected how they saw the neighbourhood and their aspirations for it. The identity was also crystallised through the process of sharing personal stories and piecing them together for the larger narrative. The t-shirt thus represented the unique language for the group that spoke of their identity. When we realized that we had some spare t-shirts, I gave one to Ash’s cousin. Kha who witnessed this protested loudly. He yelled, ‘Eh, teacher! She not performing eh!’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 19 March 2015). He rejected my explanation that we had spare t-shirts and it was fine to give one to Ash’s cousin. More of the children came over and registered their displeasure over my action. They felt that the outsider should not be given the t-shirt because she did not deserve it, she had not worked for the performance and most importantly, she did not belong to the group. When I watched the video during the data analysis, I questioned if my seemingly generous gesture of giving a t-shirt to someone outside the drama group had in fact diluted their sense of exclusivity. The children gave up after a short protest and Kha walked away from me after saying ‘Susah la!’ (meaning ‘difficult’ in Malay). I wondered that night in my reflection log if I had punctured the children’s sense of pride in their newly formed group identity through my flippancy. I thought ‘it was a harmless gesture, giving the girl a t-shirt since we have so many left’ (Reflection log, 19 March 2015). The children’s reaction was completely unexpected. Fortunately, the children’s
excitement for the performance nullified the unhappiness they had over my thoughtless generosity. However, all of them ignored the girl and when I reviewed the video, I noticed that no one acknowledged her presence anymore. That was evident even when she was in their way as they tried to arrange the chairs in the space for the audience. They simply walked around her or put chairs in front or behind her without asking her to move away. They had, in their actions and behaviours, articulated clearly the distinction between she and them.

The group identity as members of the playbuilding programme was both self-defining and self-restrictive simultaneously. Hemming and Madge (2012) explain group identity as a reference to “the social groups we belong to and the commonalities we share with others” (p. 40). The children had demonstrated that the sharing of common experiences became an entrance criterion for membership into the playbuilding programme. Sinclair and Kelman (2013) define this self-imposed criterion of the children as “rules for belonging and exclusion for those who do not ‘fit’” (p. 33). Neelands (2009) posits ensemble-based theatre processes provide young people with “new ways of living together rather than against each other; to find solidarity in their common disadvantage” (p. 176). This was evident in the social identity the children had built as one playbuilding community. They found ways of assimilating each other’s differences and similarities into modes of getting along with one another; they recognised that they were disparate individuals thrust together as one
community. Kandil (2016) suggests that this newly built community was an investment participants make to help them “feel accepted and their experiences valued” (p. 203). However, the need for acceptance and being valued within the playbuilding community had restricted the children’s sphere of inclusivity as they rejected peers with whom they shared great similarities just days before their participation in the artistic journey.
Chapter 6

‘Nobody asked me what I think’: Perspectives, Voice and Ownership

The last two chapters analysed and discussed the use of improvisatory and collaborative drama processes in the playbuilding project and the shifts in the identities of the children as a result of their membership in the project. This chapter examines the narratives of the children shared during the playbuilding processes and how the space created in the playbuilding programme enabled their voices to emerge. None of the themes discussed in Chapters Four to Six stand alone. Instead, the relationship between the themes is intricate and inter-reliant. The use of the playbuilding processes in this project created the room for the children to ponder over the identities they embodied and the agency they possess as individuals and as a collective group to make changes to their physical and social environments. At the same time, the shifts in the identities enabled perspective changes and emergence of voices in the narratives the children were collectively building. The children had also taken ownership of the playbuilding processes to ensure the narratives that were being told reflected accurately their intentions.

At the start of the playbuilding project, the children responded to my invitation to create an original performance by showing snippets of their lives. The young
people were not interested in fairy tales and fantasy stories. They insisted on performing stories that stemmed from their lived experiences instead. Oddey (1994) and Tarlington and Michaels (1995) recommended that theatre making could start with a stimulus of any form and thus, I decided that it might interest the children if the story creation process sparked from stories about their lives and their environments as mentioned earlier. I suggested that we started by getting to know what they would normally do in the playground, during recess in school and in the afternoon when they arrived home from school, three aspects of their lives that reflected their social and familial environments. The school, playground and home were also three spaces where the children spent a significant amount of their time. Gallagher (2016) argues that the sharing of “personal stories” during the theatre making process benefits the researcher in understanding the “complexities and nuances” (p. 246) in the lives of the participants. However, it is important to shroud these stories within fiction to offer the participants a level of protection, which encourages them to be more invested emotionally for deeper identification with the stories created (Kukla, 1987; Peter, 2009; Prendergast & Saxton, 2013). Heikkinen (2016) suggests that a playbuilding community needs to find a common theme that resonates with the participants involved and work on it to extract deeper meanings during the process of creating an original story. I found that, through the playbuilding process, not only did the sharing of personal stories illuminate the circumstances surrounding the children for the researcher, at the same time the children were using the storying process as a means to question and understand the events in
their lives. Perry et al. (2013) suggest playbuilding acts as “critical pedagogy in which youths use critical literacy skills to question and discuss an issue, unpacking it in the form of a play” (p. 651). The freedom and space to create the original performance offered the participants agency to plan and curate the final narrative they wished to perform for an external audience.

I maintained a conscious effort to treat the narratives that had emerged from the playbuilding processes in both phases of the programme with respect and care as the material generated was sensitive and held great importance to the children. Tarlington and Michaels (1995) advised the facilitator of a playbuilding programme to employ all sensory capacities when entering into the creative process so I remained alert to the needs of the children throughout the playbuilding process. The result was the management of the drama activities and conventions to extend and expand the children’s narratives to create room for us to make sense of the stories shared in the process. The drama techniques and conventions employed in this study are discussed in Chapter Four. While the choice of drama techniques and conventions were employed in response to the narratives that were offered, they also facilitated the performances of stories which were difficult to articulate verbally. The intimate and cyclical relationship between the choice of activities in the playbuilding process and the enabling of the story performance encouraged the children to offer their stories freely.
In this final analysis chapter, I focus the attention on the stories the children told during and outside of the playbuilding process. I believe strongly that “Narratives and stories are also valuable in studying lives and lived experience” (Punch & Oancea, 2014, p. 240) as they uncover the voices of the community and reveal opportunities for the community to look introspectively if they wish. The “studying” of lives and lived experiences were thus not limited to the rights of the researcher but the participants are equally empowered by the process of storying to examine their own lives. Additionally, the participants in this playbuilding project had the power to decide, as Vettraino et al. (2017) argue, what stories they wanted to share, how they wanted to share. At the same time, the sharing of the stories by the performers offered the audience opportunities to make interpretations for themselves (Vettraino et al., 2017). The ownership of the process and the enabling of the children’s voices emanated strongly when I analysed the data. This chapter first illuminates the children’s individual and collective narratives and discusses the significance of these stories. It moves on to examine the children’s personal stories of lived experiences which were silenced outside of the playbuilding programme. Caldwell and Vaughan (2012) argue that participation in the arts encourages young people to find a way to express themselves through an artistic medium and this provides an insulation from the daily stresses, especially in an urban environment resonates well with the findings discussed in this chapter.
6.1 Sharing Narratives: ‘It’s Our Story’

In Chapter four, I discussed the use of tableaux and developing a variety of methods to use tableaux to explore the children’s narratives and sense of agency in Phase One of the playbuilding programme. The method of working in tableaux continued into Phase Two but the theme of the playbuilding shifted from stories about the children to stories about families. In this section, I highlight the narratives of families that were shared in Phase Two as stories about the children as individuals and a collective group had been thoroughly examined and discussed in Chapter four. The process of sharing the narratives offered in Phase Two illuminated the increase in sense of efficacy and agency in the children, and further explains the environments in which the children were steeped.

The playbuilding process in Phase Two concentrated on the topic of ‘families’ and through the children’s narratives, the construct of families was problematised and investigated. The children had chosen to tell stories about the people in the neighbourhood and therefore the light was cast on the clusters of families in the rental estate. It was a difficult topic for the children as they struggled to articulate verbally or through their performances in tableaux the relationships and emotional connections between various family members when constructing the narratives. Many of the children came from incomplete or broken families and some had not met either of their parents for a long time. Bundy (2013) explains that participants in a drama process find enjoyment and relief when they engage
in the storying of stories that might have been previously difficult for them. The aesthetic distance and fictional contexts maintained in the drama process for exploring the stories “opens the way for reflection that might not otherwise be available. This seems to be the case for others who perform in the scenes too” (Bundy, 2013, p. 239). I agree with Bundy as the playbuilding programme in its totality had created platforms for the children to look at the issues and challenging circumstances confronting them as young residents in a tough low-income estate but amidst much laughter and reflexivity. During the playbuilding process, the children were looking at these events from a third person’s perspective and that helped them to learn more about themselves and become more empathetic towards others who were in similar situations (Bundy, 2013; Prendergast & Saxton, 2013).

6.1.1 Unicorns and apple trees

The children were tasked to create the map of a neighbourhood in the new story as the stimulus to start the playbuilding process. There was no other instruction given to the children except to draw on the big white sheet of plain paper how the neighbourhood looked. Very swiftly, the children discussed and collaboratively drew shapes on the paper and labelled them as buildings. The discussion between the children centred on where block 20 in this fictional neighbourhood was situated and what other things they wanted to include in this location map they were planning. Block 20 was important to the children and they insisted it
was central in the map because many of the children in the programme lived in block 20 in Sen Ling estate. The children remained focused and very serious in the collective drawing activity and each child became very protective and proud of his or her contribution to the map. Ned berated Qid for his drawing of a tree. She criticised his work and said his tree was ugly and insisted he remove it. Nellie moved into Qid's space, squeezing the boy out from the collective drawing and embellished his tree with apples. She said she was going to make the tree look better. I did not challenge Nellie to suggest that apple trees did not grow in tropical Singapore. Instead, I consciously reflected that Cahill (2010) encourages “ruptur(ing) the assumed and reimagine what is possible” (p. 155) when working in drama and questioned instead why Nellie thought an apple tree would make the neighbourhood more pleasant.

The collective drawing did not look like a map in the end. The children had drawn a huge rectangle that represented block 20 and that was the only building in the map. The children included drawings of individual households on the blank spaces on the paper, making it look as though each family was magnified from the apartment block in a 'shout-out' bubble. In that drawing, there were also several apple trees, bats, lots of flowers and rainbows. It was a lovely and happy representation of their neighbourhood until Tin decided to include graffiti that loan sharks liked to put on the walls to urge their debtors to pay up. Tin explained that his addition was ‘make things real mah!’ (Video transcription – Phase Two, 10 April 2015). He later embellished it further by adding a picture of a loan shark
with a parang in hand standing outside the door. The picture carried the weight of the harsh truths in the children’s lives and at the same time, I interpreted it as a means to convey their desires for a safer and welcoming environment.

The collective drawing reflected the porosity of fiction and reality (Cahill, 2010) where the boundaries may be blended into a blurry line revealing the discourses confronting the participants in drama. Mackey (2016) explains that “place can be reconceived conceptually and practically to reference alienation and attachment, roots and routes, stasis and mobility” (p. 107). The deliberate and purposive embellishment of beautiful objects in the location map represented the desires of the children to create a better environment than the one presented in reality. However, at the same time, they were unable to depart from the harsh reality where the common narrative of the community was one shrouded in violence and crimes. It accurately and acutely represented the conflicting emotions the children had towards their environment in a mixture of connection and rejection.

Qid had included the picture of a woman and a boy when he finally managed to find a space on the large drawing paper after being ousted. He explained that it was a mother and her son, and there were two pairs of slippers outside the door to their apartment. When I asked about the father, Qid replied very matter-of-factly that “the father missing la!” (Video transcription – Phase Two, 10 April 2015). Qid’s immediate and caustic reply to my question carries heavy
resonance with many of the children in the drama programme. Out of the ten children who were present that session, only Tin’s family was intact. The other children had either never met their father or their father had left the family. Through the drawing, Qid concretised the lives of many of the children who were growing up in single-mother families. Kandil (2016) suggests that the recognition of a shared circumstance amongst the participants would encourage the formation of a bond which acts as a form of support for the playbuilding process.

When the drawing was almost completed, Kha asked if he could draw a banner at the corner of the paper with the words ‘Sen Ling Kids, Block 20’ (Video transcription – Phase Two, 10 April 2015). He was very proud that the drawing was a representation of the neighbourhood in which he lived. The other children chipped in to decorate it with more rainbows and frills. The drawing was part of the narrative that the children were constructing about their neighbourhood and I wanted to respect the decisions they were making and the agency they possessed over how they wanted to tell their story (Kandil, 2016). At the same time, I saw resonance with Peter’s (2009) argument as the children made links between the fiction they were creating and the reality they lived in. The powerful toggling between the two states increased their level of engagement and investment into the process.
6.1.2 Portraits of families in Sen Ling

The playbuilding process was an extension from the collective drawing. The children formed three groups to create family portraits representing the three families in the drawing. I explained to the children that the portraits of each of these families hung on the walls of their homes and a passerby walking along the corridors that joined the apartments they lived in would see them. The children played the roles of the characters in these families. The fictional families in the playbuilding process were intended to add an additional layer of framing for the children. It was crucial that the narratives about families did not represent directly the children’s personal experiences in their own homes. Instead, the children were protected in the making of the stories as they cross the fictional-reality boundary by recreating the family relationships and structures based on the drawings they collectively made. I further instilled the role of a neighbourhood cat as the central character in the narrative about families in the neighbourhood. The examination of the events and people in the narrative was conducted through the cat’s eyes and that provided the second layer of framing for distancing and safety. Nicholson (2016) advises adopting a critical distance when examining reality to enable the participants to “distance themselves from the world in order to understand and know it better” (p. 253). In this way, the final product also consisted of multi-visions which reflected the personal investment from every child in the programme made up of “each group member’s individual perception of the world as received in a series of images” (Oddey, 1994, p. 1). Cahill (2010),
Ewing (2013) and Prendergast and Saxton (2013) concur and further explain that the stories offered by participants in a theatre making process reflect their situations and lived experiences which they curate to tell to specific audiences. I also believe that the critical distance the children had adopted through the playbuilding process facilitated their observations and understanding of issues from a third-party angle that encouraged them to practice the empathy and reciprocity that Bruun (2017) and Heikkinen (2017) discussed.

