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# Arresting Change: Popular Theatre with Young Offenders

*Gail Campbell and Diane Conrad*

This performance ethnography is based on a Popular Theatre project that was conducted at a young offender facility in Alberta, Canada with a group of incarcerated boys aged 12 to 18. Over six months in 2003, the researchers facilitated 90-minute drama workshops, one session per week, as part of the Community Transitions Program that offered the youth assistance with such life skills as applying for housing and continuing education. This research sought to support and build on other educational programs offered by the Centre. The study addressed the questions:

How can Popular Theatre help understand the experiences of young offenders toward finding appropriate approaches to meeting their needs?

What are the contingencies of enacting Popular Theatre to bring about personal growth and social change in the context of a young offender facility?

The boys voluntarily consented to participate in the research project (parents of underage inmates also signed consent forms). The study was approved by both the University of Alberta Research Ethics Review Board and the office of the Solicitor General of Alberta. Regular participation was affected by variables including incidents on the unit resulting in individuals being confined to their rooms, parallel programs (such as Alcoholics Anonymous) taking priority, opportunities or privileges earned (playing basketball or baseball), court appearances, probation or inmate release. At times, participants left the project and new participants joined, maintaining an average group size of 8 to 10 boys.

The demographic of the Centre during the study showed a majority of First Nations/Métis inmates – approximately 60% – that our study composition did not entirely reflect. The majority of our study participants were Caucasian, although a number of Métis and First Nations boys participated. All inmates participating in the program were incarcerated for a variety of charges ranging from car theft to murder. We neither required nor encouraged them to talk about their crimes, working instead through the fictionalized world of drama; however, details of their life experiences were at times revealed. These lived experiences became sources for pedagogical intervention and performative ethnographic exploration (Conquergood, 1985; Denzin, 2003).

## Theoretical Framework

The research took a critical arts-based educational approach to working with incarcerated youth toward personal growth and social development. Adap-

tations of popular education methods, focusing on developing the capacity to critically examine the world (Freire, 1970), as implemented in applied theatre techniques (Boal, 1979/74) offer possibilities for transformation through drama. As a process of individual and social change, applied or popular theatre engages members of communities in identifying issues of concern, analyzing conditions and causes and searching for points of change (Prentki & Selman, 2000), and drawing on participants' experiences to collectively create theatre and engage in discussion of issues through theatrical means.

Accounts of prison theatre programs based on a popular theatre model (Balfour, 2004; Thompson, 1998a, 1998b, 2000) revealed that drama is a powerful medium for change. Drama allows for self-expression. Opportunities to explore, enact, and reflect upon one's thoughts and emotions have particular significance in working with teenagers (Lavergne, 2004). Using human behaviour as subject matter, drama creates opportunities for self-knowledge as individuals gain heightened awareness of motivations behind their behaviour. Role-play develops empathy and interpersonal sensitivity by allowing exposure to situations and viewpoints beyond one's immediate experiences. Drama develops a network of skills and attitudes useful outside of drama contexts. Participation in drama helps consolidate a sense of self-worth and purpose, strengthens commitments to future aspirations, and aids in the reconstruction of identities other than criminal or deviant (White, 1998).

### **Methodological Approach**

The script presented here is a performance ethnography or ethnodrama (Denzin 2003; Saldaña, 1999, 2003), defined by Saldaña as the use of theatrical techniques to mount a performance event about research participants' experiences and/or researchers' interpretations of data. Denzin (1997) called ethnodrama "the single most powerful way for ethnography to recover yet interrogate the meanings of lived experience" (p. 94). This research sought to fulfill criteria for exemplary arts-based research (Denzin, 2003; Finley, 2003) which include

- (a) allowing the voices of participants to be heard,
- (b) offering practical utility to participants and the community,
- (c) fighting oppressive structures in our everyday lives,
- (d) experimenting with form,
- (e) producing open texts with multiple meanings, and
- (f) raising questions rather than formulating conclusions.

