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# Exploring Risky Youth Experiences: Popular Theatre as a Participatory, Performative Research Method

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***Abstract:*** *This article discusses a Popular Theatre project with a group of high school drama students in a rural Alberta community. As a research method, Popular Theatre draws on traditions in participatory research and performance ethnography. In our project, entitled "Life in the Sticks," based on students' initial claims that their issues were determined by their rural environment, Popular Theatre was a way to collectively draw out, represent and question their experiences through theatrical means. Our process helped students re-examine their beliefs and helped me reframe the notion "at-risk" to include the perceptions of youth. Popular Theatre is shown to be an effective pedagogical tool and research method in the new insights and critical understandings it yielded.*

***Keywords***: *arts-based research, educational research, participatory research, alternative representation*

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## Introduction

For my doctoral research, I wanted to better understand the experiences of youth from their perspective, in particular the kinds of experiences that might deem them “at-risk.” In prior work with so-called “at-risk” youth in inner-city high schools, a young offender facility, a youth drop-in centre, and in two Northwest Territories communities, youth had often told me that they found the label “at-risk” offensive.

The label is commonly used in education to talk about students “at-risk” of failing or dropping out of school, in health care regarding youths’ lifestyle choices detrimental to their mental or physical health, and in criminal justice with respect to the risk of their involvement with the criminal justice system. Discourse around “at-risk,” however, seems largely based on the logics of economics, a fear that “at-risk” youth will not become productive and contributing members of society. Risk factors used to describe “at-risk” youth or predict who might be “at-risk,” are based on a deficit model, portraying youth, their families, and their communities as somehow deficient or deviant if they do not meet society’s expectations (National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 1985).

I wanted to better understand the implications for youth labeled “at-risk.” To this end, I planned to engage a group of high school drama students in exploring issues they identified as relevant to their lives through a Popular Theatre process. The rural Alberta community in which I conducted my research had, as it turned out, a majority Aboriginal population. Statistically, I knew that I was likely to find fewer so-called “at-risk” youth in predominantly white, middle-class urban or suburban schools. As my previous research had been in an inner-city context, I opted for a rural

Alberta setting this time. I did not seek to work with Aboriginal youth specifically, but when the predicament of Aboriginal youth in Alberta presented itself, I was unwilling to evade it. As I was to learn, Aboriginal youth in Alberta are among those most often labelled “at-risk” of dropping out of school (Alberta Learning, 2001)[1]. I use the inclusive term “Aboriginal” in my research to refer youth belonging to racial/cultural groups indigenous to the Alberta region where I worked, and for ethical reasons as the predicament of “at-risk” youth extends beyond any one particular group.

My study explored the potential of Popular Theatre as a pedagogical tool and a research methodology, as the drama students and I enacted it. As this article illustrates, Popular Theatre draws on traditions in both participatory (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991; Kidd & Byram, 1978; McTaggart, 1997; Park, Brydon-Miller, Hall & Jackson, 1993) and arts-based/performed ethnographic approaches (Conquergood, 1998; Fabian, 1990; Turner, 1986) as an effective means of collectively drawing out and examining participants’ experiences toward producing new understandings. Popular Theatre, as a qualitative research method that is both participatory and performative, presents alternative ways to engage participants in doing research.

This article focuses on Popular Theatre as a research method. Following the Popular Theatre phase of my research process, I wrote a series of *scripted descriptions* depicting significant moments from the participatory work with students, an example of which is included. I drew on these scripts to engage in a reflective, interpretive process including discourse analysis and autoethnographic inquiry to help me make sense of what the Popular Theatre work with students revealed. I begin here by making theoretical links between Popular Theatre and other methodological approaches, and then discuss the Popular Theatre project with students, which we entitled “Life in the Sticks.”

## What is *Popular Theatre*?

The term *Popular Theatre* was used by Canadian Ross Kidd (among others) in the 1970s to talk about the form of development work he was doing in Botswana and Zimbabwe at the time (Kidd, 1982). Popular Theatre[2] is “a process of theatre which deeply involves specific communities in identifying issues of concern, analyzing current conditions and causes of a situation, identifying points of change, and analyzing how change could happen and/or contributing to the actions implied” (Prentki & Selman, 2000, p. 8). Better defined by its intentions of personal and social transformation, than by the various forms it may take, Popular Theatre draws on participants’ experiences to collectively create theatre and engage in discussion of issues through theatrical means.