After examining the three images, I challenged the children’s imaginations by conducting an interview of each character in the portrait. This activity blended the conventions of tapping in and hot-seating simultaneously. The children remained frozen in the family portrait while one of the chosen characters answered questions from the audience and me. The children were not given time to discuss with each other and they had to respond independently thus making any answer they had given in character an improvised response. I was interested in understanding how the children constructed the identities and backstories of the characters in response to the simple improvisation exercise which did not seek to mirror reality but “to illustrate the constructed and enacted nature of life” (Cahill et al., 2016, p. 90). Through this activity, the children demonstrated the ability to work amicably and collaboratively by building and extending what another child before them had offered. The ability to work cohesively together appeared to have been improved from Phase One. Peter (2009) explains that drama processes encourage participants to work “on two levels, the real and the
fictional, as they explore social meanings such as different social roles and perspectives” (p. 10). Prendergast and Saxton (2013) agree and added that participants work collaboratively when they “value what is being offered and build constructive ideas that can move the scene forward” (p. 67). In that improvisation exercise, the children demonstrated a high level of collaboration and listening skills as they paid attention to what their peers offered in terms of the identities of the various members in the ‘families’ they had constructed together. They also supported each other’s narratives by creating for themselves identities that complemented what their friends had proposed.

In the first image, Rut was the only boy in his group and he said he was the fifty-year-old father in the family and he did not work. He was the only person seated in the portrait. Vith, Pris and Ins were all standing behind Rut and they had all adopted a rather stoic stance. Vith adopted the role of a fifty-six-year-old mother in the family who was teaching English in a secondary school. Ins and Pris were twins who were both studying in the Institute of Technical Education, a vocational institution for youth who had done poorly in their GCE O Level examination.

In the second group, Shaz was also the only boy in his group and, like Rut, he was also the only person seated in the portrait. Sha was a sixty-three-year-old grandfather who worked as a mechanic at the airport hangar. Ash was a twelve-year-old girl who was about to sit for her PSLE and she was very stressed and worried. Dana was a thirty-eight-year-old mother to Ash and daughter to Sha.
She said she was a doctor at a local hospital but she could not tell me more about what she did in her job. Jole was lying on the floor and she insisted that she was a two-month-old baby who was neglected. Dana jumped in at this point and said that the baby’s father had died and she did not care as she did not love him. She claimed that she was forced to marry him because she was pregnant and thus was very happy that he had died.

In the last portrait, Kha and Qid were seated on the chairs and the girls were standing behind them. Kha was a forty-one-year-old father to the family and he owned a computer business. He was unable to explain much about what kind of computer business he was doing but he kept saying he had many computers in his office. Qid was the fifteen-year-old son who was studying at Northlight School, a vocational institute for children who had done poorly in their PSLE. Fin said she was a nineteen-year-old in the Institute of Technical Education learning to bake and Ned was the forty-year-old mother in the family who was also a plainclothes police-officer. She explained that she was very busy at work because she was in charge of investigating drug use in the neighbourhood. When queried further, Ned said she had caught more females than males in the neighbourhood for drug use. I noted in my reflection that only the male members of the families were seated and the females all stood behind them.
The physical arrangement of the characters in each ‘family’ reflected the cultural hierarchy between the genders in an Asian family, and particularly in the Malay-Muslim community. The three images mirrored the strong patriarchal status and dominance in a family unit in their culture. The children demonstrated cultural connections to these family portraits and could easily explain the relationships between the members of each family unit, although some had difficulties elaborating the job scopes they had assumed as these were more remote and unfamiliar to them. Dunn et al. (2015) suggest that these connections are signs of recognition. The children in the study recognised the characters in the stories they were making and the narratives generated, and they could empathise with the circumstances confronting each character in the drama. The playbuilding process enabled for the children “new ways of seeing and different ways of looking at the familiar” (Nicholson, 2014, pp. 12-13).

Through the image creation and subsequently the extension of these images into scenes in the play, the children “experiment(ed) with different identities and test(ed) out new ways of being” (Nicholson, 2014, p. 82). These identities were familiar characters commonly found in their neighbourhood. In Phase One, the children focused the narratives on their personal and social experiences but in Phase Two, the demands shifted to a more intense level of empathetic connection with the characters they played. Peter (2009) claims that when children engage in role play, they “explore human experience, and the realm of different perspectives, motivations, intentions and consequences, to create
increasingly complex social narratives” (p. 10). It was crucial to be sensitive to the fact that the children were creating a story based on characters and social backgrounds that were common in their environments. Cahill’s (2010) argument that “the norms and expectations of the society direct the world of the character” (p. 161) reminded me that while the characters did not depart from the rhetoric of the children’s reality, it served as an imaginative space for the children to look at the stories in their neighbourhood through different lenses. The children built characters in the narratives by “endowing them with their own life stories and sets of given circumstances” (Prendergast & Saxton, 2013, p. 48) and that facilitated additional distance to prevent the young people from feeling vulnerable when discussing issues related to their families. The children recognised and connected deeply with the fictional space in the narrative and the characters were very much present in their social and familial environments. Vettraino et al. (2017) explain that this seamless movement between the two worlds enables the participants to “see oneself as both character and actor” (p. 82-83). It creates the aesthetic distance required in playbuilding processes to provide a safe distance for the participants without feeling too close to the subject matter being investigated. These half-fabricated, half-authentic stories of the community had also made apparent the subtleties and nuances of the lives of the residents in the neighbourhood as Gallagher (2016) had argued. Moreover, in Phase One, the children had successfully built an original story that was a culmination of personal stories shared by the young people. The children expressed the desire to replicate the experience but at a higher degree of challenge. Experiences of
performance attainments breed desires for further successes as a result of an improved sense of self-efficacy (Buckworth, 2017, Gangloff & Mazilescu, 2017) and thus, the children were eager to experience the same success but with a more complex topic at this stage. Buckworth (2017) further explains that attempts to perform similar tasks but with higher levels of challenge are indicators of an enhanced sense of self-efficacy. The convincing evidence of an individual's ability through performance attainments would propel the same person to desire more mastery thus effecting a cyclical relationship between the two.

6.1.3 Performing the stories of the neighbourhood

The final plot for the performance was a hodgepodge of the individual narratives that were shared through the playbuilding process. Being told through the eyes of the cat that roamed along the corridors of block 20 in Sen Ling estate, it was intended to provide the children with the distance described by Prendergast and Saxton (2013) as a crucial means to ensure safety in the drama process. O’Connor (2009) cautions the importance of framing when working with vulnerable communities as it helps to “protect participants into the emotion” (p. 590). The children might be working with personal narratives and invested authentic emotions when creating the storyline but the framing will help to protect them from feeling exposed and personally investigated. The pre-adolescents presented tableaux of families that led disparate lives and explored the multiple ways of looking at each family construct and the issues they faced. When I
moored the idea of having the cat as the central character in the performance, the children jeered at my suggestion. Tin stood up, waved his hand dismissively and said, ‘Don’t want lah!’ (Video Transcription – Phase Two, 10 April 2015). Ned concurred and challenged the rationale for having a cat to be the central character, she retorted that the children should be ‘main people in the story. We want to make our own story, like last time like that’ (Video transcription – Phase Two, 10 April 2015). After some explanation on my part about the role of the cat, the children became excited. They insisted that the feline was a resident of block 20, where many of them resided. Although it did not belong to any particular family, it was looked after by most of the neighbours because ‘Malays like cats’ (Video transcription – Phase Two, 10 April 2015). The address of where the cat lived was of great importance and significance to the children. My reflection log that evening noted that the children wanted to draw the relevance of the cat to their lives and ‘they rejected my suggestion that the cat may live in a different block. They wanted the cat to tell the story of their block.’ (Reflection log, 10 April 2015).

The children explained that they enjoyed exploring roles and identities which were different from the ones they were playing in their lives and in the communities. Kukla (1987) suggests that role play lets “children become other people in other places; it allows them to participate in the events of the story and explore situations different from their own lives” (p. 75). The sharing of personal stories also made it possible for the participants to learn more about themselves
and for others to become more empathetic beings (Bundy, 2013; Prendergast & Saxton, 2013). The adoption of roles which departed from their regular identities offered the children an opportunity to physically and empathetically see the world through another lens which might not be available in reality. It also offered a route of escape from the humdrum of their everyday events to imagine alternative possibilities and decisions they could make in another person’s shoes.

The final performance highlighted one of the families from the tableaux exercise. Embedded within the story of this family were issues of domestic abuse, drug use and child neglect. However, the children were not content to present these harsh and unpleasant truths about what they had witnessed or experienced in the estate. They experimented and curated plausible methods of self-help for the characters in these stories. In the story, Ned chose to play a police officer whose job was to investigate the drug use in the neighbourhood and she had made several arrests. In that collective narrative, the group decided that the woman who was sniffing glue was arrested in her home in the presence of her children. During the debrief session, I found out from Zaty that the story was not far from what had actually happened in Ned’s family just months prior to her participation in the playbuilding programme. The young girl’s mother was arrested for drug use and had been in the rehabilitation center since. Ned and her group further discussed and improvised various scenarios till they finally agreed on the best outcome possible. The story ended when the woman returned to her family hesitantly and afraid but received a warm welcome from her children. The
children told their mother that they had worked hard in school and were all doing very well. They encouraged the mother to find a job and they would be happy together. The children were pleased with the simple and pragmatic ending. There were no mushy declarations of love between parent and children, and the hugs offered appeared at best cursory. Promises to turn over a new leaf or to build a better future together with big dreams were also missing in the final scene. Instead, what was performed was a practical and realistic presentation of love and care in a typical Singaporean family, muted and downplayed regardless of the intensity of emotions felt.

Heathcote (2013) advises that drama allows for the examination of a problem or situation by freezing it in time. The participants would undergo a process of change when they investigate and explore the various possibilities within the problem or situation. In Phase two, the pre-adolescents actively reflected plausible pathways the characters in their stories could take. The options and decisions they chose resulted in different outcomes and required a different form of effort and emotional investment from the young people. The children’s decision to perform the story about the woman who was arrested for drug use stemmed from the consensus that it was most reflective of what happened in their reality. The ending of the story resonated with Prendergast and Saxton’s (2013) argument of “allow(ing) participants to take on self- and/or collectively-created social roles for the purposes of shared investigation” (p. 14). It also facilitated a sense of agency in the young people which Kukla (1987) argues as a “balance
between the freedom of the imagination and the constraints of the real world, and adds a new dimension to their thinking” (p. 76). O’Connor (2013) furthers this argument and explains that drama facilitates a participant stepping in and out of the fiction and watching himself or herself be in situations that could be analysed through the safety of distance in fiction.

The final performance for Phase Two was held at the RSC’s workshop space again. The children rejected the suggestions of performing at the badminton court near to the rental estate. They did not find my suggestion of bringing the performance to the library enticing either. They wanted to have it in the RSC room and only invited their families and neighbours. Theatre making with an intended audience in mind results in a unique chemistry of inspiration of storylines and the shaping of the eventual product which could not be replicated for another group of viewers (Boehm & Boehm, 2003; Ewing, 2013). The children wanted to ensure that the stories they were creating were authentic and resonated with the neighbourhood. They were not interested in making up stories about imagined communities and environments from which they felt detached. It was crucial for the children that their story echoed the actual narratives of the neighbourhood so that their audience would find familiarity and resonance. However, the young people insisted the new insights and perspectives offered by means of solutions to the problems inherent in the story were the children’s contributions to showing the rental community alternative ways of living and being.
6.2 Untold Narratives: ‘Nobody Cares’

In the previous section, I discussed the narratives that emerged through the playbuilding process and explained how the stories remained closely associated with the children’s lived experiences in the rental estate community. The children made the final decision to eventually focus on the story of a family that was broken up due to drug use. The young people explored and curated the stories that emerged through the tableaux work and found that the story of a mother who neglected her children and eventually was removed from the family resonated with them best. They wanted to show how the mother would be welcomed back into the family and how the children were sensible beings who took care of themselves despite the lack of parental attention. There were other stories that emerged during the tableaux work. One of the tableaux told a story of domestic abuse while another one told a story of child neglect. However, all the children agreed that the story about the mother who was a drug user encapsulated the main stories of the neighbourhood. In this section, I turn the focus to the stories that emerged in both phases of the playbuilding programme.

The stories offered in this section were not unique to the individual contributors, but they did not garner the same attention and enthusiasm from the rest of the children in the group to be developed into the larger narrative. The stories examined in this section however illuminated the loneliness and helplessness of the children. The young people had personal stories and experiences that had
been difficult for them to understand but they lacked the adult guidance to help them analyse the situations, and perhaps just someone to listen to them. The result was therefore the young people grappling with the events in ways that they could manage at their young age and little of such experiences were discussed. The section is titled Untold Narratives: ‘Nobody cares’ precisely because the children told stories during and outside of the playbuilding process that might otherwise not have emerged because they felt no one cared for such narratives. The discussion in this section highlights the importance of the space offered within the playbuilding programme for the children to share these personal experiences. At the same time, I examine my role as the outsider in this playbuilding project and how that identity also facilitated the emergence of these stories.

I mentioned earlier that in Phase One, the children rejected the suggestion to build a play about aliens or robots and insisted that they wanted to work on stories about themselves. Through tableaux work, the children performed collective images of what happened at the playground. The images were created swiftly with much excitement and enthusiasm. The playground was a place where conflicts frequently arose amongst the children due to the social hierarchy present in the pre- and adolescent groups. The children were eager to share the stories in the communal space and there was evidence that the stories resonated with a majority of the children in the playbuilding group. The stories are discussed in Chapters Four, Five and section 6.1 in this chapter.
6.2.1 Stories of punishment

The enthusiasm to offer images in the school and family settings was significantly lower. After a short period of silence, twelve-year-old Kha responded to the theme of what happened in school. He jumped up from the floor, stepped into the performance space and stood with his legs apart, body bent at the waist with his upper body looking as though he was prostrating on something. No one wanted to join the image and so I asked Kha to explain what his image meant. He narrated how the discipline master from his school caned him during recess a few months ago. He elaborated that he had got into a bit of scuffle with another boy who had ‘purposely pushed him’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 16 March 2015) during recess. As a result of that push, Kha knocked into another student who had then spilled her bowl of hot noodles on her leg. Kha said he instinctively elbowed the boy back and the latter fell and split his lip. Kha and the boy were both summoned to the discipline master’s office. According to Kha, the other boy was let off with a warning and his parents were called because he had sustained injury. Kha on the other hand received three strokes of the cane on his backside. I had spent ten years teaching in government schools and while I knew some schools still practiced corporal punishment, I wondered if Kha had made up that story. I could not imagine why he was caned for such an incident. Kha probably deserved some form of punishment for his role in the altercation but three strokes of a cane seemed too harsh. Kha, elaborated that the Discipline Master in the
school had thought of him as a trouble maker and a naughty student. He said his teachers had complained about him previously and he was a ‘regular customer’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 16 March 2015) to the Discipline Master’s office. According to Kha, his social identity in the school was that of a mischief-maker while in the playground community, he was appraised as someone who did not make the cut as a leader. It appeared that he had been marginalized both in the school and social settings, and I was wondering what impact this had on his individual identity and sense of self-efficacy.