The researchers used participatory drama activities to engage incarcerated boys in exploring their collective experiences prior to incarceration, their experiences of being incarcerated and their envisioning of goals for the future. Many activities took the form of games and improvisations. More in-depth conversations took place during image theater and forum theatre work (Boal, 1979/74) wherein opportunities arose for exploring alternate realities within various scenarios. Through sculpting themselves and others and role-playing characters like themselves in situations like their own (both in and out of the young offender center), the boys engaged in dialogue with the researchers about life as they saw it.

The researchers maintained reflective journals and field notes of the drama process as it evolved. The collaborative creation of the performance script began with a thematic analysis of the researchers' journals and notes. Recurring themes, salient moments, and incidents representative of our work with the boys emerged from this process. Playwriting involved interpretive reconstruction of the drama work, including games, improvisations, images, scenarios, and reflective discussions. Characters and incidents were shaped by the researchers' perspectives, sympathetic to the predicament of the youth and optimistic for positive change.

Just as all research texts involve interpretation (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994), the script is a self-conscious construction or fictionalized representation of human interaction. It is inherently subjective and partial, but also open to multiple interpretations. The product of a creative process, it captures lived experience through expressive, evocative, non-discursive representations. It focuses as much on the researchers' struggles to make sense of the process as it does on the participants' dramatic expressions. Finally, it raises more questions than it provides answers.

In performance, all parts were played by the two researchers who assumed roles of themselves (both as researchers and drama facilitators), various young offenders, a police officer, a guard and the staff person who supervised our project. Young offender characters were portrayed as fictitious and not meant to represent real individuals. Different characters were identified through voice, gesture, and position on stage. Throughout the performance, a series of slides was projected onto an upstage screen, including slides of subtitles, generic images of prison facilities and young offenders, and photographic images of graffiti text and drawings created by participants during a drama exercise. Sound recordings were also played at various points.

### The Performance Text

*Popular hip-hop music plays in the background.*

*The title slide is projected:*

#### **Arresting Change: Popular Theatre With Young Offenders**

*The researchers enter wearing identical costumes: navy blue long-sleeved T-shirts and navy blue sweat pants. They deliver a brief introduction and background to the research.*

*The performers take neutral positions upstage as the first subtitle is projected.*

(Subtitles are indicated in bold.)

#### **Gaining Entrance**

*Image and sounds of a truck.*

*Both performers play researchers in this first segment. At the start each picks up a strip of yellow POLICE LINE tape (which reads Police Line Do Not Cross), moves into the playing space and begins to delineate square acting areas on the floor of the playing space with the tape as the dialogue proceeds. Researcher 1 constructs an inner square representing inside the prison space. In this space, scenes portraying young offenders and Drama Facilitators interacting with the boys take place. Researcher 2 constructs a larger square around the inner square delineating the outside world. Between the two is the research/transition space. In this space movement in and out of the prison and scenes of Researchers*

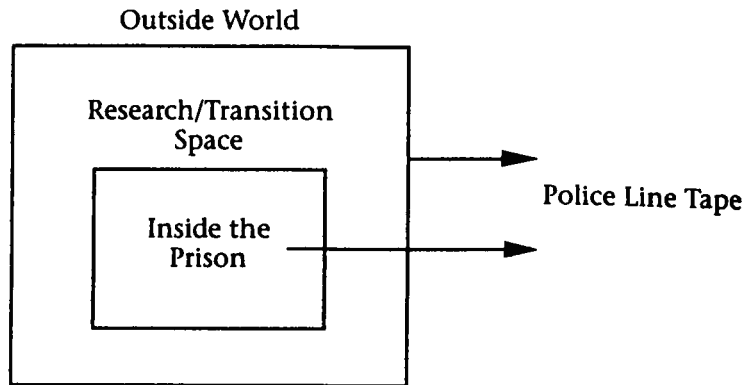


Figure 1. Arresting Change Performance Space

*reflecting on the work occurs. (See Figure 1.)*

**Researcher 1:** Here we are again.

**Researcher 2:** On our way to the young offender center.

**Researcher 1:** Wonder what the boys'll be up to tonight.  
*They share a knowing glance.*

**Researcher 2:** I wonder who'll be there. Who was released? Who's in lockup?

**Researcher 1:** Or any new boys.

*Pause.*

**Researcher 1:** Hmmmm . . . A long drive.

*Pause.*

**Researcher 1:** Good news about our ethics review, eh?

**Researcher 2:** Finally our ethics approval from the Research Ethics Board and the Solicitor General have come through.