The work of Bertolt Brecht in 1930s Germany was a theatrical form that influenced the development of Western Popular Theatre in the way it reclaimed theatre for political and community functions. Brecht felt that realism in the theatre encouraged passivity among bourgeois audiences, suppressing the inclination to be active participants in the theatre as in life. Brecht looked for ways to break the theatrical “fourth wall,” in order to raise awareness amongst his audiences. His Epic Theatre used techniques of “alienation” within the dramatic action, including episodic scenes interrupted by narration, songs, parables, the projection of texts and images, to break the illusion of the performance, to make audiences active interpreters of the multilayered text rather than playing on their emotions. For Brecht, Epic Theatre “appeals less to the feelings than to the spectator's reason. Instead of sharing the experience the spectator must come to grips with things" (1957/1964, p. 23). The Epic Theatre experience awoke a critical consciousness in the spectator.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Popular Theatre grew out of the popular education movement, with Paulo Freire of Brazil being one of popular education's best known proponents. Freire developed his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) in a time of extreme political repression in Brazil. His liberatory literacy education involved not only reading the *word*, but also reading the *world* through the development of critical consciousness or conscientization. A critical consciousness allowed people to question the nature of their historical and social situation – to *read* their world – with the goal of acting as subjects in the creation of a democratic society. Like Brecht, Freire too wanted human beings to take an active role in their lives. His popular education methods countered the dominant system of education – a system inherently oppressive and dehumanizing that he described as a "banking model" – where students were passive recipients of the teacher's knowledge.

Popular education programs with similar goals developed around the same time, and still continue, particularly in adult education and community development projects around the world[3]. Popular education is aimed at empowering traditionally excluded, marginalized, or subordinated sectors of society. With the political intentions of collective social change toward a more equitable and democratic society through raised awareness and collaborative action, popular education practices explore the learners' lived experiences in both their humanizing and oppressive dimensions. It draws on and validates learners' knowledge in the production of new knowledge. Through critical dialogue, reflection, and problem posing, learners discuss the possibilities of transforming the oppressive elements of their experience culminating in collective social action. This involves a dynamic of reflection and action or “praxis” (Freire, 1970), a concept central to participatory processes.

In the 1960s, inspired by Brecht’s theatrical techniques and Freire’s popular education approach, Augusto Boal, another Brazilian, developed a specific set of theatrical techniques he called the *Theatre of the Oppressed* [4]. Like Brecht, his theatre challenged traditional theatrical conventions. For Boal, the commercial or professional theatre was an instrument of the ruling class, creating divisions in society by separating the actor from the spectator. In traditional theatre, the spectator is invited to identify and empathize with the characters in the drama, and the play provides, at its end, an Aristotelian sense of catharsis, leaving the spectator with a feeling of resolution, a fundamentally passive exercise. To create active audiences, Boal’s theatre not only breaks the “fourth wall” but also the division between actor and audience by transforming the spectator into a “spect-actor” by taking on the role of the protagonist. His techniques of *Image Theatre*, *Simultaneous Dramaturgy*, and *Forum Theatre* give the audience a part in the dramatic action, by discussing plans for change, directing the action, and/or trying out different solutions through drama. For Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* was a weapon for oppressed people to use toward changing their social reality – theatre for the people, by the people, “a rehearsal of revolution” (1974/1979, p. 155).

Following his arrest, torture, and exile from Brazil for his political involvements, Boal went to Europe where he continued his work. To meet the needs of his European participants, who felt more anxious and alienated than oppressed, his *Rainbow of Desire* (1995) took a more therapeutic or psychodramatic approach based on his belief that "to revolutionize society requires both an analytical overview of social history and a personal, practical investigation of one's own behavioural psychology" (Cohen-Cruz & Schutzman, 1994, p. 145). On his return to Rio de Janeiro and subsequent election to Brazilian parliament in 1993, Boal developed techniques of *Legislative Theatre* (1999), a method of consulting the public on government issues through theatre.