Seven-year-old Rut wanted to offer an image of what he did during recess. The primary one boy stood with his legs apart, body straightened, and arms held straight above his head. Again, I could not make sense of the image and had to seek clarification. Rut recounted that he was made to stand like that during recess for two weeks in the school’s foyer. He was deemed disruptive in the classroom as he could not sit still during lesson time and would walk about as the teacher was teaching. He explained that his teacher told him the punishment was to teach him how to be still.

In my interview with Kha on the next day, I asked if his mother knew of the caning that took place at school. He shook his head and dismissed me by saying ‘Aiya, teacher, my mother won’t care this one la’ (Interview, 17 March 2015). Kha pointed out that even between the children, they did not talk about things like that and it was the first time he had recounted the caning incident to anyone. Through
his tableau and the subsequent discussion, Kha had offered me a direct glimpse into his school life. He explained to me during the break that there was no need to tell his friends nor his mother as what had happened was nothing special. Kha reflected that he did not perform a heroic act ‘like fight the boy’ (Personal communication, 16 March 2015) but instead he was just caned. To Kha, that was not newsworthy or gossip-worthy to other children in the neighbourhood because ‘some of them also *kena* (colloquial negative term for ‘being/receiving’) caned before’ (Personal communication, 16 March 2015). The children’s reaction to his frozen image confirmed his impression that the punishment was not interesting to his peers. The children were disengaged and they started to become distracted by the legs of the chairs or pieces of dust and dirt on the carpet. The level of interest in Kha and Rut’s images of punishment in schools differed greatly from the tableau of bullying in the playground. I speculated that the reason might be the two boys were not highly popular with the children in the group but Sha’s retort to my invitation to show what happened in schools and homes suggested popularity might have little to do with the children’s interest. Sha said, ‘Boring la’ (Video transcription – Phase One, 16 March 2015) when I asked if anyone would like to show images of school and family events after Kha and Rut’s tableaux.

I questioned in my reflection why Kha had chosen to reveal this story, despite proclaiming that his peers would not be interested. Ewing (2013) suggests that when we tell stories, we curate them according to the audience and the message we would like to communicate. In that way, the role-playing and the performance
of the roles helped to build new perspectives for both the actor and the audience and foster a sense of empathy and reciprocity in relationships (Bruun, 2017; Heikkinen, 2016). I wondered if Kha had wanted to seek empathy and support from his peers, despite the apathy exhibited, because many of them had common experiences. At the same time, I suspected Kha might have needed an audience for this story which he previously lacked, and I was a suitable candidate because I was outside of the community. I did not display the same apathy to punishments in school like his peers nor would I reproach him for being punished in school the way a parent might. Kha might have viewed my role of the facilitator in the creative process as someone who might be interested in all their stories since I kept asking them questions about themselves and encouraging them to perform these stories.

Kha explained that his mother had never shown an interest in his school life, ‘she never ask me about school before’ (Interview, 17 March 2015) so therein a lack of need to inform her of the punishment he had received even though he felt that it was not justified. Prendergast and Saxton (2013) explain that drama creates the space for participants to relate to others through the fictional context to make sense of what was happening in real life. Kha’s recount of the background story to the caning allowed him to raise several questions he had. He felt that he did not deserve such an extreme punishment but he recognized that he had been labelled by the discipline master as a troublemaker in the school. He questioned why the other boy was let off with just verbal rebuke. Kha’s questions and
thoughts resonated with O’Connor’s (2009) claims that participation in drama allows its participants to be at the center of a personal story to seek meaning and understanding for themselves. Hughes and Wilson (2004) explain that during theatre making, the participants have the opportunities to explore their feelings, thoughts and experiences through performances of the narratives. Besides the articulation of these complex emotions and events, it is also an avenue for them to participate in a reflective exercise to analyse and understand the event with the distance of time and space. Neither I nor the other children had the answers to his questions, but he seemed content to just verbalize them. He told me that he was ‘ok, never mind anymore, (he) ok already’ (Personal communication, 16 March 2015). Cahill (2010) explains that the sharing of stories through performances in drama helps to make a visual connection for the story teller and the audience. I speculated that Rut connected with Kha’s tableau and therefore decided to offer his story of punishment. I interpreted it as a gesture of showing that they shared similar experiences with authorities in school but I was unable to confirm this with the child as he rejected my attempts to discuss the image.

Kha’s decision to share his story through a single image was, superficially, a response to a call I made to share narratives about their recess times in school. However, Kha was agitated when he was explaining the circumstances that led to the caning and that signalled to me that the incident still bothered him. The boy articulated that he felt unjustified and questioned why he had to be caned while the perpetrator was let off with a warning. Hughes and Wilson (2004) posit
that it was important for young people, especially those from troubled backgrounds, to have access to people and space that were unrelated to the problems they were facing. The people and platform that were unrelated to the problems young people were facing offered opportunities for them to build new identities and relationships. Kandil (2016) suggests that participants open up their struggles during drama participation because “their initial investment was to build community with one another, and to find a place where they could feel accepted and their experiences valued” (p. 203). I believe the playbuilding processes also offered the participants a space and time to engage in multi-perspectives and multi-modal ways of looking and thinking which Kukla (1987) argues is missing in a regular classroom setting. Bundy (2013) and Prendergast and Saxton (2013) agree that the gifting of stories in drama create the platform for its participants to see themselves through different angles to make sense of the situations they were in. The playbuilding programme took the crucial role of a substitute for unconcerned parents and apathetic peers for Kha, and possibly Rut, to voice and question the injustice that he felt he had suffered. My role as the facilitator of a programme they had enrolled in and as someone outside of the school and living environments provided that distance for the two children to share stories which were untold.
6.2.2 Stories of sex and puberty

As discussed in Chapter Four, the girls took the opportunity to share stories and asked questions which they could not articulate with their parents or other figures of authority. The girls who were present engaged me in a conversation about sex. I reflected critically my position as an outsider and how that had facilitated a trusting relationship between the young people and me. In this section, I turn the discussion to the stories of peer pressure and expectations of sexual behaviours in adolescent girls to examine the space the playbuilding programme had created for these narratives to emerge.

The girls present in Phase two session four were:

Pris – twelve years old
Ins – eleven years old
Jole – eleven years old
Aysh – ten years old
Dana – eleven years old

It started with Jole telling us about her eight-month-old nephew. Jole was very proud of her little nephew. She proclaimed her love for babies and the girls teased her about having many babies in the future. The atmosphere grew serious when Ins said she was afraid of being pregnant. She turned to me suddenly and
asked about the body changes that she was going through and why some of her female classmates did not show the same signs. The other girls became very interested and many of them leant in closer and whispered questions of developing breasts and hair growth. As I was explaining about puberty and the physical and emotional changes girls could be expecting during that particular milestone in their development, the girls raised many more questions about their bodies and they were hungry for information. Sex education was supposed to be offered to all students in schools as part of their character and citizenship education. I was surprised that the girls were thus ill-informed. I asked if they had such conversations with their mothers and Ins retorted ‘my mother won’t talk about this one la!’ (Video transcription – Phase Two, 9 June 2015). The other girls remained silent but shook their heads to indicate they did not speak with their mothers either when I looked at them. It was not unusual in the more conservative or religious families in Singapore for sex to be a taboo or awkward subject between parents and children. Ins ended the topic on body changes with a sudden and abrupt declaration that she was afraid she had to have sex soon. Ins, very matter-of-factly, explained that ‘many of my friends do with boys so I think I must do also la! But I am scared’ (Video transcription – Phase Two, 9 June 2015). Dana added that she had heard that sex was painful. Upon hearing that, Jole excitedly shared that her friend in the next apartment block had seen her parents having sex and immediately, Jole stood up and did hip thrusts to show us how it was done. It had occurred to me that the girls were not uncomfortable sharing intimate details about their body changes and the
pressure they felt from peers regarding sexual relationships. From the individual contributions to the questions and stories about their friends’ sexual relationships, I also had the sense that the girls in the playbuilding programme were not hesitant or shy to discuss this matter with each other. However, the pre-adolescent girls lacked the adult insight into their stories and questions, and it did not appear they had the platform to discuss this matter maturely and factually. My position as the facilitator in the playbuilding programme had enabled the space for a “trusting and supportive atmosphere” (p. 25) which Tarlington and Michaels (1995) described as necessary for an egalitarian way of working in creating theatre. The trust and support built seeped through the creative work and infiltrated into the relationships we held with each other as evidenced in that sensitive conversation. The safe space that had been created for participants to introduce “challenging or controversial subject matter” (Hughes & Wilson, 2004, p. 64) crucial to a playbuilding process had also been made available outside of the playbuilding work. It further spoke of the trust the girls had in me to provide them with an adult perspective to a topic which disturbed them.

When I explained that the girls did not have to engage in sex with any boy even if their friends had asked them to, the girls did not look convinced, especially Dana and Ins. Dana dismissed my advice by saying that ‘it is difficult. Other people do but you don’t do, they laugh at you. How?’ (Video transcription – Phase Two, 9 June 2015). In my reflection that evening, I recorded many questions I had about the dynamics amongst the children in the playground and in the greater
community. Peer pressure seemed to be a dominating factor driving the behaviours of the children who sought to find their identities and footing in the community. Their membership in the drama programme provided the platform for them to reflect and debate on their roles in the social world. The playbuilding programme accorded time and space during the creative process for the children to discuss and explore issues that were otherwise not discussed. My role as the facilitator from outside of the public rental estate community further enabled the sharing of such intimate and important topics. I wondered why the girls did not approach Zaty but I soon realized that the youth worker lacked the distance required for such conversations. Zaty knew the children’s families and the young residents in the estate too well. Her knowledge of the sexual relationships amongst the youth in the community might result in further trouble for the children. On the other hand, I was an outsider and I would depart from the community once the project ended. The knowledge that I did not know anyone else in the public rental community and I had a fixed departure date might have encouraged the girls to seize that opportunity to voice their concerns. Hughes and Wilson (2004) claim the availability of “time and space” as pertinent resources to “establishing positive identity and relationships with peers and adults outside of their day-to-day lives” (p. 65). Although the playbuilding programme had created a safe space for the children to discuss challenging topics in the creative process, the girls’ narratives of sexual and peer pressure arose outside of the playbuilding process. The absence of the boys in that workshop created the opportunity for the girls to
voice their concerns and my roles as the teacher and also the facilitator of the drama programme filled the need for an adult perspective.

The 'untold narratives' in this section reflected the isolation the children felt in their day-to-day lives with adult figures who were supposed to be sources of guidance and security. It also provided a glimpse into the peer relationships that maintained a significant role in the development of identities for the children. The playbuilding programme enabled the freedom in space and time for the children to articulate stories that were important to them, and at the same time provided a platform for the children to delve into reflecting and understanding these events in their lives. The two examples of 'untold narratives' in this section demonstrated the children’s need to discuss and ask questions which, in their day-to-day lives had no avenue or place in the relationships they shared with the adults present in their environments. The space and the relationships formed as a result of the playbuilding programme unlodged the narratives from the children’s lives. The children might not have found the answers they needed to attain closure to the matters but the collective discussion and alternative perspectives offered, and platform to hear their views sowed seeds for individual reflection at a time and space when the young people might be ready.
Chapter 7
Concluding the Research and Leaving the Community

The final performance in Phase Two of the playbuilding programme marked the end of a three-month journey, and the end of the relationship between the children and me. On one hand, the children and I were both saddened that the playbuilding programme had come to an end. The performance making process had offered the children something to do other than spending time in the playground. They enjoyed the drama games and activities, and they were proud to be performing original creations to the residents of the neighbourhood. At the end of the performance, Tin, Qid and Ash asked if we would meet again to do drama. However, at the same time, I suspected some of the children were glad that the programme had come to an end as that signaled the end of their enrolment.

I met Zaty a year after the playbuilding programme ended in a different meeting and she updated me with some stories about the children who were participants in the playbuilding programme. Sha had been involved in youth gang activities and had been caught breaking into an apartment for theft six months after the playbuilding programme ended. Pris did well enough in her PSLE to get into a secondary school, contrary to her belief that she was destined for Northlight School, a vocational school admitting twelve and thirteen-year-olds who had
done poorly in their PSLE. Qid was starting to attend school more regularly, and according to Zaty, would ask about me occasionally and if we were going to have the drama programme again. Ned was still academically driven and wanted to excel in her PSLE. Kha had settled very well into Northlight School and was still very much the other primary caregiver to Ari (who was about to begin Primary School) and the new baby. Tin’s parents had separated and the boy had become reclusive, making it hard for Zaty and her colleagues to support him. At the end of the playbuilding programme in 2015, Zaty said she had ‘rechannelled the children into different arts groups’ (Personal communication, 20 May 2016). Some of them participated briefly in a ukulele class, some in guitar and some in dance. These classes were run by volunteers and lasted from a range of a few weeks to a couple of months.

In this last chapter, I conclude the findings of this research study and situate them within the research questions I set out when I began the PhD journey. In the following sections, I discuss the key findings from the playbuilding project and how they have provided clarity to questions I had prior to starting the research study. The discussion engages with key arguments from studies in the field which are documented within this thesis. I also examine the limitations of this study and propose recommendations for future work in this chapter. By completing this chapter, I am also concluding the journey of playbuilding with the children from the low-income rental estate and telling the story of this research through my dual lenses as the researcher and facilitator of the playbuilding programme.
7.1 Answering the Research Questions

When I analysed the data three major themes stood out:

1. Playbuilding tools that enabled the process of re-imagination and reflection
2. Shifts in personal and group identity through engagement in Drama
3. Playbuilding process enabling voice, perspectives and ownership

The main research question was:

‘How does participating in collaborative and improvisatory drama playbuilding processes enable a positive sense of self-efficacy in children from low-income families in Singapore?’

