Land-inspired drama pedagogy: Building relationships with community, family, and local Land through experiential learning and student-led inquiry

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Abstract

This dissertation documents two projects conducted with rural Ontario high school drama students in 2021 and 2022, during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is a qualitative study that investigates students' experiences devising drama based on Land where they live and go to school, and the meaning students draw from researching local history, becoming familiar with the Land that surrounds them, and learning from local partners. This research aims to understand the impact of Land-inspired drama pedagogy on students' feelings of connectedness and belonging to their classroom, school, and local communities, and how learning with local partners, and devising drama for an audience affects student learning.

This study takes inspiration from Dorothy Heathcote's Commission Model and reflects Jonothan Neelands' framework for active inquiry as well as Lyn Fels' notion of performative inquiry (Heathcote, 2003; Fels 2012; Neelands in O'Connor, 2010). Concepts of Land as reflective of all things animate are applied, adopting theories of Land-based pedagogy that take into account the fluid, relational, spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional dimensions of Land, the territorial and cultural specificity of Land as part of Indigenous epistemologies, and recognition of colonization of Land as systemic and ongoing (Goeman, 2022; Styres, Haig-Brown, Blimkie, 2013; Wilson, 2008). Arts-based, decolonizing, Indigenous, and ethnographic methodologies guide these Land-inspired drama pedagogy Projects and data is compiled through classroom observation, student photography, writing, and one-on-one interviews.

The methodological approaches implemented in this work offer a contribution to research in education that centres Land, Indigenous knowledge, experiential, and

community-based local learning, while realizing the rich source of student learning and understanding that drama pedagogy offers. Key findings suggest that time spent on Land with others learning about ecological and human (his)stories reinforces connection and forges relationships with peers, family, local Land and people. Land-inspired drama pedagogy has potential for significant impact on literacy as well as decolonization in the classroom, and invites critical consideration of autobiographical material and lived-experience in drama pedagogy.

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1 Introduction

I begin this manuscript by situating myself and the teachings I have received about local Land-based history, even before my doctoral studies began, recognizing in particular, Dave Mowat of Alderville First Nation, and Jack Hoggarth from the Chanie Wenjack School for Indigenous Studies (Trent University) and Curve Lake First Nation for sharing their knowledge. I have benefited significantly from the insights and knowledge they have shared over many years, and I am grateful for these ongoing relationships. Jack Hoggarth's involvement with this research as a local partner was integral to student learning in both Projects, and our discussions have been helpful in the analysis of findings and in thinking about the implications of the findings. My course work and time spent learning from scholar Ruth Koleszar Green (Mohawk Nation) has also significantly informed my understanding of responsibility, specifically in the context of Land-based learning, Indigenous histories, and research. As Professor Koleszar Green writes in her paper, "What is a Guest? What is a Settler?," "all people on this land need to know and understand the treaty rights and attendant responsibilities of living with this land" (2018, p. 172).

I first called Dave Mowat in 2017 to verify a land acknowledgement for a *Canada 150* theatre production performance I was directing and producing. Lindsay is part of Treaty #20 which is sandwiched between traditional Anishnaabeg territories referred to as the Williams Treaties, - one Chippewa, - one Mississauga, both signed in 1923. Though Treaty #20 was signed much earlier (1818), it is included in this grouping, which sometimes causes confusion. In my first encounter with Dave Mowat, he explained the history of these treaties, the nature of the watershed, and elaborated on the specific

history of Lindsay with respect to the treaties and to settlement and its impact on the Anishnaabeg who originally lived in the area for various parts of the year. I hung up the phone from our forty-minute conversation concerned and embarrassed about how much I did not know on this subject and how significant the stories that Dave Mowat told me still are to the ecology in our area, to local relationships, and to how we live together on the Land. The lack of visibility of local Indigenous history especially around the waterfront, and the way the viability of this area changed as a place where Indigenous people could live and have access to food - specifically wild rice and cranberry - caused me to look with greater criticality at what I knew about local history, and importantly, what I did not know.

As a non-Indigenous educator engaging with the concept of learning from and on the Land, I acknowledge the Indigenous origins and persisting relations on this Land and recognize the provenance of this pedagogical practice which is culturally entrenched in Indigenous ways of knowing and relationship to Land. My context as a non-Indigenous teacher who has benefitted and continues to benefit from the colonial settlement of Treaty #20 on traditional Mississauga territory is part of the specificity of my relationship to the place where I live. I also recognize the impact and contribution of Indigenous worldview to the development of my thinking about the importance of experience on Land, and the reciprocal commitment of relationality to Land and people.

This study investigates what students experience when creating drama based on Land where they live and go to school, and the meaning students draw from re-searching local history, becoming familiar with the Land that surrounds them, and learning from local partners. This research aims to understand the impact of drama-focused, Land-based pedagogy on students' feelings of connectedness and belonging

to their classroom, school, and local communities, and how learning with local partners impacts student learning. My interest in Land-based learning through drama grows out of curiosity about how students perceive, or might begin to perceive, Land in their understanding of and engagement with their communities, histories, and identities. This approach centres Land as part of knowledge, and recognizes that experience of Land "contextualises knowing" by working with the idea that humans impact and are impacted by Land (Meyer, 2008, p. 220). Land holds stories, and examining relationality to Land can reveal both historic and existing connections, commitments, and beliefs about the natural world that inform how people live. Investigating the human and ecological history of the Land we inhabit and spending time together outdoors present an opportunity to confront the past while also forging relations and memories that have the potential to be personally and socially impactful in the present, and beyond.

As a drama teacher in a rural setting for over twenty years, I have seen first-hand how the collective effort of students involved in drama projects builds community within the classroom and establishes collective memory in meaningful ways. In my experience, the impact of this type of work is amplified with occasion to partner with and learn from local people and organizations outside of the classroom. I have also observed the strong motivation that students demonstrate when they are charged with the task of researching, devising, and performing an original drama for others. This investigation affords the opportunity to examine students' perceptions of their experience and observe their work in a formal way within a research context.

The Projects examined in this dissertation centre drama pedagogy as an approach to teaching and learning, but also as research methodology. For the purposes of this dissertation, I use the term 'drama pedagogy' to encompass the tools, strategies,

and philosophy that are part of drama in education. Drama pedagogy values collaboration, inquiry, critical thinking, and use of imagination as inroads to grappling with subject matter of all kinds in an artful, affective way, integrating forms of drama, and making intentional use of the tools of theatre making (Taylor, 2000, p. 61). This concept of drama pedagogy is one that informs the Ministry of Education drama curriculum (2010), the advocacy work and materials developed by the Council of Ontario Drama and Dance Educators (CODE), and the practice of many teachers of drama in Canada and abroad.

In his paper “Reconsidering Dorothy Heathcote’s Educational Legacy,” David Booth notes important moments in the development of drama pedagogy and the recognition of drama as a way of learning (National Drama, 2012). In this paper, Booth highlights a research project sponsored by the Schools Council in England that resulted in the publication *Learning through Drama* (McGregor, Tate, and Robinson, 1978) as a key moment because it acknowledged drama in education as a distinct “medium of learning” that also had the potential to impact the “status of drama both in terms of teacher training and its place in the school curriculum” (Davis and Lawrence, 1986, p. 209 as quoted in Booth, 2012, p. 6). The concept of drama as a learning medium marked a shift away from strict notions of drama as an art form that focused mainly on the study of ‘canonical works’, achievement of technical proficiency, individual talent, and as a final product that an actor realized through performance for an audience. The recognition of drama as a medium of learning in England during the seventies went on to have far reaching influence in drama pedagogy through the work of practitioners worldwide, and in Canada, specifically.

The seminal work of Dorothy Heathcote as a pioneer of drama pedagogy is applied as a central approach in this study, specifically Heathcote's Mantle of the Expert and Commission Method (Heathcote and Bolton, 1995; Heathcote, 2003; Heathcote, 2010). Jonathan Needland's "active inquiry" and Lynn Fels' "performative inquiry" are integral to the study's pedagogical and methodological approaches as avenues by which students' performative work and critical reflection reveal meaning and knowledge (Fels, 2012, p. 51; Neelands in O'Connor, 2010, p. 25). Neelands' practice of valuing students as co-creators in the drama making process also informs the pedagogy of this work. Arising from the authority of all participants to steer the direction of the drama, Neelands writes that drama pedagogy aims to work with "an openness to the idea that students should discover and make their own meanings out of the content as a result of their work in drama" and to the continuation and deepening of questions (2010, p. 28). This quality of responsiveness to the interests and concerns of the students involved in the drama work is reflected in the distinctive differences between the two Projects in this study with respect to the adjustment of focus and application of drama techniques that are unique to each Project and which were made in response to student work and feedback.

The terms 'devising', and the 'ensemble devising process' are used throughout this dissertation. These terms reflect the generative quality of drama pedagogy that is based on collaborative discovery, exploration of ideas through drama, discovery of meaning through reflexive exercises, and the expression of these through performative means. Process-centred education, as framed by Jonothan Neelands, "provides an authentic mirroring of 'real-life' learning where new problems are synthesized through structures and methods formulated to enable effective discovery," the purpose of which

is for students “to discover, for themselves, new meanings” (1986, p.4). David Booth and Charles Lundy echo this understanding, explaining:

> Drama is a group process: it works from the strength of the group and enriches the lives of everyone concerned. You find drama by working within the medium - by improvising, by exploring ideas through role-play, and then by replaying, discussing, arguing, and discovering new meanings in the situation. (Booth and Lundy, 1985, p. ix)

Within the context of this study, the term ‘process drama’, ‘devising’, and ‘ensemble devising process’ refer to the creation of original drama work based on research, experience, experimentation, and application of various forms of drama. The term ‘Creative Process’ is also used throughout this dissertation and refers more broadly to the recursive steps in the development of creative work from original inspiration to final performance and reflection, using the Ontario Arts curriculum model as a referent.

My use of the term Land in this dissertation is based on the understanding of Land as encompassing everything with life, including, as Styres, Haig-Brown, and Blimkie write, “the spiritual, emotional and intellectual aspects of Land” (2013, p. 37). In defining the scope of Land as it is used here, the words of Leanne Simpson also provide guidance, as she explains that ‘Aki’, or Land, “includes all aspects of creation: landforms, elements, plants, animals, spirits, sounds, thoughts, feelings, and energies and all of the emergent systems, ecologies, and networks that connect these elements” (2011, p. 161). Included in my examination of Land and pedagogy is discussion of literature focused on pedagogical approaches that engage with ‘nature’, the living world, or, ‘the more-than-human’ as part of education for sustainability. The literature review chapter discusses the concept of Land in greater depth and expands upon

understandings of Land-based pedagogy as distinct from place-based learning, and other variants, as they pertain to this study. I have chosen to spell ‘Land’ with a capital letter, but it will appear with a lower case ‘l’ to accurately reflect how it is spelled by specific authors in quotations included here.

The interconnectedness of human and ecological history, as well as the impact of colonization on Land, speak not only to understanding the past, but are also essential to examining the present. The lessons derived from (his)stories and knowledge shared during these Projects by Jack Hoggarth, at that time a Cultural Archivist at Curve Lake First Nation, create an opportunity for deeper understanding of relationality and of how I/we (students) can act responsibly, respectfully, and reciprocally with each other and the Land, and move forward in de-colonizing practice. The hope for this work is also to think both critically and specifically about personal connection to the Land where I/we live, to continue to reckon with the colonial past in which I am/we are implicated, examine ways in which colonial power dynamics persist, and how they might be resisted and changed.

Becoming familiar with local Land has been part of my education over the course of this work and is integral to Land-based pedagogy. When I look at the Scugog River today in the town where I live, part of my responsibility is to know that the River appears the way it does today because settlers in the 1800s wanted to increase the ease of transport, which, in turn, would support the mill industries that were being established in the area. With the support of the Crown, the Scugog River was dammed by local Mill owner William Purdy, flooding farmland, cranberry bogs, and wild rice beds throughout the area, forming part of what today makes up a portion of the of the Trent Severn Water Way (Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, nd). This move compounded

the earlier impacts of Treaty #20 on the ability of the local Anishnaabe, who were largely Michi Saagiig (Mississaugas), to live sustainably on the Land, effectively forcing out the Anishnaabe who relocated further north to Balsam Lake, and then to Scugog Island, Curve Lake, Alderville, and Hiawatha (Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, nd; Williams, 2018, pp.66-67). This local history is not well known to students or many adults and the Projects in this study endeavour to engage with the histories of Land before settlement, considering, in part, how early efforts to conquer the River and surrounding Land had irreparable ecological impact and implications for the early Anishnaabeg as well as the immigrants who lived in this area (Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, nd; Williams, 2018, pp.66-67). In addition to understanding local colonial history, the learning in the Projects of this study involves lessons of why wild rice and cranberry were and are essential and impact Indigenous people who lived and continue to live locally, how those plants and others are interconnected with the health of the water and survival of the people, knowledge of the watershed, and familiarity with local animal and plant species.

As I will address in the literature review chapter, there is very little research that combines drama pedagogy with Land-based pedagogy and learning alongside local partners. In their book *Place in Research*, Tuck and McKenzie write about the "multidimensional significance of place(s)" and add to ethnographer Keith Basso's assertion that place(s) can symbolize past events and inspire collective memory, by arguing that place(s) are "sites of presence, futurity, imagination, power, and knowing" (McKenzie and Tuck, 2015, p. xiv). As a commentary on the fulsome capacities of place *as part of* Land, Tuck and McKenzie's assertion points to the interweaving of meaning and relationships that places and Land embody, which makes them rich cites of

learning. As such, this work aims to document and aspires to offer insights that arise from conducting the drama Projects that are the two case studies of this dissertation: The Scugog River and LandForms Projects.

In previous projects I have facilitated, students demonstrated engagement with material they learned through local partners about local places and events. In the past, going to the buildings or sites about which students created their work made their learning experiential and hands-on, which in turn, heightened their investment in their collaborative work. The Scugog River and LandForms Projects continue the practice of experiential, site specific learning through drama with a new focus on local Land and people, including students' own experiences and histories on Land. A guiding focus of this research is also to learn more about what understandings of the Land, human history, and themselves, students take away from a drama focused, Land-based learning Project. Students' experience on Land during the Projects and their devising work can provide valuable information about what students understand about local Land as they enter into the Projects and what they take away from their learning after the Projects. This information offers the opportunity to learn more about what students know, consider the efficacy of pedagogical approaches, and identify gaps for future learning.

In a time marked by heightened political divisiveness, intensified engagement with online platforms, and the increasingly visible impacts of the climate crisis, there is a growing role for education to play in providing opportunities for students to work collaboratively in ways that forge relationships with each other and to Land. Adults and students alike are impacted by the fast pace of a digital world wherein algorithmically tailored content provides moments of instant gratification designed to reinforce existing

interests and viewpoints. Because it is a pedagogy that invites students to entertain a variety of perspectives, new ideas, and to make meaning of complex situations, drama pedagogy is uniquely suited to facilitate learning experiences that engage skills that are urgently important, such as critical thinking, reflexivity, and empathy. Exposure to Land through experiential opportunities and consideration of ourselves as part of the natural world offers, what for many, is a new encounter, or at least, an occasion to look more closely at Land and relationality in ways they have not before. Developing awareness of Land and relationality to it through story and lived experience is an essential part of sustainability education and an active, personal response to the climate crisis.

In the chapter following this introduction, I will examine existing literature that informs this work. The literature review chapter is presented in three parts: Land-based pedagogy, community and belonging, and drama pedagogy. As mentioned above, I define the features of Land-based pedagogy as distinct from other related terms and concepts, and specify the way it is interpreted and applied in this research. I will also touch on the connection of mind, body, and Land, examining research about the impact of Land-based learning on well being. Existing research concerning community and belonging in the drama class room and the role of action and agency on eliciting feelings of belonging is discussed, as well as the implications of feelings of community and belonging on relationality, equity, and decolonizing education. Drama inquiry practices are outlined and specific approaches that inform this study are contextualized. The function of relational distancing, slow pedagogy, and the intersection of Land-based learning and the Arts conclude this chapter.

Following the literature review is a chapter addressing methodology and research design in which the research questions and aims of this dissertation are explained. In

this chapter I discuss the ways in which decolonizing and Indigenous methodologies have been integrated into the approach of this research, the implementation of embodied methodology and walking/traversing methodology, and how Arts-based methodology has informed this work. The unique qualities of classroom ethnographic methods and of the teacher-researcher as they pertain to this study are also outlined along with a discussion of research limitations. A detailed research design is provided in this chapter, describing the participants, two-Project approach, as well as the inquiry framework devised for the Projects. Validity and assumptions impacting the methodology and research design are addressed at the end of this chapter.

Chapters four and five offer ethnographic accounts of Project I: The Scugog River Project and Project II: LandForms Project. These chapters document notable moments and key components of each Project and are presented chronologically. I provide a comprehensive illustration that traces each Project through the Creative Process from the inception of the work, through to students' post-Project reflections and interviews after the conclusion of the course. Chapter six captures the observations and thoughts of local partners and partner teachers involved in the study in their own words and considers the implications of their insights for future studies.

Chapter seven is organized into analysis of findings relating to Land, community, and drama pedagogy, with a final subsection reporting on the productive and hindering effects of disruption in this study. This chapter identifies how taking notice of and building connection with Land impacted students, as well as the influence of learning outdoors. Land and language are also touched upon, considering what students' reflections reveal about connection to Land and place. I address relationality as it bears on the motivational pull of students caring for others and provide analysis of building

community through shared stories and achieving common goals. Instances of dissonance and conflict are examined and their impact discussed. The drama pedagogy findings of this study present implications for literacy, digital drama, creating drama based on autobiographical sources, and drama as part of climate crisis education.

The concluding chapter of this work synthesizes findings and identifies the broader significance and contributions of the study. The conclusion suggests possible application of the findings and proposes directions for future study.

2 Literature Review

The following literature review is interdisciplinary and draws upon existing research relating to Land-based pedagogy, community and belonging in educational context, and drama pedagogy.

2.1 Land-based pedagogy

2.1.1 *Defining features*

Pedagogies rooted in Land possess distinct theoretical contours and specific praxis that make them different in important ways from place-based pedagogy. While these two pedagogies may have elements in common, Land-based pedagogy is grounded in Indigenous knowledge and embodies concepts of Land that uphold that knowledge. Land-based pedagogy centres relationality, responsibility, reciprocity, and specific cultural and ancestral knowledge and (his)stories as key elements (McDonald, 2023; Styres, 2011; Tuck and Yang, 2014; Wilson et al., 2021). While the nomenclature of pedagogy grounded ‘on the Land’ may vary, including, for example, Land-based education (Calderon, 2014), Land education (Tuck, McKenzie, and McCoy, 2014), and pedagogy of the Land (Haig-Brown, Dannemann, 2002; Styres, Haig-Brown, Blimkie, 2013), all reflect an understanding of Land, not as place or space to be acted ‘upon’, but as a living entity, intertwined with all other living things (Goeman, 2008 as quoted in Tuck and Yang, 2014). As Dolores Calderon et al. express, Land-based learning entails shifting Eurocentric notions of “nature as external to being in relation to” (2021, p. 349). Land-based learning as a pedagogical approach employed by educators in the context of the Ontario school system and curriculum, as the work of this study reflects, entails

engaging with Land in a relational way, confronting colonial ideas and histories of Land, centring Indigenous knowledge, and creating capacity for new learning.

In their review of thirty-nine articles about Land-based learning programs, Bowra, Mashford-Pringle, and Poland found that the common elements in all programs included: Land as first teacher, centring relationships, holistic perspectives, Land as a place of reflection, and Indigenous resistance to colonial structures (2021, pp. 135-136). A foundational aspect to Land as first teacher is that learning takes place outdoors, on the Land, where the interconnectedness of the natural world can be experienced and observed in multidimensional ways. Just as Tuck and Yang have taught that "Decolonization is not a Metaphor," neither is developing relationality to Land a solely intellectual endeavour (2012). Whether it is a three-day canoe trip or examining the insects crawling on a city playground, the entry point to Land-based learning is engaging with the natural world - its sounds, smells, textures, sights - taking notice, and seeing our connection with it. Paying attention and listening are first steps in building and recognizing relationships. While the notion of physically experiencing Land in Land-based pedagogy may, to some, seem obvious, in my experience as a teacher of students in secondary and post-secondary settings, it is not. Integrating outdoor experiences in Land-based pedagogy and preparing students for these types of experiences, explicitly and purposefully, is integral.

Sandra Styres explains that Land is not only in physical space, but also references "discourses, ideologies and philosophies embedded in land in the form of ancient knowledges and storying" which, in turn, "inform[s] pedagogy from a holistic perspective that seeks to balance the physical, cognitive, emotive and spiritual elements of human interaction with and within the learning environment" (2011, p. 722). Haig-

Brown and Dannemann speak about the centrality of Land in “learning relations” and that connections to history, past knowledge, as well as connections in the present, are all founded in Land, “having foundations in and ties to material reality” (2008, p. 248). The multi-directional relationality of Land-based pedagogy recognizes the more-than-human in all that Land encompasses in the present, the past, and the future.

The recognition of dispossession, erasure, and genocide as part of Canada’s colonial past and present represent an essential part of Land-based pedagogy. Concepts of land, shared memories, stories, and the kind of history and learning that Land holds, vary, and, at least in part, are reflective of past and ongoing relationships to power. As Goeman indicates, settler colonial conceptions of Land centre around normalizing Land as property, rendering its shape familiar and useful, establishing boundaries that claim ownership, to assert the “European notion that locks together labor, land, and conquest” (Goeman, 2008, p. 24). Alex Wilson furthers this thinking, pointing out how “artificial claims about land drift into entitlement and capitalist frameworks that disembody lands in such a way as to sever our connections with and from nature” (Wilson et al., 2021). Land-based pedagogy engages with these “asymmetrical relationships to power” and critically examines concepts of, and relationality to, Land in a way that considers not only the event(s) of colonialism, but also the practice of colonization as systemic and ongoing - one that confers power only to some whose privilege relies in the subjugation of other people and of Land (Goeman, 2022, 8:00).

Land-based pedagogy can be seen as essential to the process of reconciliation and of building relationships for, “In being on the land, Indigenous and non-Indigenous

peoples are able to come together and draw strength from their ancestors, relationships, and histories in order to heal and transcend the trauma caused by past and present colonial processes" (Bowra, Mashford-Pringle, and Poland, 2021, p. 132). As a process with layers, deep roots, and entrenched thinking, colonialism and the work of decolonizing through Land-based learning is not a project with a finite conclusion, nor is it one with clear margins. Rather, as Vimalassery, Pegues, and Goldstein contend, embracing the changing elements of decolonizing involves recognizing the fluidity of how colonization persists and as such, embracing the "disruptive potential of uncertainty" (p. 10).

2.1.2 *'Land' and 'Place'*

In what ways is 'Land' distinct from 'place,' and does it matter? Pedagogies centred on 'place,' such as place-based education (Bowers, 2008; Smith 2002; Sobel, 2014), critical pedagogies of place (Greenwood, 2008; Stevenson, 2008), curriculum of place (Chambers, 2018), and place-responsive pedagogy (Mannion et al., 2013; Wattchow and Brown, 2011) share similar qualities with Land-based pedagogy in that they value learning about ecology, the meaning and impact that place-making has on community, identity, and knowledge, and that creating and living in places is an active engagement with the natural world and the people who inhabit it. Many place-based pedagogies also recognize the implications of colonialism and capitalism in the structures and development of the material world and how people live together in places, proposing place-based learning as an approach through which to address issues of sustainability and social justice (Yemini, 2025, p. 653-654).

In his article, “Place, Land, and the Decolonization of the Settler Soul,” David Greenwood discusses the disconnect in education discourse concerning equity and social justice and dialogue surrounding the environment and sustainability, pointing out that issues of equity, social justice, the environment, and sustainability coexist (2019, p. 361). As such, Greenwood argues for a pedagogical approach that reflects the interconnectivity of these issues, to which critical place-based pedagogy is an effective response (2019, p. 361). He writes about the need to collectively decolonize thinking as essential for unlearning colonial frames of mind and to ‘reinhabit’ places that have been “disrupted and injured through past exploitation” (Berg and Dassmann, 1990, as quoted by Greenwood 2019, p. 362). He notes that these are generative themes, “contingent on time and place, identity and experience” and that they can contribute to “educational theory spacious enough for everyone” (p. 363). For Greenwood, decolonization as a learning process has always been at the forefront of critical place-based pedagogy (2019). As Calderon (2014) and more recently, Bowra, Mashford-Pringle, and Poland (2021) point out, however, place-based pedagogy does not significantly account for, or adequately disrupt, colonial histories and systems and, as Calderon writes, “do not go far enough to promote decolonizing goals that should be included in any place-based education model interested in cultural and ecological sustainability” (2014, p. 26).

Celia Haig-Brown writes, “Indigenous thought is founded in a deep understanding that we all live in relation to the land” and, as mentioned earlier, that ‘Land’ refers not only to physical water, air, and earth, but also to the "spiritual, intellectual and emotional dimensions” that exist in relation to each other (Haig-Brown, 2008, p. 12). Because Land is a living entity, relations with Land are constantly evolving and unfixed. As Styres contends, “Land … is an expression of space that exists in dynamic storied

relationships that are always shifting, evolving, struggling and transforming" (2011, p. 728). Land, from Indigenous worldview specifically, carries with it a living connection to the past, present, and future in ways that are culturally, territorially, and geographically specific and diverse (Tuck, McKenzie, and McCoy, 2014, p. 8). The concept of 'place' as opposed to 'Land' becomes problematized for its potential to neutralize these ties and their bearing on relationality (Tuck, McKenzie, and McCoy, 2014, p. 1).

Historicizing, romanticizing, and/or oversimplifying Indigenous knowledge and presence on the Land are other neutralizing acts that are of concern for some scholars, such as Cash Ahenakew, who cautions against the coopting of Indigenous knowledge by Western schooling wherein there is "a tendency to seek simple, self-affirming solutions to complex and tangled histories and relations" (Ahenakew, 2017, p. 85). Moreover, Ahenakew writes that the performativity of inclusion in non-Indigenous education "point[s] to a larger concern that increased incorporation of Indigenous knowledge is a move to distract from more unsettling Indigenous demands for decolonization" (Ahenakew, 2017, p. 85). In their article, "'Learning Like Before': Continuous Resistance in Land-Based Education," Rachel Cluderay, Rena Mainville, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, and Kelsey Wrightson express a desire for non-Indigenous Land-based programs to avoid using the term 'Land' for fear that "it undermines the integrity of Indigenous knowledge," suggesting instead using terms such as "nature-based, place-based, or outdoor education" (2022, p. 62). Cluderay et al. write that "by extracting the palatable, comfortable aspects and discarding the confronting and critical portions, whiteness removes land-based education from its radical decolonial centre" and that use of 'Land' to describe these programs claims

knowledge that “is not equivalent to the many years, deep relationships, and radical grounded normativity that informs Indigenous land-based pedagogies” (2022, p. 62).