## Popular Theatre as participatory research

In the 1970s, in association with the popular education movement, participatory research developed around the world as a research method[5] (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991; Freire, 1988; McTaggart, 1997; Park et al., 1993).

Viewed both as a means of creating knowledge and as a tool for education, the development of consciousness and mobilization for action, participatory research involves a process of "transformative praxis" (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). As research "for," "with" and "by" the people rather than "on" the people, it seeks to break down the distinction between researchers and researched – the subject/object relationship of traditional research instead creating a subject/subject relationship. Ideally, participants are involved in the research process from beginning to end, in the attainment, creation, and dissemination of knowledge. Participatory research stresses the inherent capacity for participants to create their own knowledge based on their experiences. In the process, "popular knowledge" is generated by the group, taken in, analyzed and reaffirmed or criticized, making it possible to flesh out a problem and understand it in context.

Striving to end the monopoly of the written word, participatory research has traditionally incorporated alternative methods including photography, radio, poetry, music, myths, drawing, sculpture, puppets, and popular theatre, as meeting spaces for cultural exchange. Drawing on an affective logic involving sentiment and emotions rather than purely scientific logic, the group process ceases to convey isolated opinions as with surveys or interviews – becoming instead a springboard for collective reasoning. The knowledge produced is socially heard, legitimized and added to the people's collective knowledge, empowering them to solve their own problems (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). For Salazar (1991), participatory research is more than just a research method; it is "an egalitarian philosophy of life designed to break unjust or exploitative power relations and to achieve a more satisfactory kind of society" (p. 62).

Popular Theatre, as a method of participatory research, involves shared ownership of the research process and community-based analysis of issues, all with an orientation toward community action.

## Popular Theatre as performative research

Popular Theatre as a research method builds on qualitative methods, such as Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) narrative inquiry, and alternative or arts-based ways of knowing and representing research (Diamond & Mullen, 1999; Eisner, 1997; Finley, 2003). A postmodern attitude toward "truth" and the production of knowledge has legitimized an abundance of alternative approaches to doing research and new forms of representing research in the social sciences[6]. Amongst these, arts-based researchers have written performative texts, performed their research and used performance to gather participant responses and interpret them (Conrad, 2002; Norris, 2000; Saldaña, 2003). Denzin calls ethnodrama “the single most powerful way for ethnography to recover yet interrogate the meanings of lived experience” (1997, p. 94) and elsewhere calls for research that is pedagogical, political and performative (2003).

Performative research or performance ethnography has roots in the fields of anthropology (Fabian, 1990; Turner, 1986) and communication/performance studies (Conquergood, 1998), where performance is regarded as both a legitimate and an ethical way of representing ethnographic understanding. In their research, performance ethnographers find or create opportunities to perform their cultural understandings by observing, participating in performances, and/or representing their findings to others through performance. As instances of performance that provide cultural understanding, performance ethnographers inquire into cultural events: public occasions, rituals, games, storytelling, theatre, and dance; social dramas or dramatic events in everyday life such as moments of conflict; everyday interactions including culturally conditioned behaviour, the performance of social roles of gender, race, status, age, and so on; and communicative/speech acts that are performative (Austin, 1975; Butler, 1997). In performance ethnography, performance spills from the stage into “real” life.

Recently, the notion of performance (or performativity) has been taken up by qualitative social researchers as a form of critical pedagogy in doing arts-based inquiry (Finley, 2003), in the writing of performance texts (Denzin, 2003), and in critical arts education (Garoian, 1999). For

Denzin, performance ethnography as praxis is “a way of acting on the world in order to change it” (p. 228). Finley asserts that performance creates an open, dialogic space for inquiry and expression through “an imaginative interpretation of events and the contexts of their occurrences” (p. 287). For Garoian (1999), performance opens a liminal pedagogical space that allows for a reflexive learning process that “recognize[s] the cultural experiences, memories, and perspectives – participants’ multiple voices – as viable content . . . encourages participant discussions of complex and contradictory issues” (p. 67) and includes the involvement of the observer. As a passionate, visceral and kinetic activity, performance creates opportunities for communion among participants, researchers and research audiences.