Three sub-questions emerged to guide the research process:

i. How does participating in drama become a means for children to explore issues pertinent in their lives?

ii. How are voice, perspectives, ownership and agency enabled through participation in playbuilding activities?

iii. Does the relationship between the facilitator and participant matter in a collaborative and improvisatory process?
The interconnectivity between the themes and research questions produced a complex and intricate web of relationships that explained shifts in the children’s exhibition of self-efficacy. In the following sub-sections, I respond directly to the main research question and then the sub-questions to explain different ways participation in playbuilding affected the children in the study.

7.1.1 How does participating in improvisatory and collaborative playbuilding processes enable a positive sense of self-efficacy in children from low-income families in Singapore?

This research study found that improvisatory and collaborative playbuilding processes share close and prominent connections with three factors that influence self-efficacy in the participants in the programme. The three factors are: imaginal experiences; vicarious experiences and performance attainments. Elements of the five factors that influenced self-efficacy were evident in the research. However, the three factors listed above were observed more frequently in the playbuilding programme.

The different methods of making tableaux in this research study enabled the children to re-imagine alternative ways to look at the community’s rhetorics. The children were engaged in processes of tableaux making throughout the two phases of playbuilding. Chapter Four discusses the development of two methods of tableaux making in this research: (i) Sculpting and Re-imaging; and
(iii) Five-count image-making. The two methods of working in tableaux making facilitated imaginal experiences for the children which enabled them to: firstly, re-imagine plausible outcomes contradictory to the community’s rhetoric and secondly, to visualize the impacts of the re-imagined outcomes through the performances.

The tableaux work in the playbuilding processes resonated with Tsang et al.’s (2012) suggestion that imaginal experiences; mental images of possible failures or successes before attempting a task, would affect an individual’s sense of self-efficacy. The difference, however, between the process of imagination facilitated by image work created in the playbuilding programme and Tsang et al.’s (2012) definition of imaginal experiences, was the direct impact of visualizing what they had imagined being performed in reality. Imaginal experiences through improvisations and role play in the tableaux making enabled the young people to rethink and explore different ways to visualize outcomes to the issues they were facing in reality. It further provided the opportunity for the children to reflect if those were outcomes they wished to see in their futures and helped to shift the young people’s perspectives about who they were.

Vicarious experiences build on the re-imagination and visualization processes to facilitate the being of alternative identities and ways of living through role playing. It was a means for the children to work through various possibilities of being rather than just accept what they had known. Buckworth (2017) suggests that
vicarious experiences impact the sense of self-efficacy in a person by providing “a guide to behavior and opportunities for social comparison” (p. 41). In the playbuilding programme, some of the children took inspiration from their peers and started to reflect on what they might do in similar situations or when facing similar problems presented in the drama. Additionally the act of watching their peers try out different ways of being encouraged the young people to think creatively and explore alternatives within their comfort levels in the playbuilding process. Nicholson (2005) and Prendergast and Saxton (2013) suggest that drama allows a pathway in which its participants are empowered to reflect and investigate their identities through experimentation of roles and circumstances. The young people reflected on the ways their peers behaved and responded to situations in the drama and then considered how they would have acted similarly or differently in reality.

The playbuilding programme also facilitated the process of enhancing the children’s sense of agency and ownership as it encouraged them to actively make decisions about the trajectories of their narratives. The children experienced performance attainment in two ways in Phase One. The first example is the children’s desire to perform authentic negative experiences of living in the low-income estate but included plausible solutions in their performance as a way to educate the community about different ways of being. The young people were proud that they had success at finding alternative trajectories and that gave the children the confidence to include the new possibilities in their final performance
for the audience. The second example is the children’s request to perform their show a second time when Kha’s mother came to the performance late. After the first performance, the audience affirmed the young people’s effort and offered words of encouragement which boosted the children’s sense of confidence and nullified the anxiety they felt before the show. The second performance showed the young people demonstrating a heightened sense of efficacy and confidence as they performed with less apprehension and more confidence and joy on their faces.

The following sections answer the sub-questions that guided the research process. Collectively, the findings for the sub-questions contribute to the overall knowledge in the main research question. However, as individual sub-questions, they surfaced further findings that inform researchers and practitioners interested in working with young people through participatory work.

7.1.2 **How does participating in drama become a means for children to explore issues pertinent in their lives?**

The playbuilding programme gave the children space and audience to tell and perform stories which needed dialogue and listening ears. During the playbuilding, the young people shared and performed authentic stories inspired by events in the home and school environments. The children debated and reflected on the reasons why some situations had occurred and using the
different methods of working in tableaux discussed in Chapter Four, they adopted different perspectives to look at an issue and experimented with different pathways to achieve contradistinctive outcomes. Many of the negative narratives performed collectively by the children were common events in the low-income estate but the children needed the space and time during the playbuilding programme to understand why such situations occurred. In addition, the playbuilding programme also created the space for the children to share stories which they deemed uninteresting to their peers and family but needed attention from an adult to dialogue with nonetheless. Kha and Rut’s stories of punishments in schools demonstrated the young people’s need to talk through some of their experiences but both lacked suitable audience and conversation partners.

Although Cahill (2010) cautions us that performances of authentic experiences may lock the story-makers into “replications of dominant storylines” (p. 161), this research study showed that the performance of the “dominant storylines” was an important process for the young people. The children in the study had limited or no other platforms that offered them opportunities to examine and discuss difficult experiences in their lives. Not many of them had access to positive adult role models or adult figures who thought positively of the young people in both home and school settings. The children used the playbuilding process to discuss the negative or disturbing issues they encountered in the low-income neighbourhood or in school.
The process of creating fiction in the playbuilding programme provided the young people with opportunities to adopt critical and reflective lenses to evaluate their desires and attraction to risky activities and identities. In Chapters Four and Six, I gave examples of the older boys’ desires to perform negative characters such as loan sharks, gang members and playground bullies. Throughout the playbuilding programme, the children were eager and insistent on performing honest renditions of the playground events. They had chosen to include stories of bullying, peer conflicts, drug use and domestic violence in their performances during both phases of the playbuilding programme.

The building of a fictional story for performance created a safe pathway for the children to discuss the pertinent issues. The pre-adolescents were aware from the first playbuilding session that they were working towards creating a performance for an invited audience. Although they insisted on including authentic material from their lived experiences, the final performance was a culmination of shared individual and collective narratives from all the participants. The final storyline that emerged after both phases of playbuilding was fiction mirroring reality. Ned said the final performance was ‘a bit like real’ (Personal communication, 19 March 2015) but not exactly the actual story of the community. The oscillation between fiction and reality when the children examined authentic stories within the creative process to build a fictional performance alleviated the possibility of locking the participants into reliving the events which might be traumatizing or unpleasant. The switching of the lenses used to look at the events
in their lives - from the lens of children reviewing events in their lived experiences being performed to the lens of theatre makers selecting appropriate narratives from within their lived experiences to be included in an original product - enabled the children to look at their experiences with distance and objectivity.

7.1.3 How are voice, perspectives, ownership and agency enabled through participation in playbuilding activities?

When they first entered the programme the children saw themselves as products of the circumstances they were born into and these circumstances shaped their identities, and their sense of agency and efficacy. The children saw bullying as inevitable in the playground and when asked if the situation could be changed, they agreed unanimously that it was impossible. In the initial stages in Phase One, the children displayed a reluctance to view the events in their environments differently. They saw themselves as helpless beings trapped within their circumstances.

Before their participation in the playbuilding programme, the children had not seen alternatives to the rhetoric of the community narratives being modelled by other children and adults in the neighbourhood. Therefore, the young people’s sense of who they were and who they could become were entrenched in their experiences of the neighbourhood. The use of tableaux in the playbuilding
programme enabled alternative voices and perspectives to emerge and resulted in a sense of ownership and agency.

I have argued in Chapter Four that the tableaux making exercises were important tools used in the playbuilding process to create plausible futures and selves for the young people. The children engaged in re-imagination of events through the re-sculpting of images and the five-count image making exercises to experiment with different ways to resolve the problems they faced as residents of the estate and co-users of the playground. Through tableaux the children were facilitated in step-by-step image creation work to explore alternative circumstances to the ones they felt had trapped them in Phase One. The process of creating tableaux allowed the children to actively reflect on the plausible pathways the characters in their stories could take similar to Heathcote’s (2013) suggestion that participants undergo a process of change when they investigate and explore possibilities within the problem or situation.

The playbuilding process demanded different forms of effort and emotional investment from the young people when they made decisions to take their narratives to different trajectories. For example, Sha explained how he felt very powerful when he played the role of a bully. However, after the five-count image making exercise showed that the victims and bystanders in a bullying situation could unite together to walk away and render the bullies powerless, Sha reflected that it was a feeling he had not experienced before. In the same workshop, Kha
remarked that he had realized through the activity that walking away from the bullies was a possible way of managing the situation and it did not always have to end up in fights.

The opportunities to perform an original performance to the neighbourhood held significant importance to the group of young theatre makers. The young people were conscious of how the audience, made up of residents from the neighbourhood, would view them. At the same time, the young people were proud to be actors in a performance where they articulated that they could show their peers other ways of being. The children insisted that they only wanted their families and friends as audience members. The young people reasoned that the narratives presented in the final performance would only resonate with people who knew them and the events in their lives. The opportunity to perform and select their audience made the children think that they had the responsibility to educate the audience who came to watch them of plausible outcomes to the rhetoric of the community. The scenes that were created at each playbuilding session were intended for the consumption of their peers who were members of the creative process and it explains the children’s insistence on ensuring the narratives that were contributed to the playbuilding process were authentic.

The children’s responses to the playbuilding process resonated with Prendergast and Saxton’s (2013) suggestion that when participation in applied drama programmes encourages the exploration of lived experiences, the participants
are more concerned with creating links between their work and the audience. I suspect the initial insistence on performing the negative realities of their lives was very much linked to their beliefs that their identities were locked within the harsh environments and events. At the same time, the playbuilding process was facilitated to ensure every child understood that he or she had a stake in how the eventual story was shaped and how their individual voices were represented through the performance to the audience.

7.1.4 Does the relationship between the facilitator and participant matter in a collaborative and improvisatory process?

The position of the facilitator as an outsider to the community but supported by an insider in the form of the community worker created an intriguing blend of factors that worked together in the research. The narratives performed in the playbuilding process revealed the absence of positive adult influences in the children’s lives. Most of the children in the playbuilding programme came from single parent families and at least six of them had an elderly grandparent looking after them because their parents were in drug rehabilitation centres. Through the children’s creative work in the playbuilding process, it became evident that some of the young people had to grapple with the changes in their family units and the insecurity of not being able to control the relationships they shared with their parents. My position as the outsider served to situate me as a neutral party that was unconnected to the events in the children’s lived environments. At the same
time, my close working relationship with Zaty, at least in Phase One, created
important and critical links for the interpretations and understanding of the
children’s work in the playbuilding process.

I found my role as the facilitator in the playbuilding programme serving as the
intermediary between the creative process and the children’s narratives. My
careful consideration and facilitation of the improvisatory and collaborative
processes within the theatre making were results of my heavy reliance on
reflective practice. The notes I made after each workshop served as important
data for me when I planned the subsequent sessions. As a result, the children
were supported through the playbuilding process to oscillate between real life and
fiction to examine issues that they wished to discuss but lacked the opportunities
or audience. When facilitating the playbuilding process, I was highly conscious
that I must not allow my personal values and biases to affect the way I treated
the children’s narratives. Kandil (2016) suggests that “the process in which we
elicited these personal narratives respected their preciousness” (p. 203) and I
demonstrated my respect for the young people’s narratives by avoiding giving
them advice or instructions as to how they could solve problems in the stories
performed. The neutrality of my role propelled the children to be responsible for
the decisions they made in the creative process while I asked questions and
guided their way of working with my skills and knowledge in playbuilding. My
position in the playbuilding programme thus resonated with Prendergast and
Saxton’s (2013) advice to avoid directing the action in the drama but instead offer
to be “a part of the drama that is being co-created on equal terms with the group” (p. 62).

The deliberate relinquishing of power to the children in the creative process resulted in a transfer of agency from me to them. However, it was not a conscious effort on my part to empower the participants with a sense of agency. Instead, the toggle of agency between the children and I happened seamlessly when we began to work in drama; once they took on the role of theatre makers, the children assumed a greater sense of agency. The young people were aware that they had the power and autonomy to decide what they would like to share and the extent of details they wished to disclose in the creative process. It was also apparent to the young people that my main task in the playbuilding journey was to use my knowledge and skills in drama to facilitate the creative process. I became a conduit for “travelling into another world” (Nicholson, 2005, p. 12-13) but the real power of what they wished to see, and how they wanted to view the world lay in their hands. While the improvisatory and collaborative processes in playbuilding enabled the emergence of new identities and improved sense of agency in the children, an adult figure was equally important as a means of support to the developing selves in the pre-adolescents. Dunn et al. (2015) explain that the commitment of the participants in a dramatic process is “influenced by the specific dynamics of relationship within the group and with the facilitator” (p. 16). The relationship I shared with the children in the programme
fostered a safe space for them to speak while maintaining some elements of risk within the process to explore challenging issues and investigate alternatives.

The facilitator in a participatory drama programme connects the needs of the participants to a creative process and finds a way forward to enabling the telling of stories in a safe but encouraging environment. The distance maintained by the facilitator to the community might serve to avoid an overly reliant and emotionally entangled relationship that complicated the creative process instead of enabling it. At the same time, a highly reflective facilitator would be able to respond to the situations during the playbuilding process to employ the most suitable methods to further the work of the participants. It is therefore critical that a facilitator working with vulnerable and marginalized communities understand and maintain the respectful distance required in the relationship with the participants.

My unique working relationship with Zaty illuminated the importance of a bridge between the facilitator who had come from outside the community to work within the community. One important quality Zaty brought to this role was her expertise and experience in applied theatre practice. Her knowledge of applied theatre processes meant that she was able to provide a critical eye to my work with the children as well as providing an insight into the means of enhancing the engagement of the children. The young woman’s presence and participation in Phase One meant that the progress of playbuilding was considerably faster than
Phase Two when she was present for only two sessions. Because of her supportive presence, the playbuilding work went mostly uninterrupted in Phase One and even when conflicts arose, they died down very quickly and the children were more willing to apologise and move on.

There were particular qualities that made Zaty such a valuable member of the playbuilding team: one, she was knowledgeable and informed about applied theatre processes; two, she was a respected and valued member of the community; and three, she saw her role as supporting my work as facilitator, providing me with important critical reflections and key information but not seeking to steer the work, or take over the facilitation. She showed that she trusted me to lead the project.