Comparatively, Alex Wilson, of the Opaskwayak Cree Nation, discusses a spectrum of education relating to Land in which outdoor education without integration of Indigenous knowledge is positioned at one end, and Indigenous Land-based education at the other (Wilson et al., 2021). Wilson conceives of Indigenous Land-based education on the far end of the spectrum as that which exists in “its deepest and most expansive potential and meaning” such that “it gives context to the knowledges that arise from the land as well as from a specific nation” and “encompasses the preservation of culture, language and philosophy, and addresses the ramifications of colonization and “epistemicide” (Wilson et al., 2021). Wilson situates place-based pedagogy somewhere between the two poles of the spectrum, noting that there are place-based pedagogies focused on location that have little engagement with “the spiritual and cultural knowledge that has been part of it or created through it,” as well as Land-based pedagogies centred on “the importance of teaching about the land to create global citizens who will care for the Earth” (Wilson et al., 2021). Wilson’s positioning of different types of Land related learning along a continuum invites the idea of growth and movement and offers an opportunity to examine how different engagements with Land provide distinct learning.

Greenwood suggests that ‘place-based’ pedagogy may be more learner-centric, and accessible to “the large numbers of the world’s urbanized and mobile citizens,” and that the language of ‘place’ presents an “invitational construct for learners who have little experience with or interest in land, as well as for those learners who have little experience with or interest in cultural and geographical diversity” (Greenwood, 2019, p.

368). He contends that binary language used in the field (i.e. Indigenous/Settler, ignorant/complicit, innocent/guilty) further promotes dualisms which reinforce colonial constructs and "promulgates the colonial lie that we can only be one or the other" (2019, p. 371). Greenwood's perspective seems to suggest the view that Land, as part of Indigenous cosmologies and knowledge, is culturally specific in a way that presents a barrier to non-Indigenous people, or people in general, who do not have a preexisting interest in or connection to Land, and that their capacity to connect with concepts of Land that originate from Indigenous beliefs may be a challenge to overcome. To Greenwood's earlier point, I suggest that two things can be true: Learners can both engage with Indigenous concepts of Land at the same time as they bring their own experiences, relations, and entry points to that same learning.

In thinking about the idea of cultural and historic specificity as a barrier to engagement with Land for those who are not Indigenous, I am reminded of Ruth Koleszar's delineation between 'Settler' and 'Guest' and her assertion of the following:

> A Guest … understands through a reflexive process that as a Guest they have responsibilities to learn about rematriation of the land (including for example, stewardship and possession are foundational to environmental revitalization). The Guest learns the history and current story of the land that they are Guests on! They politicize that understanding. Finally, they listen to and learn protocols which do not appropriate but unsettle the privilege of ignorance. The Guest is an active and respectful individual who recognizes their privilege and uses that privilege in a way that does not centre themself but centres the community. (2019, p. 174)

In the work of this dissertation, the choice to align with Land-based pedagogy is an acknowledgment of origin and recognition of relationality as foundational to moving forward in an anti-colonial way. The referent ‘Land’ also serves to recognize the protocols and traditions that have existed from time immemorial. In application, Land-based pedagogy is imperfect, unsettled, and, as the unfolding of the Projects outlined here attests, fluid. Tuck, McKenzie, and McCoy perhaps say it best when they write, “This is difficult terrain in working both with Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners: to acknowledge and include Indigenous knowledge and perspectives but in non-determined ways that do not stereotype Indigenous knowledge or identities” (2014, p. 11).

2.1.3 *Being on Land: body and spirit*

Land-based pedagogy provides an opportunity for students to have a physical experience on Land that also impacts their non-physical selves through their thoughts, feelings, emotions, and memories, both individually and as part of a collective. Experiences such as these are of particular importance for what they might reveal about the ways in which meaning and knowledge are generated through the senses, through affect, and through being with others in natural spaces. This section of the literature review will conclude by returning to the findings of Bowra, Mashford-Pringle, and Poland, and the final three elements of the framework for Land-based programs which focus on a) the “wholistic” aspects of this learning, b) reflective practice, and c) Land-based learning as protest and resistance (2021, pp.136-137).

Various studies indicate that ‘nature-focused’ learning can increase self-concept, social and interpersonal skills, mental, emotional health and wellbeing, and

environmental knowledge and attitude: findings that speak to the potential for Land-based pedagogy to offer learning that is multifaceted and holistic (Ly and Vella-Brodrick, 2024; Tillmann, 2018; Wolf, Kunz, and Robin, 2022). The Bowra et al. study draws on Styres, Haig-Brown, and Blimkie (2013) in explaining that the “wholistic” aspects of Land-based pedagogy take into account the spiritual, physical, mental, emotional, nature of human interaction (2021, p. 136). This thinking is supported by Indigenous epistemologies scholar Manulani Aluli Meyer who writes that the acquisition of knowledge is a multifaceted process that necessarily involves being in - and recognizing that ‘we’ are all part of –the natural world in a literal sense (2001, p. 130). She writes of listening, touching, paying attention to, and experiencing the natural world, and relationship to ancestors and the Land, as ways of knowing and learning that are valued and fostered in Hawaiian concepts of education, contending that identity, acquisition of knowledge, and what knowledge is prioritized, “... ends up being the stuffing of identity” (2001, pp. 125, 122-134). Meyer elaborates on the notion of prioritizing knowledge and its connection to identity, warning that it is important to think about what is worth knowing “as we enter the new millennium where information will no longer be synonymous with knowledge, but rather how that information helps us maintain our sense of community in the daily chaos of access and information overload” (2001, p. 125). While not everyone may feel, or can claim, a relationship with their ancestors or to Land, establishing memories that are situated on Land through experience and acquiring knowledge that is specific to place are key to forging connections such as these (Greenwood, 2019, p. 370; Kimmerer, 2013, pp. 214-215). The relationship of knowledge acquisition to experiential learning on Land and to human interactions is of ongoing importance to how people live in the world together, how communities might be

sustained, and how learning in school settings can be enriched. These are values that I endeavour to infuse into both my pedagogical and research practice.

The case studies presented in this dissertation work with the notion of Land as place of reflection, and as such, students participate in various activities outdoors that call upon their ability to consider and reflect on their relationality to Land and to each other. Contemplative practice in educational experiences on Land offers the potential to raise students' awareness about their surroundings, making feelings of connectivity or, equally as important, of distance and separation, recognizable, as opposed to walking through experiences in an "autopilot state" (Pulkki, Dajlin, and Carri, 2017, p. 226). Contemplative practice can also entail engaging in reflection about positionality, power, place, and experience, in ways that "integrate both inner and outer dimensions of learning" and that address "the emotional, personal, and embodied components of learning" (Fritzsche, 2021, p. 174). In their research, Bates, Teudt, and Collier use the term "attentive receptivity" derived from Beeman and Walton (2016) to describe a reflective practice enacted in their research in which being still in nature provided participants with occasion to "write about place through more noticed lived experiences (Teacher feedback, May, 2018)" (2019, p. 94). Intentional moments of reflection as part of "attentive receptivity" may also serve to "shift individuals to a witnessing of the natural ecosystem rather than a domination over it" (Bates, Teudt, and Collier, 2019, p. 94, citing Beeman and Walton 2016, and Gendlin 2004). Reflective practice on and about Land is echoed in drama pedagogy, as I will touch on in later sections. Reflection is an integral part of the recursive Creative Process followed in drama pedagogy that asks students to make observations, connections, and consider adjustments to their thinking and drama making. As the centre of the Creative Process, reflection is also the practice

that allows students and educators to realize the meaning of their observations, connections, and artistic output.

Dolores Calderón has written that it is insufficient simply to know about colonialism and that "rather, we must actively engage in dismantling coloniality" (Calderón, 2014b, p. 86). She goes on to state that "to engage in anticolonial approaches, we must first understand the multiple ways coloniality shapes our lives" (Calderón, 2014b, p. 82). Land-based pedagogy proposes a multidirectional reflective practice that entails anti-colonial and, by extension, anti-oppressive education. Examining colonial presence on Land means learning local histories and considering how power imbalance is evident on the Land, past and present. Given that "settler colonialism destroys to replace," as Patrick Wolf has written, learning about the history of Land, in many cases, is an exercise in noticing what is absent (Wolfe, 2006, p. 388). The pedagogical approaches of the Projects profiled in this dissertation aim to have students notice, in their research and walking, whose stories and presence on Land are evident, and whose are not. Identifying and dismantling settler colonialism in education also requires careful consideration of teaching strategies, curricular content, and the modalities through which students are invited to communicate their learning. These considerations are outlined in greater specificity in the methodology and research design, Project I and II chapters, respectively. The protest and resistance of Land-based pedagogy in this respect can be found in unsettling what, and where, learning takes place, whose voices are included, and how. This pedagogical approach is specific to the learner and to place, embraces complexity, and reflects the foundational concepts of Land-based learning in theory and in practice. As Styres and Zinga have expressed, "Land as pedagogy is a highly individualized, contextualized, intimate, and iterative

experience… not an experience that can translate into a toolbox for duplication" (2011, p. 79). Relationality, with respect to developing and recognizing relationship to Land, is an element of investigation in this study that leads to another area of focus: community and belonging.

2.2 Community and belonging

Building community in the drama classroom and working alongside local partners and partner classes to develop relationships outside of the classroom informs this study in distinct ways. Community and belonging are examined here for the ways in which literature in these areas can bear on practice in the drama classroom in particular, contributing to an understanding of how action relates to the development of community, as well as how relationality and difference factor into feelings of belonging.

2.2.1 *Community in the drama classroom*

Caitlin Munday and Josephine Fleming describe the learning community of the drama classroom as dynamic, fluid, "socially and culturally responsive … [and] aesthetically oriented" (2015, p. 151). The collaborative manner in which students in a drama classroom pursue the common goal of building a performance, especially in listening and giving space for others to share their thoughts and ideas, is "how classroom community builds" (Nelson, 2011, p. 82). Purposeful cultivation of classroom culture, directed by the teacher and co-constructed by students, lays the groundwork for establishing a temporary, but nevertheless felt, community in which students can be seen, or not seen, to take risks and rely on each other to achieve common goals (Galloway, 2023, p. 21; Macpherson, 2021, p. 80). The capacity for the drama classroom to function in this way has been so accepted that, as Jonothan Neelands and

Bethany Nelson write, the consistent efficacy of drama structures to build community in the classroom “is nearly a truism in the field” (2013, p. 16).

More recently, however, the experience and aftermath of COVID-19, students’ increased online engagement, competition with cell phones for students’ attention, increasingly serious weather events that disrupt attendance at school, and deepening societal polarization, have impacted students in school in both discrete and cumulative ways (Harmey and Ross, 2021; Müller et al., 2025; Sampasa-Kanyinga, 2022; Schwartz et al., 2021). Examining the causal connection between these global events and changes observed in students socially and emotionally within the drama classroom is not the direct focus of this work, however, as an intensely social medium, I contend that drama in education inherently lends itself to continuous and direct observation of student interactions, engagement, and behaviour in ways that allow for tendencies to emerge and divergences from past norms in dynamics to be noted. The social and emotional reality of students in current times highlights the need to think with greater specificity and intentionality about how to form ‘community’ and to observe with greater attentiveness when and how moments of community transpire, or when they do not. The design of the drama Projects documented here builds in opportunities to observe different types of interactions as well as artistic interventions, both of which inform the analysis and discussion and are touched upon in later chapters.

Students forge connections with each other in the drama classroom by virtue of the collaborative and highly interactive processes involved in the acts of learning through drama as well as through the activities involved in mounting a production and/or devising drama from ‘scratch’. Experimenting, improvising, planning, rehearsing, and/or executing a performance, at its best, sees students adhere to agreed upon ensemble

rules such as listening to each other, accepting all ideas for five minutes, adopting a ‘yes...and’ development mentality, contributing ideas, and helping one another to reach a goal. ‘Yes… and’ is a reference to an improv acting guideline wherein one actor accepts the underlying reality of the scene material offered by another actor (Lee, 2025; University of Chicago, 2021, 43:45). The willingness to ‘accept’ given circumstances for a scene as offered by a scene partner is an affirming action that demonstrates vulnerability and commitment to building something alongside another person. I suggest that ‘Yes…and’ is a concept that helps define what community means and how community is enacted in drama classrooms. ‘Yes… and’ recognizes that the well-being and success of a group is dependent on the well-being and success of all its members. This ethos reflects a culture of care that is built on the demonstration of responsibility, respect, patience, and a belief that each member of the community has something unique to contribute.

Peter O’Connor and Kelly Freebody align the sense of community in the drama classroom with notions of cultural citizenship that are ”pro-social, community building, collaborative, and concerned with progressing a social good“ (2022, p. 20). They suggest that “cultural citizenship is about the relationship between self and others. Through a focus on diversity, complexity and imagination, it suggests the ‘me’ within ‘us’, rather than the ‘me’ and ‘other’” (2022, p. 21). The drama classroom community exists in a continual state of what Freire terms “becoming” in that students’ exposure to others who are different from themselves (peers, local partners, audiences, characters who are real or imagined) in the drama class environment complicates their perceptions in expansive ways. Exposure to difference creates opportunity for ongoing development of students’ worldview, which, because it is disrupted, remains “unfinished” (Freire,

2018, p. 84). Freire writes, “In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation” (p. 83). Ideally, the community of the drama classroom is responsive to its membership, attentive to how individuals contribute to the whole, and attuned to achieving shared artistic goals. The overarching task of developing and executing a performance for others creates a communal situation in which, as I will address in later pages, the unique strengths, vulnerabilities, and stories of individual students, disrupt assumptions, and allow new relationships and group identity to form.

2.2.2 *Affect through action and agency*

Greg Noble of Western Sydney University offers some perspectives on defining feelings of ‘belonging’, suggesting that feelings of belonging in youth might be seen as sets of practices that are both situational and relational, changing with context and function, and which are active such that they are a form of “labour which produces and reproduces the worlds in which they function” (2019, p. xviii). Specifically, Noble maintains that action or labour is an essential component to building connection to place, noting that pedagogy as it relates to belonging “is cumulative, iterative, and involves embodied labour” (Noble, 2015, p. 34). He points out that the embodied practices of belonging are learned over time and space, and as such, demonstrate “a capacity to function within and across social contexts which contain diverse ensembles of humans and non-humans” as opposed to belonging as a more superficial “form of symbolic attachment to an identity or community” that is conceptual as opposed to felt and experienced (p. 34). Noble also asserts that belonging necessarily involves

emotional attachment which informs our interest in and motivation to act and feel "empowered to take up civic space" (2019, p. xviii).

The role of affect, as Noble suggests, is an essential component of community and feelings of belonging. As Kaaren Dannemann relays, community and belonging speaks more to the presence of a felt relationship and connection than to a claim of belonging (2002, p. 3). Bethany Nelson writes that 'community' might be conceived of as a feeling of "belonging, connectedness, influence, fulfilment of needs" (2011, p. 84). She identifies that the feeling of having power and the acknowledgement by others of that power contributes to connectedness to community, and citing Che, Lee-Chai, and Bargh (2001), connects feelings of power to action, importantly noting, "communal power orientation characterizes individuals who use their power for the communal good rather than their personal good" (p. 84). This argument proposes that having a sense of agency (power) and authorship towards their work and the right to negotiate content may contribute to drama students' feeling of community in the drama classroom. Recognition of agency also speaks to the presence of equality as a requirement of feeling a part of community.

Nelson's position that feelings of community are linked to agency is shared by Jonothan Neelands who writes of process drama, that

> …nothing can happen unless young people take action, initially through their social participation in making decisions, taking on roles and interacting with each other, and ... by carrying through the choices that they make in relation to the developing of 'plot' or 'situation'. (Neelands in O'Connor 2010, p. 138)

Moreover, as Santini et al. write, the role of agency in fostering feelings of belonging in the classroom and school is also dependent on students feeling the contributions that

they make are valued (2021, p. 11). The implications beyond the drama classroom for this type of pedagogical approach are, in part, the demonstration of democratic processes at work. Peter O'Connor forwards a similar perspective and writes that drama pedagogy "centres on democratization of learning and artistic processes through high quality relationships for learning and living together... participatory democracy in action" (2010, pp. 116-117). As an exercise in shared power, leadership, and collaborative participation in community towards common good, drama pedagogy, specifically, has significant value as an experience that carries life-long lessons as well as immediate benefits to students.

Research examining Australian students' feelings of belonging in classrooms and in schools identified "emotional support, support for learning, social connection, and respect, inclusion, and diversity" as key areas of influence (Allen at al., 2023, p. 934). This work along with others flag the teacher as integral to inspiring students' feelings of connection within the classroom by creating opportunities for building social connections within the class, developing strong rapport with students, and as noted above, providing emotional support, and support for learning (Allen et al., 2023, p. 935; Osterman, 2010, p. 239; Slaten et al., 2015, p. 4). This understanding points to the importance of teachers in modelling pro-social, inclusive behaviour, as well as purposefully integrating opportunities for connection building and collaboration within their pedagogical approaches. As Karen Osterman writes, "motivational needs, competence, autonomy, and relatedness, are integral and interdependent," and that "addressing student needs for competence and autonomy also reinforces and enhances students' sense of belonging" (p. 240). Pedagogical practices that allow students to exercise their autonomy through unique and independent contributions to group or class projects

support classroom community and foster belonging among students. Students' feelings of connectedness and belonging in school are important not only for the positive short term impacts these feelings have on achievement, attendance, relationships, and participation, but also for the broad and long-term significance that they have on overall well-being and mental health (Allen et al., 2023 p. 934; Arslan et al., 2020, p. 1622; Santini et al., 2021, p. 7).

2.2.3 *Community, relationality, and difference*

Feelings of belonging to a classroom or school community can be experienced differently by various students, especially students from marginalized groups and racialized students (Falkenberg and Heringer, 2024, p.8). Imbalances of power that diminish feelings of community and belonging can be detected through students' real or perceived social power, which are phenomena that present in a variety of ways. Creating community within a classroom can also pose a challenge because it is a place where, traditionally, students have little agency, considerable vulnerability, and into which students bring all of their previous experiences, both positive and negative. As a space where ideas are shared and performance occurs, the drama classroom can be charged with complex emotions and trepidation surrounding expectations that are tied to potential judgement by others. Developing cohesion within a classroom relies upon diminishing fear by establishing relationships through shared action.

In her study of youth perspectives on community belonging, Kate J. Cassidy inquires into the nature of belonging based on similarity, versus belonging that accommodates and invites the presence of difference (2019). She points out that while, for some, the notion of community conjures ideas of "unity, harmony, and safety," that

community based on sameness also “creates an inherent push towards conformity, agreement, and surface harmony” which is exclusionary and denies the capacity of community to contain and even be strengthened by difference (2019, p. 142). Citing Baumaster and Leary (1995), Cassidy highlights that sharing similarities is not necessarily a requirement for feeling part of community, and that while belonging and the desire to feel included are deep-seated human needs, other factors such as reciprocal care for others might also motivate inclusion in community (Cassidy, 2019, p. 144). She provides a framework for community belonging based on a 2008 study she conducted with middle school students in Southern Ontario in which students were asked to write an essay and create a poster in response to the prompt “Imagine a class where students feel like they belong, where everyone is accepted, and everyone is committed to getting along and working well together” (2019, p. 145). What emerged from the study revealed that students saw individuality and relationships as intertwined and that the attributes of belonging to community included: support for others, respect and care, dialogue, healthy conflict, and safety (Cassidy, 2019, pp. 153-154). Cassidy examines the ontological implications of her findings bringing philosopher Martin Buber’s concept of relations with others to bear, noting that the students’ concept of community complied with seeing the self in relation to others as ‘I-thou’ as opposed to ‘I-It’, supporting the idea of community as a way of being that depends on reciprocity of relationship with others (Cassidy 2019, p. 152). This reciprocity echoes the relationality of Land-based pedagogy, underscoring the manner in which relationship, action, and Land are braided together.

2.2.3.1 Drama in education as transitional space

Ways in which students and teachers approach difference, and encounters with the unfamiliar, impact relationship-building and community. Elizabeth Ellsworth's explanation of D. W. Winnicott's concept of "transitional spaces" is useful here in that the term denotes, "a process that moves inner realities into a special relation to our outer realities" (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 60). Ellsworth writes:

> The transit across the space of difference between inside and outside is transitional because encounters with the 'not me' that one finds there and the actions that we take in response to such encounters change both the inside of the self and the outside of the social environment. (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 60)

This process becomes particularly salient to the Projects of this study as students experience time on the Land which may be unfamiliar and/or uncomfortable because of weather, physical demands, or lack of experience outdoors, and do so with people who may be unfamiliar to them. New realities and 'difference' may also arise as student researchers investigate histories of Land that are new to them, that constitute "difficult knowledge," and that challenge their thinking (Pitt and Britzman, 2003, p. 756). Ellsworth suggests that understanding "what we cannot know requires us to constantly traverse the porous boundaries between self and other, individual and social, personal and historical. We cannot know self in absence of separate, different others" (2005, p. 61). This thinking recognizes that multiple ideas and identities exist at once and that the presence of difference is not something to be fixed or reconciled, but represents an opportunity for learning to be in the world with others, and openness to multiplicities.

2.2.3.2 Drama in education as a process of disruption and drama for pro-social skills

Disrupting fixed ideas and assumptions is a task that drama does well. Stories, both real and imaginary, can serve as a reminder of what is unknowable and different from students' own experiences. The content of dramas and the social activity of 'doing' drama, requires students to grapple with difference and 'the unknowable' in productive ways. This kind of learning, and the ways drama challenges students through form and content, affect, and action, creates the opportunity for peaceful and productive social engagement with others; a pressing need in education currently. Collaborative tasks that expose students to situations in which they need to exercise pro-social skills are especially essential in post-COVID-19 classrooms (Patrick & Pamflett, 2025, p.13). Focused, intentional group activities in drama require students to interact with a diversity of students in both scaffolded and self-directed ways, creating an opportunity for "social connections" and community to form through active engagement in tasks (Allen et al., 2023, p. 933; Patrick and Pamflett, 2025, p.13).

2.2.4 *Community, equity, and decolonizing theatre work*

From the work of Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed and Forum Theatre in Brazil to the community-based, applied theatre collaborations of Michael Rohd and Sojourn Theatre in the United States, many teachers, students, practitioners, actors, and "spect-actors" have interrogated perspective and examined social problems through drama work with an aim to encourage activism and protest, explore new ways forward, and to educate (Boal, 2002, p. 15). Though methods and approaches may vary, and the terminology that is ascribed to them may differ, there are shared foundational ideals pursued in work of this kind. As Boal has written, "In Theatre of the Oppressed, reality is

shown not only as it is, but also, more importantly, as it could be" (2020, p. 6). Boal believed that theatre was a form of knowledge and could be used as a transformative tool by and for actors and non-actors alike (2020, p.16). Sharing personal versions of world view and experimenting with ideas of what could be through embodied action recurs in Boals' exercises and games. Michael Rohd's work and thoughts about what theatre can do aligns with those of Boal and suggests as well the rich possibilities that lay in re-visioning theatre-community collaborations and conceiving of these partnerships in long-term, relational ways. Rohd writes, "Producing new work for/in the theatre does not have to only mean making new plays. It can mean producing new relationships, producing new forms of events and processes, producing new ways of crossing disciplinary and sector boundaries" (Rohd, 2012).

In his article entitled, "Civic Imagination: The Urgency of Possibility" Rohd asks how artists and organizations might work in an intersectional way with multiple other sectors towards equity and sustainability in communities, suggesting:

> We need to build individual and community capacity for residents and decision-makers who share place, who hold different values, who do not share lived experiences nor make sense of the world in the same ways, to *imagine*, together, equitable and just futures for all. We need civic imagination. (Rohd, 2023)

Much like Boal, Rohd conceives of theatre as a transformative medium through which to address oppression and extends that belief in current work to examine the immediate social, economic, and environmental implications of worsening divides within communities. He also argues the need for artists, educators, and others to scrutinize how colonial systems persist in this work, despite best intentions, writing, "When, as a nonprofit, local government, or Arts institution, we try to build relationships and trust in

community, we are often operating from within systems that have done harm. Can we build a healthy ‘we’ on a foundation of harm?” (2023). Decolonizing through listening, centring marginalized voices, and the imperative of recognizing the interconnectedness of not only community, but of people with Land, are emergent needs that collaborative theatre and drama pedagogy are able to confront because they involve engaging with varied perspectives and social imaginaries, and do so through affective means and authentic experiences. The design of the Projects in this dissertation endeavours to provide the opportunity for those involved to participate in ways that encourage meaningful discoveries, connections, and new learning. While community-based and applied theatre are distinct from drama pedagogy, the strategies, goals, and devising practices found in community-based, applied theatre, coincide with many of those in drama pedagogy (Prendergast and Saxton, 2020, p. 9). The ways in which drama pedagogy aims to engage students through purposeful activities is considered in the final section below.

2.3 Drama Pedagogy

As mentioned in the introduction, I have used the term drama pedagogy in this work as an umbrella to contain the various tools, strategies, and theories that are part of drama in education. The sections below address literature that inform the research methodology and drama pedagogy aspect of this study, touching specifically on the inquiry practices of David Booth, Dorothy Heathcote, Jonothan Neelands, and Lyn Fels, as well as theories that engage with the idea of making the familiar strange in pedagogical practice. The following also contextualizes Land-based learning with

respect to Arts education, and marks areas of commonality within this work as well as points of divergence.

2.3.1 *Drama inquiry practices*

Inquiry is a foundational component of drama pedagogy. As a teaching and learning methodology, inquiry-based drama work asks questions in an effort to inspire students' curiosity and further their thinking, as well as deepen knowledge and understanding. Inquiry entails imagining 'what if?', asking 'why?' or 'how?' and in so doing, activates critical thinking and engagement with the creative process. Inquiry might involve students imagining what they would do if faced with a situation in a story that the class is reading and then demonstrating their idea through tableaux. It might also involve asking students what aspects of their research they find most compelling and leading an improv activity that explores characters and stories that arise from that research. The work of Canadian educator David Booth serves as a guiding example of drama inquiry. Booth was a master practitioner whose work inspired and intrigued teachers and students around the world, and his humour and insight are remembered fondly by those of us who were fortunate to call him our teacher. He often engaged students through story drama, using teacher and student in role (among other techniques) to have students consider perspective, understand what might motivate people/characters to act a certain way, examine feelings and values, and make difficult decisions about complex problems using the protective fiction of drama (Booth, 1994, p. 70). David Booth captured the pedagogical aims and praxis of educators facilitating drama-making writing:

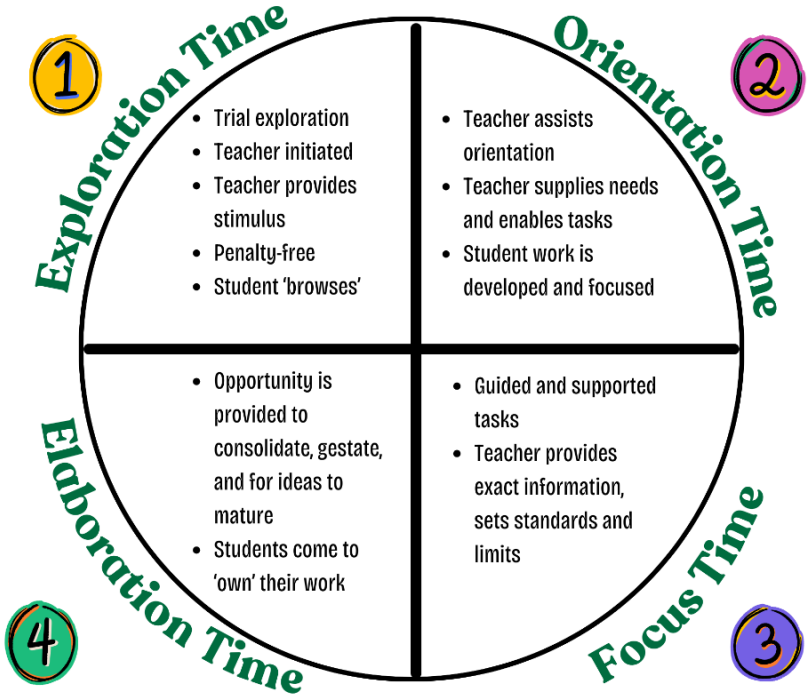
> We nudge them [students] further; we challenge their assumptions; we use the theatre conventions and forms to magnify and sharpen their ideas; we replay our improvised situations with new information and understanding; we create an ensemble where everyone is integral and necessary to the drama-making. A drama experience that offers them [students] some scope for intellectual engagement, emotional commitment and aesthetic satisfaction is what we strive for. (Booth, 2008, p. 9)

Booth championed drama pedagogy as an entry point to reading and writing because he witnessed first-hand the power of drama to activate students' ability to connect to the experiences and circumstances of others and its potential to impact their social and emotional development.