**Researcher 1:** Can you believe what they put us through?

**Researcher 2:** The paperwork.

**Researcher 1:** The signatures.

**Researcher 2:** And the wait time.

**Researcher 1:** Well, at least we finally have the okay to use what we're doing for our research.

*The construction of the squares is completed.*

**Thou Shalt Not**

**Recorded Voice of the Institution:** You must not allow them to portray images that glorify or promote criminal behaviour.

*Researchers, within the designated research space, look around as if to see where the disembodied voice is coming from.*

**Researcher 1:** Oh ya. You know, I can understand why the center would stipulate that, but how are we supposed to know whether the boys' improvisations are glorifying or promoting criminal behaviour or not?

**Researcher 2:** (*addressing audience*) Many of the boys' improvisations involved portrayals of criminal activities . . .

*Mime of smoking and passing a joint.*

**Researcher 1:** Like smoking (*cough, cough*), drinking, hold-up, car theft, pimping, bling bling, that sort of thing<sup>1</sup>.

**Researcher 2:** And they sure seem to get a kick out of it, but does that mean it's glorifying or promoting???

**Researcher 1:** I don't know. I think the relationship between what the boys are portraying and what it means to them is more complex than just promoting or glorifying.

**Researcher 2:** What is it then?

**Researcher 1:** I guess that's what we're here to find out.

**Researcher 2:** Anyway, it sort of stifles the improv if we're having to censor them all the time.

**Researcher 1:** Well, we better keep an eye out tonight to make sure we're not doing any glorifying or promoting, okay?

**Researcher 2:** Yeah, okay.

*Pause.*

### **The First Visit**

*Images of the exterior of a prison facility from various angles on screen.*

**Researcher 2:** Remember our first visit?

**Researcher 1:** Yes.

*Performers move to either side upstage. As the scene progresses they move downstage as they symbolically enter the facility for the first time. They play separately out toward the audience miming the actions they speak.*

*Mime of researchers approaching the building, hesitating, looking around, apprehensive. They arrive at the door and mime the actions of buzzing in.*

**Researcher 2:** (*vocal sound effect of the door*) Bzzz.

**Researcher 1:** (*vocal sound effect of the door being unlocked*) Pshhhht. *They mime opening the door and each takes a step through.*

*Mime of researchers reading the rules on a signboard and getting a locker key.*

**Researcher 2:** Lots of rules.

**Researcher 1:** Hmmmm. Here's the lockers.

*Mime of emptying their pockets at the lockers.*

**Researcher 1:** No keys allowed.

**Researcher 2:** Or cell phones.

**Researcher 1:** Money.

**Researcher 2:** Or pens.

*Mime of stuffing things into lockers, locking lockers, buzzing into the front desk area.*

**Researcher 2:** Bzzz.

**Researcher 1:** Pshhhht.

*They mime opening the door and stepping through. Mime of signing in at the desk.*

**Researcher 2:** *(to imaginary staff person)* Visitor's lounge?

**Researcher 2:** Bzzz.

**Researcher 1:** Pshhhht.

*They both take a step through the imaginary door to the visitor's lounge. This brings them together downstage center in the research space.*

**Researcher 1 & 2:** *(together)* Hi!

*Researcher 1 becomes Janice. Identical eyeglasses are used by both actors to indicate the Janice character throughout the performance.*