In Phase Two, Zaty’s absence due to work reasons resulted in several negative discipline issues. However, Zaty’s absence in Phase Two had also ironically enabled the children to raise topics which were sensitive to the culture of the community. The girls’ discussion of sex and stories about teenagers having sex as discussed earlier were unlikely to have surfaced if Zaty was present. The community worker’s familiarity with the youth in the neighbourhood would have prevented the girls in the playbuilding programme from divulging such sensitive information. My lack of contact within the community gave the girls the security that I would not know who they were talking about and they had trust in me that the contents of that afternoon would not be revealed to anyone, including Zaty.
So, while the role Zaty played within the process was an important contribution to the programme, the need for participants to hold a positive and trusting relationship with the facilitator is also of great importance, and it is evident that my outsider position provided, in this instance, opportunities for the young girls to broach topics that they would not have raised with someone more closely linked to the community.

7.2 Challenges in the Study

The playbuilding project met with several unforeseen difficulties. My instinctual disposition when each of the challenges arose was to find ways to overcome them. I treated them as problems that needed to be solved or eradicated. However, when I analysed the circumstances that led to these problems and the eventual impacts, it became obvious to me that the challenges I experienced had helped to shape the playbuilding programme and the data collection process in a positive manner. The main challenges I encountered in the playbuilding programme were:

i. Language barriers

ii. Irregular attendance of the participants

iii. Inability to conduct post programme interviews.
7.2.1 Language barriers

The children in the programme spoke mainly the Malay language. Pris and I were the only two ethnic Chinese persons in the group while the other fifteen children all belonged to the Malay ethnic community. Besides Malay language, the children also communicated in Singlish, a colloquial form of English that encompassed a variety of dialects and other languages. As a Singaporean who was born and bred in the island state, I also speak Singlish but I had originally planned to conduct the programme in English as that was the common language used between the different racial groups in the country. When I was confronted by the low levels of English language abilities, I decided to use Singlish as an alternative way to connect with the young people. However, the children deemed my Singlish too proper and jarring to their ears so they made an effort to communicate with me in English instead. The children below ten years old generally had more difficulty expressing themselves coherently than their older counterparts. However, it was interesting to note that none of them appeared to have problems understanding me during the playbuilding sessions or when we spoke casually. My deliberately slow manner of speech and choice of simple vocabulary might have assisted understanding.

The lack of a common language between the children and myself became an acute problem only when I wanted to pursue particular points of interest at different junctures of the playbuilding process. The children took on roles of
characters that were familiar to them from their lived experiences and created tableaux that resonated with actual events in their lives. There were occasions when I did not know how to read an image or wanted to dig deeper into the situations performed in the tableaux but my lack of ability at speaking Malay and the children’s low level of English prevented a dialogue that could have helped to delve further into discussing their image work. Drama conventions that weighed heavily on verbal communication had limited value in the playbuilding programme as they relied on language to further the meaning in the work. The children’s inability to explain and the lack of vocabulary in our common vernacular limited my understanding of their narratives, and compromised the richness of the stories they were telling.

7.2.2 Inconsistent attendance

While we enjoyed mostly regular attendance from the children in Phase One, the attendance in Phase Two of the playbuilding programme was irregular in part due to the familial circumstances and also due to the activities in their schools. In Phase One, the children and I met on a daily basis during the term break starting from Tuesday and the programme culminated in a performance on the Friday. The stable attendance from most of the children in Phase One made it easy and possible to observe and examine the nuances of change in the children’s identities, sense of agency and self-efficacy.
In Phase Two, the children were engaged in the playbuilding programme on a weekly basis. After the first session, Zaty suggested having a three-week recess so that the children could spend more time revising for school tests and exams which typically happened towards the end of April in the academic calendar. The children and I met again towards the end of April on a weekly basis. The break in between the playbuilding process in Phase Two resulted in a loss of continuity in our work. The focus and excitement experienced in Phase One compounded by the instant gratification of seeing a performance being built very quickly in a matter of days sustained the interest and energies of the young people. However, the process of making a performance together over a few months while grappling with the realities of school and family issues watered down the children’s ability to maintain that same excitement and motivation.

The irregular attendance of the children in Phase Two meant that the group and I had to spend time discussing what had been created in the week(s) before in order to build on the plot for the performance. The children became frustrated as they felt the playbuilding process lacked progress and they did not experience the same gratification they felt in Phase One. The few children who were consistently present in Phase Two were eager to get on with the playbuilding process; they were impatient to build a story for performance and the pride they felt after the performance in Phase One was still lingering. Unfortunately, the positive feelings that spilled over from Phase One did not last long as the children
grew resentful that they had to accommodate members who were irregular in attendance and that held them back in their theatre making journey.

7.2.3 Post-programme interviews

When I was planning the data collection for the study, I had intended to conduct interviews with the young people six months to one year after the programme ended. The data collected during the playbuilding programme provided an insight into the use of improvisatory and collaborative processes in the playbuilding programme, and the relationship between the drama process and the enabling of self-efficacy in the children during that time. Bruun (2017) and Taylor (1998) argue that participants of regular drama programmes are able to transfer the skills and knowledge learnt in the artistic process into their real lives. The purpose of the post-programme interviews with the young participants was to examine if the playbuilding process had effected any changes to the agency and efficacy levels in the young people even after their membership in the drama programme ended.

The changes in the children’s living arrangements and family conditions described earlier meant that some of the children did not keep in regular contact with the staff from RSC. Zaty had also left her job at RSC two months after the playbuilding programme ended to join an arts company and she could not facilitate the arrangements for post-programme interviews. The post-programme interviews were intended to provide an insight into examining the lingering
impacts of participation in a playbuilding programme. Although I had not been able to conduct the interviews as intended, Zaty shed light on the developments of some of the children as discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

7.3 Recommendations

The research story that unfolded in this thesis brought to surface some considerations to further improve the study of playbuilding processes in child and youth development beyond the examination of self-efficacy. The entire playbuilding programme took place over a three-month period between March and June 2015. However, the period of engagement in the research study was insufficient to suggest the impact of this relationship and how it could have facilitated the development of a positive sense of self-efficacy in the children in the longer term. Etherton and Prentki (2006) warn against such brief periods of engagement with a community. They suggest that “the benefits of critical distance and innovative vision have to be set against the disadvantages of restricted knowledge and limited time” (p. 144) and this proved to be critical in my analysis of the findings in this study. I was unable to ascertain if my relationship as an outside adult figure engaged in a creative process of playbuilding with the young people resulted in sustainable impacts to the children’s sense of self-efficacy. Furthermore, I was unable to delve deeper into whether the positive shifts witnessed in the children during the drama programme were transmissible into other aspects of their lives.
A longitudinal study over a period of at least one year, engaging the children on a weekly basis, would allow for a more in-depth study into the role playbuilding has on child and youth development. At the same time, it could further examine Brice Heath’s (2013) claim that engagement in the arts complements the school’s and family’s support for the healthy development in children and youth. A study conducted over the course of at least one year would allow for sufficient attention and investigation into the community identity formed as a result of the young people’s membership into a playbuilding programme. The examination could extend to understand if and how the community identity that was fostered might affect the children’s individual identities.

7.4 Final Thoughts

Hogett and Miller (2000) suggest that the outsider does not get an “all access pass” into the community. I reflected and argued in this thesis that I was an outsider to the public rental housing community. I entered the community with my bag of tools in the form of drama processes to facilitate the making of performance with the children. In that sense, I had gifted each of the child participants an access pass into a playbuilding programme where they became theatre makers of original performances. The children reciprocated by gifting me an access pass into the personal and communal stories of their lived experiences.
as young residents in a tough neighbourhood. The relationship of reciprocity lasted throughout the playbuilding programme.

Throughout the playbuilding journey, the children found opportunities to delve into conflicts and issues which made up their lived experiences, and examined them from different perspectives within the dramatic contexts. The young people transited between the fiction and the real world to make sense of the events happening in their lives to re-imagine and visualise their realities. The experience of working collaboratively within the fiction facilitated multi-modal ways of learning and multiple ways of being.

The shared experience of building a play together fostered a new sense of identity in the children, both collectively and individually. The young people saw themselves as a group entity, separated from the playground community, and they were doing something other than spending time at the communal space. The children also found that they had talents and capabilities that they had not realized before, and their identities were not limited to their perceived inadequacies and lack of academic achievements. This propelled a sense of agency in some of them as they started to see themselves as capable of making positive changes to their environments and lives. However, this newly formed group identity proved to be limiting and exclusive when they rejected the inclusion of other children into the playbuilding community. The children in the programme
became protective of the shared experiences and they felt their privacy had been compromised when new comers joined the artistic journey.

The final performance in June 2015 ended the intense playbuilding process I had shared with the children. During the debrief at the end of Phase Two, the children returned the figurative access pass for the playbuilding programme to me. They thanked me for teaching them how to do drama but reminded me that the stories belonged to them. The children were ready to move on from their participation in the playbuilding programme to try other activities. Zaty was recruiting children into a Scouts programme starting the following week, and many of the children were interested. With the completion and submission of this thesis, it is also my time to return the figurative access pass back to the community. I watched the videos and relived the playbuilding programme many times during the analysis and writing of this thesis. I carried with me the children's narratives of their lived experiences through the years of completing my study. The story of the research is now complete and I am happy to return the access pass back to the young people who had privileged me into their lives.
Appendix A

Playbuilding Programme Schedule

Inside Out – Schedule

Phase One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16 March 2015 – Workshop</td>
<td>2pm – 6pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 March 2015 – Workshop</td>
<td>2pm – 6pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 March 2015 – Workshop</td>
<td>2pm – 6pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 March 2015 – Workshop</td>
<td>2pm – 6pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 March 2015 – Performance</td>
<td>6.30pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phase Two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 April 2015 – Workshop</td>
<td>4pm – 7pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08 May 2015 – Workshop</td>
<td>4pm – 7pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 May 2015 – Workshop</td>
<td>4pm – 7pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 May 2015 – Workshop</td>
<td>4pm – 7pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 May 2015 - Workshop</td>
<td>4pm – 7pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 May 2015 - Performance</td>
<td>7.30pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Ethical Consent

B.1 Information and Consent Forms for Parents and Caregivers in English

Inside Out: the role of drama in enabling a positive sense of self-efficacy in children

Research Team
Assoc Prof Penny Bundy
Senior Investigator
School of Education and Professional Studies
Griffith University

Dr Madonna Stinson
Senior Investigator
School of Education and Professional Studies
Griffith University

Jennifer Wong
Student Researcher
School of Education and Professional Studies
Griffith University

Dear Parents/Guardians,

A very warm welcome to you!

Thank you for allowing your child/ward to join us in this drama journey. We are very excited to be working with your child/ward in the coming weeks to create and perform stories in the drama. Below is the schedule for this programme:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16 March – 19 March 2015</td>
<td>Story making, play building, props making and rehearsals for the performances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 April – 08 May 2015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This drama programme is also a student’s research project to find out if the participants will benefit with an improved sense of self-efficacy through the drama work.

This is a research study by a Doctor of Education student from Griffith University, Australia, and it aims to find out the role drama has in enabling a more positive sense of self-identity and self-efficacy in children. This study is approved by the Office for Research in Griffith University and it adheres to the institution’s code of ethics in research.

The research questions for this study are:

- How does drama assist in enabling a more positive sense of self-efficacy in under-privileged children in Singapore?
- How does being engaged in a drama programme provide under-privileged children in Singapore the platform to explore issues pertinent in their lives?

The participants of this drama programme and research project can expect to learn drama skills that will contribute to the creation of original performances for public viewing.

By participating in this drama programme and research project, your child/ward will:

- need to spend time after school hours and during the school holidays to work on the creation of the drama and rehearsals for performance
- be required to work in groups with the other participants
- have to perform the drama to a group of an audience of family and friends, and members of the public

His/her participation in this drama programme and research project is completely voluntary. If you change your mind about allowing your child/ward to being part of the research at any point in time during the drama programme, please feel free to inform the staff at (Name of VWO). The telephone number of the center is +65 (Contact number of VWO).

You can also direct any questions or concerns that you may have regarding this drama programme and research project to the staff. Your questions and/or concerns will be conveyed to the research team by the staff from (Name of VWO). You can be assured that if your child/ward chooses not to continue with the drama programme at any point
in time, you or your family will not be penalized or have your welfare/financial assistance privileges withdrawn.

A social worker from (Name of VWO) will be present during the weekly drama sessions. The children are reminded that the social worker present will have access to the information offered during the story making and playbuilding sessions. Should the children choose to divulge information that reveals that he/she or his/her family members have participated in activities that are illegal, the social worker may have to report the issue to (Name of VWO), and/or the police. This information will also not be recorded by the research team or reported in the final research document.

Should you be interested in the results of this research study, you are free to request a copy of the written report through the staff at (Name of VWO) 6 months after the project has ended. Please be assured that the names of the participants will not be used in the report, a pseudonym will be used instead.

The conduct of this research involves the collection, access and/or use of your child/ward’s de-identified personal information. The information collected is confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties without your consent, except to meet government, legal or other regulatory authority requirements. A de-identified copy of this data may be used for conference presentations of the research, and publication of research articles or books. However, your anonymity will at times be safeguarded. For further information consult the University’s Privacy Plan at http://www.griffith.edu.au/about-griffith/plans-publications/griffith-university-privacy-plan or telephone +61 (07) 3735 4375.

We hope you are as excited as we are in starting this journey of exploring, story making and performing.

Thank you for joining us.

Best regards,

Jennifer Wong
Drama Facilitator and Research Member of Inside
Consent Form

Research Team

Assoc Prof Penny Bundy  
Senior Investigator  
School of Education and Professional Studies  
Griffith University

Dr Madonna Stinson  
Senior Investigator  
School of Education and Professional Studies  
Griffith University

Jennifer Wong  
Student Researcher  
School of Education and Professional Studies  
Griffith University

By signing below, I confirm that I have read and understood the information package and in particular have noted that:

• I understand that the involvement in this research will include participation in the weekly drama programme of 2 - 4 hours long for a total of 32 hours;

• I have had any questions answered to my satisfaction;

• I understand the risks involved;

• I understand that my child's/ward's participation in this research is voluntary;

• I understand that if I have any additional questions I can contact the research team;

• I understand I am free to withdraw my child/ward at any time, without explanation or penalty;

• I understand that I can contact the Manager, Research Ethics, at Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee on +61 3735 4375 (or researchethics@griffith.edu.au) if I have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the project.
Please tick in the boxes below to indicate the level of agreement to this research study:

☐ I agree to participate in this drama programme.
☐ I agree to have my pixelated photographs taken for research conference presentations, conference and/or journal publications, book publications and research reports.
☐ I agree to have pixelated videos taken for conference presentations, conference and/or journal publications, book publications and research reports.
☐ I agree to be interviewed and contents of the interview recorded for research analysis and reporting.
☐ I agree to have my pixelated digital images and information about me reported in conference presentations, conference and/or journal publications, book publications and research reports.