In Popular Theatre, participants’ performances depict and examine their ‘performances’ in real life, providing insight into their lived experiences and their cultural world. As Fabian claims, some types of cultural knowledge cannot simply be called up and expressed in discursive statements by informants, but can be represented “only through action, enactment, or performance” (1990, p. 6). Knowledge of culture or social life is performative rather than informative. In this way, Fabian, an anthropologist, pushes insight about performance “toward its methodological imperative: performance as a method, as well as a subject of ethnographic research” (p. 86). In a performative epistemology, performance is an embodied, empathic way of knowing and “deeply sensing the other” (Conquergood, 1985, pg. 3).

Popular Theatre makes use of a participatory form of critical performance ethnography, deliberately creating opportunities for exploration through performance or “acting out.” What better way to study lived experience than by re-enacting it. A Popular Theatre process, which may include drama activities such as image work, improvisation, role-play and collective creation, engages participants in generating, interpreting, and re-presenting their ideas. By taking on a role, the player exists simultaneously in two worlds: as a character inside the experience of the "as if" world and as an actor evaluating the situation from the outside, within the real world. The player is both involved and detached, alternating from one to the other observing the self in action, comparing the two worlds to arrive at some understanding or meaning (Courtney, 1988).

Performance theorist Richard Schechner (1985) too sees performance as a paradigm of liminality. Fundamental to all performance is the characteristic of "restored behaviour" or "twice-behaved behaviour" that is "symbolic and reflexive: not empty but loaded behaviour multivocally broadcasting significance . . . [in which] the self can act in/as another" (p. 52) allowing the individual to become someone other than themselves. The play frame opens a liminal space where the "not me" encounters the "not not me" (p. 123). As such, it offers an alternative performative way of knowing – a unique and powerful way of accessing knowledge, drawing out responses that are a spontaneous, intuitive, tacit, experiential, embodied or affective, rather than simply cognitive (Courtney, 1988). In Popular Theatre, through "acting out" participants are involved in a process that is critical and analytic, a mimetic[7] process that has transformative potential (Taussig, 1993).

## "Life in the Sticks": A Popular Theatre project

My doctoral study involving Popular Theatre with a group of high school drama students began from my interest in "at-risk," and my search for ways to better meet the educational needs of so-called "at-risk" youth. Popular Theatre was a way for the students and I to collectively examine their experiences, for the purposes of raising their awareness (and that of the audiences for which they performed), helping them look for solutions or responses to issues, and to give me insight into their experiences that might deem them "at-risk," from their perspective.

With appropriate ethics review board approval, I spent one month living and working in the rural Alberta community. The drama teacher at the school was generous in allowing me to work with his two mixed-grade 10/11/12 drama classes during their scheduled class time in the drama room. The group included twenty-two students in all with an equal numbers of males and females. Ninety percent of the students at the school were of Aboriginal descent including students of mixed First Nations heritage and of the Métis Nation. The classes I worked with also included some white students. Each class met 5 times in an eight-day cycle, with each meeting lasting 1 hour, giving us approximately thirty hours of contact time over a one-month period.

The drama teacher generally included an issues-based component to his program. Some of the students with whom I worked had also taken part in one or more of the collective creation projects on family violence, alcoholism, gun safety, AIDS, and suicide prevention that his classes had done in previous years. The students were already familiar with issues-based or applied approaches to drama. I introduced adaptations of Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* as an alternative dramatic form.

The project was intended as a unit on Popular Theatre for the drama classes and a Popular Theatre project with a community of students. It was a participatory, performative inquiry into the experiences of these youth both for their own personal and social development and for the purposes of my research. The students' familiarity with improvisational drama, and more importantly their comfort and willingness to use drama as a medium of expression and their openness to exploring issues through drama greatly assisted our process. I took on the roles of teacher, Popular Theatre facilitator and co-researcher.

I engaged the students in a Popular Theatre process that drew on their experiences to examine issues they identified as relevant. The process began with a series of games and activities for group building, trust building, and skill development, moved on to the exploration of themes through brainstorming, image work and discussion, then into devising, storytelling of incidents from their lives and the creation of scenes based on these stories. As we created the scenes, we animated them to explore the issues raised, using techniques adapted from Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*.