David Booth's skillful use of inquiry learning in drama was influenced by his work with renowned UK drama practitioner, Dorothy Heathcote. The conceptual underpinnings of Heathcote's pedagogy are captured in a 1991 workshop session she

Figure 1

Dorothy Heathcote's Teaching Cycle



led entitled, "Making Drama Work: In the Classroom" in which Heathcote outlines a framework distinguishing the equally important of moments of ‘play’ in students’ educational activities from those of ‘work’ (Midland Actors Theatre, 2024). Heathcote maintained that a period of no-stakes exploration, or play, was essential for student investment in creating quality work. She introduces four parts of a recursive Teaching Cycle: Exploration time, orientation time, focus time, and elaboration time (Midland Actors Theatre, 2024) (see Figure 1). In this Teaching Cycle all endeavours begin with a period of teacher provided stimulus which invites curiosity, and possesses an element of game or tension within the exploration. Greater intervention by the teacher is seen in each part of the cycle to refine focus, expand difficulty, and build parameters for final outputs as the learning endeavour continues.

In 2002, Dorothy Heathcote gave a talk at the National Association for the Teaching of Drama (U.K), entitled “Contexts for Active Learning - Four models to forge links between schooling and society” in which she presented four drama models and their specific workings: Model 1 – Drama used to explore people; Model 2 – Mantle of the Expert; Model 3 – Rolling Role; Model 4 – Commission Model (Heathcote, 2002, p. 1). As Heathcote has written, all of the models possess the common quality “of agreeing to work through invented and agreed fiction” with the understanding that drama in education calls on an array of interests and skills, and engages students as ‘doers’ and ‘creators’ who, through observation and reflection, are invited to learn about others and themselves, as they wrestle with real world challenges (2002, pp. 1, 13). While grounded in these shared foundations as well as Heathcote’s Teaching Cycle, the four models are distinct in their processes and approaches. The two models most relevant to this study are Mantle of the Expert (MoE) and the Commission Model.

2.3.2 *Mantle of the Expert*

Mantle of the Expert (MoE) is a teaching strategy that uses the fiction of drama across curricula as a "communication system that allows learning to take place simultaneously at conceptual, personal, and social levels" (Heathcote and Herbert, 1985, p. 173). Despite its name, MoE doesn't assume students or the teacher to be 'experts' in any given subject, but rather, uses a fictional frame that assumes 'expert' knowledge to support inquiry learning in such a way that students work collaboratively in the discovery of information, interpretation of material, perusal of perspective, and creation of dramatic work. Students and the teacher act 'as if' they were experts, sometimes using imagination to respond 'in role', and at other times sourcing out knowledge and information required to answer what the group needs to know, exercising skill in analysing information. MoE relies upon a selected metaphor, theme, or problem from which the drama inquiry is devised, and places the teacher in the role of facilitator as opposed to supplier of knowledge and source of all answers. As Anna Hickey-Moody and Amanda Kipling have said of Heathcote, "her model is one whose relationship with knowledge is that of co-discoverer: student-teachers and teachers are part of material networks that intra-act" (2015, p. 62).

In MoE, often within the context of a story or 'problem', students are tasked with "interrogating evidence" that arise from their own thinking, research and investigations, or that the teacher makes available to them (Heathcote, 2002, p. 7; Heathcote, 2010, p. 1). The task of interrogation paired with the responsibility bestowed upon each student to share and contribute to the knowledge of the group, brings weight to their efforts and elevates the stakes of the drama work. Students grapple with ethical concerns that are

tied into the responsibility of interpreting information, asking questions, and considering ways forward for their discovery/research work and/or the drama itself.

In a keynote address presented at the CODE Conference in 2008, Heathcote presented three “Levels of thought and action/purpose” that inform Mantle of the Expert work, which include a) context, b) curriculum work required by students, and c) “the episodes which arise to point up crises, tension points, opportunities for encounters and to enable the ‘intelligence of feeling’ to make the learning memorable and important” (Heathcote, 2008). The latter helps to build understanding of context through, as Heathcote explains, “‘safe adventures’, tensions to be explored, story, and plot lines to be woven into the enterprise and resolved in dramatic encounters” (2008). Curriculum work arises from tasks that students complete within the pretense of the drama. This work can take many forms - it might be research shared through the creation of posters, writing contributions in the form of letters or reports, or responding in role to investigate perspective. While the Scugog River/LandForms Projects take inspiration from Heathcote’s Commission Model in particular, the levels of thought and action/purpose that Heathcote articulates as part of the Teaching Cycle and Mantle of the Expert are integral to the drama work pursued in the work of this study.

2.3.3 *Drama inquiry and the world outside of the classroom: The Commission Model*

An extension of Mantle of the Expert is Heathcote’s Commission Model in which the provocation or theme of the drama work originates from a real-world concern, issue, or challenge that students take up as commissioners. A notable example of the Commission Model in action is Heathcote’s design project with students from Queen

Elizabeth High School in the U.K., wherein students were tasked with devising a concept for the Hexham Hospital Memorial Gardens in 2003 (Heathcote, 2003, p. 17). The class was led through writing, discussion, exploration of perspective through drama, research, and design tasks, and were ultimately divided into teams of commissioners. These teams devised their garden designs, participated in consultations with senior commissioners, and conducted presentations of their final designs with the actual Hexham Hospital committee. Heathcote enumerated key principles of the Commission Model as follows:

1. Throughout the work we carry our ‘client’ in our heads
2. There will be no pupil talk or teacher talk, but instead shared power and responsibility
3. Time scales matter
4. There is no curriculum map. Study and learning needs are determined as the commission is moved along and inevitably several curricular connections and learning needs will become evident as the project progresses.
5. The tasks are formulated by the needs of the commission
6. Personal whims regarding ordering of study must be set aside so that the commission drives the learning
7. All work resulting from every task will be placed ‘in the bank’ as currency to be re-used and developed
8. Nothing in the room will be static, but rebuilt to serve individual tasks
9. The commission model demands openness to each other’s contributions (Heathcote, 2003, p. 3)

The principle referring to time scales mattering relates to the idea that intervals between sessions in which students work on the commission impact how the project unfolds. The time available to devote to the commission in terms of duration of the classes and time between these classes may require different scaffolding by the teacher and may impact the time available for the process of exploration. The real-world circumstances on which the commission is based can remain “domestic” and contained to resources and the help of contributors from within the school or, as with the Hexham commission, can be real-time commissions that “require ‘delicate’ ventures involving people outside” of the school community (Heathcote, 2002, p. 12).

While both pedagogical scenarios (within the school or the outside community) make use of the same processes, commissions in real-time and circumstance carry with them specific timelines and the complexity of engaging with stakeholders outside of the school. Working with partners outside of the class with whom and for whom the commission is completed adds a layer to this work that is in service to others, which “provides a sense of authenticity and responsibility for students, for there are clients to be consulted and their precise needs taken into account” (Heathcote, 2003, p. 16). The heightened stakes of responsibility in this case also intensify the importance of each student having meaningful work to contribute to the whole. In this Model, valuing the uniqueness of each contribution and contributor is paramount, and as Heathcote notes, elicits offerings from students who have not previously been, or seen themselves, as contributors (2003, p. 18).

In the Commission Model, what students need to know, and what they research and examine, evolves with the project such that “the commission drives the learning” as well as the drama making (Heathcote, 2003, p. 18). Topics and perspectives of interest

to students are also an essential driver of the learning and devising, which means that there are considerable ‘unknowns’ that only become clear once the work is begun. Commission Model learning concludes with the realization of a “published” final product, the form of which may be a presentation, a report, or, as in the case of the Scugog River/LandForms Projects, a performance (Heathcote, 2002, p. 9; Heathcote, 2003, p. 6). In the Scugog River/LandForms Projects, the integration of real material such as facts, statistics, stories, history, and objects, paired with the job of creating a drama to be shared with younger students, borrowed from the ‘real-ness’ on which MoE depends for student investment, and pushed it into the world outside of the classroom in both process and product.

The language of Dorothy Heathcote’s Commission Model presents some challenges to a pedagogical approach that aims to decolonize. The Model itself adopts business concepts in framing the students as ‘commissioners’ who work in service to a ‘client’, which is problematic in that the terminology could be seen to imply a type of worker-training within a corporate structure. Underlying Mantle of the Expert and the Commission Models, however, is a non-hierarchical approach that relies on sharing power, and building community, which requires the collaborative work of students towards a common goal (Heathcote, 2002, pp. 1, 4; Heathcote, 2010, p. 1). Heathcote’s respect for children as thinking contributors who require agency is foundational to her approach and informs her view that schooling has transformative power to teach students about grace, participation, and responsibility to others in hands-on ways, both in and outside of school (Heathcote, 2009, p. 9). Her models value relationality and listening, and are based in responsible accountability - concepts that I suggest align well with decolonizing pedagogy (Heathcote, n.d.). As I will discuss in the Indigenous

methodology section below, the notion of responsibility to which Heathcote refers, compliments what Hughes, Wilson, and Barlo term “relational accountability” (2023, p.510; Wilson, 2008, p.97).

Although the terminology and worker/business focus of the Commission Model may reflect the culture and time in which it was devised in ways that present difficulties, in this Model and in other writing, Heathcote’s thinking continues to have intrinsic importance and speak to concerns in education that are ongoing. Heathcote’s critique that in education “we work on clocks, not on learning times” is as true today as it was in 1991 when she forwarded the idea that students require a period of exploring ideas and stimuli without evaluation or penalty, and that this time can lead to greater investment in their subsequent work by piquing curiosity (Midland Actors Theatre, 2024, 5:39). Heathcote’s Teaching Cycle notes that observation is an integral part of the trial exploration time wherein teachers can assess student work and differentiate instruction according to students’ interests and needs; a concept that teachers continue to grapple with today. Other key ideas in Heathcote’s pedagogy that are reflected in current efforts in education include her focus on action and experiential learning, as well as the belief that in order for students to engage authentically in their learning, they must find their work of interest and of value (Cornell University, 2025; Howell, R, 2021). These examples, and many others not included here, illustrate how Heathcote’s approach continues to be instructive, particularly in the areas of student engagement and conceiving of the classroom as a place of learning “how to be in the world with others” (Garrett, 2017, p. 13).

Building upon offerings from students requires skill on behalf of the educator to see how moments that arise from drama activities can play a pivotal role in the work as

a whole. This pedagogical approach also requires that teachers have a strong understanding of curriculum expectations and the ability to apply drama strategies and manoeuvre deftly with changing focuses as they emerge. This observation is shared by Gain and Aitken who write,

> In the case of Mantle of the Expert's spaces for play, teachers need to learn to notice, recognize, and respond effectively to participants as they drive their play forward, and encourage them to test their thinking against the variety of experiences, perspectives, and viewpoints that exist in the learning group. (Gain and Aitken, 2022, p. 114)

Identifying when key moments emerge in drama work and how they may come to define the focus of the groups' work through inquiry is discussed with more granular consideration of inquiry in the following section.

2.3.4 *Active and performative inquiry*

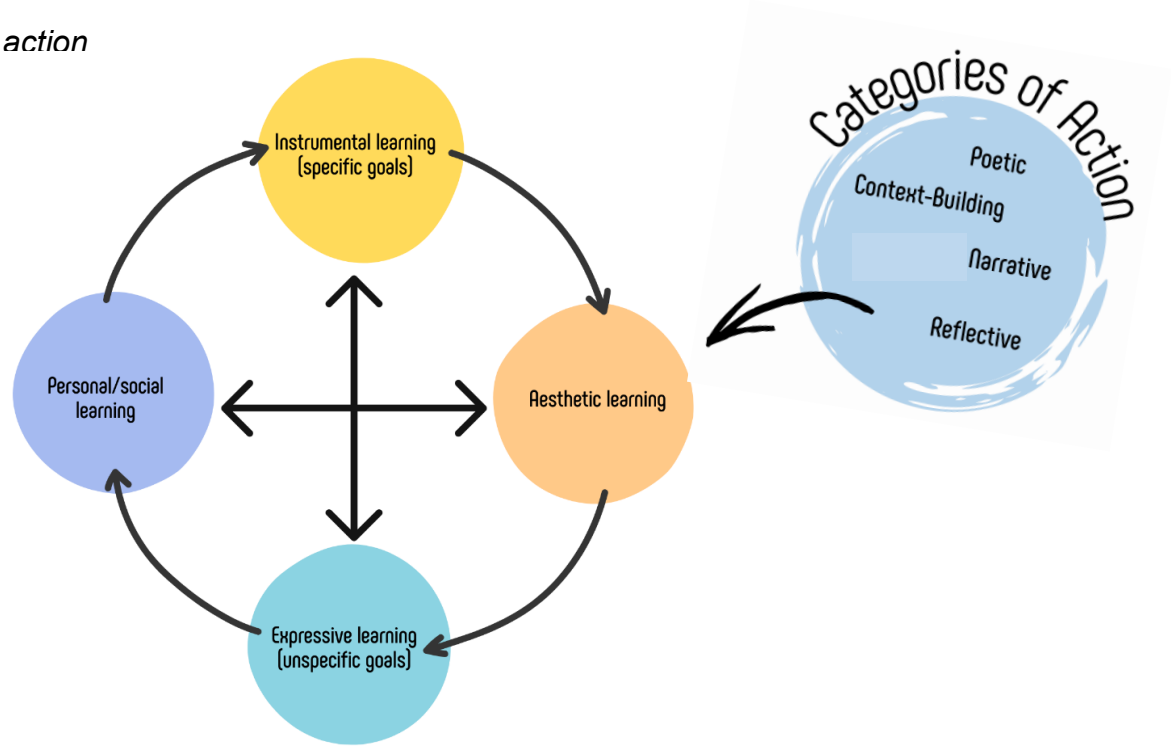
Aligning with Heathcote's methodology, Jonothan Neelands proposes that active inquiry is a cyclical process by which we return again and again to seek meaning and "rediscover new depths in the material in focus" (O'Connor, 2010, p. 25). He identifies two key stages in active inquiry, the first of which is engagement with source material in order to establish the topic or issue that will be investigated through drama. The second is the transition to applying drama conventions in order to deepen the inquiry and communicate learning. This first stage of interrogating the source for initial potential meaning, context, personal and social issues, curiosities, and questions lays the groundwork and sparks the inspiration for the directions in which the drama inquiry will proceed (O'Connor, 2010, p. 26). In the second stage of active inquiry, the work of

building student commitment and classroom culture takes place at the same time as various drama conventions are applied to shape the action of the drama. Agreements about how to proceed with the drama work and establishing, and adhering to, norms for how to engage are also key components. In this framework, the improvised drama moments (through role-play, for example) that occur prompt both the teacher and the students to identify new meaning, deepen understanding, and/or see a perspective or aspect of the issue which previously had gone unnoticed. Neelands' articulation of active inquiry also extends to the aesthetic/artistic decisions that the group makes in what drama conventions to use and how, if and when there will be group moments or solo moments, and the impact of those decisions on the group's intention for drama.

Intentionality is central in the teacher's guidance of active inquiry towards various specific educational/learning objectives. The model offered here (see Figure 2) provides a simplified version of Neelands' conceptualization of the types of objectives and

Figure 2

Elements of Jonothan Neelands' Objectives and intentions for learning and categories of action



intentions for learning that may be in play at various points of instruction, outlining focuses of learning that are Instrumental, Aesthetic, Expressive, or Personal/social (O'Connor, 2010, pp. 32-33). In the cyclical and multidirectional framework, Neelands also outlines Context-building, Narrative, Poetic, and Reflective "Categories of Action" that the teacher may use to achieve the intended learning goals (O'Connor, 2010, p. 33). His approach requires critical reflection by the educator both in the active moment and "from the cool distance of 'after the events'" (Booth, 1994, pp. 14-15). The skill to reflect critically in the instructional moment and in hindsight depends on identifying what Lyn Fels (expanding on the work of David Applebaum, 1995) refers to as 'stops' (Fels, 2012, p. 51). In her discussion of performative inquiry, Fels connects Applebaum's 'stop' to drama in education work, elaborating on his notion of the stop as "a moment of risk, a moment of opportunity" (Fels, 2012, p. 51). Fels presents a child's tug on her sleeve as a metaphor through which the stop is part of performative inquiry in that it represents "embodied data for pedagogical exploration" (2012, p. 53). The stop is a moment of recognition of the learning of and meaning made by students as they wonder aloud or offer an instance, through role-play, that invites further inquiry. Applebaum writes that stops "arrest the attention," exposing fresh ground, that compels us to a more acute awareness and that in such moments there is a "shift from passivity to activity to face the unknown" (Applebaum,1995, pp. 53, 81).

Fels draws attention to the embodied nature of learning in drama and in performative inquiry, observing that 'stops,' "invite us to pause and reflect on the pedagogical significance of such moments for our work, for our relationships with others, for who we are in the world" (p. 51). A stop, she goes on to say, requires action and response, sometimes in ways that "may make us uncomfortable, throw us off

balance in an unfamiliar (or feared) landscape, and yet, we must choose to engage" (p. 54). Drama strategies and performance are ways of knowing in performative inquiry because they create the potential for perspectives to emerge and situations to unfold in ways that are new and revelatory; practices that I emphasize in the structure of this study.

2.3.5 *Making the familiar strange: panning out and zooming in*

Heathcote maintained that sharing power with students was a key element not only to engaging students, but also to creating a culture of working that decreased the class's dependence on teacher knowledge and increased students' agency as 'knowers' and their ability to think critically (2010, p. 1). She felt that a key principle in establishing this way of learning lay in the distance that was created by the fictional premise of the class's work which had students engage with feelings, thoughts, and circumstances while under the protective guise of the drama. The relational distance, Heathcote felt, "brought the learning into close range" (2010, p. 1). The critical reflection that is required for learning in drama pedagogy draws in part on making the familiar strange. I argue that strangeness can transpire by having students step back (retract) to see more than had previously been visible, and also, that unseen details and nuance are brought into focus and made clear by zooming in and refining the view. In both cases, by drawing nearer or stepping away, we are afforded a different vantage point. Eriksson suggests that "the effect and function of making strange is inherent in creating a sense of wonder" (2011, p. 103). I would add to this notion that wonder is a variant of the tension required to make drama compelling. What makes us lean in, causes us to be curious, to want to play out the drama, try on the role, engage with a different perspective to see what

happens and what can be learned, are actions provoked by the creation of tension and presence of wonder. These are ideas the propel the Projects detailed here, and I would argue, are aspirational goals whenever we engage in drama pedagogy.

Distancing in theatre is often associated with Brecht and the Verfremdungseffekt (estrangement effect) of creating greater awareness and critical thought in the audience by implementing devices (narration, projection, song, keeping lighting instruments in plain sight) that disrupted passive spectatorship (Bradley, 2025, p. 7). The underlying idea of distancing, or estrangement, in drama pedagogy serves to enhance awareness, draw attention to what is absent, and, from an aesthetic perspective, consider how individual elements work on one another in theatre making to reveal meaning. This stepping back occurs when pedagogical approaches involve interrogating assumptions, examining issues and hearing stories from the vantage point of different stakeholders (both human and non-human).

In contrast, the familiar can also be rendered strange by bringing small details into focus and taking time to look carefully in order to heighten and deepen perception. This kind of strange-making can occur, for example, when a drama strategy isolates a moment from a scene, turns it into a tableau image, and asks each performer in the tableau to share a question, worry, or hope, that their character might have in that moment. It can also come from encounters with “difficult knowledge” in learning about history that is unfamiliar (Pitt and Britzman, 2003, p. 756). The encounter with new knowledge, especially when it is paired with an experiential moment, transforms the familiar into something new, which in turn renders thinking more complex. This methodology is integrated into the Scugog River/LandForms Projects and is discussed in the chapters to come.

Slow pedagogy, as Payne and Wattchow write, “can be characterised as a multi-layered experience of time(s) ‘presenced’ in a certain socio-environmental location and locale, or place” (2008, p. 35). Coming from their perspective as post-traditional outdoor education researchers, Payne and Wattchow connect ‘slowness’ with the desire to create opportunities for learning whereby “the experiential qualities of the place and its natures...strongly attend to the received lived experiences of our meaning-making bodies ... and their perceptions and sense of what is afforded” (p. 35). In her book *Slow Looking*, Shari Tishman describes a slow pedagogy wherein learning how to look carefully generates critical reflection in a specific way. Tishman articulates the opportunity slow looking creates for observing complexity and creating “a space for the multiple dimensions of things to be perceived and appreciated” (2018, p. 7). Slow and careful looking provides contrast to the fast pace with which we usually take in information and render judgements. The effect of this contrast being, that slow looking, “foregrounds the capacity to observe details, to defer interpretation, to make careful discernments, to shift between different perspectives, to be aware of subjectivity, and to purposefully use a variety of observation strategies in order to move past first impressions” (Tishman, 2018, p. 6). The strange-making of slow and careful observation of Land and of performance, alters the frame, expands understanding, and complicates the view. As Tishman also notes, slow looking generates intrinsic engagement: “the more you look, the more you see; the more you see, the more engaged you become” (p. 3).

2.3.6 *Land-based learning and the Arts*

Because little research has been conducted into Land-based drama pedagogies in particular, I have provided in these brief final pages of the literature review, some context through adjacent research areas that combine Land- or place-based pedagogies and the Arts. Pedagogies based in learning outdoors and teacher training that incorporates learning on Land are largely found in subject areas such as outdoor education, physical education, geography, Indigenous studies, and environmental science (Wolf, C., Kunz, P., & Robin, N., 2022). A review of literature that integrates place- and Land-based pedagogy with the *Arts* reveals that, in many cases, the Arts are present as a means of supporting learning across the curriculum, often in environmental science, outdoor education, and, more recently, sustainability education. Some specific examples include:

- Outdoor adventure programs that involve students creating visual art or dance expressions of their experiences to inspire greater feelings of care for the environment (Gray and Birrell, 2015);
- Environmental visual art installations on the health of bees or the plight of birds in urban environments used to build students' ecological literacy about local environmental issues through visual art (Inwood, 2016);
- Using teacher and student 'in role' to examine local environmental issues from different perspectives (McNaughton, 2007).

The above examples and others demonstrate various cross-curricular ways to effectively engage students through an affective Arts experience that interweaves environmental science content knowledge with artistic expression. The seamless integration of the Arts across subject areas, especially in sustainability education,

reflects an interest to diminish divisiveness and disrupt siloed approaches to learning in pursuit of “cultivating cultures of sustainability” (Trott et al., 2020, p. 1068). This aim moves Arts-integration beyond its usefulness as a delivery modality by which to share and mobilize completed understanding, to serve instead as a pedagogical approach through which students continue to grapple with their understanding, engaged in the Creative Process for the “purpose of envisioning and enacting alternative futures” (Trott et al., 2020, p. 1071). In so doing, students may also perceive themselves and their stories as part of the landscape, for, as Belarie Zatzman has observed, “Drama education has the capacity to situate participants between history and memory, offering a process for constructing and rehearsing our own identities among the narratives of others, present and past” (Zatzman, 2011, p. 105). The Scugog River/LandForms Projects align with the latter approach by having students experience and learn about Land locally while also deepening learning and expanding their discovery through drama pedagogy.

Land-based learning that integrates drama pedagogy is different from science and sustainability-oriented pedagogies, though these areas of knowledge contribute to learning about Land. Because Land-based pedagogy centres on culturally, historically, and territorially specific Indigenous knowledge of Land, its application within a drama context poses important challenges that disrupt traditional drama conventions. Representation in role and how drama strategies work to examine perspectives must be carefully considered in order to avoid both appropriation of voice as well as tokenization (CODE, 2020). Consultation and partnership with Indigenous partners in executing work concerning Indigenous knowledge is also essential in Land-based pedagogy. Student learning and pedagogical approaches that engage with these elements have not been

well studied and represent gaps in current research. This study endeavours to learn more about how Land-based learning impacts drama pedagogy, and how this type of learning might inform a reimagining, or realignment, of drama strategies. The following section explains the methodological approach of this study and as well as the research design used.

3 Methodology and research design

This chapter provides an overview of the research questions that this study explored and presents the methodological approaches of the inquiry. The second part of the chapter presents the research design and methods in detail. Limitations of the study, validity, and assumptions are also examined.

3.1 Research questions

The purpose of this study is to examine drama students' experience in locally situated, Land-based drama Projects that include experiential, collaborative, and performative modes of learning. The study endeavours to contribute new knowledge to the seldom combined research areas of drama pedagogy, Land-based pedagogy, community and belonging. Specifically, the research questions The Scugog River and LandForms Projects seek to address include:

- How is the learning experience of students impacted when it is situated on the Land they occupy and takes place in outdoor spaces?
- What impact does drama-focused, Land-based pedagogy have on students' feelings of connectedness and belonging to their classroom, school, or local communities?
- How does working with local partners impact student learning?
- What understandings of the Land, human history, and themselves do students take away from a drama focused, Land-based learning experience?

- What is the experience of students when they share their knowledge through drama, specifically with younger students or peers?

This qualitative study examined the above questions through specific pedagogical and inquiry strategies, triangulating varied sources of information for analysis. Methodological approaches that inform the Scugog River/LandForms Projects are discussed in the following sections and include decolonizing and Indigenous methodology, embodied decolonization and walking/traversing as methodology, classroom ethnography, and Arts-based methodology.

3.2 Decolonizing and Indigenous methodologies

In this study, decolonizing approaches to teaching, learning, and research are based on building relationships, acting reciprocally, and critically examining colonial power structures with the aim of dismantling them (Campbell-Chudoba, 2024, p. 7). The commitment to engage with decolonizing methodology in this work also involves centring Land and Indigenous knowledge through outdoor experiential learning, integrating teachings from local partners, and conducting independent research into local human and ecological histories. The Projects profiled here recognize the interconnection of humans with Land, are collaborative in process and product, and carry the responsibility of engaging with difficult histories and Indigenous knowledge in truthful, informed ways, with care.

Hughes, Wilson, and Barlo discuss “relational accountability” as an integral part of an Indigenist methodology, which aligns with the idea of responsibility (2023, p. 510; Wilson, 2008, p. 97). Like Hughes, though I am a non-Indigenous researcher who does not claim an Indigenous worldview, I centre “a commitment to participate in a relational

framework, engage respectfully with Indigenous Knowledge and Indigenous Peoples, and do the ongoing work of learning," specifically, learning about building relations that observe local protocols and demonstrate cultural awareness and responsibility (2023, p. 510). As Sean Wilson writes, relational accountability means upholding relationships with "ourselves, the community, our environment or cosmos as a whole, and also to the idea or topics that we are researching" while respecting the unfolding of learning as a process with a high degree of contextual specificity (2008, pp. 106, 118).