Name & Signature : ___________________________  Date:
B.2 Information and Consent Forms for Parents and Caregivers in Chinese

从内到外 - 戏剧对于儿童自我效能扮演的角色

研究小组:  Penny Bundy 副教授
高层研究员
教育与专业学学院
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Jennifer Wong
学生研究员
教育与专业学学院
格里菲斯大学

亲爱的家长/监护人，
谢谢您同意您的孩子与我们共度从内到外的戏剧之旅。我们非常兴奋，迫不及待的想与他们一起分享，创造以及呈现大家的作品。以下将是我们接下来几周的行程。

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>日程表</th>
<th>活动</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16/03/2015 – 19/03/2015</td>
<td>故事创作, 建构戏剧, 道具制作和演出彩排</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/04/2015 – 08/05/2015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19/03/2015</td>
<td>对外演出 (亲朋好友)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08/05/2015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

这项计划是个学生研究专案，用来探讨参与者是否会效益于戏剧对于他们信奉于建功立业的成效。
这项研究是由澳大利亚，格里菲斯大学教育博士的学生担任。目的是为了找出戏剧对于儿童信奉于自我认同感和自我效能所扮演的角色。这项研究以取得了格里菲斯大学研究室的认同，而过程中会谨守于本校的道德准则。

研究考查问题：
- 戏剧如何帮助不在特权的新加坡儿童得到自我效能的成效？
- 参与戏剧节目如何提供一个平台给不在特权的新加坡儿童分享有关他们的议题？

身为这项戏剧计划与研究的参与者，您的孩子将会学到一些戏剧技艺，有助于创造对外的公众演出。

参与这项研究与戏剧项目，您的孩子将会需要：
- 在下课后和放假时抽空创作与彩排故事
- 和其他参与者组成一组，一起合作
- 对外演出包括呈现给亲朋好友和公众

您的孩子在此项研究与计划中以随意为主。若您在活动进展中改变注意，而不想让您的孩子继续参与，请您联络(Name of VWO) 的员工。本中心的联络方式，+65 (Contact number of VWO)。

若有任何疑问，您也可以随时联络本中心的员工。您的问题将会转交于研究案的小组。若您想让孩子退出这项研究计划，您可以放心您的孩子或家人将不会受到惩罚，您的福利以及财政援助的特权也不会被撤回。

从(Name of VWO)的社会工作者将会在场为每周的戏剧活动。我们必须声明，社工将会获得您的孩子在故事制作和建构戏剧活动中提供的信息。如果您的孩子选择透露，揭示他或您的家庭成员曾进行过一些非法活动的信息，社工将有权向公司汇报，或交给警察处置。这些信息将不会被研究小组记录下来，也不会用于最终的研究报告。

如果您有兴趣知道研究的结果，您可以在项目结束后六个月，通过工作人员要求索取书面报告的副本。您可以放心参与者的姓名不会在报告中呈现，完全会以化名的方式进行。

本研究的行为涉及将会收集以及使用您的个人识别信息。收集到的信息是保密的，我们不会在未取得您的同意下泄露给第三者，除了满足政府，法律或其他监管机构的要求。这项研究的最终报告会拷贝于往后类似的研究温习，如出版书或会议演讲。然而，您孩子的匿名将在此得到保障。欲了解更多信息，请上往查询

我们希望您与我们一样期待开始这段探索，制作故事，创作和表演的旅程。

感谢您加入我们的研究方案。

此致，

Jennifer Wong
戏剧驻团艺术工作者以及从内到外的研究成员
知情同意书

研究小组: Penny Bundy 副教授
高层研究员
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格里菲斯大学

Jennifer Wong
学生研究员
教育与专业学学院
格里菲斯大学

若在以下签名, 本人申明以读过与了解这份咨询包裹, 包括:

- 我明白我的孩子在这项研究的实职为每周 2 - 4 小时的戏剧活动, 总数为 32 小时
- 我发问的问题都得到了我满意的回复
- 我明白这项活动的风险
- 我明白参与这项活动以随意为主
- 我明白若有任何疑问, 我能随时联络研究小组
- 我明白我的孩子能随时退出, 并且不必解释也不会有任何刑罚
- 我明白我能联络格里菲斯大学的研究道德委员会或经理+61 3735 4375 (或上网 researchethics@griffith.edu.au) 若我有任何疑问关于这项专案的道德行为

请在下面的方框打勾, 表示同意本研究的协议:

☐ 我同意参与这项戏剧活动
☐ 我同意工作者以研究目的拍取我的照片, 而将会用于往后研究, 刊登在出版书或会议演讲上及相关的研究报告
☐ 我同意工作者以研究目的拍取我的视频, 而将会用于往后研究, 刊登在出版书或会议演讲上及相关的研究报告
☐ 我同意被访问而访问的内容与过程将被录制作为研究分析
☐ 我同意让我的数字图像和相关信息在会议上介绍, 期刊出版, 图书出版和研究报告的报道

姓名及签名: ____________________________________________ 日期:
B.3 Information and Consent Forms for Parents and Caregivers in Malay

Dalam ke Luar (Inside Out): peranan drama dalam memupuk rasa keberkesanan diri dalam kanak-kanak

Ahli Penyelidikan
Assoc Prof Penny Bundy
Penyiasat Kanan
Sekolah Pendidikan dan Kajian Profesional
Universiti Griffith

Dr Madonna Stinson
Penyiasat Kanan
Sekolah Pendidikan dan Kajian Profesional
Universiti Griffith

Jennifer Wong
Pelajar Penyelidikan
Sekolah Pendidikan dan Kajian Profesional
Universiti Griffith

Kehadapan Ibu Bapa/Waris,

Kami mendahulukan dengan ucapan salam sejahtera!

Kami ingin mengucapkan terima kasih kerana membenarkan anak/waris anda menyertai perjalanan drama ini. Kami amat ghairah untuk berkerja bersama anak/waris anda dalam minggu-minggu yang akan datang untuk mengarang dan mempersembahkan cerita dalam program drama ini. Di bawah ialah jadual bagi program drama ini:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minggu</th>
<th>Aktiviti</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16/03/2015 – 19/03/2015</td>
<td>Pengarangan cerita, pembinaan drama, pembinaan peralatan bagi persembahan dan latihan bagi persembahan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/04/2015 – 08/05/2015</td>
<td>Persembahan di hadapan ahli keluarga dan rakan-rakan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19/03/2015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08/05/2015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Program drama ini juga bertujuan sebagai projek penyelidikan untuk mengetahui jikalau para peserta akan bermanfaat dengan meningkatkan rasa keberkesanan diri mereka melalui program drama ini.

Kajian penyelidikan ini dilakukan oleh seorang pelajar Doktor Pendidikan dari Universiti Griffith, Australia, dan ia bertujuan untuk mengetahui peranan drama dalam membolehkan kanak-kanak mempunyai rasa positif diri dan keberkesanan diri. Kajian ini telah diluluskan oleh Pejabat Penyelidikan Universiti Griffith dan ia mematuhi tatalaku etika dalam penyelidikan, bagi institusi tersebut.

Soalan-soalan bagi kajian ini ialah:

Bagaimana drama dapat menolong memupuk rasa keberkesanan diri dalam kanak-kanak dalam golongan berpendapatan rendah di Singapura?

Bagaimana penyertaan dalam program drama dapat memberi kanak-kanak dalam golongan berpendapatan rendah di Singapura ruang perkongsian mengenai isu-isu yang membabitkan diri mereka?

Para peserta program drama dan projek penyelidikan ini dapat mengharapkan untuk mempelajari kemahiran drama yang akan menyumbang kepada penciptaan persembahan untuk tatapan umum.

Dalam menyertai program drama dan projek penyelidikan ini, anak/waris anda perlu:

- meluangkan masa selepas sekolah dan ketika cuti sekolah untuk menghasilkan drama dan melatih bagi persembahan yang akan dilakukan
- bekerjasama dengan para peserta yang lain
- mempersembahkan drama di hadapan ahli keluarga, rakan-rakan dan orang awam

Penyertaan anak/waris anda dalam program drama dan projek penyelidikan ini adalah dengan sukarela. Jikalau anda menukar pilihan ketika program drama ini untuk membenarkan anak/waris turut serta, sila hubungi pegawai (Name of VWO) untuk memaklumkannya. Nombor talian pusat Beyond ialah +65 (Contact number of VWO).

Anda juga boleh mengarahkan mana-mana soalan atau kebimbangan mengenai program drama dan projek penyelidikan ini kepada pegawai (Name of VWO). Soalan dan/atau kebimbangan anda akan dimaklumkan kepada pasukan penyelidikan oleh pegawai dari (Name of VWO). Anda boleh pastikan jikalau anak/waris anda memilih untuk tidak meneruskan program drama ini pada bila-bila masa, anda atau keluarga anda tidak akan didenda dan bantuan kebajikan/kewangan anda tidak akan ditarik balik.
Seorang pegawai (Name of VWO) akan hadir ketika sesi drama pada setiap minggu. Anak/waris anda akan diingatkan bahawa pegawai sosial yang hadir akan dimaklumkan mengenai informasi yang ditawar ketika sesi pengarangan cerita dan pembinaan drama. Sekiranya anak/waris anda memilih untuk mendedahkan maklumat mengenai penyalahgunaan undang-undang yang dilakukan oleh ahli keluarga anda, pegawai sosial mungkin perlu melaporkan isu tersebut kepada (Name of VWO), dan/atau pihak polis. Maklumat ini juga tidak akan dirakam oleh pasukan penyelidikan atau dicatat dalam laporan akhir penyelidikan ini.

Jika anda berminat dalam mengetahui keputusan kajian penyelidikan ini, anda boleh meminta salinan laporan akhir penyelidikan ini melalui pegawai dari (Name of VWO) 6 bulan selepas projek ini berakhir. Anda boleh memastikan bahawa nama para peserta tidak akan digunakan dalam laporan ini. Sebaliknya, nama samaran akan digunakan.


Kami ingin mengongsi kegairahan ini bersama anda dalam memulakan perjalan meneroka, mengarang cerita dan mempersembahkan drama.

Kami mengucapkan terima kasih atas sokongan anda.

Yang benar,

Jennifer Wong
Jurulatih dan Ahli Penyelidik bagi Dalam ke Luar (Inside Out)
Borang Kebenaran

Ahli Penyelidikan
Assoc Prof Penny Bundy
Penyiasat Kanan
Sekolah Pendidikan dan Kajian Profesional
Universiti Griffith

Dr Madonna Stinson
Penyiasat Kanan
Sekolah Pendidikan dan Kajian Profesional
Universiti Griffith

Jennifer Wong
Pelajar Penyelidikan
Sekolah Pendidikan dan Kajian Profesional
Universiti Griffith

Dengan menandatangani borang ini, saya memastikan bahawa saya sudah membaca dan memahami maklumat yang telah diberikan terutama sekali:

• Saya memahami bahawa penyertaan anak/waris saya di dalam penyelidikan ini termasuk latihan mingguan drama selama 2 - 4 jam untuk 32 jam secara keseluruhan;

• Semua soalan-soalan saya telah dijawab dengan memuaskan;

• Saya memahami setiap risiko yang terlibat;

• Saya memahami bahawa penyertaan anak/waris saya dalam penyelidikan ini adalah dengan sukarela;

• Saya memahami bahawa saya boleh menghubungi kumpulan penyelidikan jikalau saya mempunyai soalan tambahan;

• Saya memahami bahawa anak/waris saya bebas untuk menarik diri pada bila-bila masa, tanpa penjelasan atau denda;

• Saya memahami bahawa saya boleh menghubungi Pengurusi bagi Etika Penyelidikan dari Jawatankuasa bagi Etika Manusia, Universiti Griffith, di talian +61 3735 4375 (atau melalui e-mel researchethics@griffith.edu.au) jikalau saya mempunyai kebimbangan mengenai tatalaku etika bagi projek ini.
Sila tandakan dalam kotak di bawah untuk menunjukkan tahap persetujuan anda untuk kajian penyelidikan ini:

☐ Saya bersetuju untuk membenarkan anak/waris saya menyertai program drama ini
☐ Saya bersetuju untuk mengaburkan gambar-gambar anak/waris saya yang dipetik untuk persidangan penyelidikan, penerbitan persidangan dan/atau jurnal, buku dan laporan penyelidikan
☐ Saya bersetuju untuk mengaburkan video-video anak/waris saya yang dirakam untuk persidangan penyelidikan, penerbitan persidangan dan/atau jurnal, buku dan laporan penyelidikan
☐ Saya bersetuju untuk membenarkan anak/waris saya ditemu duga dan kandungan yang diberi akan dirakam dan digunakan untuk analisis penyelidikan dan laporan
☐ Saya membenarkan gambar-gambar digital anak/waris saya yang telah dikabur dan maklumat mengenai diri anak/waris saya dikongsi di persidangan penyelidikan, penerbitan persidangan dan/atau jurnal, buku dan laporan penyelidikan

Nama & Tandatangan: ____________________________ ___________________  
Tarikh: ________________________

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B.4 Information and Consent Forms for Participants in English

Inside Out: the role of drama in enabling a positive sense of self-efficacy in children

Research Team
Assoc Prof Penny Bundy
Senior Investigator
School of Education and Professional Studies
Griffith University

Dr Madonna Stinson
Senior Investigator
School of Education and Professional Studies
Griffith University

Jennifer Wong
Student Researcher
School of Education and Professional Studies
Griffith University

Dear Participants,

A very warm welcome to you!

Thank you for joining us in this drama journey. We are very excited to be working with you in the coming weeks to create and perform stories in the drama. Below is the schedule for this programme:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weeks</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16/03/2015 – 19/03/2015</td>
<td>Story making, play building, props making and rehearsals for the performances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/04/2015 – 08/05/2015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19/03/2015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08/05/2015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Performance to family and friends

This drama programme is also a student’s research project to find out if the participants will benefit with an improved sense of self-efficacy through the drama work.