**Researcher 2:** You must be Janice. *(to audience)* Our staff support person.

**Janice:** Hi there. Come'on in. Why don't you get ready and I'll call the boys.

*Mime of phone call to the unit.*

*Researcher 2 mimes getting the space ready.*

**Janice:** Here they come.

*Vocal sound effect Pshhhht is heard repeatedly to indicate the arrival of the boys.*

### **Incarcerated**

*Images of fingerprints, barbed wire, handcuffs, leg irons on screen.*

**Researcher 2:** You think it was hard for us to get access to this place? It was much worse for the boys.

*Researcher 1 becomes a young offender (James) in leg irons and handcuffs. Researcher 2 becomes a Police Officer escorting James to the center for the first time.*

**Police Officer:** Come'on. Move it . . . First time, eh? Well, you may be going in a tight end, but you'll be coming out a wide receiver. *(Laughs)*

*James takes a step upstage. Researcher now becomes a guard.*

**Guard:** Next . . .

*James shuffles to where the guard is waiting.*

*Guard mimes undoing handcuffs and leg irons.*

**Guard:** Now drop your pants, bend over and spread 'em.

*James mimes dropping pants, etc.*

*Guard shines a flashlight to get a view of James's behind.*

**Guard:** That wasn't so bad was it? *(Laughs)*

*Mime of guard giving James blankets and sending him to unit.*

**Guard:** *(Laughing)* Off to the condos.

*James mimes taking the blankets and steps into the prison space.*

### **The New Guy**

*Images of young offenders in groups and pairs.*

*James moves to the upstage area of the prison space, mimes putting down blankets, then turns and addresses the audience as if they were other boys on the unit.*

**James:** What are you lookin' at?

*On cue from Researcher 2 pointing a remote control and pressing pause, James freezes.*

**Researcher 2:** If you're the new guy inside it's best to learn the ropes quickly.

*Researcher 2 points the remote control and presses play.*

*James enters the unit and sits in a corner trying to be invisible.*

*Researcher 2 moves into the prison space and becomes a young offender (Tony).*

**Tony:** Hey, new guy. Come over here.

*James ignores him.*

*Tony shrugs as if to say, "Fine, keep to yourself."*

**Researcher 2:** *(stepping into research space)* The boys came up with many different strategies for the new guy. So, let's try that again. *(Points remote control and presses rewind.)* Rewind.

*Researcher 2 moves back into prison space to become Tony.*

*James enters unit again as if for the first time and tries to be friendly.*

**James:** Hi.

**Tony:** What are you in for?

**James:** I boosted a car.

*Tony shrugs as if to say, "I'm not impressed."*

**Researcher 2:** *(Points remote control and presses rewind.)* Rewind.

*James re-enters tries to impress others by acting tough. A tough look.*

**Tony:** What are you in for?

**James:** Murder.

- Tony:** Ooooh. Murder, eh?
- James:** *(gives a serious look)* Ya.
- Tony:** *(a little hesitant in case it is true)* Is that right? *(to audience as other young offenders)* He says murder.
- Researcher 2:** *(Points remote control and presses rewind.)* Rewind.  
*James re-enters trying to be accepted.*
- James:** Hey.
- Tony:** What are you in for?
- James:** Oh, I . . . I *(mumble, mumble . . .)*
- Tony:** What's that?
- James:** I don't really . . . *(mumbling)*
- Tony:** What's your problem?
- James:** I don't really wanna say . . . *(mumbling)*
- Tony:** Come on, speak up . . .
- James:** Okay, . . . I . . . I fucked a sheep.
- Tony:** *(A moment of disbelief then breaks out in laughter.)* Good one.  
*James shrugs.*
- Tony:** Did you hear that? *(to audience as other young offenders)* He says he fucked a sheep. *(Laughs)*
- Tony pats the James on the back. James is pleased by the positive attention.*
- Tony:** A funny guy, eh?
- James:** Ya, a funny guy. *(Pause)* What was it like when you were new here?
- Tony:** Me? When I was new? Shit, I can't remember. I've been in and out of here since I was twelve.