Margaret Kovach brings relationality into conversation with reflexivity and abductive reasoning in Indigenous methodology, explaining that as a methodological stance, "abduction bridges observation, instinct, and experience. Because of its experiential basis, it allows for a holistic way of knowing" (2021, p.34). It is useful here to speak briefly about abductive reasoning as a framing concept for the collage of methodological approaches, research design, and analysis that are assembled in this study. Abduction resides alongside deductive and inductive analysis, but is distinct in part, for its sensitivity to complex relationships that contribute to meaning making and knowledge creation. Research informed by Indigenous methodologies remains open to "a number of possible explanations for the phenomenon" that are observed and experienced, which supports an abductive approach to analysis (Kovach, 2021, p. 34). Sandoval-Hernández and Rutkowski point out that abduction allows for unexpected relationships and complex factors to inform explanatory hypotheses that "account for the nuanced and context-dependent nature of instructional practices and their effects" (Sandoval-Hernández and Rutkowski, 2025, pp. 255, 265). Moreover, abductive methodology "emphasizes research as an iterative process, with insights continuously

sharpened through the interplay of data and theory," existing knowledge, and experience (Ramesh and Howlett, 2025, p. 356).

Some critics of abductive reasoning suggest that its divergence from methodologies that claim definitive 'proof', demand reproducibility, and profess objectivity, represent limitations in abductive approaches (Sandoval-Hernández and Rutkowski, 2025, p. 266). I would suggest these goals are problematic to decolonizing qualitative research in education, and privilege positivistic methodologies that are exclusionary and limiting. "Being open to and then embracing surprises, tensions, and doubts" is a reflexive practice embedded in abductive approaches that allows research design and subsequent theorizing to be flexible and responsive; qualities that are part of a critical paradigm (Hulst and Visser, 2025, p. 572). Flexibility was part of the decolonizing approach in this study, and changes were made throughout the project based on feedback, preferences, and circumstances in an effort to be reflective of, and responsive to, student needs. Scaffolding and choices were also provided to limit barriers to participation and invite participants to engage with the work of the Projects in ways that encouraged inclusion.

This study makes space for different ways of knowing to emerge through its integration of multiple places of learning, pedagogical approaches, and opportunities to express knowledge in varied ways. For example, participants are invited to bring their stories and histories into their drama work, contributing their own relations to the collective. Students also apply drama conventions collaboratively to create a performance in which they share their knowledge with younger students or peers through story. The integration of story in the research of the Projects and in the expression of student learning demonstrates the value of narrative as a way of knowing

and of transmitting knowledge to others. Moreover, as Kovach asserts, “qualitative inquiry is an approach to research that tells a story through words not numbers. It is story interpreted from experience with an aim of offering further insight into human experience from human experience” (Kovach 2021, p. 24).

Reciprocity as a practice of relationality in Indigenous methodology strengthens relationships with people, place, and Land. In this respect, the act of researching holds the potential to generate new relationships and strengthen existing ones (Wilson, 2008, p. 119). As Celia Haig-Brown has written, being ‘in relationship with’ and valuing Indigenous knowledge as part of that relationship means valuing “the contemporary knowledge that arises from innumerable generations of people living in relation to a specific land and seeing it as the source of all their relations” (2008, p. 12). The Scugog River/LandForms Projects works in a reciprocal way with local partners, teachers, and students, remaining reflexive and accountable for what and how research is conducted, as well as how that research is shared, honouring Indigenous knowledge, and an “egalitarian, participatory, and community-based” approach (Carlson, 2017, p. 502). The research design section below outlines more specifically how efforts to honour the spirit of reciprocity are made in this work and provides an account of how relationships inform the research strategies used in planning, execution, and in the ensuing analysis of findings.

3.3 Embodied decolonization and walking/traversing as methodology

The Projects of this study include intentional walking experiences as methodology. These embodied encounters with Land and interactions with people create unpredictable sites of learning. Margaret Kovach writes about spaces of knowing

in the context of embodying decolonizing, and highlights Lil'wat pedagogical principles in the work of Lorna Williams which include:

> Acknowledging the energy of the group (Kamúcwkalha); being responsible for one's own learning (Celhcelh); seeking stillness (Kat'il'a); valuing one's own skills and how they contribute to the world beyond self (A7xekcal); recognizing the value of dissonance and uncertainty (Cwelelep); and the role of encouragement in learning (Emhaka7).
>
> (Ritenburg, H. et al, 2014, p. 70; original citation: Sanford, K. et al, 2012, p. 18)

Williams' articulation of the above principles speaks to the relationality of bodies to each other as well as Land, and outlines the role of intentionality in creating 'spaces of knowing' that are inclusive and expansive. This methodology is complementary to the Arts-based methodology also used to conduct this research, and both approaches reflect the importance of relationality and relationships to decolonizing practice.

In their book *Walking methodologies in a more-than-human world*, Stephanie Springgay and Sarah Truman identify place, sensory inquiry, embodiment, and rhythm as recurring concepts in walking methodologies (2018, pp. 4-5). They expand upon these concepts to reflect ethical and political accountability to the more-than-human, including Land and geos, affect, and movement into their theoretical framing of walking as methodology (2018, pp. 4-5). Springgay and Truman write about a walking and art intervention conducted by Hannah Jickling and Helen Reed that "explored artists' investigations into the Canadian landscape" with classes from an elementary school in Toronto along on the Don River (2018, p.115). Digital photographs documented students engaged in various activities using mirrored reflection panels in multiple ways to capture both the environment and the students situated in the environment. The

project created an experience of spending time along the River while engaging in artistic activities that disrupted well known depictions of the outdoor environment as neutral and separate from humans. As Springgay and Turman noted, “New Canadian students and their families don’t often see themselves reflected in Canadian vistas and landscape art, and as such the dominant discourses that separate nature and culture persist” (2018, p. 118). As a methodological approach in this study, walking and engaging in a collective experience in outdoor spaces serves to reframe outdoor spaces as sites of learning as well as what being on Land might mean to individual students.

The Don River project created an opportunity for students to see themselves on Land, literally through their reflection panel art, and in their memory of the embodied experience, which imbued the moment with another layer of meaning. In their discussion, Truman and Springgay highlight Margaret Somerville and Monica Green’s view that “walking-with,” as part of education, possesses an intimacy that “obstructs and contests the dominant Anthropocentric narratives” wherein “intimacy becomes acts that inhere, intervene, and make visible students’ entanglements within landscape” (Springgay and Truman 2018, p. 119). The affective workings of embodied methodology, such as walking, support the decolonization of how students know and learn, and resist the notion of Land, culture, and humans as separate. African-American studies scholar Jasmine L. Harris comments that decolonizing the classroom requires identifying barriers created by content, knowledge creation, and expressions of knowledge that are colonial and white centred, and calls for greater breadth and inclusivity with respect to “what we define as knowledge and who gets to produce knowledge” (2025, pp. 289-290, 303). Reflexive, critical consideration of how students acquire knowledge, as well as what and how they are asked to learn and express their

learning are part of decolonizing practice. This, in turn, can make way for more inclusive knowledge and ways of knowing, such as walking and traversing as an experience of Land and relationships that are informed by Indigenous knowledge. In the Discussion and Analysis section of this dissertation, I will address how accessibility contributes to walking/traversing methodologies in ways of importance for praxis and theory.

3.4 Classroom Ethnography and teacher-researcher

Bloome and Beauchemin write that classroom ethnographic research is distinct from other types of ethnography on account of the particular assemblage of diverse factors that render the classroom a complex space. Classroom ethnography entails the examination of the events and interactions that transpire within the classroom while simultaneously "working to understand how the participants concertedly reflect and refract the multiple social and historical contexts in which they are embedded" (Bloome and Beauchemin, 2018, p. 3). In this study specifically, students, teachers, local partners, and even audience members, bring the vastness of their experience, ideas, and identities to their work and witnessing, while at the same time negotiating and building relationships to new knowledge and new people through their interactions with each other. The ethnographic methods here involve observation and analysis of how students engage with their work and environment (both in the class and on field trips outdoors); the dynamics between peers and between the students and me (their teacher), local partners, and younger students; and the expression of student understanding of their learning through the Creative Process.

I carefully considered whether to invite students from my own classes to participate in this study or to enlist the help of a drama teacher within my school board

who might be willing to take on the project as part of their syllabus. Observing a colleague's class may have been a simpler choice because it would have mitigated the need to integrate my job as a researcher with the pressures and responsibilities of being the classroom teacher. However, in addition to the very small pool of drama teachers in my school board, I was concerned that team teaching would add a layer of complication to the execution of the Projects and would require a greater level of negotiation and time. Given my experience that the community building aspect of drama work is based on rapport developed over time between the students and their teacher, I was skeptical about approaching these Projects as a visitor who would drop in and out of the classes. In retrospect, conducting research as a visitor would have created opportunities to examine the dynamics of community building arising from another teacher's pedagogical approach and rapports, which may have resulted in equally valuable learning. The choice to conduct the study with the students in my own classes was ultimately a fortuitous one because at the scheduled time of the study, no visitors were allowed in any buildings within the school board I worked in as part of COVID-19 health protocols.

My role as the teacher of the drama classes in this study provided an insider (emic) perspective into the development and execution of student work and class discussions. The dual role of "reflective practitioner" and participant-researcher afforded me the benefit of knowing students well, having developed a rapport over the term (Taylor, 1996, p. 27). Being the teacher at the same time as researcher, however, meant that I was also responsible for more than executing a research plan, documenting the process, and making observations. The Scugog River/LandForms Projects represented only a portion of the syllabus that I was required to teach over the

course of the study. Subsequently, the work of the study was part of regular assessment and reporting, and was subject to specific learning and evaluation criteria. Further, addressing attendance, behavioural issues, policing adherence to COVID-19 protocols, and monitoring digital phone use were part of my job as teacher on a daily basis, all of which at times called my attention away from strictly observing and documenting the students throughout the Projects.

This pull between roles nevertheless provided a unique opportunity to experience and document teaching and researching in a face-to-face learning situation during COVID-19. Over the course of the Projects students returned to in-person learning for the first time after an extended period of online learning. The Grade nine participants in the LandForms Project experienced an additional lockdown over the December holiday that caused significant disruption and forced classes online for a period of three weeks. While the impact of changing circumstances due to COVID-19 on this work will be addressed in later chapters, with respect to methodological concerns, the high level of change and disruption during these Projects required regular reconsiderations of methodological and pedagogical approaches.

“Reflection-in-action,” while often practiced by drama teachers, was a recurring part of my effort to document and understand the goings on of the classroom as a researcher (Taylor, 1996, p. 28). In both Projects, ongoing reflection and modifications were necessary to respond productively to changing circumstances and student needs. As Philip Taylor writes, reflective practitioner research entails “a recognition of how one interacts with others, and how others read and are read by this interaction” (1996, p. 27). The unique confluence of teaching and research was also present in maintaining the balance between planned strategy and improvisation in teaching and in

research. As teacher-researcher, the overlapping responsibilities were immediate, and reflected, as Gallagher et al identify, the need to take “into account the ways in which the lived contexts and material realities of participants shape[d] the direction of the methodologies-to-come as part of an emergent metho-pedagogical approach“ (Gallagher et al., 2022, p. 753). In earlier work, Gallagher and Wessels use the term metho-pedagogy to reflect classroom-based ethnographic research, and discuss that while “emergent pedagogy invites the unexpected to interrupt and change the direction of classroom work,” so too can research methodologies work in responsive ways (Gallagher and Wessels, 2011, p. 239). They make the valuable argument that metho-pedagogical approaches require “critical reflexivity” in order to respond in productive ways to “unanticipated and frequently unreported instances of collaboration breakdown that inevitably occur when researchers take up a flexible stance towards fieldwork, entering into the pedagogy of a place and making the most of the real-world unpredictability of a research site” (Gallagher and Wessels, 2011, p. 240). The work of the Projects reflects this responsiveness and critical reflexivity, the results of which are documented in the chapters describing both Projects, and in the Analysis and Discussion chapter.

3.5 Arts-based methodology

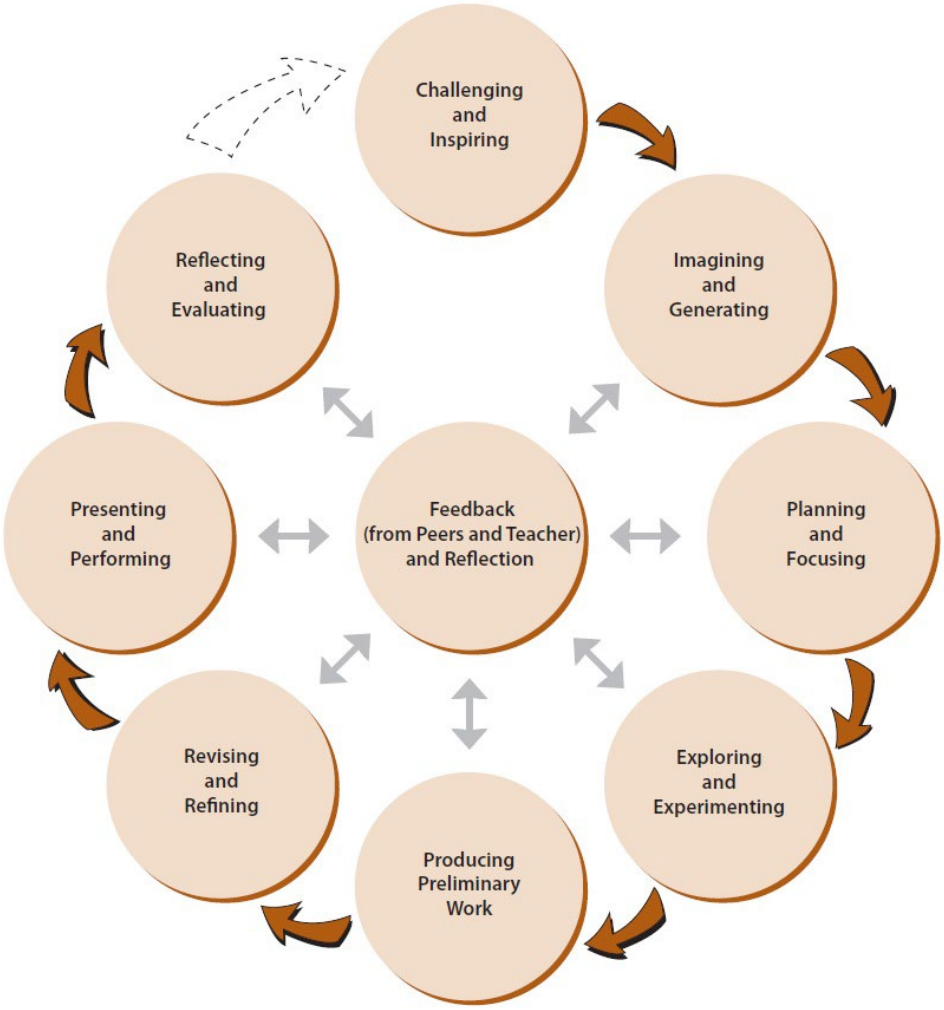
The Arts-based approach of this research methodology involves the examination of process as well as product. This methodology allows for close examination of pedagogical approaches alongside artistic explorations and outcomes generated by students. Arts-based methodology also places weight on gathering and analyzing students’ critical reflections, both in formal and spontaneous, or informal, ways.

The Arts-based methodological approach offered here aims to contribute to research processes that are practical in nature, but that are also informed by frameworks and concepts specific to drama pedagogy. As such, the Creative Process, as a foundational framework for all Arts education in Ontario, guides this work. For the purposes of this study, I will refer to the model of the Creative Process found in the Ontario Arts Curriculum (2010). The Creative Process is a circular, recursive model that begins with a challenge and/or inspiration and ends with reflecting on and evaluating the outcomes and process. Reflection and feedback are at the centre of the model because each is pivotal to discrete steps of the process. Seminal to this model is the notion that there is something of value to be learned at every part of the process and that the relational connection with others through feedback and reflection contribute to the continual development of the work (see Figure 3). The Creative Process allows for changing course and anticipates moments of surprise discovery, broadening or refinement through new learning, and deviation from the planned approach in order to overcome a challenge.

As a compliment to the Creative Process as methodology, this study employs the concept of performative inquiry as outlined by Lyn Fels, Jonothan Neelands' framework for active inquiry, and Dorothy Heathcote's Commission Method as research approaches (Heathcote, 2003; Fels 2012, p. 51; Neelands in O'Connor, 2010, p. 25). While an outline of these concepts and approaches was provided in the previous chapter, this chapter discusses the application of these ideas as methodologies. The drama pedagogy elements that comprise this work use drama as a tool through which

Figure 3

The Creative Process, The Ontario Arts Curriculum (2010)



to both facilitate and express learning, the process of which offers dynamic ways of garnering understanding about student learning, experiences, and their impact. Methodologically, these approaches provide fertile ground for observing student interactions and noting key moments in student learning.

Liora Bresler discusses the power of drama-based embodied research to enhance more traditional forms of qualitative research through drama's different "ways of knowing" (2011, p. 322). As co-creator, teacher, and researcher, I come in and out of different kinds of engagement alongside the students whose roles are also reframed in

the rotation of their responsibilities as researchers, writers, performers, and community discussion facilitators. The complexity of these multiple frames brings with them the unique language of performative inquiry and drama as methodology, which Fells notes "speaks to our way of being in inquiry: possibility, absence, gaps, stop, journey, landscape, mapping in reflection, resonance, realisation, moments of recognition - terms very different from those of data collection, analysis, reliability, validity, generalizability" (Fels, 2012, p. 55 - italics are original). This 'way of being in inquiry' pays attention to the variety of roles in play, different drama conventions in use, participants involved, and the potential depth of meaning and experience that arises from such complexity. Fels' description of 'being in inquiry' compliments the Creative Process in highlighting the abundance of learning opportunities that emerge through engagement with the process and development of drama as well as the importance for the teacher, students, and researcher, to pause and note when they occur.

Fels characterizes performative inquiry as "critical moments that emerge through creative action" (2012, p. 50). As previously noted, she uses the imagery of a child's tug on her sleeve as a metaphor that represents instances when a moment of importance takes place during phases of creating, conversation, and reflection work, that prompt us to stop and dig deeper into what it reveals or illuminates (2012, p. 51). Fels notes that performative inquiry does not offer prescriptive methods or steps, but rather affords "a way of inquiring into what matters as we engage in drama or theatre activities" (2012, p. 51). Performative inquiry from Fels' perspective "embodies mindful attention, creative and improvisational interactions, and reflection" (2012, p. 51). These components of performative inquiry are reflected in the research design (see below) of the Projects profiled here. The information derived from the Projects are examined with care to "to

illuminate, interrupt, and interrogate the environment, contexts (social, cultural, political, economical, geographical), and habits of engagement that shape our performance in relationship with others on the stage, in rehearsal, during creative play, and in our lives" (Fels, 2012, p. 53).

Much like Fel's concept of performative inquiry, Jonothan Neelands' application of active inquiry as a methodological approach is open-ended and remains flexible in response to students' engagement and offerings. Doreen Massey's concept of "throwntogetherness" is one that applies well to active inquiry, descriptive of the diverse assemblages of the classes involved and how their Projects present the "challenge of negotiating a here-and-now," implicating people, Land, and their "stories-so-far" into each other's existence (Massey, 2005, pp. 283, 285). Needlands' approach counts on the specific pedagogical objectives, chosen material and categories of action to provoke and inspire students' contribution and engagement. The pedagogical choices and responsiveness of the teacher therefore become an important part of the analysis of the Projects. Active inquiry was used throughout the Scugog River and LandForms Projects to ensure that students' interests drove the focus and content of the material to a significant degree. Various activities from research to role play revealed layers of complexity or new avenues of interest to explore, in keeping with Neelands' belief that active inquiry allows students to "discover the questions and issues which are relevant to their needs and level of experience" (Neelands in O'Connor, 2010, p. 25). The voices, creative work, reflections, and participation of students also reflect the influence of experiences with local partners, partner teachers, and students. The diversity of student perspective along with the multiplicity of experiences and expressions of learning in the Projects created the possibility for observing nuance in learning and in meaning. As

Kathleen Gallagher writes, “the more differently positioned eyes there are, the more complete the picture” (2000, p. 15).

Performative and active inquiry provide qualitative data in this work and reveal information about student thinking and interpretations, while also allowing for observation of students’ engagement with the Creative Process as an ensemble and as individuals. As a model focused on collaboration, self-direction, drafting and revisiting, Dorothy Heathcote’s Commission Model worked in concert with the Creative Process, performative, and active methodologies, to reveal new knowledge. Finally, based on work in service to others, the Commission Model created opportunities to witness and understand students’ work as part of a classroom community.

3.6 Methods and sources of analysis

Marcus Mauss writes in *Manual of Ethnography*, “Do not believe you know just because you have seen” (2007, p.8). Heeding this advice, the research methods in this study have aimed to gather material in different forms and from multiple sources. These observations were captured through field notes, photography (both mine and that of students), audio and video recording as well as analysis of students’ creative work (soundscape, drama activities, visual art, writing, performance), reflective writing, and interviews. These varied methods of collecting information, or data, allowed for a fulsome triangulation of material falling into three categories: interviews and written student reflections, students’ artistic outputs and research, and participation and interactions in class. My observations as witness to student work and their learning is complemented by students’ observations and thoughts about their experiences, their own work and that of their peers, as well as partner teachers’ thoughts and observations

of the drama students' work and its reception. My observations and thoughts about my experiences within the Projects have been captured through reflective journal entries and notes within lesson plans.

One-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with three students from the senior class. I conducted a joint interview between myself and two grade nine students as well as a one-on-one interview with the third student from the grade nine class. The students were chosen to interview based on their indicated willingness to be interviewed on their consent forms and because they responded to a follow up email after the course was completed to confirm they were still interested in speaking with me about their experiences. The interviews took place several weeks after the drama Projects had concluded in one of the school's drama rooms during the lunch hour or after school (see Appendix C for Interview protocols). Students who were interviewed were given ten-dollar gift cards to a local eatery as thanks for their time and the contribution of their insights and observations. These interviews were filmed and transcribed. Interviews with students were coded to identify repeating key words, themes, and sub-themes and to isolate trends as well as recurring, or outlier responses (see Appendix D). The written reflections of study participants in both Projects were similarly coded for inclusion in the broader analysis (see Appendix D). Interviews were also conducted with the partner teachers and local partners involved in the Projects. These interviews were recorded and transcribed as well.

My observations of, and reference to, students and partner teachers makes use of pseudonyms in consideration of confidentially that is part of professional practice in education. I wanted my documentation of the Projects to protect the risk taking and process of learning that, while not private, is also not public. The names of the three

local partners involved in the Projects and their organizations held a different place in the documentation of this work, and I felt it was important to recognize their insights and perspectives by identifying them by their names.

3.7 Limitations

Lauren Tynan writes that Land, or “Country” as she prefers, “reframes the lessons we expect to learn” (2021, p. 599). Reflective of Indigenous knowledge, Tynan’s conception of Country is as animate being who teaches and to whom we can listen and learn. She explains that,

> …as teacher, Country taught me that despite the deadlines and fieldwork timeframes in research, to work with a relational ethos means responding and *listening* to Country, and her timeframes; a lesson that can be applied to other contexts and Peoples too. (Tynan, 2021, p. 599.)

Weather and health compelled a ‘re-framing’ of different elements of this study. While the core methodology and methods remained in play as much as possible, the circumstances in which they were executed were impacted by limitations imposed on interactions and the school environment. These changes, while altering the process and outcomes to varying degrees, did provide an opportunity to observe drama pedagogy during an historic moment in time which led to important findings.

My experience and knowledge of Land-based pedagogy was just beginning during the time the study was conducted. My education and learning in the years since the Projects have afforded me greater confidence in working with students alongside Indigenous educators to engage with Land-based pedagogy and Indigenous knowledge. Decolonizing, working in relation, exposure to Indigenous teachings, and

experience as a teacher are long term endeavours. As a non-Indigenous teacher with novice level experience in Land-based pedagogy, I was at the early stage of developing entry-points to this work and language with which to talk about colonial and Indigenous histories. This lack of experience impacted my effectiveness in responding improvisationally in different moments out of fear that I misstep. This situation is common in any area of new learning, but is especially important to discuss in the context of teachers extending their practice to address gaps in their own knowledge in the areas of Indigenous knowledge and (de)colonization, or indeed, material concerning any traditionally marginalized groups to which they cannot claim membership.

Julie Salverson writes that while educators should avoid being tourists in their efforts to practice decolonizing pedagogy, that apprehension surrounding making mistakes should not prevent efforts from being made. Salverson points out that “the other side of rushing in to fix it is to be too afraid to rush at all” (Salverson, 2006, p.151). Brulé and Koleszar-Green assert that despite possibly “feeling immobilized by a lack of knowledge, it is up to non-Indigenous peoples to acknowledge that colonialism is an ongoing reality and to take responsibility for the role they can play on the journey to reconciliation” (2018, p. 113). I propose that for educators, this means conducting research to learn more, reaching out for guidance, and moving forward while treading lightly. As educators we model lifelong learning for our students which entails correcting missteps and remaining open to what lessons there are to (un)learn, despite uncertainty.

3.8 Research design

In this section I will outline the design of the two Projects of the study and delineate the activities that took place at different stages and which generated the material for analysis. I will also elaborate on the characteristics of the participant groups who were involved, which include drama student participants, partner teachers, and local partners.

3.8.1 *Two Projects*

This study was conducted with the two classes I was assigned as part of my teaching timetable for the 2021-2022 school year. Project I was conducted with a four-way split class of thirteen grade eleven and twelve students, covering two curricula (Ontario Ministry of Education Drama and International Baccalaureate Theatre (IB)) over forty-seven days in a 'quadmester' format. Project II was conducted with an open level class of twenty-eight grade nine students over forty-two days. In an effort to control COVID-19 exposure points, during this time, students and staff were cohorted such that students attended only two classes a day in a schedule termed a quadmester. The course delivery schedule in a quadmester meant that the classes of both Projects were one hundred and fifty minutes long, everyday, for forty-seven days (Project I) and forty-two days (Project II) instead of one seventy-five-minute period everyday for four months. The condensed delivery time of the course put significant pressure on teachers and students alike to move swiftly through the syllabus. The unusual circumstances in which these Projects were executed are examined in chapters to come.

The first Project in this study was titled The Scugog River Project because the focus of work was the Scugog River, a local water way that runs through the town in

which I teach. After studying student reflection writing and recordings from this initial Project, I made adjustments to the second Project, whereby we continued our investigation of the Scugog River, but also placed focus on Land the students traversed each day on their way to school, as well as the places they live. The Scugog River Project refers to Project I, conducted with the grade eleven and twelve class in October and November of 2021, and Project II refers to the second Project, entitled LandForms, conducted with the grade nine class over November, December, January of 2021/2022. LandForms is the name that the grade nine class arrived at in deciding on a title for their performance. It is particularly apt, given that their work investigated Land near them and reflected how Land had formed them in various ways.