This is a research study by a Doctor of Education student from Griffith University, Australia, and it aims to find out the role drama has in enabling a more positive sense of self-efficacy.
self-identity and self-efficacy in children. This study is approved by the Office for
Research in Griffith University and it adheres to the institution’s code of ethics in
research.

The research questions for this study are:

How does drama assist in enabling a more positive sense of self-efficacy in under-
privileged children in Singapore?
How does being engaged in a drama programme provide under-privileged children in
Singapore the platform to explore issues pertinent in their lives?

As participants of this drama programme and research project, you can expect to learn
drama skills that will contribute to the creation of original performance for public
viewing.

By participating in this drama programme and research project, you will:

- need to spend time after school hours and during the school holidays to work on the
  creation of the drama and rehearsals for performance
- be required to work in groups with the other participants
- have to perform the drama to a group of an audience of family and friends, and
  members of the public

Your participation in this drama programme and research project is completely
voluntary. If you change your mind about being part of the research at any point in
time during the drama programme, please feel free to inform the staff at (Name of
VWO). The telephone number of the center is +65 (Contact number of VWO).

You can also direct any questions or concerns that you may have regarding this drama
programme and research project to the staff. Your questions and/or concerns will be
conveyed to the research team by the staff from (Name of VWO). You can be assured
that if you choose not to continue with the drama programme at any point in time, you
will not be penalized or have your welfare/financial assistance privileges withdrawn
from you or your family.

A social worker from (Name of VWO) will be present during the weekly drama sessions.
You are reminded that the social worker present will have access to the information you
offer during the story making and playbuilding sessions. Should you choose to divulge
information that reveals that you or your family members have participated in activities
that are illegal, the social worker may have to report the issue to (Name of VWO),
and/or the police.
If you are interested in the results of this research study, you are free to request a copy of the written report through the staff at (Name of VWO) 6 months after the project has ended. Please be assured that the names of the participants will not be used in the report, a pseudonym will be used instead.

The conduct of this research involves the collection, access and/or use of your de-identified personal information. The information collected is confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties without your consent, except to meet government, legal or other regulatory authority requirements. A de-identified copy of this data may be used for conference presentations of the research, and publication of research articles or books. However, your anonymity will at times be safeguarded. For further information consult the University’s Privacy Plan at http://www.griffith.edu.au/about-griffith/plans-publications/griffith-university-privacy-plan or telephone +61 (07) 3735 4375.

We hope you are as excited as we are in starting this journey of exploring, story making and performing.

Thank you for joining us.

Best regards,

Jennifer Wong
Drama Facilitator and Research Member of *Inside Out*
Consent Form

Research Team
Assoc Prof Penny Bundy
Senior Investigator
School of Education and Professional Studies
Griffith University

Dr Madonna Stinson
Senior Investigator
School of Education and Professional Studies
Griffith University

Jennifer Wong
Student Researcher
School of Education and Professional Studies
Griffith University

By signing below, I confirm that I have read and understood the information package and in particular have noted that:

- I understand that my involvement in this research will include my participation in the weekly drama programme of 2 - 4 hours long for a total of 32 hours;

- I have had any questions answered to my satisfaction;

- I understand the risks involved;

- I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary;

- I understand that if I have any additional questions I can contact the research team;

- I understand I am free to withdraw at any time, without explanation or penalty;

- I understand that I can contact the Manager, Research Ethics, at Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee on +61 3735 4375 (or researchethics@griffith.edu.au) if I have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the project.
Please tick in the boxes below to indicate the level of agreement to this research study:

☐ I agree to participate in this drama programme.
☐ I agree to have my pixelated photographs taken for research conference presentations, conference and/or journal publications, book publications and research reports
☐ I agree to have pixelated videos taken for conference presentations, conference and/or journal publications, book publications and research reports
☐ I agree to be interviewed and contents of the interview recorded for research analysis and reporting
☐ I agree to have my pixelated digital images and information about me reported in conference presentations, conference and/or journal publications, book publications and research reports.

Name & Signature : ___________________________________ Date:
B.5 Information and Consent Forms for Participants in Chinese

从内到外 - 戏剧对于儿童自我效能扮演的角色

研究小组: Penny Bundy 副教授
高层研究员
教育与专业学院
格里菲斯大学

Madonna Stinson 博士
高层研究员
教育与专业学院
格里菲斯大学

Jennifer Wong
学生研究员
教育与专业学院
格里菲斯大学

亲爱的参与者，
热烈欢迎您的到来。
谢谢您与我们共度从内到外的戏剧之旅。我们非常兴奋，迫不及待的想与你们一起分享，创造以及呈现大家的作品。以下将是我们接下来几周的行程。

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>日程表</th>
<th>活动</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16/03/2015 – 19/03/2015</td>
<td>故事创作, 建构戏剧, 道具制作和演出彩排</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/04/2015 – 08/05/2015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19/03/2015</td>
<td>对外演出 (亲朋好友)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08/05/2015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

这项计划是个学生研究专案，用来探讨参与者是否会效益于戏剧对于他们信奉于建功立业的成效。
这项研究是由澳大利亚，格里菲斯大学教育博士的学生担任。目的是为了找出戏剧对于儿童信奉于自我认同感和自我效能所扮演的角色。这项研究以取得了格里菲斯大学研究室的认同，而过程中会谦守于本校的道德准则。

研究考查问题:
戏剧如何帮助不在特权的新加坡儿童得到自我效能的成效?
参与戏剧节目如何提供一个平台给不在特权的新加坡儿童一个分享有关他们的议题?

身为这项戏剧计划与研究的参与者，您将会学到一些戏剧技艺，有助于创造对外的公众演出。

参与这项研究与戏剧项目, 您将会需要:
- 在下课后和放假时抽空创作与彩排故事
- 和其他参与者组成一组, 一起合作
- 对外演出包括呈现给亲朋好友和公众

您的参与在这项研究与计划中以随意为主。若您在活动进展中改变注意，(Name of VWO) 的员工，中心的联络方式，+65 (Contact number of VWO)。
若有任何疑问，您也可以随时联络本中心的员工。您的问题将会转交于研究案的小组。若您想退出这项研究计划，您可以放心将不会受到惩罚，您的福利以及财政援助的特权也不会被撤回。

从(Name of VWO)的社会工作者将会在场为每周的戏剧活动。我们必须申明，社工将会获得您在故事制作和建构戏剧活动中提供的信息。如果您选择透露，揭示您或您的家庭成员曾进行过一些非法活动的信息，社工将有权利汇报于公司，或交给警察处置。

如果您有兴趣知道研究的结果，您可以在项目结束后的六个月，通过工作人员要求索取书面报告的副本。您可以放心参与者的姓名不会在报告中呈现，完全会以化名的方式进行。

我们希望您与我们一样期待开始这段探索，制作故事，创作和表演的旅程。
感谢您加入我们的研究方案。

此致，

Jennifer Wong
戏剧驻团艺术工作者以及从内到外的研究成员
知情同意书

研究小组: Penny Bundy 副教授
高层研究员
教育与专业学学院
格里菲斯大学

Madonna Stinson 博士
高层研究员
教育与专业学学院
格里菲斯大学

Jennifer Wong
学生研究员
教育与专业学学院
格里菲斯大学

若在以下签名, 本人申明以读过与了解这份咨询包裹, 包括:

- 我明白我在这项研究的实职为每周 2 - 4 小时的戏剧活动, 总数为 32 小时
- 我发问的问题都得到了我满意的回复
- 我明白这项活动的风险
- 我明白参与这项活动以随意为主
- 我明白若有任何疑问，我能随时联络研究小组
- 我明白我能随时退出, 并且不必解释也不会有任何刑罚
- 我明白我能联络格里菲斯大学的研究道德委员会或经理+61 3735 4375 (或上网researchethics@griffith.edu.au) 若我有任何疑问关于这项专案的道德行为

请在下面的方框打勾，表示同意本研究的协议:

☐ 我同意参与这项戏剧活动
☐ 我同意工作者以研究目的拍取我的照片, 而将会用于往后研究, 刊登在出版书或会议演讲上及相关的研究报告
☐ 我同意工作者以研究目的拍取我的视频, 而将会用于往后研究, 刊登在出版书或会议演讲上及相关的研究报告
☐ 我同意被访问而访问的内容与过程将被录制作为研究分析
我同意让我的数字图像和相关信息在会议上介绍，期刊出版，图书出版和研究报告的报道

姓名及签名：______________________________  日期：

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B.6 Information and Consent Forms for Participants in Malay

Dalam ke Luar (Inside Out): peranan drama dalam memupuk rasa keberkesanan diri dalam kanak-kanak

Ahli Penyelidikan
Assoc Prof Penny Bundy
Penyiasat Kanan
Sekolah Pendidikan dan Kajian Profesional
Universiti Griffith

Dr Madonna Stinson
Penyiasat Kanan
Sekolah Pendidikan dan Kajian Profesional
Universiti Griffith

Jennifer Wong
Pelajar Penyelidikan
Sekolah Pendidikan dan Kajian Profesional
Universiti Griffith

Kehadapan Para Peserta,

Kami mendahulukan dengan ucapan salam sejahtera!

Kami ingin mengucapkan terima kasih kerana anda turut serta dalam perjalanan drama ini. Kami amat ghairah untuk berkerja bersama anda dalam minggu-minggu yang akan datang untuk mengarang dan mempersembahkan cerita dalam program drama ini. Di bawah ialah jadual bagi program drama ini:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minggu</th>
<th>Aktiviti</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16/03/2015 – 19/03/2015</td>
<td>Pengarangan cerita, pembinaan drama, pembinaan peralatan bagi persembahan dan latihan bagi persembahan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/04/2015 – 08/05/2015</td>
<td>Persembahan di hadapan ahli keluarga dan rakan-rakan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19/03/2015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08/05/2015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Program drama ini juga bertujuan sebagai projek penyelidikan untuk mengetahui jikalau para peserta akan bermanfaat dengan meningkatkan rasa keberkesanan diri mereka melalui program drama ini.
Kajian penyelidikan ini dilakukan oleh seorang pelajar Doktor Pendidikan dari Universiti Griffith, Australia, dan ia bertujuan untuk mengetahui peranan drama dalam membolehkan kanak-kanak mempunyai rasa positif diri dan keberkesanan diri. Kajian ini telah diluluskan oleh Pejabat Penyelidikan Universiti Griffith dan ia mematuhi tatalaku etika dalam penyelidikan, bagi institusi tersebut.

Soalan-soalan bagi kajian ini ialah:

Bagaimana drama dapat menolong memupuk rasa keberkesanan diri dalam kanak-kanak dalam golongan berpendapatan rendah di Singapura?

Bagaimana penyertaan dalam program drama dapat memberi kanak-kanak dalam golongan berpendapatan rendah di Singapura ruang perkongsian mengenai isu-isu yang membabitkan diri mereka?

Sebagai para peserta program drama dan projek penyelidikan ini, anda dapat mengharapkan untuk mempelajari kemahiran drama yang akan menyumbang kepada penciptaan persembahan untuk tatapan umum.

Dalam menyertai program drama dan projek penyelidikan ini, anda perlu:
- meluangkan masa selepas sekolah dan ketika cuti sekolah untuk menghasilkan drama dan melatih bagi persembahan yang akan dilakukan
- bekerjasama dengan para peserta yang lain
- mempersembahkan drama di hadapan ahli keluarga, rakan-rakan dan orang awam

Penyertaan anda dalam program drama dan projek penyelidikan ini adalah dengan sukarela. Jikalau anda menukar pilihan ketika program drama ini untuk turut serta, sila hubungi pegawai (Name of VWO) untuk memaklumkannya. Nombor talian pusat Beyond ialah +65 (Contact number of VWO).

Anda juga boleh mengarahkan mana-mana soalan atau kebimbangan mengenai program drama dan projek penyelidikan ini kepada pegawai (Name of VWO). Soalan dan/atau kebimbangan anda akan dimaklumkan kepada pasukan penyelidikan oleh pegawai dari (Name of VWO). Anda boleh pastikan jikalau anda memilih untuk tidak meneruskan program drama ini pada bila-bila masa, anda atau keluarga anda tidak akan didenda dan bantuan kebajikan/kewangan anda tidak akan ditarik balik.

Seorang pegawai (Name of VWO) akan hadir ketika sesi drama pada setiap minggu. Anda akan diingatkan bahawa pegawai sosial yang hadir akan dimaklumkan mengenai informasi yang ditawar ketika sesi pengarangan cerita dan pembinaan drama. Sekiranya anda memilih untuk mendedahkan maklumat mengenai penyalahgunaan undang-
undang yang dilakukan oleh ahli keluarga anda, pegawai sosial mungkin perlu melaporkan isu tersebut kepada (Name of VWO), dan/atau pihak polis.

Jika anda berminat dalam mengetahui keputusan kajian penyelidikan ini, anda boleh meminta salinan laporan akhir penyelidikan ini melalui pegawai dari (Name of VWO) 6 bulan selepas projek ini berakhir. Anda boleh memastikan bahawa nama para peserta tidak akan digunakan dalam laporan ini. Sebaliknya, nama samaran akan digunakan.


Kami ingin mengongsi kegairahan ini bersama anda dalam memulakan perjalan meneroka, mengarang cerita dan mempersembahkan drama.

Kami mengucapkan terima kasih atas penyertaan anda.

Yang benar,

Jennifer Wong
Jurulatih dan Ahli Penyelidik bagi Dalam ke Luar (Inside Out)
Borang Kebenaran

Ahli Penyelidikan

Assoc Prof Penny Bundy
Penyiasat Kanan
Sekolah Pendidikan dan Kajian Profesional
Universiti Griffith

Dr Madonna Stinson
Penyiasat Kanan
Sekolah Pendidikan dan Kajian Profesional
Universiti Griffith

Jennifer Wong
Pelajar Penyelidikan
Sekolah Pendidikan dan Kajian Profesional
Universiti Griffith

Dengan menandatangani borang ini, saya memastikan bahawa saya sudah membaca dan memahami maklumat yang telah diberikan terutama sekali:

• Saya memahami bahawa penyertaan saya di dalam penyelidikan ini termasuk latihan mingguan drama selama 4 jam untuk 32 jam secara keseluruhan;

• Semua soalan-soalan saya telah dijawab dengan memuaskan;

• Saya memahami setiap risiko yang terlibat;

• Saya memahami bahawa penyertaan saya dalam penyelidikan ini adalah dengan sukarela;

• Saya memahami bahawa saya boleh menghubungi kumpulan penyelidikan jikalau saya mempunyai soalan tambahan;

• Saya memahami bahawa saya bebas untuk menarik diri pada bila-bila masa, tanpa penjelasan atau denda;

• Saya memahami bahawa saya boleh menghubungi Pengurusi bagi Etika Penyelidikan dari Jawatankuasa bagi Etika Manusia, Universiti Griffith, di talian +61 3735 4375 (atau melalui e-mail researchethics@griffith.edu.au) jikalau saya mempunyai kebimbangan mengenai tatalaku etika bagi projek ini.