Our theme, "Life in the Sticks," emerged from the drama activities and discussion. Students felt that the issues they faced were determined by their rural environment. As one student put it, "It's because we've got nothing better to do. Kids get into all kinds of trouble because they are bored." Students brainstormed words and phrases in a Graffiti Wall activity and sculpted images of "Life in the Sticks." Students told stories about incidents from their lives, took on roles and acted out situations based on the stories told, always looking for alternative responses. The process of devising and animating scenes allowed an in-depth, embodied discussion of students' perspectives regarding issues that affected their lives. The scenes we created, based on their stories and/or issues that arose during our exploration were about boredom, rule breaking at school and its consequences, substance use, addiction, risky sex, gossip, gender relations, and interpersonal conflict. The drama raised questions inciting students to examine the issues and their beliefs and to re-evaluate aspects of their lived experiences.

Toward the end of the process, I conducted an informal interview with a small group of students who volunteered to participate. I asked them what they thought the scenes we created were all about. Did they believe that the behaviour depicted was determined by their rural environment? Ultimately, the students denied being victims of their environment; they rejected the notion “at-risk,” claiming instead that their risky behaviour was a matter of personal choice and habit. As one student said, “You drink just because you want to and do anything else because you want to.” The notion of personal choice gave them back a sense of agency in and responsibility for their own behaviour. This attitude had the potential to be empowering – a step toward finding solutions. Our work left me wondering, however, what motivated their risky choices.

The community action that was the culmination of our Popular Theatre project was a pair of performances/workshops of the scenes we had created, one for students at their school and another at a school in a neighbouring town. We used a Forum Theatre model (Boal, 1979/1974) to engage audiences in further discussion of issues, searching for solutions or alternative responses to the “problems” presented.

## Performative re-presentations

Following the Popular Theatre work with the students, my interpretation of “Life in the Sticks” began with a process of recursive writing. To talk about the Popular Theatre process, I needed to describe instances of our performance. I found an appropriate way of doing this through writing a series of scripted descriptions or “ethnodramatic” vignettes, sixteen in all, depicting salient moments of our work together (Conrad, 2002; Saldaña, 2003). Based on the audio and videotapes we made throughout the process, my journal and field notes, and students’ journals, the scripts depict instances of performative interaction, discussion, the devising process, the scenes that students created, the animation of these scenes, responses to our performances and the interview I conducted with students.

My notes and transcriptions served as memory aides, but the scripts are also partly fictionalized (Banks & Banks, 1998) for ethical, thematic and practical/writerly purposes. While the details do not always represent precisely what happened, to the extent to which it is possible, acknowledging that all interpretive work is inherently subjective (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994), I have tried to remain true to the substance of our work, and tried to capture the spirit of the interactions the scripted descriptions depict. For example, the scenes that students created were never formally scripted, but improvised anew each time they were performed based on some cursory notes. My scripted recreations of these scenes are compilations based on videotapes of specific performances interwoven with details from other performances of the same scene and discussion that arose on various occasions as recorded in my field notes. As in any case, no text can claim to be free of the author’s subjectivity (Banks & Banks, 1998), my scripts are constructions, but self-consciously so. I acknowledge that even in my choice of moments to script an interpretive process was involved, thus my account of our participatory work is inherently partial.

The scripts are meant to be expressive and evocative rather than just explanatory. They are performative texts that bring the processes of academic interpretation and representation in closer touch with the actual performative events. My series of scripted vignettes describes the process involved in our Popular Theatre project in a way that preserves some of its performative quality. They embody the context and dynamics of the situations, and preserve some of the authenticity of participants' voices and gestures. The scripts served as an initial level of interpretation for my subsequent interpretation/inquiry.