3.8.2 *Participants*

3.8.2.1.1 High School Students

Project I class was comprised of thirteen students from a grade eleven and twelve four-way split class of IB (five students) and Ontario curriculum students (eight students). Of this group of thirteen students, a third (four students) served as participants. The Project II class was an open level grade nine class with twenty-eight students, of which more than three quarters (twenty-three students) served as participants. These classes represented a range of learners. In each class there were students with individual education plans (IEPs) addressing a diversity of needs, students who struggled with food security and housing, students from wealthy households, students who identified as male, female, transgender, or fluid, LGBTQ+ students, and students with disabilities. Each class also had students with varying

interest in drama as a subject: some students were deeply invested, while others were reluctant drama students who were mainly concerned with acquiring an art credit.

The study took place in a rural school composed largely of Caucasian students whose first, and often only, language is English. The school population is roughly eleven hundred students. Some of the students in the classes of the study were new to the local surroundings, province, and/or country with few family ties, while others had a long, multi-generational history in the area. For the duration of the courses involved in the study, some students self-identified as Indigenous through their own wish to share with the class. One student self-identified as Indigenous during an interview when the Project had been completed. It was essential during this work to avoid placing students who self-identified as Indigenous in the position of feeling they had to represent or speak for all Indigenous people. With this in mind, discussions were carefully navigated to avoid placing students who self-identified in uncomfortable and unfair situations.

An important ethical concern in conducting ethnographic research within my own classroom was to ensure that students did not feel undue pressure to participate in the research. Letters of Assent and Consent were provided to all students and their parents after I provided an explanation of the research project, outlining students' opportunity to be involved in the study to the extent that they wished. The participants in the study remained unknown to me until the course was complete. The process of managing consent forms that were returned involved a student volunteer from both classes collecting consent forms while I stood outside the class. The student volunteer then delivered the forms to my department head who retained them until the end of the quadmester. I was not aware of which students had agreed to participate in the study

until the marks for each course were submitted. Although this strategy presented some limitations for the data, film, and photography that I have been able to use as part of this work, by having a third party collect the Letters of Assent and Consent, I avoided a situation in which students may have felt coerced to participate. Students whose parents requested their child not take part in the research are neither identifiable in film, photographs, or digital products, nor is their individual work cited in the analysis, or included in the data. Students whose parents did not wish for them to participate in the research still remained meaningfully engaged in all aspects of the class project, as the Project was part of the regular course syllabus. Within this work, observations referencing ‘students’ refer to participant students collectively.

As mentioned above, students did not receive remuneration for consent to participate in the study, as the Project work was part of their course syllabus. The fifteen-minute semi-structured interviews that were conducted with participating students from both classes took place between April 6th and May 24th, 2022, several weeks after students’ course was completed. Further information about interviews will be discussed in the Project chapters. The Interview Protocols can be found in Appendix C.

3.8.2.1.2 Local Partners

Three local partners took part in this research and visited my classes over the period from October to December 2021: Jack Hoggarth of Trent University and Curve Lake First Nation, local historian, writer, and museum studies specialist, Ian McKechnie, and Brett Trugunno, Aquatic Biologist at Kawartha Conservation. Two teachers from my school board also participated, joining my class with their students for virtual

performances and, in the case of Project II, collaborating alongside my drama students. Dave Mowat, former Chief of Alderville First Nation, provided knowledge of local Land and history over many years of one-on-one meetings with me, which has informed my learning and that of students. I will outline specific meetings with Jack Hoggarth, Ian McKechnie, Brett Trugunno, as well as the partner teachers and their classes below, and in the Project descriptions in the chapters to come.

My learning and experience over the past several years surrounding Indigenous history and knowledge, especially in classroom settings, has taught me the importance of building and respecting relationships with Indigenous Knowledge-Keepers and Elders and in so doing, modelling respectful relations that don't end when the field trip or project is over (Kovach, 2021, p. 241). This approach has proved to be a meaningful way to approach all connections that are made both within the classroom and outside of it. It has been my intention to be thoughtful in reaching out to local partners, especially from Indigenous communities, and to make efforts to ensure these relationships remain reciprocal.

The approach of the Projects was to balance student-directed, teacher-supported inquiry into the ecological, Indigenous, and colonial histories of local Land, with knowledge shared with us by local partners who visited our class. While it is preferable to have an Indigenous person share history and conduct teachings, there is considerable ongoing demand for Indigenous Knowledge-Keepers and Elders by non-Indigenous educators to come into the classroom and share teachings and knowledge (Koleszar-Green, 2019, p. 77). While this demand may point to an increased understanding and desire to create authentic relations with Indigenous Knowledge-Keepers and Elders, it also represents an opportunity to articulate the need for teachers

and students to conduct their own education in responsible ways, such that the responsibility for learning about colonialism does not reside solely with Indigenous people. While Indigenous cultural teachings should be shared by Indigenous Knowledge-Holders or Elders, there is much learning that can, and should, transpire in classrooms in advance of, and alongside Indigenous local partners who visit the class. Students in this study participated in site visits on the Scugog River, conducted their own research into Land near them, learned about the purpose and meaning of Land acknowledgements, reflected on their own connection and responsibilities to Land, and developed a class or personal Land acknowledgement. These activities were then complemented with teachings by Jack Hoggarth, who visited each class in the school's outdoor classroom on November 9th and December 2nd, 2021.

My consultation with Jack Hoggarth about this study began in the spring of 2020 as a continuation of my ongoing communication with Tracey Taylor, Cultural Outreach Coordinator at Curve Lake First Nation. I consulted with Jack Hoggarth about the work of this study at various stages and when he visited our classes he spoke about the specific history of the area and provided teachings around the relationality of humans to Land, and the importance of our responsibility to each other and the Land we occupy. Jack Hoggarth visited the classes I was teaching under the auspices of Curve Lake First Nation Cultural Centre and travelled a significant distance to meet with us; there are no Indigenous Friendship Centres, Indigenous-led community groups, or Reservations closer than an hour away from Lindsay. He received mileage according to Curve Lake Cultural Centre travel protocols as well as a fee set by the Cultural Centre. To cover the cost of Jack Hoggarth's visit I applied for and received special funding from the Trillium Lakelands District School Board Indigenous Education Fund. He also received a

traditional gift of loose tobacco each time he visited, wrapped and presented by a student in the class, in keeping with Anishnaabe tradition in our area. I was also able to interview Jack on November 20th, 2023, at which time I provided him a fifty-dollar honorarium in recognition of his time and a tobacco tie.

I had suggested to Jack Hoggarth early on in our discussions that a reciprocal gesture might include sharing the students' performance and the lesson plans or activities leading up to it, however he suggested that this offering was not as useful for the Cultural Centre as perhaps sharing any new history we might uncover about the Scugog River. We agreed that I would share any new information that we learned about the River, specifically as it related to Indigenous history. Jack Hoggarth also expressed that having students become aware of the history of the Land and their connection to it was a part of the goals of the Cultural Centre and that my students sharing their learning about the River, Indigenous history, and our responsibility to care for the Land with younger students was an important contribution and was achieving an education goal that is central to the Centre's mission. As the realities of executing the Project with the students set in, it became apparent that the likelihood of uncovering history surrounding the River that was not already known would be slim. Conducting research using available, known sources was a positive achievement for the students and uncovering unknown history was a stretch, and remains an aim for future projects. At the completion of this dissertation, I will provide a summary report to Jack Hoggarth, at Trent University and the Cultural Centre at Curve Lake, outlining the work we did, what was learned, and its impact.

I have learned a great deal about the settler history of Lindsay through various projects over time, but in the past eight years that knowledge has been disrupted in

productive ways and enhanced by the treaty and ecological history shared with me by Knowledge-Keeper and Elder, Dave Mowat, of Alderville First Nation. In addition to serving as Chief of Alderville First Nation for two terms, Dave Mowat is a treaty expert, traditional wild rice harvester, and exceptional musician, whose harmonica playing and singing is as rockin' as the black pork-pie hat he often sports. Dave Mowat has supported me in my understanding of local history and has provided invaluable assistance throughout my studies by sharing his deep knowledge of the areas where we live, answering questions, offering guidance and his perspective on many aspects that my work as an educator has touched upon.

My connection with Dave spans more than eight years of face-to-face meetings, emails, phone calls, and texts. As mentioned previously, our interactions pre-date my doctoral studies and have not always concerned this research. As such, while I haven't always taken notes or carefully documented the dates of all of our interactions, I have aimed to provide a general timeline of some of our meetings. I met with Dave at Scugog Island First Nation (March 13th, 2019, June 7th, 2019), the Black Oak Savannah (Spring 2021, September 11, 2023, August 22, 2025), and in the Band Offices at Alderville First Nation (October 7th, 2021), and have always included my tobacco offering to accompany my request for Dave's knowledge and insights. Of the places we have met, the Alderville Black Oak Savannah is one that bears further discussion. The Black Oak Savannah is the "largest intact tract of native grassland in Central Ontario" and is an important site for the practice and research of ecological restoration (Alderville Black Oak Savannah, 2019). Dave Mowat, along with Rick Beaver, also of Alderville First Nation, and others have been instrumental in saving the land on which the Black Oak Savannah sits, and through their efforts, it continues to exist as a protected site.

The preservation of the Black Oak Savannah and its use as a place for education and sharing knowledge is an accomplishment that Dave Mowat holds very close to his heart. One gesture I have made is to contribute a donation each year to the Alderville Black Oak Savannah which, as a not-for-profit organization, uses donations to help fund their ongoing work in ecological restoration, education, and research. In addition, I have provided Dave Mowat with an honorarium in recognition of his time and the benefit that his knowledge has been to me and my learning. While I'm not sure that I can ever adequately return the ongoing gift of his insights, stories, and knowledge, I continue to think of ways in which to demonstrate my gratitude to Dave. At the completion of this dissertation, I will provide a summary report to Dave outlining the work completed, what was learned, and its impact.

Ian McKechnie, a local historian, writer, and museum studies specialist, led both classes on a history walk along the Scugog River. I have known Ian since 2015 in his capacity as a researcher with the Old Gaol Museum in Lindsay and have collaborated with him on a number of projects commissioned by the Museum as well as the Academy Theatre in Lindsay. In more recent years, Ian has worked as freelance historian and writer for local and national organizations and publications, such as The Presbyterian Church in Canada, the Kawartha Art Gallery, and the Lindsay Advocate. Ian provided information about the waterfront and community pre- and post-settlement, and contextualized the role of the River in the settler community over time. Ian met with the grade eleven and twelve class on a very cold and rainy day on October 26th, and with the grade nine class on a snowy day on November 30th, 2021. Despite the weather, Ian led us on hour long walks along the River, engaging students with stories of what had once existed where they were walking and how people who lived here had relied on

the River in different ways. As an independent contractor, Ian received an honorarium for his participation as a partner in the project, which was paid for by the Performing Arts Department at my school. I interviewed Ian on September 14th, 2023, and his insights into the Projects and his thoughts about drama work with and about local topics is highlighted in chapter six.

Last, Brett Trugunno is a local Aquatic Biologist who works with Kawartha Conservation, a not-for-profit organization attending to the stewardship of the local watershed and forests. Kawartha Conservation provides valuable education programs for local schools and community members generally, while also managing natural resources in the surrounding area (Kawartha Conservation, 2025). I contacted Brett at Kawartha Conservation and asked for his help in providing some education to my students surrounding the Scugog River, its ecological history, and present-day health. Brett also provided information about the stewardship of the River and surrounding water ways to Project I students, meeting us on-site along the Scugog River. In addition to agreeing to take part in this study, Brett also served as a speaker alongside Ecological Restoration Professor Eric Sager (Trent University) on the topic of Scugog River Conservation in a speaker series I helped plan with the Lindsay Canadian Club in February 2021, which contributed to my knowledge of this local waterway. Brett met with my class on November 4th, 2021 in his capacity with Kawartha Conservation, and I presented him with a gift card to a local eatery in thanks for his time. Brett's passion for his subject area is inspiring and his ability to engage in meaningful ways with students was an important contribution to this study.

3.8.2.1.3 Partner Teachers

The teachers assisting with the study Projects were educators with whom I had an existing relationship. Each teacher has over fifteen years of classroom experience. Both teachers are arts advocates and were eager to have the drama students perform for their classes. Ms. Atkins is an experienced drama teacher who uses drama pedagogy in her classrooms regularly and with whom I became familiar through our interactions at CODE and through mutual friends. Mrs. Nyland was new to drama as an educational methodology and was interested in learning alongside her students. Mrs. Nyland and I are friends and colleagues at the same high school. I have invited the students in Mrs. Nyland's class to watch drama performances in the past so the connection through drama was not entirely new. While I had spoken with both partner teachers informally directly after the Projects, I interviewed Mrs. Nyland on September 10th, 2022 and Ms. Atkins on October 12, 2022, to capture their thoughts on the experience to document here. Neither received monetary remuneration for their participation, however I provided both educators with small gifts after their interviews as a gesture of thanks for their time. Chapter six highlights the reflections of these teachers as part of the Projects.

The classes of students we performed for in Project I and Project II, like the drama classes, represented a diverse cross section of students found in rural schools across Ontario. The practice of performing for a live audience from outside our class or school is a usual part of final performances in my drama courses and occurred as part of the culminating project process as it normally transpires. Parents of students in the partner teacher's classes were provided with information about the performance and

were also made aware that the performance was connected to this research. Given the time constraints and unusual school circumstances under which this work was undertaken, a fulsome engagement with audience members and their reception of the performance they witnessed was not feasible. While the student audiences in the partner classes were not the focus of the study, the observations of the teacher partners provide some valuable insights into the reception of the drama students' work, and both teachers offer their thoughts on Land-based drama pedagogy generally.

The student audience in Project I were Kindergarten students of Ms. Atkins at a nearby elementary school who, as I will later discuss, had limited experience as audience members for drama performances. The senior drama class performed for Ms. Atkins' seventeen students through Google Meet on November 10th, 2021. The student audience in Project II were students from the same school as our drama class. Mrs. Nyland's mixed grade Practical and Academic Life Skills class was a particularly good fit to serve as the student audience for Project II because they follow a unique schedule that had flexibility. The Practical and Academic Life Skills class had participated as part of a student audience for numerous culminating performances in previous drama courses I have taught in the past. Mrs. Nyland was very enthusiastic about the opportunity the performance offered to incorporate drama into the syllabus of her class, especially since the subject of our performance complimented her class's study of things in the natural world through their daily walks outdoors. Mrs. Nyland's class was comprised of eight students and several Educational Assistants for whom the grade nine drama class performed through Google Meet on February 1st, 2022.

3.9 Inquiry Framework

The drama work comprising the Projects I and II were part of the regular syllabus of the grade eleven, twelve, and grade nine courses, and were completed as final culminating assignments. Elements of the Projects were spread out over the courses with more concentrated focus towards the end. Both Projects were designed to integrate multiple pedagogical features such as:

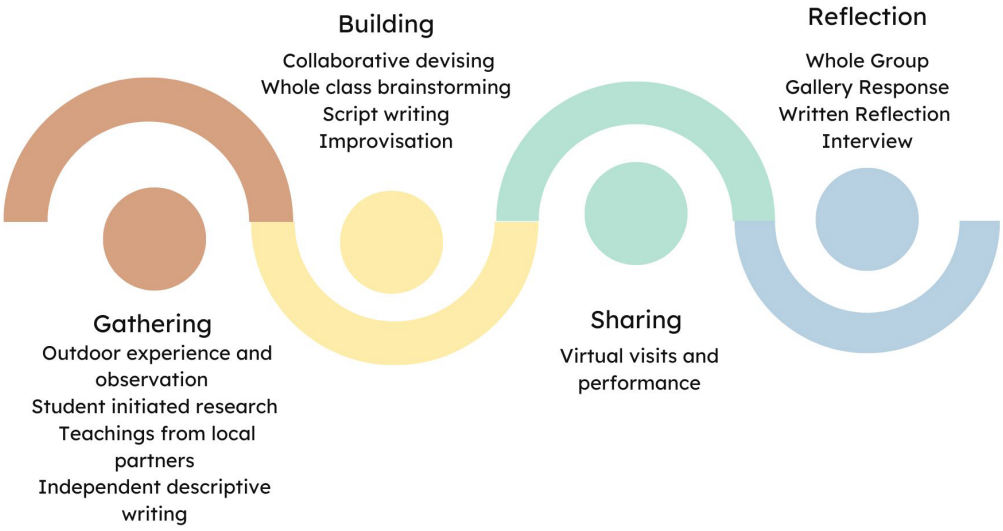
- outdoor experience and observation + learning within the classroom
- collaborative activities + independent inquiry
- script writing + small group drama devising and process drama
- student initiated research + teachings from community partners

As mentioned previously, the material for analysis in the Scugog River and LandForms Projects was derived from observation, field notes, photography (both mine and that of students), audio and video recording as well as analysis of students' creative work (soundscape, drama activities, visual art, writing, performance), writing, and interviews with teachers, local partners, and student participants.

Both Projects in the study were structured in four parts: Gathering, Devising, Sharing, and Reflection. While the design of each Project remained the same, the ways in which each Project fulfilled the elements of the design remained flexible in order to account for the artistic leanings, contributions, and preferences of the classes involved in the study. Adjustments were also made from Project I to Project II in an attempt to improve upon previous plans, remain responsive to the students taking part in each project, and to adjust for changing circumstances caused by COVID-19. Specific impacts of COVID-19 on the Projects are outlined in Chapters 4 and 5.

Figure 4

Inquiry framework



The four-component design of Projects I and II included Gathering, Devising, Sharing, and Reflection as reflected in Figure 4 below. The table provided in Appendix A itemizes how Project I and Project II each fulfilled the components of the Project design. A detailed account of each of the phases of this work follows below.

3.9.1 Gathering

The Gathering component of the Projects in this study involved students acquiring information about the ecological and human history of the River, spending time outdoors on the shores of the River and other nearby areas. In Project II, this element was expanded to include gathering knowledge and making observations about Land and landmarks that students encountered at home or on their route to school. Students in both Projects had on-site experiences along the River, conducted inquiries, and gained

information through a) independent and whole class inquiry, b) teachings and conversations with local partners, and c) by conducting field visits.

3.9.1.1 *Independent and whole class inquiry*

In the Gathering stage of the project, students investigated through various means the history, Land, and stories that stood out for them. In Project I students discussed their knowledge of the River through pre- and post- Project peer interviews, creating a field visit photo collection, conducting a fact-finding mission about the River, and completing a follow up assignment in which they researched more deeply into the history they learned and the photos of nature they took during their initial field visit. Chapter 4 outlines these activities in depth. As part of the process of gathering information and knowledge on the topic they were learning about, students in Project I took part in an improvisation based on some of the history and stories they learned about during the historic River walk. This group also engaged in a role play in which they enacted a town hall meeting about a fictional waterfront improvement project featuring historic and cultural markers. In this role play, students took on the perspectives of different stakeholders and represented a specific role in the context of the meeting. Both the improvised drama and the role play activities served to highlight key issues, raise questions, and illustrate perspectives, adding to students' information gathering.

Students in Project II created a digital portfolio on Google Sites in which they assembled various materials that would make up the gathering component of the project. Their digital portfolio contained descriptive writing on Land and landmarks near them, independent research and photos of local Land and landmarks, archival images

of the Scugog River and other local places, as well as filmed or transcribed interviews with family. The digital portfolio contained entries expressing students' connection to the Land where they live, writing about whose traditional lands they live on, and what they feel their personal responsibility is to the Land they occupy. These entries served as sources in the Devising phase of this Project, when students created coordinated movement and spoken word performances based on each other's written work and shared remembrances, experimented with how to weave their stories together, and developed plans for how they would engage with our partner class both leading up to and during their performance.

Students in both Projects learned about the history and ecology of the Scugog River and/or Land near them by consulting primary and secondary materials, including archival newspapers, historic documents such as the Rice Lake Treaty (#20 which is the territory that Lindsay occupies), photographs, and items from the Kawartha Lakes Public Library Digital Archive. Students in Project I shared their knowledge, memories (in some cases), connection to the Scugog River in pre- and post- project interviews and informally during our time on field visits along the River. Students in Project II conducted interviews about Land and landmarks near them with family members, friends, and community members which were shared in their digital portfolios. Students' own experiences of the outdoors near them entailed sharing their own observations and family memories. They shared photographs from family albums and more recent photographs they had taken of themselves in the 'nature near them' and by local landmarks. Once again, these materials formed the basis for further inquiry and the development of drama work that we would share through the devised performance.

3.9.1.2 *Teachings and Conversation with local partners*

Both Projects began with students participating in field visits along the Scugog River which included meeting with local partners. To reflect COVID-19 health protocols at all points in the projects, interaction with local partners took place outdoors, observing social distancing. Co-constructing and curating students' learning experiences with local partners was an important aspect of the Projects, and the plans for what partners would discuss with students were determined ahead of time, with both myself and partners offering ideas for what might make for a meaningful time together. Students met first with local historian, writer, and museum studies practitioner, Ian McKechnie, who led them on a history walk along the River, discussing the River in the context of its role over time in the lives of humans in the local area. Ian provided insights into how people in the past worked and lived on the River and offered information about the role of industry and governance at the time of settlement.

The second connection with local partners was a visit from Cultural Archivist Jack Hoggarth from Curve Lake First Nation who visited the outdoor classroom on the grounds of our school to share teachings with students on the history of the Mississauga Anishinaabeg in the local area, discuss the meaning of Land acknowledgements, as well as living and caring for the Land with mutual respect. In advance of Jack Hoggarth's visit, the students and I conducted our own learning and discussion about treaties, colonialism, Land acknowledgement, and the history of Indigenous people in our area. In keeping with local Anishnaabe tradition, we also learned about providing loose tobacco in a small cloth pouch that we made and presented to Jack Hoggarth to accompany our request for his teachings, knowledge and insights.

The third local partner we worked with was Aquatic Biologist, Brett Tregunno. In Project I, students met with Brett along the Scugog River where he provided teaching with respect to the ecology of the River, explained the impacts of human interaction, and types of current conservation efforts. The students were able to ask questions during the outdoor visit which informed their work in the Devising portion of the project. This component of the project was disrupted for Project II when, in December of 2021, I contracted pneumonia and missed a week of school, which in the context of the abbreviated course delivery time, was a substantial time loss. The interruption meant I had to cancel plans for a field trip to Ken Reid Park, a conservation area along the Scugog River, where my class was to meet with Brett Trugunno for our discussion about the ecological specificities of the River. This absence and cancellation of the visit so close to the winter holiday, meant that only one week would remain before the class departed for the December break - insufficient time to complete the final stages of the Project and share with our partner class. Subsequently, I paused the Project and in the remaining days before the holiday our class completed a separate unit of study for the course which could be successfully completed in the remaining time before the break.

Over the December holiday the Omicron variant spread rapidly across Ontario and cases of COVID-19 surged. In January of 2022 it was announced that our school would switch to online learning and that we would not return to our school. Alongside more serious implications of this news, it meant that the outdoor visit with Brett would be postponed indefinitely with a strong possibility that the visit may not happen at all. The ensemble Project remained on pause as I switched to a syllabus that could accommodate the different circumstances that my students were encountering at home. Some students shouldered responsibilities to care for younger or senior family

members and many had parents and siblings working remotely at the same time which created strain on families' internet usage. Students required the flexibility to complete work independently rather than being forced to continue with the ensemble Project through online learning, and my approach to instruction and course content reflected that reality.

In mid-January, just as we were about to return to school and resume our project, significant snow storms moved into the area, which made our first day retuning to school another online learning day. I resumed our Project by having students respond to writing prompts about the weather event that was happening outside their homes. This descriptive writing was accompanied by photos the students took and this material was ultimately used to form a spoken word and movement piece that was performed as part of the performance Project. Although the students in Project II did not have the benefit of learning about the ecology of the Scugog River from local partner Brett Tregunno, as the students from Project I did, their observations in the aftermath of the snow storm and their descriptive writing about Land near them created new opportunities. The work completed over the time of the snow storms expanded the geographic diversity of our look into connections to Land. Not only were students looking at the Scugog River, but they were also examining the ecology near them which laid the path for us to devise drama with even greater personal connection and meaning.

3.9.1.3 *Field visits*

Outdoor field visits were an essential part of this project. Students engaged with the concept of walking as a means of learning by taking part in outdoor experiences

together at different sites along the Scugog River, on our school property in the outdoor classroom, and in outdoor spaces where they live (Pyne Feinberg, 2016; Springgay and Truman, 2019a, 2019b). In Project II some of these experiences in the field were completed independently by students where they live, on their properties, or in nearby places that they pass on their bus rides or walks to school. During the field visits students were asked to complete specific tasks which involved taking photos that they could refer back to at a later time (See Appendix B for further examples). Once back in class, as with the visits with local partners and their independent research, students worked with their photographs, descriptions, and memories of local outdoor spaces experienced through field visits, to create moments of drama using various drama conventions.

3.9.2 Devising

3.9.2.1 *The Creative Process*

The Creative Process engages various skills, creative thinking, and problem solving all at once, in ways that involve “the invention and the assimilation of new thinking and its integration with existing knowledge” (The Ontario Arts Curriculum, 2010, p.15). Working in this way “is paradoxical in that it involves both spontaneity and deliberate, focused effort” (The Ontario Arts Curriculum 2010, p.15). In my experience, the visual, kinesthetic, verbal, written, aural modes of learning and expression that are used in drama pedagogy in the Creative Process diminish barriers to student engagement and participation because they provide multiple entry points that invite students to contribute according to their strengths and interests. The opportunity for students to engage and demonstrate learning in various ways at different points in the

process is central to the Creative Process and, importantly, compliments the collaborative, community-oriented approach to the Projects outlined here.

Throughout the Devising phase, students explored ideas, made connections, and developed stories that were compelling and relevant to them through various conventions of drama foundational to the Ontario Drama Curriculum such as writing in role, verbatim theatre, improvisation, role play, process drama, coordinated movement, tableaux, mime, choral speaking, and fusions of these, to devise original work. Our application of drama conventions from the curriculum entailed the use of both active and performative inquiry to explore perspective, examine context, reflect on story, develop aesthetic elements of the scenes, and consider what students knew as well as what they didn't know about the stories and histories we were working with.

3.9.2.2 *Active inquiry*

Through gallery walks of posted ideas and information, small and whole class discussions, and written reflections, students worked with ideas acquired from their shared pieces of writing or research to generate performance pieces. Layering active and performative inquiry as strategies in our creative work added a specific critical and analytical lens to students' reflections. In keeping with Neelands' model of intentional learning in active inquiry, students were engaged in instrumental learning (planning, listening, negotiating, problem solving), aesthetic learning (development of performance skills, technical skills and making choices about language, structure, action, and visual aspects), expressive learning (learning that engages students' attitudes and/or values), and personal/social learning (relating to development of skills and/ or acquisition of knowledge of self and others) (Neelands in O'Connor, 2010, p. 25). These types of

learning occurred, to greater or lesser degrees, as students explored content, thought about how we might structure the drama we would create, and made decisions about form. In early classes, connections between experience, information, memories, and drama as an art form were forged through active inquiry. This meant that students made connections between their experience, information gathered, memories, and drama as an art form. They worked independently on writing exercises, through group discussion, and small group devising, to develop initial drama work that expressed what they had learned and to bring those stories to life. As we moved through our devising process, students increasingly needed to negotiate the content as well as the form(s) of the stories they wished to share so that a cohesive shape for the performance began to form. Because their dramas were to be shared with a specific audience, we also engaged in small group and whole class discussions about how and what the drama students would communicate what they had learned with their audience. Students in both Projects had discussions about whose voices and histories were being presented by the choices they made in form and content.