### Monologues

*Images on screen – excerpts of graffiti text and drawings: lonely, stressed, picture of a crying face, I miss my mom, outraged, poem, etc.*

*A series of mini-monologues follow with both performers taking on the roles of various young offenders. As one speaks, the other turns her back to audience.*

- Lonely:** This place sucks. Sure there's lots of guys in here in the same boat but you can't trust anyone. Everyone's after something. Best thing is to just do your own time. Mind your own business until you get out. I miss my friends. No one ever comes to visit. I never thought I'd say this, but I miss my mom.
- Bored:** This place sucks. I am so bored. I can't believe I'm stuck here for six months. I've only been here three weeks and I'm already going crazy. There's nothing to do. Same thing day after day. I'm ready to anything for a little excitement. Even basketball gets boring after a while.



- Stressed:** This place sucks. I'm turning into a nervous wreck. Always watching my back. Watch what you do and watch what you say. Even if you try to mind your own business, some other jerk is bound to do something stupid and get you all in trouble. If only they'd at least let us smoke.
- Frightened:** This place sucks. Yesterday a guy got the shit beat out of him because he wouldn't hand over his shoes. I'm wondering when it's my turn. Doesn't matter what you do if some guy's got it in for you. I don't want to fight and I don't want to kiss ass either. I just want to survive and get outta' here.
- Sick:** This place sucks. I feel like shit. The food is awful, I mean really awful and there's never enough of it. I'm hungry all the time. I haven't been sleeping well and I've got headaches. I can't stand being cooped up in here. I wish they'd let us outside more often. Just to get out of these walls. What I wouldn't do for a pizza.

*Image of poem on screen. Researchers take turns reciting lines from the poem as Young Offenders.*

- Poet 1:** I'm looking up at the stars  
**Poet 2:** the starlight between metal bars  
**Poet 1:** watching the car lights as they pass by  
**Poet 2:** wondering if I could ever be free  
**Poet 1:** this jail has me trapped  
**Poet 2:** has me praying on my knees.

### **On The Inside**

*Images of a young offender bullying another young offender on screen.*

*A series of mini scenes follow with performers playing various young offenders.*

#### **At the canteen**

*Bob mimes buying a bag of chips and a pop.*

**Bob:** Chips and a coke. *(in response to an imaginary server)* Yeah, whatever.

*Harry enters and looks at Bob threateningly.*

**Harry:** Give me that.

**Bob:** What?

**Harry:** Give me that food.

**Bob:** But . . .

*Harry makes a threatening gesture.*

*Bob hands over the food reluctantly.*

#### **On the unit**

*Scott walks past Francis and brushes his arm.*

**Scott:** Baaa, baaa.

**Francis:** Fuck off. Leave me alone.

*In the gym George is shooting baskets.*

*Stanley walks past George.*

**Stanley:** I'm going to get you.

**George:** Fuck you.

**Stanley:** Don't turn your back in the shower, bitch.

### **Recti "Fuck" Ation**

*Various images of graffiti text and drawings on screen. Both Researchers move into research space.*

**Researcher 1:** Have you noticed all these? Are they homo-erotic images and stories that keep coming up?

**Researcher 2:** Yes. They're hard to miss. The gay characters, the pick-up lines, male prostitutes, bum fucking jokes all mixed up together with talk of hiding things "up there", "hooping it," strip search and references to rape.

**Researcher 1:** I wonder if this kind of stuff actually goes on in here. Janice?

*Researcher 2 takes on the role of Janice.*

**Janice:** I'm surprised at all the sexual references too. They keep coming back to it. But you know, there's never been a case of sexual abuse or rape reported in here. Although of course they are subject to a strip search at any given moment. If there's even a suspicion of anything gone missing, like a nail from the shop or something, the whole unit is strip-searched. Or if they've had a visitor that is suspicious . . .

### **Sex & Power**

*Image of a graffiti drawing showing stick figures in postures and dialogue representing anal sex/rape/strip search.*

**Researcher 1:** We read that rape is a real threat in adult prisons. With all the jokes and rumours that the boys hear, we wondered if it was the boys' fears that something like this could happen to them made them bring up all these images.