I offer here an excerpt from one of the vignettes I wrote as an example of the Popular Theatre process in action – an improvised performance and the animation process that followed. I chose this moment to share because of the intriguing queries it raised. One of the scenes that students created, which we called "The Bus Trip," was based on an incident that occurred at the school the previous year, involving many of my students. It depicted a group of students illicitly drinking alcohol on the bus ride home from a class trip. In devising the scene, students took on the roles of characters and improvised the situation. The excerpt below shows a moment we enacted between two young men whose idea it was to buy the alcohol. This was an out-scene (a common Popular Theatre technique), a behind the scenes look at the original scene we created about the bus trip incident. In the midst of our re-enactment, in the role as facilitator or Joker (Boal, 1979/1974), I stopped the action temporarily to question the actors in character (another Popular Theatre animation technique), to delve deeper into the moment of decision making and the motivation underlying their choice. All of the names in the vignette are code names that students gave themselves, a measure taken to protect their anonymity.

*(The bus stops at the rest stop and they all get off. Shadzz and Daryl meet on the sidewalk.)*

**Shadzz**: *(to Daryl in character)* So give me some money, man.

**Daryl**: What for?

**Shadzz**: I'm gonna get the stuff, remember?

**Daryl**: Na, forget it.

**Shadzz**: Come'on man you said back there that you wanted to.

**Daryl**: . . . I don't know . . .

**Shadzz**: Come'on, it's just around the corner. I'll go get it and bring it back here.

**Daryl**: Na . . .

**Shadzz**: What's the matter? Nobody's gonna know.

**Daryl**: I don't know Shadzz.

**Shadzz**: Come'on, Daryl.

**Daryl**: Okay, what the hell . . . Here. *(Daryl gives Shadzz some money.)*

**Teacher**:*(Interrupting the improvisation.)* Stop it there for a minute. Daryl, I want to ask your character a question . . . You hesitated to give him the money. Why?

**Daryl**: I wasn't sure if I wanted to risk it.

**Teacher**: So, is there risk involved in what you're doing here?

**Daryl**: Ya.

**Teacher**: Go on.

**Daryl**: Well, we're kinda breaking the rules.

**Teacher**: And where's the risk in that?

**Daryl**: Well, we might get caught.

**Shadzz**: And expelled.

**Teacher**: So there may be negative consequences to what you're doing . . . Why do you do it?

**Daryl**: I don't know?

**Teacher**: Shadzz, what about your character? (*Shadzz think about it.)*

**Shadzz**: I don't know, just for the rush, I guess.

**Teacher**: For the rush? Is that what risk-taking is about? Is that why someone might drink booze on a bus trip?

**Shadzz**: Ya, it's fun.

**Teacher**: *(Addressing other students on stage and in the audience.)* Does doing something risky give you a rush?

*(Echoes of agreement around the room.)*

In the moment of Popular Theatre process depicted here, students enacted an incident based on their lived experiences, and with my intervention, explored the meaning behind their behaviour revealing that they sometimes engaged in risky behaviour “for the rush.” In my further interpretation of our Popular Theatre work, I engaged in a discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992) of “The Bus Trip” and other of my scripted descriptions to query students’ responses to our work. The moments under analysis explored how students identified themselves, how they perceived their risky behaviour and their responses to the label “at-risk.”

Students’ responses to my questions about risk-taking led me to further theoretical investigation of youth and risk. Elsewhere, I explore compelling theories on adolescent risk-taking (Lyng, 1993), theories on performative forms resistance (Scott, 1990), and psychoanalytic interpretations of self-destructive behaviour (Copjec, 1994) that provided further insight into risky youth behaviour. An emergent realization that my interest in “at-risk” was based on a desire to better understand my own risky experiences as a youth led to an autoethnographic inquiry (Conrad, 2003; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The recovery of a collection of artifacts from my past (Slattery, 2001) and stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) of my youthful risk-taking experiences resonated with what the students said and what theories revealed.

## Conclusion

Combined, my interpretation of our Popular Theatre work, my theoretical investigations on youth and risk, and my autoethnographic understandings provide a layered exploration of youth behaviour. This allowed me to re-frame the concept “at-risk” (Roman, 1996) to include youths’ perceptions of their behaviour. A better understanding of youth and risk that more fully reflects their reality may better respond to their needs. Together, the Popular Theatre work with students, a participatory, performative approach to doing research, and my interpretation of it, present a counter-narrative (Foucault, 1977) that interrupts the "common sense" or taken-for-granted understandings of "at-risk," providing a more complex picture than one of deviance and deficiency currently suggested. My reinterpretation highlights youths' choice to engage in risky behaviour, the enjoyment they gain from it and its resistant quality – its potential to undermine unjust social structures. My study affirms the potential of Popular Theatre as a research method based on the new insight and critical understanding it has yielded (Denzin 1997; Lather, 1986) for my students and myself.