3.9.2.3 *Performative inquiry and "stops" applied*

In the spirit of active inquiry, in the initial devising work, the students and I grappled with the information acquired and shared to determine what material was relevant to them, what they found interesting, and what we would work with to meet the needs of the project (Neelands in O'Connor, 2010, p. 25). During the sharing times of this process, key moments, or "stops" were identified spontaneously by me and the students, and at other times I provided a prompt for students to be on the lookout for moments they felt were compelling in their colleagues' work (Fels, 2012, p. 53). Once

identified, these moments in the devised drama were examined further through discussion, reflection, and observation. Several questions emerged through this process such as: How might we extend this part further? Could this element be paired with another that complements it or speaks to a similar theme? Could we have two elements happening simultaneously? Is this perspective overshadowing or silencing another? The practice of noting something important or revelatory in these instances served the purpose of engaging students in drama as a process of creation in which we explore, test, consider, pull apart, create new combinations, extend, and sometimes, toss out. This way of working also resulted in student responsibility and authorship in the process of creation which each student took up with, or didn't, in ways unique to them.

3.9.3 Sharing

In the Sharing component of the Projects students performed their devised drama for an audience. In Project I, the performance was presented as a virtual visit wherein our class joined Ms. Atkins' kindergarten class on a Google Meet and merged moments of live performance together with images and filmed moments through Google slides, all of which the Primary students saw broadcast into their classroom. In Project II, students engaged with the partner class ahead of the presentation and modeled a co-ordinated movement technique. The partner class created their own version of the movement technique which was shared and then integrated into the Project II performance. Despite being physically apart, the Project II audience watched the presentation from laptops in their classroom and joined the grade nine students in performing the part of the finale they helped to create.

3.9.4 Reflection

In keeping with the framework of the Creative Process, the final phase of the Projects was Reflection and Evaluation. This component involved class discussion, interviews, and students creating responses, through audio recordings/written work, that looked back at their experience in all its parts to consider its meaning, what was learned, and how the experience impacted them as artists and community members. In drama, as with other subject areas, the impact and lessons of experiential learning come from the observations, connections, analysis, and questions that the experience evokes, often through examination *after* the experience. The Reflection part of the learning focused on individual moments of significance that were burnished in the minds of students and asked them to articulate a key moment, why it was important, and/or what it meant to them.

3.10 Validity and Assumptions

As the teacher of the students I studied, there was a risk that students' responses would reflect their desire to please me and provide feedback they believe I wanted to hear. The triangulation of observation, student generated work (written work/performance), and interviews provided multiple sources of information and offered a fulsome picture of students' experiences that inform my analysis.

An assumption of the study also lies in my belief that experiential learning outdoors with local partners, drama pedagogy, and Land-based education are 'good' pedagogy and will lead to student success. Marin asserts that "'data' is coproduced through iterative research relations which are themselves cultural processes" and as such, my research, reading, teaching, and positionality all factor into my 'reading' of the

research and the themes or patterns that I identify (Marin, A. 2020, p. 285). By featuring students' drama work and reflections in their own words as a foundational aspect of this study, my hope is to counter the imposition of my own interpretation and analysis with the opportunity for others to 'read' the material make their own observations.

I put great care and thought into the pedagogical approaches that guided the Projects discussed here, taking into account how to differentiate the offerings, making space for student preference and discovery, and integrating changes based on feedback. Some students were positively impacted by the chance to learn from local partners outdoors, others enjoyed the exercise of learning about family stories of Land and structures near them, and some were mainly excited by the prospect of using the lighting board. I am sure there were students who were not 'outdoor' students and who found our excursions aggravating. I know there were students who were not inspired by creating work for a kindergarten audience. Some students may have found learning about colonialism and local Indigenous histories challenging to their prior knowledge, or difficult because it touched on their personal experience. The nature and extent of these impacts remain a mystery to some extent, because students often chose to be silent. The silences are important to note, however, because they serve as a reminder of the limits of what is knowable. Nevertheless, all of the students involved in the case studies described here engaged in a shared experience on the Land, with local partners, using their imaginations, artistic judgement, and ability to perform a collaborative work for others. Part of what makes being an educator a fascinating enterprise is not knowing how, when, or to what extent the content and/or experience that you have facilitated will resonate with students.

The class sizes and number of participants in Project I and Project II are significantly different. Although this research is not a comparative study, the implications of the difference in participant and class size of each Project is worth discussion. Project I took place in a class of thirteen students with four participants, and Project II took place in a class of twenty-eight students with twenty-three participants. As part of the ethical considerations for this research, I was not aware of who would be counted as participants in this work. In Project I, my department head checked in with the class when participant consent forms had not been returned and offered a reminder that forms could be submitted whenever was convenient for students. The timing of the Projects coincided with in-school learning during COVID-19, and was a period of many changes to classroom and school protocols, and concerns about health, which contributed to the high stress and anxiety felt by many. The fall in which Project I took place was also marked by the death of a recently graduated student, a car crash resulting in a death and serious injuries of senior students in our community, and the loss of an extended family member of a student in one of the Project classes. These losses were felt by the students and several of their families in different ways. While some families were directly impacted, the tragedy of the losses touched everyone. Given the circumstances, it was not the time to ask anything more of students or their families beyond showing up for school when they could.

The four student participants In Project I, though a smaller sample than that in Project II, were representative of some the diversity that was present in the class. As outlined above, some participants were quite interested in drama, others were not; some attended class regularly, others did not; some were academically high achievers, others were not. The participants came from different backgrounds and family dynamics

and had different learning needs. The thoughts, interactions, writing, photography, and performances of the participants in both Projects provide insight into their individual experiences of the Projects in which the class was engaged. The accounting of Projects I and II includes my experience of, and general observations implementing the Projects, as well as the observations and work of the student participants.

Finally, the Projects in this study involved outreach with various partners, a multidisciplinary inquiry approach, and use of different modalities to capture observations and learning. Both the research design and Project designs were planned to invite students to bring their own lived experience and interests to bear on the content of the work and to capture the learning, observations, and creative outputs of different learners in various ways. The next chapters provide an ethnographic accounting of both Projects, and document phases of the Creative Process.

4 Project I: The Scugog River Project

This chapter discusses Project I, highlighting specific material from the Gathering, Devising, Sharing, and Reflection components of the Project. The sections below present an account of the forty-seven days over which Project I took place, from September 7th to November 12th of 2021. In it I describe activities that transpired in class, examine student creative work and reflection, and discuss my own observations of this first group in the study, comprised of thirteen students. Specific quotations, work samples, and direct observations are drawn from the work of four student participants (Avery, Irene, Ronnie, and Erin). One-on-one interviews were conducted with the three students who indicated an interest in discussing their work with me after the course was complete on their consent forms and in a confirmation email. I also provide my general experience of the activities that occurred in our class over the course of the Project.

4.1 In the field: first walk

Project I took place in the fall, which was an excellent time for walking given the mild temperature and the mostly favourable weather conditions. This class conducted three walks to the Scugog River over the course of Project I. The trips to the waterfront took, in total, roughly thirty minutes on foot from our school. While I had been wary that students might protest the duration of the walk, all were in high spirits and there was a sense of anticipation about leaving the school on this first venture out. In the days leading up to our excursion, one of the students in the class had been injured and required a cast and the use of crutches for the foreseeable future. I felt that the experience of walking and researching together was one that everyone in the class

should be part of and made arrangements for the student to be delivered by taxi, accompanied by a classmate, to our destination point and picked up by taxi when we were through.

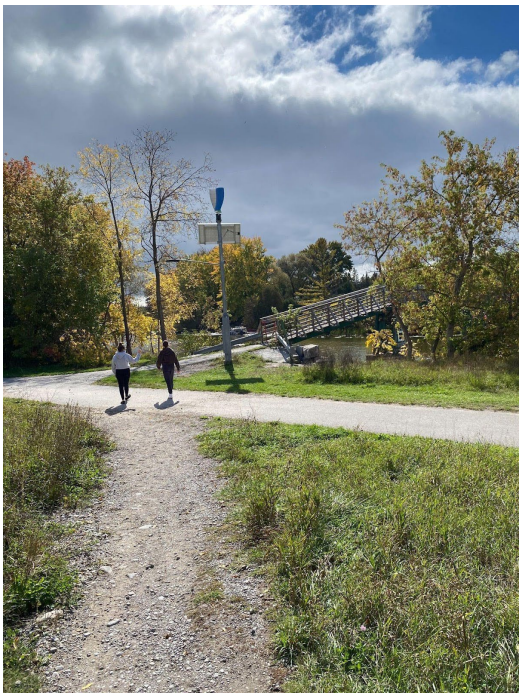
Students were given the task of taking photos during their walk. Using their phones or pairing up with a friend who had a device, students were directed to capture specific images according to the following prompts: Take a photo of something you have a question about; Take a photo of three things that catch your attention; Take a photo of three things in the natural world. Students later uploaded their images to a slide on a shared Google Slide document that we examined as a class in the days after the walk.

For our first excursion, on October 6th, 2021, I had plotted a route that led from our school, down a hill and across the highway, through a residential area and along a pathway to a foot bridge known locally as the Rainbow Bridge, which provided passage over the Scugog River. The pathway took us through an older residential area before we arrived at the remains of the Sadler Needler Mill. On the afternoon of our first trip, we walked together down the hill on which our school resides, crossing the highway at the four way stop signs. The big group cleaved into smaller pockets who walked together - one group of three at the front, a larger group walking with me in the middle, and a smaller group in the rear. Students spoke animatedly as we made our way down the hill towards the River. As we walked, they listened to a classmate share frustration about feedback they had recently received and students chimed in, asking questions and providing their own critique on the exchange this student had experienced, showing support of their classmate. We commented that it doesn't feel great for others to point out our shortcomings or gaps in our learning, but that if we can get past that initial

feeling, there's something constructive to take away from exchanges like the one the student had experienced, and learn from it. The conversation changed to college and university applications, where students were applying and how they felt about moving away from home. Everyone was warm from the walk and the sun as we crossed Logie Street and the bridge above the River came into view (see Figure 5). We walked over

Figure 5

Students on field walk to the Scugog River



the Rainbow bridge, paused for some photos, and carried on, into a residential area, winding our way towards the Old Mill.

As we continued, bursts of the students' laughter and storytelling peppered the otherwise silent streets. The houses of the neighbourhood we walked in were very close to the sidewalks and there was a sense of being in others' space and edging in on privacy. A cat stood on a lawn as we walked by. Some students greeted it and

commented, others passed it without recognition. Eve, who was walking ahead of me, noticed that a classmate behind her had picked up the cat from its property and was carrying it away from its lawn. Eve told their classmate to put the cat back – a request that was ignored. Eve noted that the cat had been deposited several houses away from where it was first seen, so she backtracked, picked up the cat and returned it to the lawn of the home where it was first seen. The small group involved in this exchange began walking again, and caught up with the rest of the class. The confrontation introduced a level of tension into the excursion that did not subside over the course of the trip.

We came upon the site of the Old Mill and meandered along the walkway overlooking the River, taking in what we could see, making observations (see Figures 6, 7, 8, 9). Several students noted garbage in the River and along the pathway we were following. As we continued further along the remains of the Old Mill, some students

Figure 6

Reeds in the Scugog River



Figure 7

View of the Scugog River looking south



climbed up on its stone edges, others looked through the windows, the view partially obstructed by rusted bars and the dark maroon of the leaves that crept up the brick. Some students recounted times they had spent here in years past, sometimes with family, sometimes with friends. Their stories piggy backed on whatever story was last shared. We carried on to the boardwalk where Avery noted that an interpretive sign outlining an environmental program about water plants that helped clean the water was no longer there. We walked along the boardwalk, taking in the locks, walking under the bridge at Lindsay St. and along the landing beneath the Legion building where riverboats used to await passengers in the mid-1800s. Students took photos as we walked, veering off the path to point things out. We turned around at a spot in the path in front of one of the retirement homes in our area. We retraced our steps on the route back, some students walking alone, some in groups. We passed a playground

Figure 8

Student walking along the Scugog River under the Lindsay St. bridge towards the Mill

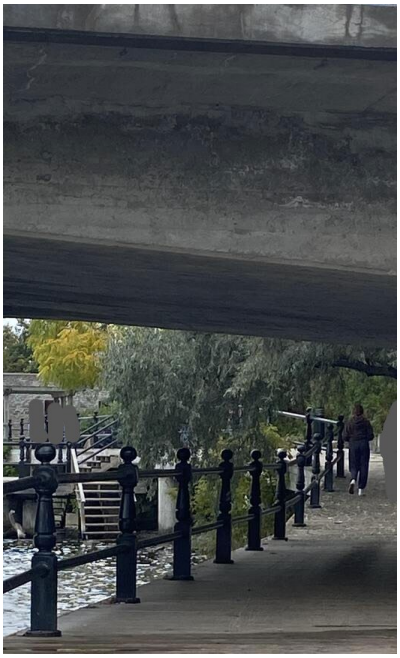


Figure 9

View of Sadler Needler Mill from boardwalk



and some students jumped on the apparatus on our way by. As we walked through the residential neighbourhood once again, Avery struck up a conversation with a classmate, asking questions that invited them to chat and share their thoughts. It was evident that Avery was purposefully engaging her classmate to forge friendship or connection of some kind in an effort to engender a collegial spirit that was generally lacking in the class. The overture was met with disinterest and Avery redirected her chat to me and we spoke amicably as we walked. We retraced our steps, crossing back over the Rainbow bridge and the highway beyond it, eventually climbing the gently sloping hill back to the school and to our class.

4.1.1 Chosen Images

Several of the images that students captured in response to the prompt, ‘Take a photo of something you have a question about’ were images that involved traces of humans in the outdoor spaces (see Figure 10). One photo of a fallen green street sign prompted Ronnie to wonder about the provenance of a street name. Irene took a photo of the bark of a tree that had been pulled back, making them curious about the cause of the damage. Avery was intrigued by the components of a wind-powered park light at the Rainbow Bridge.

Students also took photos based on the prompt ‘Take a photo of three things that catch your attention.’ Some of these photos included images of brilliant red vines that grew on the brick remains of the Mill, the natural awning created by an overhang of Russian Olive tree branches, a former pajama factory that had been developed into a

Figure 10

Collage of three images captured by students in response to prompt 1



condominium complex along the River, caution tape wrapped around the teeter totter of the playground, and a stone bust of a community donor who funded the creation of the boardwalk along the River (see Figure 11).

The final inquiry prompt asked students to capture images of ‘nature’, for which students chose to take photos of shrubbery growing up from inside the Mill, the brilliant orange flowers and foliage of Nasturtium, the changing colour of leaves on the Sumac trees, a red maple tree, and a chipmunk whose cheeks were plump with its findings (see Figure 12).

All of the images were uploaded to a Google Slide deck so everyone in the class could see the photos. When we shared the images the next day, some students commented on having seen the same things as their peers and some offered further insight about the images they had chosen to capture. Conversations with teenagers

Figure 11

Collage of three images captured by students in response to prompt 2



about the small town in which our school is located often dwell on the negative: there is little to do, there is a significant drug problem, and a lack of cultural and artistic opportunities. While the conversation that took place during our perusal of the students' images was peppered with some negative commentary, the photos themselves captured images that were positive and even quite beautiful. There was shared laughter among some of the students as they recollected certain aspects of the walk and commented on how cute the chipmunk had been.

The photo inquiry task drew students' attention to their surroundings by conducting the type of close observation that, as Shari Tishman suggests, invites engagement and thinking (2018, p. 141). The goal of noticing surroundings was achieved by students' attending to the living world around them for the purposes of capturing a photo. These were brief encounters that proved useful in familiarizing students with the native and naturalized plants

Figure 12

Collage of images captured by students in response to prompt 3



in our midst, animals, geography, and water. A secondary intention for the photo inquiry was to document the time spent as a class on the walk. Students had been instructed to avoid taking photos of people because I wanted them to focus on the Land around them. In many ways, the directive to notice the natural world, although prescriptive, was useful and required that students look beyond themselves and observe what surrounded them. Taking photos of each other during the walk, however, may have captured instances of connection between the students and documented their experience in a more personal and spontaneous way.

In proceeding iterations of this project, I have found that when students look back on photos they have taken on walks such as these, there is instant recognition, often through laughter. Seeing themselves in photos they have taken together recalls a shared moment that gives the memory potency and brings it back into the class for a moment as a second collective experience. The photos that feature students give weight to what transpired on the walk and consequently in the course. These kinds of photos may also speak to what was important enough to students to capture. Photo taking is ubiquitous in the digital age, especially for youth who often capture photos of themselves daily, and yet, viewing photos of each other as a group remains a powerful method of connection.

4.2 Post-walk research and reflection

In Project I the net of possible sources on which to base a devised drama was cast wide in the hope that experiences, research, and learning from local partners would inspire greater inquiry and exploration later through drama exercises. As such, part of the Gathering phase of Project I entailed students creating a gallery of images as a starting point to potential topics to pursue. Some of the images were those taken on our first walk as described above, and other images students discovered through research in a follow up assignment.

Students used their photos to identify a plant or tree, and research its name and provenance. They put together Google Slide decks that documented what they had uncovered. Avery wrote, “The tree that I have selected is a Russian Olive tree. Its Latin name is, Elaeagnus angustifolia … [the] Russian olive is native to southern Europe and western Asia. It was introduced to North America as an ornamental shrub and as a

windbreak plant in the late 1800s. Russian Olive tree berries are edible and the fruit attracts wildlife" (see Figure 13). Erin researched a coleus plant which her research revealed was a plant that came from Southeast Asia (see Figure 14). Other plants and trees were identified, many of which were not native to Canada. Making note of how many species along our River walk were not native to Canada was surprising for many students and represented new knowledge.

Students were also asked to make use of the online digital archives of the Kawartha Lakes Library and other web- based sources, to find three images from the past, before 1990: one photo of a Mill (there were several Mills at one point), one of the Scugog River in Lindsay and one of Kent Street, the main street in Lindsay. Through their research they were asked to uncover a detail to share about the building of the first Lindsay dam by one of the Mill owners, William Purdy. As noted earlier, between 1827 and 1833 William Purdy, a settler from New York, built a saw mill, grist mill, and dam with the support and protection of the Crown to render the Scugog River more navigable, thereby supporting local industry and settlement efforts (Jones, 2023; Walker, 2012, p. 244). The dam caused massive flooding downstream, drowning wild rice beds, cranberry bogs, and

Figure 13

Student photo - Russian Olive Tree



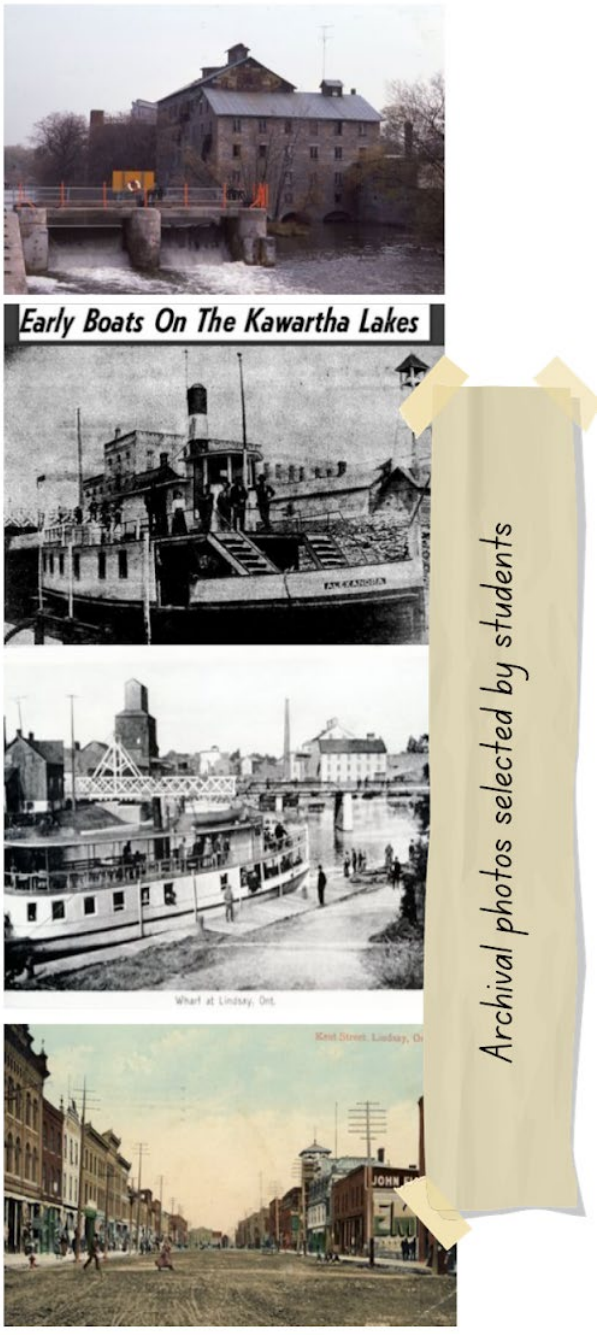
Figure 14

Student photo - Coleus plant



Figure 15

Student selected archival photoas



creating an infestation of mosquitoes that brought with them a malaria type of disease that caused serious illness and death for years afterwards (Walker, 2012, p. 224).

Through their initial photo finding and research, some students shared archival images of the main street of Lindsay in 1908, newspaper articles about the use of steamships in the early years of settlement, and photos of the Scugog River and the Sadler Needler Mill which is the only Mill with remains that can be seen today (see Figure 15). The exercise gave students some context in terms of historic time frame and the chance to learn more about the purpose of the Mills during the early 1800s and what the landscape along the River and town looked like in the early days of settlement and beyond. Some information was uncovered about the dam, but it did not, as I had hoped, provoke questions or critical thinking about how the unilateral action to create the dam impacted local people and altered the watershed.

The last part of the follow-up work had students reflect on what they noticed on our walk along the Scugog River with respect to information about the history of the place as indicated by signs, memorials, and plaques. They were asked to comment on what they might add or change about signage, public art, memorials, or plaques commemorating the history along our route. The intention of the prompt was to have students consider with a critical lens, what they saw, and even notice what aspects of the history of the area might be missing. I anticipated that students would realize that there were no reference points to the history of the River and local area before settlement, and that they would identify that there was no recognition of the Land as traditional territory of the Mississaugas. The absence of documented history before settlement, however, was noted by one student only. Others commented on the beauty of the changing leaves and signage that reflected the history of the town's settlement. Some students pointed out that it would enhance the experience of the history along the River to have more photos posted of the Mill and surroundings as it was developed over time, as Avery wrote:

> Along my walk down the Scugog River only one plaque caught my attention. The play [plaque] was title [titled] PURDY'S MILL … the plaque goes on to talk about the ownership of the mill's [*sic*] and milestones in Purdy's life. If I were in charge of the signage commemorating history I would like to possibly create a memorial of photos contrasting from the past and present. Examples could be the old mill and what it looked like before the fire and what it looks like now … another example would be the Scugog River.

Avery explained that she was already quite familiar with River, but noted that the walks we did as a class had afforded the opportunity to notice new things, writing, "I grew up

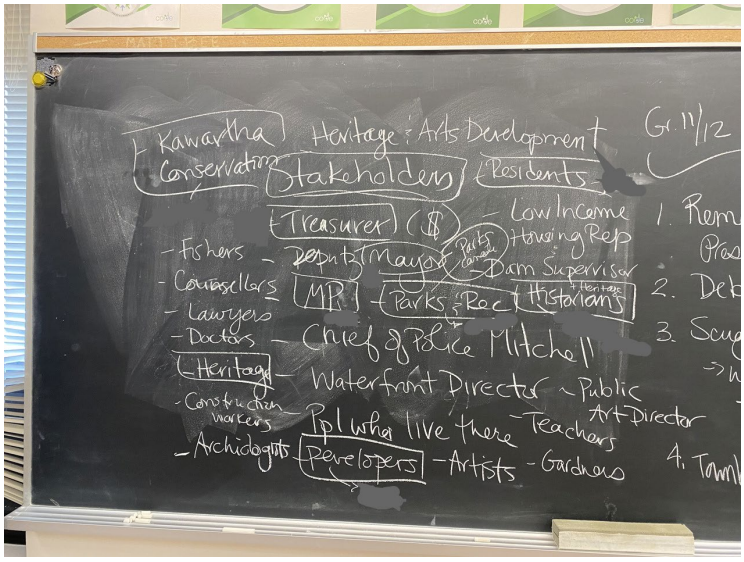
walking down the river with my grandma so I'm very familiar with the sightings but walking with my class was a different experience as I got to see it through their perspectives." Erin suggested that adjustments be made to the area along the River to enhance its use, remarking, "I would also like to add more benches so people can sit and watch the water." Students' sharing of images and observations from the walk served to catalogue their awareness of what was there and how the enjoyment of the natural elements of the area might be enhanced further. Although there was little critical engagement with the representation of the history of the Land in ways that I had hoped, the exercise revealed that the students felt that the waterfront was a space to be cared for and that it was important for its history over time to be made explicit through images for the public's enjoyment and edification. Avery's insight that the experience of being along the waterfront as a class created new meaning for her suggests that, in this case, the walk had disrupted 'the familiar' and prompted new observations, for at least one student.

4.3 Role play – town hall meeting about Arts and Heritage on the Scugog River

To extend our thinking about the River, our class conducted a role play using a town council meeting as the premise. The students took on the roles of stakeholders involved in a discussion about improving the presence of Arts and Heritage along the waterfront of the Scugog River. The town hall meeting, conducted 'in role', created an opportunity to identify stakeholders in the issue of commemorating the past through public art and Heritage installations and invited an exploration of the power dynamics that have, and continue to impact, the human and ecological history of the River. I captured roles students brainstormed that would be required to represent various stakeholders involved (see Figure 16). We discussed the challenge of representing Indigenous presence and interests, asking how we might do this without appropriating voice. It was decided that sensitivity to and awareness of the traditional territories and

Figure 16

Brainstorming stakeholders



people would be considered through a dual role played by a student representing Heritage and historians. This person would engage in the discussion with the goal of bringing awareness to all histories. This solution wasn't ideal, but neither was the idea of having a non-Indigenous person represent the Mississaugas and other Indigenous peoples in the area.

The class was a group of ten students on the day of the role play and each chose the role they would play: the mayor, a land developer, residents, historians/Heritage, City Parks and Recreation, the Member of Provincial Parliament, City Treasurer, and representative from Kawartha Conservation all took part in the discussion (see Figure 17). The students gathered their chairs in a loosely assembled circle, some sitting close to friends, others sitting by themselves as the student playing the mayor brought the meeting to order. Students raised their hands and offered their ideas in role, and the student playing the mayor asked questions of the participants that advanced the discussion by asking "What environmental concerns might there be with the idea of

Figure 17

Students taking part in Town Hall role play



providing jet skis for tourists to rent along the River?" and "How might the City prevent graffiti on an art installation?" The conversation proceeded haltingly with increasing frustration from some students towards peers who were not participating at all or who they perceived were deviating from the productive flow of the conversation. This conversation took place at the end of the day before a long weekend, which contributed in no small part to the scattered focus exhibited by some, and waning patience of all. With two and a half weeks left to complete the course, however, the option to postpone the role play until Monday did not seem feasible.