**Researcher 2:** We imagined how we would feel if we knew we could be strip searched at any moment, even if we hadn't done anything wrong.

**Researcher 1:** In adult prison it's not even so much about sex, as it is about power.

*Performers move into prison space representing a holding cell. Researcher 1 becomes Neil, a new young offender, pacing. Fred is in the cell with him.*

**Fred:** So has anyone hit on you yet?

**Neil:** What do you mean?

**Fred:** You're lucky, man. After my first week, I had to get twelve stitches in my ring. *(Makes a gesture to indicate his behind.)*

**Neil:** Really? *(Looking frightened.)*

*Fred winks at audience with a knowing smile.*

**Fred:**           *(Putting his arm around Neil.)* That's okay, stick with me. I'll look out for you.

**Power/Status**

*Image of a gun on screen.*

*Researcher 2 moves back into research space.*

**Researcher 2:** While we didn't see any evidence of sexual abuse as such, we did see the power/status strategies going on.

*Moves back into prison space. Researcher 2 takes on the role of Drama Facilitator 2, while Researcher 1 plays Bernie.*

**Drama Facilitator 2:** Let's play Who's the Leader.

*A mimed version of the game follows.*

**Drama Facilitator 2:** We're going to send one person off. The rest of us will choose a leader to start an action and he'll change it whenever he wants while we follow. The person who has gone off has to come back and guess who the leader is.

**Bernie:**           I'll go off.

**Drama Facilitator 2:** Go ahead.

*Drama Facilitator 2 mimes choosing a leader who begins a series of actions.*

**Drama Facilitator 2:** Okay, Bernie you can come back.

*Bernie comes back, looks around and guesses the leader right away.*

**Bernie:**           It's George.

*Researchers both move back into research space.*

**Researcher 2:** How did he do that?

**Researcher 1:** We've both played that game with many different groups and neither of us has ever seen anyone guess as quickly or accurately as these boys.

**Researcher 2:** Maybe they're just super-sensitive when it comes to matters of status.

**Researcher 1:** Knowing your place in the pecking order seems essential to survival.

**Researcher 2:** Remember Brian?

**Researcher 1:** Yes.

**Researcher 2:** He seemed to have quite high status. He could do anything, even play a "gay" character without losing status. If another boy tried that . . .

**Researcher 1:** Oh . . . he'd get taunted.

*Researcher 2 momentarily becomes Janice.*

**Janice:**           The worse the crime, the higher the status.

**Researcher 1:** And then there was Jonas, who let's face it, was a little slow. He had very low status when we first started coming here. The other

boys were always making fun of him. He sure has gained a lot of status since.

**Researcher 2:** Wasn't it interesting to see him stand up to Peter the other day?

*Both Researchers enter the prison space and mime the confrontation between Jonas and Peter.*

*Researcher 1 as Jonas is goofing around and getting in the face of Peter played by Researcher 2.*

**Jonas:** Oh, Peter, pick me, pick me . . .

**Peter:** Will you just settle down and get out of my face?

**Jonas:** *(Standing up for himself.)* Or what?

*Peter backs down.*

*Researchers move back into research space.*

**Researcher 1:** Jonas had learned enough to know that Peter was not about to try anything.

**Researcher 2:** Seniority gave him status.

### **Thou Shalt Not lie**

*Image of crime scene tape.*

**Researcher 1:** So what about the glorifying or promoting criminal behaviour thing? Have we done any of that?

*Researcher 2 shrugs.*

*Performers move into the prison space. The following scene takes place during drama group. Researchers play researchers, drama facilitators, various young offenders and Janice.*