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Sila tandakan dalam kotak di bawah untuk menunjukkan tahap persetujuan anda untuk kajian penyelidikan ini:

☐ Saya bersetuju untuk menyertai program drama ini
☐ Saya bersetuju untuk mengaburkan gambar-gambar yang dipetik untuk persidangan penyelidikan, penerbitan persidangan dan/atau jurnal, buku dan laporan penyelidikan
☐ Saya bersetuju untuk mengaburkan video-video yang dirakam untuk persidangan penyelidikan, penerbitan persidangan dan/atau jurnal, buku dan laporan penyelidikan
☐ Saya bersetuju untuk ditemu duga dan kandungan yang diberi akan dirakam dan digunakan untuk analisis penyelidikan dan laporan
☐ Saya membenarkan gambar-gambar digital yang telah dikabur dan maklumat mengenai diri saya dikongsi di persidangan penyelidikan, penerbitan persidangan dan/atau jurnal, buku dan laporan penyelidikan

Nama & Tandatangan : ________________________________  Tarikh:
B.7 Information and Consent Forms for Social Workers and Community Workers in English

Inside Out: the role of drama in enabling a positive sense of self-efficacy in children

Research Team
Assoc Prof Penny Bundy
Senior Investigator
School of Education and Professional Studies
Griffith University

Dr Madonna Stinson
Senior Investigator
School of Education and Professional Studies
Griffith University

Jennifer Wong
Student Researcher
School of Education and Professional Studies
Griffith University

Dear Staff (Name of VWO),

A very warm welcome to you!

Thank you for joining us in this drama journey. We are very excited to be working with you and the children residing in the (Name of estate) neighbourhood in the coming weeks to create and perform stories in the drama. Below is the schedule for this programme:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weeks</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16/03/2015 – 19/03/2015</td>
<td>Story making, play building, props making and rehearsals for the performances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/04/2015 – 08/05/2015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19/03/2015</td>
<td>Performance to family and friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08/05/2015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This drama programme is also a student’s research project to find out if the participants will benefit with an improved sense of self-efficacy through the drama work.

This is a research study by a Doctor of Education student from Griffith University, Australia, and it aims to find out the role drama has in enabling a more positive sense of self-identity and self-efficacy in children. This study is approved by the Office for Research in Griffith University and it adheres to the institution’s code of ethics in research.

The research questions for this study are:

- How does drama assist in enabling a more positive sense of self-efficacy in underprivileged children in Singapore?
- How does being engaged in a drama programme provide under-privileged children in Singapore the platform to explore issues pertinent in their lives?

The participants of this drama programme and research project can expect to learn drama skills that will contribute to the creation of original performances for public viewing.

By participating in this drama programme and research project, you may be required to:

- spend time after office hours to supervise the children involved during the drama programme
- spend time during the weekends for rehearsals and the final performance with the children

Your participation in this research project is completely voluntary. If you change your mind about being part of the research at any point in time during the drama programme, please feel free to inform the student researcher at +65 97927908. You can also direct any questions or concerns that you may have regarding this drama programme and research project to the research team.

This research study requires the presence of a social worker from (Name of VWO) for all the weekly drama sessions. Should the children in the drama programme choose to divulge information that reveals that he/she or his/her family members have participated or are participating in activities that are illegal, the research team will not interfere with the code of conduct the social worker has to adhere to when such information is made available to them. This information will also not be recorded by the research team or reported in the final research document.
Should you be interested in the results of this research study, you are free to request a copy of the written report from the research team 6 months after the project has ended. Please be assured that the names of the participants will not be used in the report, a pseudonym will be used instead.

The conduct of this research may involve the collection, access and/or use of your de-identified personal information. The information collected is confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties without your consent, except to meet government, legal or other regulatory authority requirements. A de-identified copy of this data may be used for conference presentations of the research, and publication of research articles or books. However, your anonymity will at times be safeguarded. For further information consult the University’s Privacy Plan at http://www.griffithedu.au/about-griffith/plans-publications/griffith-university-privacy-plan or telephone +61 (07) 3735 4375.

We hope you are as excited as we are in starting this journey of exploring, story making and performing.

Thank you for joining us.

Best regards,

Jennifer Wong
Drama Facilitator and Research Member of Inside Out
Consent Form

Research Team
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Griffith University

Dr Madonna Stinson
Senior Investigator
School of Education and Professional Studies
Griffith University

Jennifer Wong
Student Researcher
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Griffith University

By signing below, I confirm that I have read and understood the information package and in particular have noted that:

- I understand that my involvement in this research will include my participation in the weekly drama programme of 2 - 4 hours long for a total of 36 hours;

- I have had any questions answered to my satisfaction;

- I understand the risks involved;

- I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary;

- I understand that if I have any additional questions I can contact the research team;

- I understand I am free to withdraw at any time, without explanation or penalty;

- I understand that I can contact the Manager, Research Ethics, at Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee on +61 3735 4375 (or researchethics@griffith.edu.au) if I have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the project.
Please tick in the boxes below to indicate the level of agreement to this research study:

☐ I agree to participate in this drama programme.
☐ I agree to have my pixelated photographs taken for research conference presentations, conference and/or journal publications, book publications and research reports
☐ I agree to have pixelated videos taken for conference presentations, conference and/or journal publications, book publications and research reports
☐ I agree to be interviewed and contents of the interview recorded for research analysis and reporting
☐ I agree to have my pixelated digital images and information about me reported in conference presentations, conference and/or journal publications, book publications and research reports.

Name & Signature : ___________________________________    Date:
Reflection Notes

Reflections – 16 March 2015

2pm – 6pm

- Children showed the lack of listening. Why don’t they like to listen to what others have to say? Familiarity? Some pre-existing animosity amongst them? There is this sense of a need to make fun of someone else, to insult another party. However, this is only between the boys. The girls get teased too but they would smile and not retaliate. The boys would engage in a series of quarrels at best, or physical challenges at worst.

- Sha’s interruption, and sometimes from the other children as well, is to speak up for their friends. In this case, Sha and Tin are very tight, Sha constantly wants to protect Tin and speak for Tin.

- Might need to look at ways to work that allows everyone to contribute. How can drama make them collaborate? What do I need to do to foster the team spirit in them to motivate them to work together?

- Taking turns does not seem to be a natural thing for them to do. The natural instinct from the children is to yell. I had to repeat instructions several times and to catch the children’s attention is an uphill task.
Collaboration was lacking. The children were very much for themselves. The children who did not perform as well were reprimanded. The ones who did better were constantly looking for opportunities to do it again. There was little encouragement or advice given to the ones who did not perform as well.

The need to win is evident. Their sense of efficacy heightens when they see that they are able to do it well. The celebration within the group and the pride is also evident.

Why didn’t Ash put up a fight? Did she not want to be a leader badly enough so it didn’t matter to her? Why had she readily allowed Sha to take the position of the leader when he didn’t respond quickly enough?

The yelling works or again, is it the hierarchy in the playground? Why did the children respond so much quicker to the yelling by the two boys than to my gentle but firm instructions?

Ash didn’t respond too. She was in the same group as Ros and she just focused on her drawing. She did not offer a word of comfort or care to the brother. Why?

What has Sha, Tin and Shad have against Rut? Or how has the boy been behaving that is causing him so much trouble? Is it Rut that the children have a bone to pick or the pecking order at the playground that is at play here?

How much of the distraction was from the children and how much can be attributed to the layout of the room? What can be done to the excess furniture in the room?
- It is funny how the social worker could walk past but she didn’t respond nor stop the fight. Did she think it was my job? But even if it was, I couldn’t possibly be resolving so many fights that were going on at the same time!

- Ros was appointed as the guesser to keep him engaged in the activities. He drifts off easily and he throws childish but huge tantrums that can be disruptive. Am hoping that by making him the guesser in the follow the leader game, he would get excited and focused, even if it was for a while.
Appendix D

Observations Notes

Inside Out – The role of drama in enabling a positive sense of self-efficacy in children

Observation Notes

Date: 17\textsuperscript{th} March 2015

Observer: Phyllis

Phase/Session: Phase 1, Session 2/4

Attendance: Ash, Ni, Dana, Tin, Shad, Tas, Pris, Rut, Ros, Fin, Sha, Wiy [12]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>My opinions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simon Says</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lining up Spectrum</td>
<td>Ros comes but refuses to participate as a participant, give comments as an observer point of view though. Ros brought sweets for everyone.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forming a Picture</td>
<td>Tin tries to change the image the other group makes, Dana is unhappy.</td>
<td>Overpower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Together</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touching the Hands Behind</td>
<td>Ros accidentally touches Wiy’s chest while running. Wiy is afraid and covers her chest by crossing her arms. Rut and Shad broke into a fight. Tin scolds them before they stop. Ros plays with the curtains all the time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remembering the associated fiction from the first letter of your name</td>
<td>Wiy wraps Dana using the curtain. Dana is scared and she started screaming.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaping Images</td>
<td>“The person in the middle is a model.” Rut said “what the fuck”. Everyone wants to be the model/volunteer. Fin sits one corner, with a grumpy face. Ni is always picturing himself smoking. “Is it common that fighting takes place at the playground?” “Yes!”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| Why? |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ni plays with switches and lights.</th>
<th>Omg why? Shouldn’t it be filled with happiness and fun instead?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shad repeatedly mentioned “smoking”.</td>
<td>- Social Learning theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ni keeps imitating Ros and pulls his shirt up</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playground = Smoking, Fighting &amp; Police</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home = Eat &amp; Pray</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School = Eat (Dana) &amp; Punishment (Kha &amp; Rut)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>15 Minutes Break</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One Ball, Many Interpretations</td>
<td>Tin keeps snatching the ball from the rest, refuses to wait for his turn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tin purposely hits Rut with the ball, and he laughs and apologises. Everyone else laughed at Rut.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Everyone listens to Zaty. Eg. Come back! (and they really do)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blindfold Car and Driver Trust Game</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They tend to sit aside and refuse to participate when they don’t get what they want. Usually only when the social workers goes over and talk/“pacify” the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freeze Frames</td>
<td>Ros likes to disturb Rut. Ros pushes Rut even when Rut is not doing anything.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

children, they would then be willing to join back the circle.

Ros refuse to participate. Zaty partners him before he decides to join the game.

Shad pushed Sha. Sha lay flat on the ground. He’s angry.

They take big steps even when they are blindfolded. When they knock onto something, they just continue.

Rut makes fun of Ni by squeezing his face.

Tin is very happy when facilitator praised him.

Pris likes Sha, but the feeling doesn’t seem to be reciprocated. He refuse to partner Pris.

Shad tied Rut’s neck with the black cloth, Rut screamed.

Everyone has their own partner except for Ros. He felt left out and didn’t wanted to participate.

There’s no fear even when they can’t see.

Getting injured is common for them.
| Acting Frames Out | Ros plays and runs around when the others are performing.  
A teenage boy comes and everyone is distracted.  
Sha “eh cannot, the police must handcuff us.”  
“How do you threaten people?”  
“If you never give us, we will kill you/your family.”  
See ah longs around the playground  
Sha witnessed a fight 2 months ago, at blk 29, 12 midnight. A fight broke out because of a girl and there were swords and knifes. The police came shortly afterwards. | I always thought this is TV scene since in Singapore, police don’t usually handcuff the criminals.  
How is this experience going to affect them in future? |
Appendix E
Rut’s Drawing
Appendix F

F.1 Mindomo Map – Screen Shot
F.2 Mindomo Mindmap - Notes Format

Ownership

- In a team game, there was little thought to how the game could be won with collective effort.
  - Phase 1: day 1, we were playing Dog and Bone as the first game after introduction.
    - The children who managed to get the bag and returned safely back to 'home' demonstrated a strong sense of pride and achievement.
    - If one of the older boys had done it, then it would be celebrated by the other older boys with high-fives.
    - However, if one of the younger ones had managed to get the bag and returned to 'home' the sense of celebration was missing, but the child still displayed happiness at having 'won'.
    - When the younger/unpopular children failed to get the bag, and returned to 'home' defeated, they would often be reprimanded and called 'bodooh' (Malay for stupid).
    - There was no evidence of coaching or encouragement from the team to how it could have been done better.

- A performance to an audience outside of the group will increase the sense of ownership and achievement as it increases the stakes for the participants.

Lack of Listening

- Listening does not seem to be a skill they possess.
  - In Phase 1, day 1, seated in the circle, children were asked to introduce themselves.
  - It was difficult to get through one person's introduction without having to stop the children from either talking amongst themselves or interrupting the child who was doing the introduction.
  - E.g. Bax was introducing the school he came from and Sha and Tin repeatedly said he came from 'Ken Ching School' (Malay for pewong).
  - Introduction took close to half hour for a group of 12 people.
  - Question in reflection log: 'Is it just poor listening skills or a lack of respect for the other parties?' Regardless if they liked the person or not, if it was their friend doing the introduction or not, the children showed little interest in listening, they were more interested in getting their voices heard.

- Phase 1: Day 1, during the presentation of their drawing, few children were listening.
  - Ayth, Tasha, Ni and Fin would sit and listen attentively to the presentations. It is dubious if Tasha and Ni knew much of what was being presented by the other children as they didn't speak or understand much English.
  - Pri, Dana, Sha, Tin would listen if it was either of them presenting. Otherwise, they tended to walk around or be engaged in their own conversation.
  - Shad was constantly distracted by kids who kept throwing bits of rubbish found on the floor at him. Shad retaliated by throwing the rubbish back.
  - Perhaps it wasn't so much of them not having the ability to listen but it highly depends on
Appendix G

Post-programme Interview Questions

Interview Questions (Post Programme)

Qn. 1 What have you been doing after the drama programme ended?

Qn. 2 Did you enjoy being a part of the drama programme?

Qn.3 Which parts of the drama programme did you like or dislike?

Qn.4 Did you find that you could use the methods we created during drama to solve some of the problems you face in school or at the playground?

Qn.5 Are there new problems now and what do you think you can do?
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