The perspectives that emerged through the fiction of the role play revealed an interest in safety, maintaining a nice-looking area along the water, a concern for where the funds would come from to pay for any suggested projects, and questioning the appeal of an Arts and Heritage project. Erin, speaking as a developer, commented that if the project were to be placed on historic ground, care would need to be taken in the building process and that any development should involve consulting experts. She went on to suggest that the project should reflect the distinct local Indigenous Heritage and build on what was there already. The conversation took a sharp turn when Avery challenged her classmates' idea to boost tourism with revenue-generating recreational activities along the water by way of offering Sea-Doo rentals. Avery asked about the environmental cost of some of the recreational ideas put forth but her concerns were not addressed in an authentic way by her classmate. The conversation was forced to conclusion as the bell rang.

I wondered if the students needed more scaffolding to understand what a commemoration of local history and Heritage was. Perhaps looking into examples in other communities beforehand would have enabled them to think about and discuss

what it might look like in the local community. Despite what I felt were shortcomings of the exercise, the role play provided another brief exposure for students to the issue of representation and including Indigenous voices in the discussion, and engagement with reparative action to address the absence of Indigenous histories along the waterfront. Also of interest were the two kinds of role play that had transpired concurrently: One that was about performance in the instance of the student arguing for the benefits of tourist Sea-Doos, and one that was about putting on a role, such as mayor or developer, to investigate a situation through different perspectives in a more serious way. The students engaging in both of these ways were attempting to contribute to the whole, but the effort to do so was at odds with the approach of the other, which caused frustration.

4.4 Pre-Project interviews

In the early days of the Scugog River Project, students recorded interviews in pairs to understand what prior learning they brought to the Project. The questions asked included: What do you know about the River? In what ways do you think that this River is important? What connections or feelings do you have about the River or the land around it? Together with a classmate, students found quiet spaces in and around the class to record their interviews. Although students had attended class together for a number of weeks, there was some shyness evident in their conversations, likely caused by my directive that students pair up with classmates they didn't usually work with. In some cases, students built on each other's answers and in many of the interviews, students offered encouragement and validation by making statements such as "That's true," "Yes! Of course, of course," "Um hmm," "Cool!" and "Yes!" In one case, Avery helped her partner make a connection to the River when she struggled to find one,

offering that her classmate could comment on the “Connection to the time that we went on that [field trip] walk two weeks ago?” Students were given the choice to video or voice record their interviews. Of the students who conducted video recordings, physical gesture and body language were also indicators of encouragement and connection. These were discernible in participants nodding their heads up and down in an affirmative gesture in response to a partner’s answer, making intermittent and sustained eye contact, sitting in close proximity, and smiling.

The knowledge that students shared about the River at the beginning of the Project was largely limited to its location and appearance. Several students had familiarity with the River by virtue of walking or driving alongside it and commented on an appreciation for its appearance, such as Erin who said, “It’s in Lindsay and it's really nice to look at.” Irene demonstrated knowledge that the River was connected to the locks and Mill, commenting, “I don’t know much about the River, to be honest. It’s just… it was connected to the Mill when it was running, and the lock…” Responses to the same questions at the end of the Project were more substantial in all cases and are discussed later in this chapter.

4.5 Research take-two: key places and people

In advance of the guided history walk along the River, students teamed up with a partner, or worked alone, to research a topic from a list that we brainstormed using knowledge acquired on the first walk by the River and from their initial research. Students helped each other to source further information and images on their topic and recorded it onto giant chart paper that we posted around our class. This approach to research garnered more interest than the previous research task that students were

assigned to complete independently after our first walk. Students' motivation to gather and share what they had uncovered in pairs and small groups was significantly higher. They worked, scattered throughout the class, huddled in groups and crouched over Chromebooks, adding information to their chart paper, and asking me to print photos they had found on the Digital Archive. At various times students would call out a question to the class and spontaneous answers would be offered by those who knew the answer. They also shared resources with each other, commenting on where they had been successful in finding information.

At the end of forty minutes, students were asked to contribute their findings by presenting to the class the learning that their fact-finding mission had produced. Information was shared about William Purdy and his sons who built the dam that was attacked by local residents in 1841 in retaliation for the damage it caused to land and health. Students also shared information about the use of steamships on the Scugog River with accompanying images. One student searched out details about Treaty #20. Together we were able to clarify that this Treaty was signed on Rice Lake and that it provided for harvesting rights, trapping, and gathering. I supported this information by speaking about what history I had read and been told about the Mississaugas with respect to the Mills and creation of the dam, and the displacement it caused for Indigenous people. Last, information was read out about local lumber merchant John Carew, the development of wood mills on the Scugog River, and his role as a settler in the area. We left the research posted on the walls of our class for future reference and reviewed the plans for the next day's history walk.

4.6 History walk along the River

In the early afternoon the following day, October 26th, 2021, the students and I climbed aboard the school bus to make the short drive to the western side of the Scugog River where we would meet with Ian McKechnie, local historian, writer, and museum studies specialist. The cold, rain, and windy weather did not appear to dampen spirits, as students seemed happy to be leaving the school grounds once again. We assembled at the riverside, umbrellas in hand, where Ian awaited us. We made multiple stops along the route and students were attentive to the information that Ian outlined about the lumber yards that had existed where we stood over a hundred and fifty years previous. As a group, we noted the interpretive signage in a place titled ‘Carew Park’, named after lumber merchant John Carew, which highlighted his contribution to the settlement and growth of Lindsay (see Figure 18). Ian pointed out the offices of Mr. Carew and mentioned his nearby home, all built in close proximity to the water. We

Figure 18

Interpretive signage about John Carew in Carew Park along the Scugog River



Figure 19

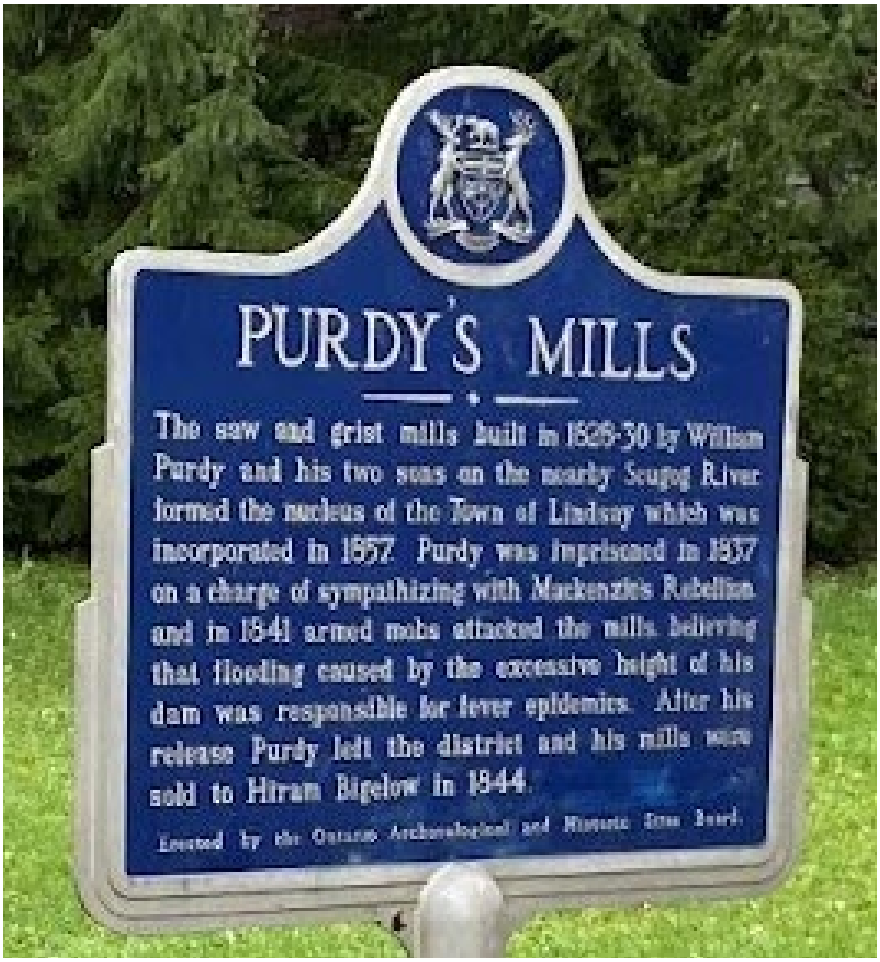
Ian McKechnie speaking with students along the Scugog River



walked south along the pathway and stopped again to look westward at a converted apartment building that had previously housed The Horn Brothers Woolen Mill, built in 1892. It had employed many women at the time to weave raw wool into yarn, cloth, and blankets (Walker, 2022). As we walked, Ian pointed out other aspects of how the River would have been used in earlier days, recounting stories about young people who would swim in the water and seek out warm spots created by used dye that factories discarded directly into the River (see Figure 19). Stories of the women weaving wool and people swimming in the River were ones that students would later remember most vividly. We stopped at a plaque south of the Wellington Bridge and Ian explained its significance as the former site of William Purdy's saw and grist mill, which was built in 1828 (see Figure 20). He spoke about the impact of the dam on local farmers and the Anishinaabek, recounting that the increase in the water level drowned essential food sources, forcing the Mississaugas off of the local land, but remarked that none of this history was noted in the plaque we were looking at. Ian suggested that we consider the

Figure 20

Provincial plaque commemorating John Purdy and the Mills he built along the Scugog River



responsibility of historical markers to reflect diverse histories - not just those of settlers. As we walked on, the students heard about local churches and how their congregations reflected distinct class differences in Lindsay, and about the steamboats that used to transport passengers from Lindsay to Sturgeon Point for a day of picnicking and outdoor amusements. Ian also spoke about the Sadler Needler Mill remains which, today, are the only remains of the mills, tanneries, and industry of the nineteenth century along the riverfront (see Figure 21). He discussed that the area of the River near the Sadler Needler Mill had been considered the ‘downtown’ during the 1800s and was a

Figure 21

Ian McKechnie discussing the Sadler Needler Mill in front of its remains



destination for many farmers who would come to have their wheat ground into flour. We finished our time together at the boardwalk of the Sadler Needler Mill remains and boarded our bus to return to school.

4.7 Experimenting with story and form

The follow up activities we conducted as a class included exploring some of the stories we had heard during the walk by doing improvised scene work. While some students were resistant to the idea of improvised acting, most participated in a brainstorm of the aspects of the history they had learned the day before, and shared what appealed most to them as an exploration through drama. The students created three scenes based around the concept of a journalist interviewing people along the River during three different time periods and what the people walking along the River at that time would have to say about it. We saw scenes from contemporary times, from the time of the damming in 1838, and from the future, in 2046. Students used their own

experience to create a contemporary scene from ‘today’, considered the feelings of the residents of Lindsay when the original dam was built in the second scene, and in the final scene projected a bleak future from the standpoint of a fish swimming in contaminated water. As the students moved forward with their devising, incorporating the perspective of a fish became a leading idea.

We also experimented with creating progressive tableaux to depict the Mill and the activities that might happen surrounding it. Students physicalized the action loading timber into the Mill, and of farmers bringing their wheat to be ground. As different elements were added, or characters spoke, I asked the students engaged in action surrounding the Mill to freeze in tableaux, which served to highlight one part of the scene. Ideas for dialogue and physical action were offered by classmates and myself as we built different layers to the drama. Some students became frustrated by a small number of reluctant participants who felt challenged by the activity and responded negatively, halting the action and dampening the energy of the group. While some classmates offered immediate suggestions to help those who didn’t know what to do, even demonstrating possible actions, the frustration felt by the rest of the class was evident.

Often exercises such as creating a tableau and expanding upon it, building in moments of dialogue or monologue, reveal new points of interest or perspectives. Devising offers the benefit of multiple entry points wherein contributions can be suggested for others to act out or that willing participants act out themselves. Devising also affords participants the freedom to highlight the aspect of the topic or associated roles that appeal most to them. The structure is open to all ideas. Working as an ensemble to devise work in this manner tends to inspire a cascade of ideas for

furthering the exploration in a way that energizes participants. Frequently, ideas beget other ideas and the motivation to revisit, refine, and expand the drama is strong. The generative force of devising is fragile, however, and can quickly be diminished. The resistance of some of the students to this type of activity and micro acts of refusal can deflate the momentum of the ensemble devising, and in this case, the ability for this class to work as a team seemed thwarted once again.

4.8 Teacher partner conference and a tepid take-off

A key component of Dorothy Heathcote's Commission model is conferring with the recipients of the project under development to outline expectations and to share plans and get feedback. In this case, the teacher of the kindergarten class, Ms. Atkins, was the point of contact for information gathering about how the drama being devised might be age appropriate and entertaining for the kindergarten audience. Ideally, the drama students would have conducted ongoing consultation with Ms. Atkins live, however, our class schedules did not align well with the elementary schedule, and the time demand of live interactive sessions with a busy kindergarten teacher was a big ask. The mood amongst many educators at the time that this Project took place was grim. As I have noted in a previous chapter, the additional responsibility of policing COVID-19 protocols in classes, coupled with acclimatization to school life after periods of lockdown, and the pervasive sense of disorder and fear, made school life exceptionally stressful for many. Given the climate, I was mindful of asking partner teachers for only what was minimally necessary for the Project to progress, and did what I could to make it easy for them to participate.

In my phone call meeting with Ms. Atkins, I shared some initial ideas for the drama given what had transpired so far in class, and she suggested that the senior students create something that made connections to the kindergarten students' school neighbourhood and to their points of reference. She shared that the students were learning about seasons and suggested that incorporating sights and sounds into the drama would be a concrete way for students to connect. Ms. Atkins also mentioned that the students had demonstrated enjoyment of puppets in the past. She advised that providing contact through a letter or video message in advance of our digital visit would help prepare the students for what they would later see and hear.

Returning to our class the next day, I outlined more formally for the class the Project parameters, expectations, and grading rubric. The Project outline read that students would create a drama presentation to share with a primary class based on the stories, information, and impressions that they acquired through time spent along the Scugog River, learning from local partners, and research. I outlined the 'Gathering, Building, Sharing, and Reflecting' components of the Project and provided details about each phase of the Project (See Appendix B for Project description). Not all of the students reacted with enthusiasm upon hearing that our work would be created for kindergarten students. There were grumbles about not liking kids, and questions about why we had to create work for that particular audience. I suggested that this would be an interesting challenge and that Ms. Atkins and I were excited to see what they would put together. There was further resistance to the idea that a final culminating project worth a significant part of their grade be completed as a group and one student remarked that "Culminating projects are usually done with one person alone" (personal notes, November 2, 2021). Another student was concerned about the equity of marks

and proposed that some students might get a higher grade despite doing less work. These same students articulated frustration and confusion surrounding how experiences and research would inform our drama work. I responded to questions and offered explanations for how their work might progress. I also clarified how grades would be generated, referring back to the criteria outlined in the rubric we had discussed as a class. As a culminating task, the assessment criteria reflected previously established norms and markers of achievement, which I pointed out. The most helpful responses to the concerns voiced by some students were offered by their peers, which made it evident that a number of students in the class had a clear idea of what the project entailed. As these students spoke up to help their classmates better understand, the tension and conflict that had begun to build amongst those who were less clear diminished.

4.9 Land acknowledgement: promises and relationships

A well-known drama game to randomly sort students into groups is called Atom. In this activity the students traverse the class and when the caller yells out a number, they gather in groups of that number. Any students remaining are ‘hidden’ inside of the existing groups. This is the method by which I grouped students to discuss a series of questions surrounding Land acknowledgements. Our project investigated the human and ecological histories of the Land, and as such, discussing the nature and purpose of Land acknowledgements was essential. I explained the protocol for the activity and had students wander the room, telling them to walk faster, slower, change direction, then finally, I called, “Atom, two!”. The students scrambled together and I asked the first question “What Treaty Land do we live on?”. The students talked in pairs about their

responses, some laughed self-consciously, most unsure as to what Treaty we live on. We shared responses, none of which were correct. I let the class know that we were on Treaty #20 signed in 1818. I prompted the students to wander once more, then called out for groups of four and asked students to discuss whose traditional Lands we occupy. There were many guesses and attempts by some to recall the School Board Land acknowledgement and work through the listing of various Indigenous groups aloud. We gathered again as a class and established that as a geographically large school board, the acknowledgement used by the board applies to an extended area, and perhaps did not reflect specifically where we were located. I shared that the Land we occupy at our school was traditional Land of the Mississauga Anishinaabe. I invited the class to move once again, called out for new groupings, then asked, “What is the purpose of a Land acknowledgement?” As I circulated around the room, I overheard responses such as ”it’s something we hear all the time on the announcements,” “I actually don’t know,” “it’s recognizing Indigenous Land,” and “It’s saying whose Land this first was.” When the chatter dissipated, I asked for groups to share what had been said, then had them resume their walking before calling “Atom three!”. My last question asked students to chat about whether the Land acknowledgment on morning announcements was effective and if people know what it meant and what might make it more effective. The students discussed the questions and when I asked groups to share, some revealed that they felt the repetitiveness of the statement that was read at the beginning of the week during announcements as a Land acknowledgement was meaningless because it just recited words that people tuned out. Several agreed that they felt that students didn’t know what the Land acknowledgement meant and that often they would talk right through it at announcement time. Students suggested that the

acknowledgement would become more meaningful if teachers spent time explaining what it was that was being acknowledged and provided more personal delivery.

With these ideas in mind, I asked students to think about how they might create a more accessible Land acknowledgement that would be meaningful to them and their kindergarten cohorts. We started by considering the Land acknowledgement the drama students were familiar with from school announcements. At the time, there was little distinction made between Land acknowledgement and territory acknowledgement in our board. Our school used two alternating Land acknowledgements during the time of the study. These statements, retrieved from the Announcement Binder at the school in which the study was conducted read:

> We respectfully acknowledge that [our school] is located on the Treaty 20 Michi Saagiig Territory and the territory of the Michi Saagiig and Chippewa Nation, collectively known as the Williams Treaties First Nations.
>
> Weldon respectfully acknowledges that the Williams Treaties First Nations are the stewards and caretakers of these lands and water in perpetuity, and that they continue to maintain this responsibility to ensure their health and integrity for generations to come.

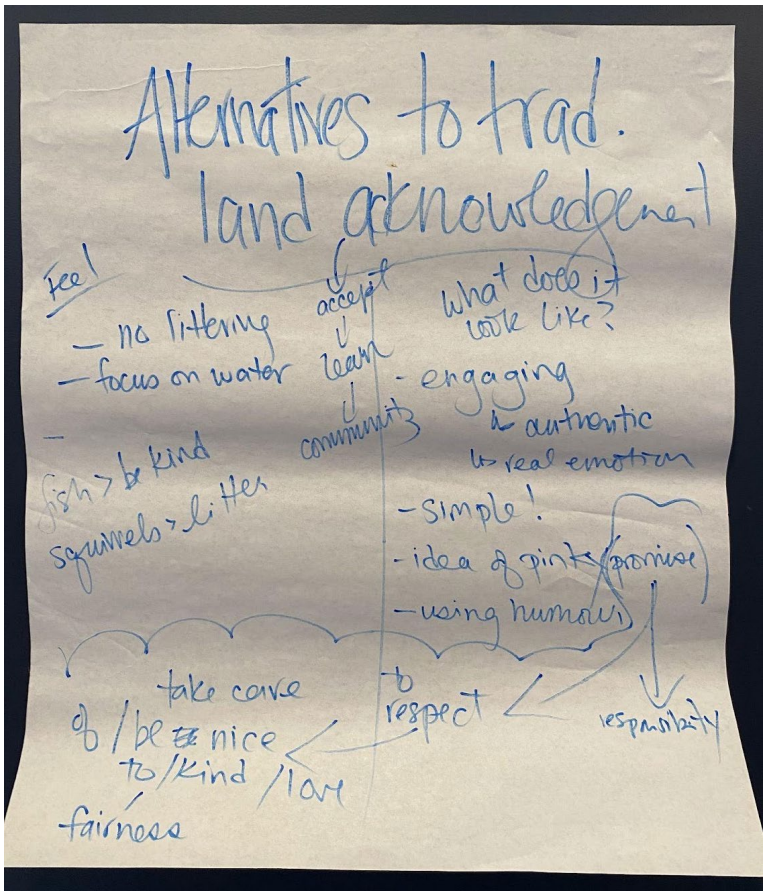
We discussed that the statements reflect historic facts of the traditional territory, but do not acknowledge our responsibilities to the Land. What was the Land acknowledgement getting at? What were the core ideas it aimed to express? I suggested that we break down our understanding of what a Land acknowledgement was about and we began brainstorming what a Land acknowledgement might 1) feel like and 2) look like in action. I wrote on large chart paper posted on the wall while students called out ideas and built on or challenged their classmates' thoughts. Students appeared energized by the goal

of accurately describing what a meaningful Land acknowledgement aimed to do, and students critiqued their own and others' use of language and concepts throughout the discussion. Although the students were challenging each other's ideas, the conversation remained productive and positive. It was evident that the goal of creating something useful, personally important, and clear for their young audience was a positive motivator.

Ultimately, the students determined that a meaningful Land acknowledgement would feel engaging personally (see Figure 22). To be engaging, they agreed the Land acknowledgement would need to be authentic and have real emotion attached to it. It needed to be simple and feel like a 'pinky promise.' I suggested that we break down the idea of a promise further. What did we mean by the word promise? Contributions led to a list that further described that a Land acknowledgement promise was a responsibility, that it reflected respect, and it was a commitment to "take care of, be nice to" and to act in ways that were "kind" in the spirit of "love" and "fairness." We then turned our attention to what a Land acknowledgement would look like in terms of action. From this prompt, we determined that it might mean that we don't litter and that it would focus on water. I suggested that we begin crafting a Land acknowledgment by starting with what we literally see around us. Avery jumped up to glance out the window and described what she saw, listing a field, sky, trees, a bird, which I recorded. Avery improvised what some lines of a Land acknowledgement might be, using what she saw out the window and arrived at, "If we look out our window we see sky, trees, leaves, birds…" Avery continued riffing, and I transcribed, "This is also called Land, nature… life. Today we're going to tell you a story about the Land we live on…" (see Figure 23).

Figure 22

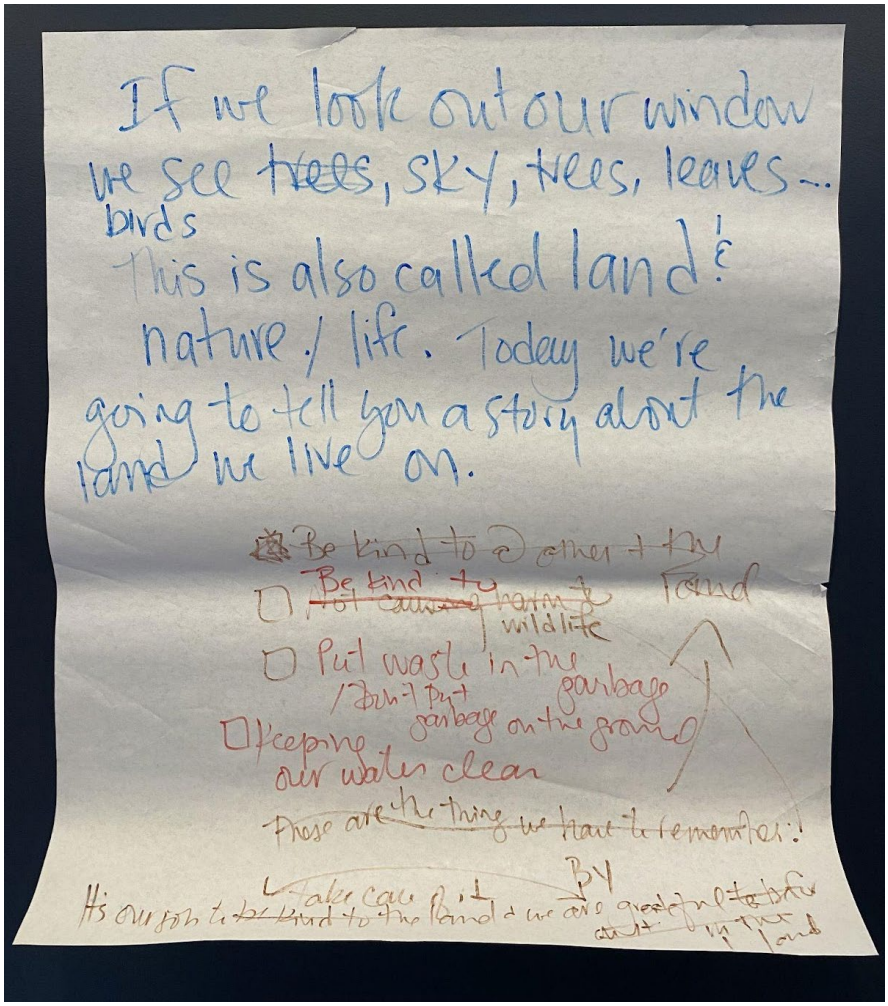
Brainstorming Land acknowledgements



We became stuck and decided to turn the brainstorming material into a checklist of key ideas that the Land acknowledgement lines should reflect. The checklist included: be kind to each other and the Land, be kind to wildlife, put waste in the garbage, don't put garbage on the ground, keep our water clean, it's our job to take care of the Land, and we are grateful for the Land. We left the outputs from the improvisation and brainstorming posted on the wall and they served as a guide for the lines that ended up in the final script and impacted the story lines the students created. In the end, the Land acknowledgement read, "If we look out our window we can see sky, trees, leaves, and a corn field. This is also called Land. We can also see birds who live on the Land. Today we are going to tell you a story about where we live. We are grateful

Figure 23

Devising a class Land Acknowledgement



for the Land and it's our job to take care of it by … being kind to animals, putting waste in the garbage, and keeping our water clean" (Scugog River Project Script, 2021).

In one-on-one interviews with three participant students after the course was completed, I asked about their thoughts on how they fit into the history of the Land and if their work on this project had impacted their understanding. Avery responded:

> Surprisingly … when we did the acknowledgments, I knew very little even about what a treaty was which is embarrassing. Literally I knew the bare minimum. Because they don't tell us what they're explaining to us

> on the announcements. I guess there's 'respectfully acknowledge,' … they say it, but I think half or three quarters of the people don't even know what they are acknowledging. After drama I ended up taking the Indigenous Studies course which was amazing. I learned a lot. I did take it as an extra credit thing, but I think everyone should have to take Indigenous Studies, like we do English, because it is a part of our history and so having that included in our Drama project was definitely important because we should acknowledge that we're on this Land…I'm glad younger children are actually learning about Indigenous people and the way they actually should be represented. This drama project was a great introduction and I actually did learn a lot. The way we dissected it [the Land acknowledgement] really helped me learn.

Erin echoed some of the same thoughts, commenting that the focus of creating a Land acknowledgement for younger students helped to clarify class understanding by thinking of its meaning in the simplest terms. Erin went on to say that "...what we play on the announcements everyday… I know not everyone listens to that … but, when it's fun and … basic, you kind of understand it more." The collective challenge of rendering the land acknowledgement simple and accessible was engaging to students as an exercise. The act of identifying and grappling with what ideas were the most important to capture, attached students to the content and the words they chose. A responsibility towards finding the absolute right words reflected an element of care taking in this exercise. There was a level of empathy evident in the drama students' effort to think about how their work might be received by the kindergarteners. Given the tepid reception of the

news that our audience would be primary students, the high level of engagement in the exercise to create this first piece was gratifying.