**Drama Facilitator 1:** So in the scene we just did, did Roger get what he wanted from Sam?

**Brian:** Fuckin' right, he kicked his ass!!!

**Janice:** *(looking up from her book)* Brian, watch your language.

**Researcher 2:** Janice was always there when we needed her.

**Kevin:** Yeah, Brian, watch your language.

**Brian:** Sorry.

**Mark:** *(to Drama Facilitator 1)* You want to see my tattoos?

**Drama Facilitator 1:** NO, no, no . . . That's not allowed, Mark, we know that's not allowed.

*Shrug and a smile from Janice.*

*Researchers move back into research space.*

**Researcher 2:** Sure, lots of the scenes the boys created involved criminal activity.

**Researcher 1:** These were their experiences. Their lives. Tragic as that may be.

**Researcher 2:** There is something to be said for giving these boys a chance to put their experiences out there.

**Researcher 1:** If they portrayed images of an idyllic adolescence, how real would that be?

**Researcher 2:** Does laughing at the “bad” stuff necessarily mean promoting or glorifying?

**Researcher 1:** Maybe it’s laughter of recognition.

**Researcher 2:** Or discomfort.

**Researcher 1:** I think we have to get through the “bad stuff,” the joking and the stereotypes before we can get on to the serious stuff.

### **Future Goals**

*Images of graffiti text and drawings indicating goals: smoking, pimpin’, bling bling, get married, have kids, drugs are bad, etc.*

**Researcher 1:** The last phase of our work involved envisioning goals for the future.

**Researcher 2:** While the boys did come up with some positive options for the future . . .

**Researcher 1:** . . . we sometimes wondered if they were just telling us what they thought we wanted to hear.

**Researcher 2:** We were a little discouraged by the difficulty they had in setting positive long term goals.

*Performers move into the prison space. The following scene takes place during drama group. Researchers play Researchers, Drama Facilitators, various young offenders and Janice.*

**Drama Facilitator 2:** What do you want to do when you get out of here?

**Max:** Have a cigarette.

**Jerry:** Get stoned.

**Wayne:** Get laid.

*Laughter.*

**Drama Facilitator 2:** We were actually thinking a little longer term.

**Sam:** Bling, bling.

**Bill:** Pimpin’.

*More laughter.*

**Researcher 1:** *(Momentarily stepping into research space.)* Is that glorifying criminal behaviour?

**Drama Facilitator 1:** What about your goals for the future that don’t involve crime?

**Tom:** Me, I’m a lifer.

**Drama Facilitator 1:** Don't say that. There must be something you want for the future.

**Tom** Definitely get laid.

**Drama Facilitator 1:** And then what?

**Tom:** I don't know. Get married.

**Drama Facilitator 1:** And then?

**Tom:** Get drunk. Beat her up.

**Drama Facilitator 1:** Wait a minute. This is your long-term goal?

**Tom:** I was drunk.

**Drama Facilitator 1:** Is that an excuse?

**Tom:** Sometimes they deserve it.

**Drama Facilitator 1:** So beating a woman is okay if she "deserves" it?

**Bruce:** Yeah.

**Fred:** No way.

**Larry:** You shouldn't hit girls.

**Drama Facilitator 1:** What would a woman have to do to make her deserve it?

**Tom:** Cheat on me. Call me an asshole.

**Craig:** That doesn't mean you have to beat her. Guys like that are psycho.

**Bruce:** I think she deserved it.

**Larry:** No way, you'd never catch me beating on a girl.

**Researcher 2:** At least we're hearing multiple sides to the argument.

**Fred:** Whatever I do, this is my last time in this place.

**Janice:** I've heard that before.

### **Last Day**

*Image of empty jail cell.*

*The following takes place in the prison space.*

**Drama Facilitator 2:** So our next week is our last. What do you want to do?

**Jeff:** Let's have a party.

**Nick:** Can you bring in the Eminem CD? The one we were talking about - Guilty Conscience<sup>2</sup>.

**Drama Facilitator 1:** I'll have to check with Janice.

*Janice nods.*

**Jeff:** Can we have pizza?

**Mark:** And vanilla coke. And ice cream . . .

*Music begins playing in background.*

**Researcher 2:** They were the ones who associated Eminem's song Guilty Conscience with their dilemma. The pros and cons of doing the crime.