## Notes

1. I find the label "at-risk" extremely problematic. I am particularly disturbed by the way in which being an "at-risk" youth in Alberta highly correlates with being Aboriginal (Alberta Learning, 2001). I explore the ethical implications of the label, the act of labeling and the school and social structural factors that put youth "at-risk" in my research. I problematize the fact that the majority of students at the school were of Aboriginal descent while the teachers, myself included, were predominantly white.

2. Popular Theatre is the term I use to talk about a politically motivated type of participatory theatre alternately referred to and/or closely allied to Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed (1979/1974); community theatre (in Britain) or community-based performance; applied theatre (Taylor, 2002); developmental theatre in the developing world; some forms of documentary theatre, collective creation or sociodrama. Similar methods are employed in psychodrama or drama therapy contexts (Boal, 1995; Cohen-Cruz, & Schutzman, 1994). Within drama/theatre-in-education it is a form of issues-based, socially critical or critically reflective drama (Errington, 1993).

3. Popular education is alternatively known as people's education or education for self-reliance (Africa), education for mass mobilization (Asia) cultural animation (Europe) and transformational education (North America). The Highlander Research and Education Centre (www.hrec.org), a popular education and research organization in Tennessee, U.S.A., was established as early as 1932 and still sponsors educational programs and research into community problems. Catalyst Centre in Toronto (www.catalystcentre.ca) a non-profit workers co-op, and the Centre for Popular Education, University of Technology Sydney (www.cpe.uts.edu.au) promote popular education, research and community development to advance positive social change.

4. While Popular Theatre takes various forms, Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* is perhaps one of the best known with organizations around the world practicing adaptations of these techniques including the Center of the Theatre of the Oppressed in Rio and Paris (www.ctrio.com.br);

FORMAAT in Holland (www.formaat.org); Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed based at the University of Omaha (www.unomaha.edu/~pto); Theatre of the Oppressed Laboratory in New York (www.toplab.org); Mandala Centre Seattle, Washington (www.mandalaforchange.com); Headlines Theatre in Vancouver (www.headlinestheatre.com); Rohd's (1998) Hope is Vital (HIV) program; New York University's Creative Arts Team (www.nyu.edu/Gallatin/creativearts); and the Centre for Applied Theatre Research in Australia (Taylor, 2002). Further approaches to *Theatre of the Oppressed* are described in Cohen-Cruz & Schutzman's (1994) *Playing Boal: Theatre, Therapy, Activism.* Other forms of Popular Theatre are explored in Prentki & Selman's (2000) *Popular Theatre in Political Culture: Britain and Canada in Focus.*

5. The Highlander Research and Education Centre and the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (www.pria.org) are amongst the organizations that promote participatory research. Orlando Fals-Borda, a leading figure in the development of participatory research in Columbia, calls his line of research participatory action research. Participatory research also allies with socially critical action research (Tripp, 1990) and transformative research (Deshler & Selener, 1991).

6. In the past few years I have attended presentations at conferences and read about research using forms including: reader's theatre, poetry, photography, music, collage, drawing, sculpture, quilting, stained glass, performance and dance. For examples see Diamond & Mullen (1999) also recent special issues of journals dedicated to arts-based research including Qualitative Inquiry Vol. 9 No. 2, The Alberta Journal of Educational Research Vol. 48 No. 3, The Journal of Curriculum Theorizing Vol. 17 No. 2, and the Arts-based Approaches to Educational Research Special Interest Group of the American Educational Research Association (www.usd.edu/aber).

7. Mimesis, the human faculty for imitation or representation of reality, as it is put to use in Popular Theatre and performance ethnography has ethical implications which I explore in relation to my research in detail elsewhere.

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