**Jeff:** All right, pizza!!!

**Mark:** Shrimp, my favourite.

**Tom:** And taco!

*Mime of boys eating pizza, drinking coke and listening to music.*

*Mime of Drama Facilitators saying goodbye to the boys, waving and wishing each other well as they move out of the prison space into the research space.*

**Drama Facilitator 2:** Good luck with your writing, Mark.

**Drama Facilitator 1:** Hope your arm heals quickly.

**Drama Facilitator 2:** Only one more week Tom. Try to stay out of trouble, eh?

*Music off.*

### **What Janice Said**

*Performers in the research space address the audience.*

**Researcher 2:** What? A little anti-climactic, you think?

**Researcher 1:** It was.

**Researcher 2:** It was kinda' sad to leave them.

**Researcher 1:** Did we really achieve anything?

**Researcher 2:** Have an impact?

**Researcher 1:** Well, remember what Janice said . . .

*Researchers take turns reading from a paper, transcripts of an interview with Janice regarding the gains the boys made. Both take on characteristics of the Janice character as they read.*

**Researcher 2:** I was impressed at the boys' level of participation. They were willing to let go of their inhibitions, act different or silly. It was risky for them. Something new. It showed a lot of self-confidence.

**Researcher 1:** It was interesting to see how they worked together and what they came up with.

**Researcher 2:** Their work was flexible and imaginative and still within the boundaries. They usually stopped themselves before it got too out of control.

**Researcher 1:** They examined their own lives and the lives of their peers. Looked at alternatives.

**Researcher 2:** It was a chance for them to learn from their peers. They are more willing to give an idea credit if it comes from someone more like themselves.

**Researcher 1:** They had a chance to work on their social skills too. They don't necessarily all have very appropriate social skills, you know?

**Researcher 2:** Through the drama they were exposed to an activity that they might be able to pursue in the future.

**Researcher 1:** The last exercise on goals got them thinking about goals other than criminal options, the decisions they need to make and steps they need to take to achieve them.

**Researcher 2:** Some of their misconceptions were exposed, like violence against women and homophobia.

**Researcher 1:** It was good for them to see that there are volunteers in the community that care about them and want them to have fun.

*Both researchers fold their paper in half.*

### THE END?

**Researcher 1:** But did we have any real impact?

**Researcher 2:** Are they likely to behave any differently because of what we did?

**Researcher 1:** Have we found ways to empower them?

**Researcher 2:** Have we helped them think beyond criminal behaviour?

*Researchers shrug.*

*End.*

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The illicit activities listed here include: Smoking – referring to the smoking of drugs; hold-up means robbery or armed robbery; pimping describes the activities of a prostitute's manager; "bling bling" is a slang term for the heavy gold jewelery worn by rappers and "thugs" with association to the spoils of criminal or gang related activity.

<sup>2</sup> American rap artist Marshall Mathers, known as Eminem, was one of the participants' favourite artists. Much of Eminem's music is said to be autobiographical in nature (msn Entertainment, 2004) The song that the boys related to entitled "Guilty Conscience" (Mathers & Dre, 1999) explores consequences of an action. The music video depicts three scenarios of criminal activity: a convenience store robbery, a date rape, and a husband confronting his unfaithful wife and lover with a gun. In each scenario, just before the moment of no return, the action is frozen. In the foreground the characters of Slim Shady and Dr. Dre appear, like opposing sides of a conscience, one supporting and one speaking against the crime that is about to happen. At the boys' suggestion we used this format to act out a situation of decision making with them, drawing on their experiences.

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# Universal Mosaic of Drama and Theatre

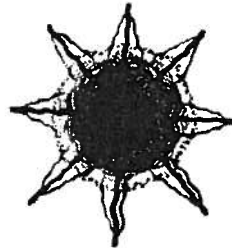
The IDEA 2004 Dialogues

Edited by

Laura A. McCammon and Debra McLauchlan

with

Gail Campbell, Francine Châiné, Jane Leavitt,  
Carmen L. Medina, and Sara M. Sanabia Arce



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