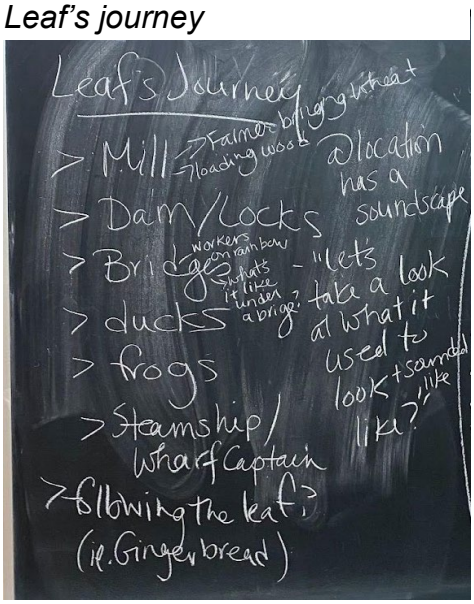
4.10 Framing the drama

Thinking through the development of a class Land acknowledgement led to another brainstorming session around how to frame the drama for the younger students. The students decided to further pursue the idea of telling a story from the perspective of fish and squirrels. What might these creatures see and care about and how could these ideas be illuminated by incorporating them into the narrative? A story depicting a trail adventure was suggested with the idea that it progress through various locations with different animals at each location, passing the story from one animal character to the next. This prompted new questions such as what parts of the Land along the River were most compelling and how might we weave them together in a drama? Recalling that the kindergarteners were learning about seasons, I suggested that a falling leaf could be the bridging element of the story and asked how we might work with the idea of a leaf's journey as a framework.

We made a list of locations along the River that were important and interesting for the leaf to pass by as it travelled the River bank on the wind (see Figure 24). I mapped the area of the River that we had walked on the chalkboard and marked in key landmarks that students had identified as important (see Figure 25). The idea of creating a drama resembling an episode of *Dora the Explorer* had caught hold and our discussion returned to what characters might be encountered on the journey along the River. We made a list of animals that student had seen during our time along the River, which included squirrels, heron, ducks, and chipmunks (see Figure 26). While some

Figure 24

Brainstorming locations of the Leaf's journey



students remained confused as to how their experiences and photography could be rendered into story form, let alone a performance, others began suggesting lines of potential dialogue that would link various scenes and stops along the River such as having the animals say, "Now let's see the next story" and "Let's take a look at what it used to look like."

We created a framework of locations that a leaf would pass by on its adventure down the River and discussed creating a presentation that would be part 'live' physical performance and part images using Google slides. The students could 'voice' the scenes that would have images or footage that they filmed, as well as moments of physical performance live in the classroom. I framed the performance concept as a 'living picture book' and hoped that it would resonate with the senior students. This multimedia approach would allow students to use photos and video to visually create slides of a story book while voicing the story live in class.

Figure 25

Mapping key locations along the River

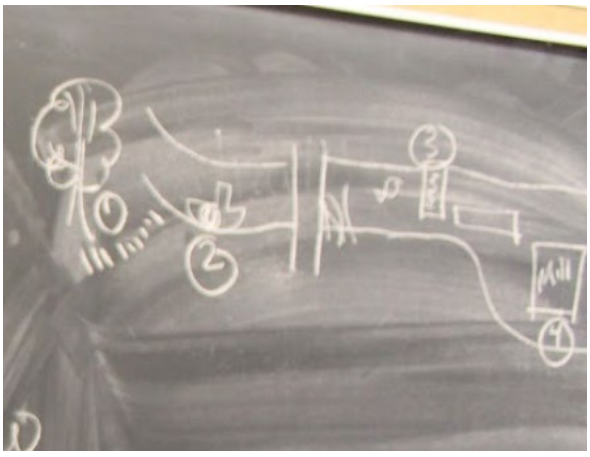
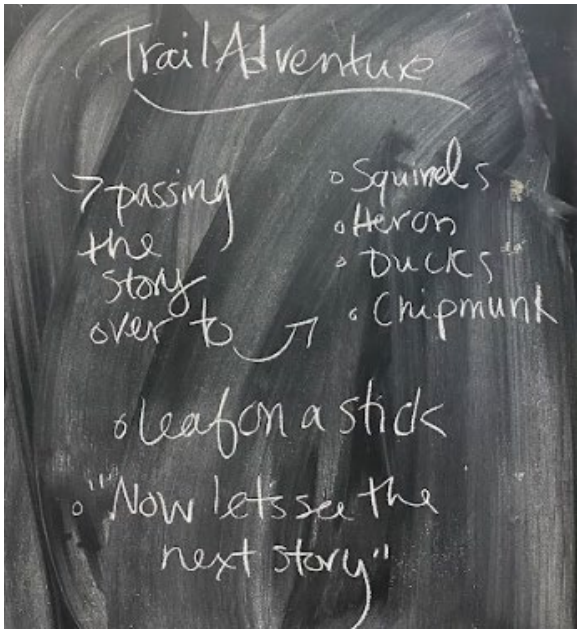


Figure 26

Brainstorming animals on the journey



4.11 In the field: Wetland habitat, scampering squirrels, and filming leaves in flight

On November 4th, the students and I headed out into another warm fall afternoon, walking, once again, down the hill of our school, across the highway and through the residential neighbourhood east of the River. This time we turned left and walked south along the bank of the River, following the ravine trail to the Iron Bridge where Kawartha Conservation Marine Biologist Brett Trugunno awaited us (see Figure 27). The Iron Bridge is another footpath bridge, like the Rainbow Bridge, that crosses the Scugog River. Once part of the Midland train rail, the Iron Bridge, as it is referred to locally, is now a footbridge that crosses the Scugog River between Logie and Durham Streets. We deposited the camera equipment that we had brought and gathered on either side of the bridge, taking in the view of the River below. Brett Trugunno spoke with the students about the habitat that this wetland area provides for animal life and

Figure 27

Students along the Scugog River, talk with Aquatic Biologist Brett Trugunno



outlined the importance of the shoreline. He spoke to the ways in which the damming of the River in the early 1800s would have impacted local ecology, changing the habitat for all aquatic life. Questions that students asked also led to discussing the role of humans in ensuring the health of the River now and for the future. Runoff water from roads and from farms in the area were flagged as points of concern and the role of shoreline reconstruction in preserving the health of the River was also explained. As we listened, I wondered if the students would have enough time to incorporate the information Brett Trugunno shared into their drama work and how they would render what they were hearing into their drama. Students listened and asked questions, taking part in the moment of shared time outdoors, learning something about a body of water and other aspects of Land locally. Our meeting on the bridge and the students' interaction with the

area surrounding the bridge created authentic context and a concrete reference point for students that had not existed previously.

When our time with Brett Trugunno had concluded, students turned their attention to filming the footage that would be used for the living picture book. Students worked in teams to set up and shoot different scenes and work through the best way to achieve the required footage. The flying leaf, the running squirrel, and a farmer bringing a sack of wheat to be ground at the Mill were all shot simultaneously in the area around the bridge and pathways along the River as I floated between groups. There was much experimentation and guess work that went into the students' attempts to acquire usable shots. How to best capture the perspective of a squirrel running through the leaves along the path beside the River involved thinking about the height of a squirrel, representing its line of sight, and negotiating the logistics of getting low to the ground while mimicking the speed of a running squirrel as it scampered. The shared goal of recording effective material despite the students' collective lack of experience as videographers produced instances of cooperation and productive interaction. Collaborating with students in their work by holding the camera, offering ideas, or lying on the ground to get a shot of the flying leaf, placed me in the role of co-creator, which reinforced the team approach to the project. Our attempts to shoot video that would suggest the spontaneous flight of the leaf on the wind without seeing hands, as well as narrating the imaginary voice of a squirrel as it ran through leaves while holding the camera close to the ground and mimicking squirrel-like movements, produced gales of

laughter (see Figure 28). Spontaneous conversation arose on a myriad of topics, and the unstructured social moments left room for different kinds of interaction. Students made comments connecting their own experiences to the wildlife we were profiling, such as one student who remarked, “we have a rock snake in our neighbourhood.” Students also took turns making suggestions for filming: “That’s not in the frame,” “Did you get it?” The crew capturing the squirrel segment also broke into a spontaneous voicing of the squirrel’s perspective as they filmed his discovery of some interesting food: “munch, munch, munch.” In contrast to the heaviness that seemed to hang in the air in the first term, the afternoon of filming that day offered a brief, but meaningful, reprieve. Moreover, the laughter, problem solving, and use of imagination that students showed as they engaged in

Figure 28

Capturing a leaf in flight



their tasks brought a spirit of hope to the experience.

4.12 Reinforcing research: Indigenous teachings and history

The weather in Kawartha Lakes had begun to turn cold on the day we met with Cultural Archivist, Jack Hoggarth from Curve Lake Cultural Centre in the outdoor classroom at our school on December 9th, 2021 (see Figure 29). We had discussed in class the purpose of honouring the traditions of the original people whose territory we were on as well as how to say thank you in Ojibwe. As the students settled themselves on the large boulders of the listening area, a student volunteer handed Jack Hoggarth a tobacco pouch offering and said “Miigwetch.” Jack Hoggarth responded in kind and began his talk by discussing the meaning of offering tobacco. He spoke about the specific history of the local Land and about Anishnaabe teachings with respect to the connectivity of all things. Jack shared the meaning behind the practice of carrying an eagle feather as he spoke and allowed it to be passed around to each of the students who shared where they were from and what community they lived in. Some students

Figure 29

Jack Hoggarth and students in the outdoor classroom



seemed self-conscious sharing out loud in front of the class and a local partner who was new to them. Other students seemed excited to connect with each other in this way and reflected positive anticipation about learning something they knew little about. They listened attentively to the forty-minute talk in which Jack Hoggarth made connections about caring for the Land and for each other. He explained the history of Indigenous people on local Land. Confronting colonial thinking and history in relation to Indigenous worldview was new for many students. Over their time in school, most students in this age group have learned about Residential schools, albeit in ways that often characterize the system, the beliefs that fueled it, and their impacts as a singular event, and one that happened relatively long ago. One of the goals of this Project was to disrupt the historicizing of Indigenous people and of colonization by understanding the history of where we live and experiencing the Land first hand. I wanted students to see how colonial expansion efforts and the unilateral actions of early settlers had permanently impacted Indigenous Land and local people in support of capitalist ventures. I hoped for students to become critical about how we use Land today and to care more about it by virtue of having spent time along the Scugog and the surrounding area. I wondered if the talk with Jack Hoggarth had been left too late in the course and if there was enough time for students to internalize what they had heard, for us to discuss, and consider how the talk had informed their perceptions of the history of the Land and our ongoing responsibility to ensure good relations with people and Land. I needed more time to determine how to thoughtfully facilitate discussions about these ideas, and there were few days left of the course. The work of identifying, unpacking, and un-learning colonialism is a long-term and ongoing effort, and I hoped that the teachings with Jack

Hoggarth, coupled with our time in class and outdoors, had in some way, begun or added to that process.

4.13 The final countdown

With one day left until performance there was an alarming amount of work still to be done. One student had taken on the responsibility of piecing together the filmed portions of the ‘living picture book,’ which had just been completed. There was still a song to finish, choreography to create and teach to others, and a script left to refine. The pressure of performance worked its usual magic and an element of increased energy permeated the activities of the class. We gathered together and three students informally led a conversation about what gaps remained in the script. Ideas for refinement were offered as well as ideas and plans for how to complete the remaining work. Some groups were further ahead than others and had not completed their portion of the work, so classmates whose work was completed stepped in to help. Despite some frustration evident towards classmates who had not completed their share of the devising in the allotted time, students nevertheless offered to share the effort. The class learned and rehearsed the sea shanty, debating how slowly to sing the song so that the kindergarteners could learn it and sing along. We discussed what kinds of costume pieces and props we could procure for the scene and conducted a stumble-through rehearsal. Several students offered ideas for how we might improve and also flagged details to help with timing their narration with the images in the slide deck. Still feeling unprepared, we planned to conduct multiple run-throughs in the next day’s class before meeting up with the kindergarteners and Ms. Atkins for our virtual visit.

4.14 Performance

On November 10th, 2021, presentation day arrived and we spent the time leading up to the virtual meeting rehearsing the performance. There was a sense of anticipation and most students appeared very focused as they practiced. I was in charge of controlling the slide deck and rehearsed switching back and forth between sharing the screen with the still images and the live camera. We logged on and saw the small classroom with the kindergarteners seated at their shared tables arranged throughout the room. Ms. Atkins and I ensured that both sides could see and hear, adjusting the technology as the students patiently waited, and then we began. I have offered an account of four moments of the Project I performance below. In Figure 30, I have provided a table documenting the scripted dialogue, images of the living picture book performance, and descriptive notes and observations as the performance took place.

The kindergarten class began the performance seated and paid close attention to the screen on which the drama students were projected. Their teacher Ms. Atkins introduced the presentation by saying, “Can you say, good morning, Ms. Kennedy’s Class? These students are learning about drama, about acting out stories, and they have a story to share with us today.” The drama student narrator began the presentation, greeting the students and asking her classmates to introduce themselves by name. Throughout the beginning of the performance several questions were posed to the kindergarten audience, designed to engage the younger students by having them think and answer (See Figure 30). The kindergarten students’ responses became more animated as the student leader’s questions progressed. When asked if they had their leaf puppets (real leaves that had been laminated and mounted on popsicle sticks), they waved them in the air. Several kindergarten students stood and some tried to get closer

to the projector screen or camera, as though trying to ensure that the drama student narrator could see them waving their leaf.

The Steamboat scene began with one of the drama students introducing himself with the dialogue he wrote as the rest of the drama students put on their captain hats and grabbed mop and broom props. The drama student began the song slowly to allow the younger students to catch on to the tune and chorus. The drama students increased the tempo of the song as it progressed and as that happened, several students in the kindergarten class began waving their leaves above their heads seemingly in response to the singing, though they did not sing along. The drama students enacted gestures and choreography such as swabbing the deck, and acted out the motion made by gears. The three drama students who led the song swung their arms back and forth, and traded spots through various choreographed moves to alternate being the 'lead' singer of the group. At the end of the song in the pause between switching from the live action to the video and still images, the strains of a single small kindergartener voice could be heard repeating the shanty tune.

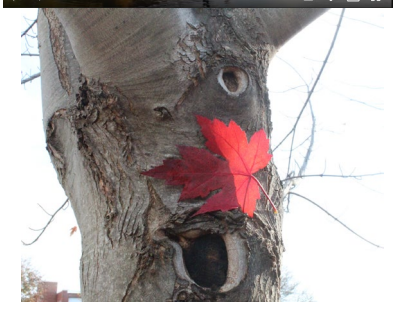
The level of activity in the kindergarten class seemed to increase during Fish Friends segment of the presentation. There was a lot of movement and continuous talking that could be heard from the audience as the fish characters from the Scugog River enacted their scene. Ms. Atkins rose from her seat to accompany wandering children back to their chairs. During the image of the locks and fish, the students yelled out excitedly. At the end of the dialogue the fish said goodbye, and at which point we could hear several children from the class calling out, "Goodbye!" When the drama student narrator introduced the squirrels Sally and Steve, the kindergarteners could be heard shouting "Steeeeve!" in excited participation. Various kindergarten students arose

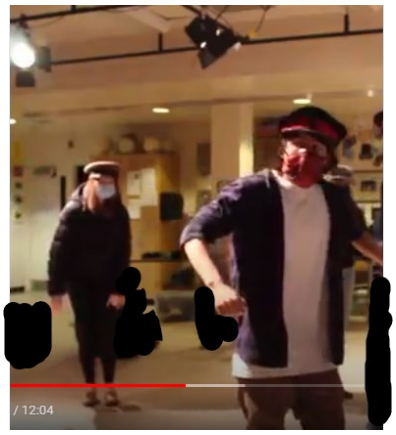
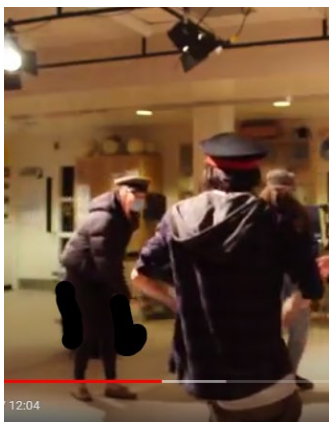
from their seats and began to wander, which required Ms. Atkins and the Educational Assistant to redirect each of the children back to their chairs. The performance concluded with a senior drama student thanking the students for joining in and asking the students if they had any questions or wanted to share anything they liked about the story. The activity in the kindergarten room continued to rise and retaining students' interest in a conversation about what had transpired quickly dissipated. We waved good bye and ended our call.

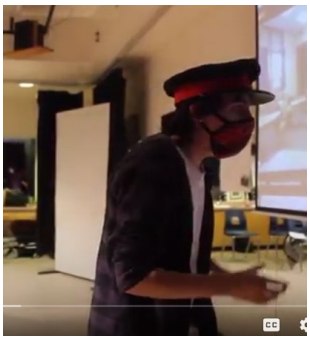
Figure 30

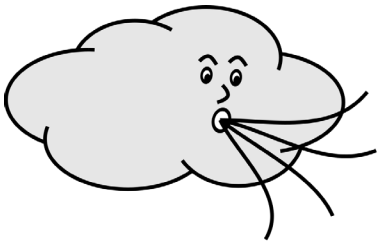
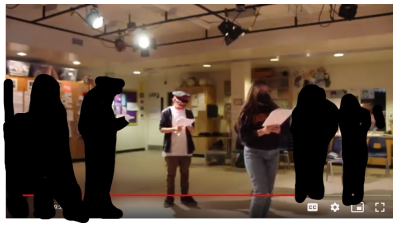
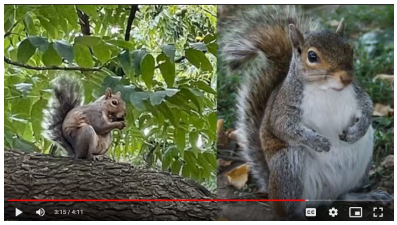
Project I - Four Performance Moments

Performance Moment	Image	Discussion
Introduction Drama student narrator 1: If we look out our window we can see sky, trees, leaves, and a corn field. This is also called Land. We can also see birds who live on the Land. Today we are going to tell you a story about where we live. We are grateful for the Land and it's our job to take care of it by being kind to animals, putting waste in the garbage, and keeping our water clean. Does anybody know what season it is? And have you noticed leaves falling from the trees? On each of your desks there should be a leaf. Can everyone hold up their leaves to show us that they have them? Awesome! Okay, perfect. Once everyone has that we're all going to hold up		The kindergarten class began the performance seated and paid close attention to the screen on which the drama students were projected. Their teacher Ms. Atkins introduced the presentation by saying, "Can you say, Good morning Ms. Kennedy's Class? … these students are learning about drama, about acting out stories, and they have a story to share with us today." The drama student narrator began the presentation, greeting the students and asking her classmates to introduce themselves by name. Throughout

our leaves. Can you put up your hand to tell us what colour you see? [Kindergarten students call out colours] Yellow? That's a pretty colour…[continued calling out of colours] Awesome, guys! Alright. Now we want to see what your leaves look like when the wind blows. Make your leaves fly in the wind just like this (demonstrates making leaf fly in the wind by putting it above head). Can everybody wave it up high? What about low? (Laughs at students' full body leaf demonstration). You guys are perfect! Now anytime you see a leaf floating around in our story we want to see you guys waving your leaves just like we were practicing. Does everyone understand? [Enthusiastic approval from kindergarten class] Okay, amazing! Now keep your leaves in your hand because they're about to take flight. Let the story begin… Drama student narrator 2: Meet the leaf, this leaf lives on a big tall maple tree that's bigger than a house. On the very top branch lives our leaf friend. A big gust of wind takes the leaf with a big swoosh, the leaf glides along the breeze, it passes humans walking, animals munching on berries, buildings standing tall and proud and finally a twisty River that looks like it goes on for miles.	   	the beginning of the performance several questions were posed to the kindergarten audience, designed to engage the younger students by having them think and answer. The kindergarten students' responses became more animated as the student leader's questions progressed. When asked if they had their leaf 'puppets' (real leaves that had been laminated and mounted on popsicle sticks), they waved them in the air. Several students stood and some tried to get closer to the projector screen and/or camera, as though trying to ensure that the drama student narrator could see them waving their leaf.

Excerpt from Sea shanty scene Drama student narrator 3: This is a steamship that used to sail the Scugog River. The steamship lets out a loud whistle that can be heard all the way across town. The sun is shining brightly as passengers who are wearing their best clothes get on board. Musicians play music on the boat to entertain the passengers during the trip the Sturgeon Point where they will spend the day. There's a deep rumble of the steam engine and the water splish sploshes against its sides as the huge ship turns around and heads north on the River. (Drama student leading song approaches the camera and addresses class directly, leaning in towards the camera). Hello, kids! I'm Captain D. And this? (Gestures behind him). This is me steamship. (Other students in the drama class put on their caps to approximate steamship workers). I've got a little 'ole shanty for you. Why don't you sing along? (The drama student backs up into the performance space and looks to his classmates, inviting them to join the song, starting to sing slowly so students can learn the tune). Hey, ho it's the Steamship, Hey, ho it's the Steamship, Hey, ho it's the Steamship. Hot Steam makes the pow-er Hot Steam makes the pow-er Hot Steam makes the pow-er	    	As the drama student introduced himself with the dialogue he wrote (provided left) the rest of the drama students put on their captain hats and grabbed mop and broom props. The drama student began the song slowly to allow the younger students to catch on to the tune and chorus. The drama students increased the tempo of the song as it progressed and as that happened, several students in the kindergarten class began waving their leaves above their heads seemingly in response to the singing, though they did not sing along. The drama students enacted gestures and choreography such as swabbing the deck, and acted out the motion made by gears. The three drama students at the front of the group who led the song swung their arms back and forth, and traded spots through various choreographed moves to alternate being the 'lead' singer of the group. At the end of the song in the pause between switching from the live action to the video and still images, the strains of a single

This is how it work-s. (Drama student leading song and the rest of the class sing the song with actions/choreography).		small kindergartener voice could be heard repeating the shanty tune.
Excerpt from Fish friends scene Drama student playing fish A: Our favourite part of our home are the sounds we hear in the dam: the water splashing against the wall and when it rains the sounds of water drops dancing on top of the River. Our River is beautiful and we need your help to keep it that way! Still image of Largemouth bass Drama student leader: We see the reflection of the sunrise every morning when we wake up. The River current flows quickly and it carries us along making us feel like we are at our own personal water park. If you take a peek into the water you can see us and we can see you too! Oop! Watch out for that hook! Still shot Fish Friends Drama student playing fish A: Thanks for swimming by! Drama student playing fish B: You're welcome back any time!	  	The level of activity in the kindergarten class seemed to increase during this segment of the presentation. There was a lot of movement and continuous talking that could be heard from the audience. Ms. Atkins rose from her seat to accompany wandering children back to their chairs. During the image of the locks and fish, the students yelled out excitedly. At the end of the dialogue the fish said goodbye, and at which point several children from the class called out, “Goodbye!”

Wind and squirrels Drama student narrator: The whistle of wind catches the leaf from the Mill. It dances through the air like a ballerina. The fresh breeze takes the little leaf up and down like a roller coaster. The leaf is brought to a trail that looks over the sparkling River where animals run back and forth. This trail is also used by humans who walk their dogs, run, and ride their bikes. But sometimes they also leave litter. A big sneeze from the wind blows the leaf down to two excited squirrels, Sally and Steve, who walk along the waterfront.	   	When the drama student narrator introduced the squirrels Sally and Steve, the kindergarteners could be heard shouting “Steeeeve!” in excited participation. Various kindergarten students arose from their seats and began to wander, which required Ms. Atkins and the Educational Assistant to redirect each of the children back to their chairs.

4.15 Post-Performance reflections

On our last day of the course students worked independently to record or write their post-performance reflections about their experiences over the process of the Scugog River Project. A comparison of student responses about their pre- and post-Project connections to and knowledge of the Scugog River are discussed in the next section, and the debrief comments relating to reflections on the process and performance are offered here. These responses reflect specific commentary from four of the students who consented to participate in the study.

Students agreed that during the devising process having interactive components to the presentation was important for the sake of maintaining the kindergarteners' interest. In one of the post-performance reflection questions, I asked students to comment on which of those elements they felt had been most effective and why. The leaf puppet was referenced by two students who both felt it provided a chance for students to be physically engaged in a controlled way; "it's something physical for them to get their energy out, but it also doesn't require them to have to move around the classroom in a huge show" and "it gave the reckless children something to do." One student felt that the puppets brought the students into the performance as co-performers; "it gave the students a hands-on activity through our virtual project therefore adding a personal connection." The sea shanty song and dance was a favourite participatory moment noted by two students because of the repetitive nature of the movement and sound, which they felt allowed students to remember the content of the song after the presentation was long over. In some of the reflection responses and in discussion, students commented that it was heartening to see and hear the kindergarten students responding enthusiastically to the song.

I was also interested in the students' perspectives on the visits from local partners and how, or if, these had impacted their experience. The responses from students highlighted their appreciation for acquiring knowledge through "multiple different ways of learning." Recurring comments reflected enjoyment for the immediacy of the exchange of information and that learning from local partners created "a more personal experience" and "better connection," which students felt impacted their retention of the knowledge that was shared. All of the respondents commented that working with local partners helped them in generating ideas for their own work. Two students also remarked that they preferred learning from local partners than using the internet as a source of learning. As Avery commented, "Being in person added a depth to our learning as it was in person rather than doing a quick Google search." When describing how they engaged with local partners, students said that they "asked questions" and "listened," and that the local partners "made me more interested," and that it "helped" to hear from live people.

This project was significantly impacted by the health and safety restrictions put in place by the local Health Unit and School Board to mitigate exposure to and spread of the COVID-19 virus. Acting in person is a different experience from acting online and so I asked students what skills they had to make use of for the online performance, and how performing online impacted the product they created and the dynamic with the audience. Students identified "having patience" with the technology, how technology can fail, and that performing online requires actors to be more intentional about "getting more physical emotions across." Three students commented that the lack of physical presence of the audience impacted the dynamic negatively and was a loss that they tried to make up for in various ways. Avery remarked that performing online created a

“disconnection between audience and performers” and that the presentation relied more heavily on digital images for the interactive moments because the performers and audience weren’t face to face. Irene felt that it was more difficult to maintain the attention of the audience and that the novelty of watching a live performance was lost. Ronnie commented that the dynamic between the actor and the audience online was entirely different in the exchange of emotion. He remarked that in live theatre “you can actually feel in the moment what that [specific emotion] is” whereas in a movie “you may feel those emotion[s] but you’re not connecting to them [the actor] as a human … and that human connection is what makes live performance just that much better.” The distance that Ronnie identified in on-screen performance speaks to the uniqueness of live performance as an exchange that is based in projecting and responding to emotion. In his live performance Ronnie, more than any other student, made a concerted, observable effort to reach the kindergarten audience through his voice and physicality.

Students also contributed thoughts anonymously on chart boards with prompts that I posted around the class in response to debriefing questions. The prompt, “Creating something to share with younger students versus older students requires…” received completion responses such as: patience, restraint, simple words, meticulous problem solving, making it fun, including them, making it interesting and fun, easy concept and “make it more straight forward compared to detail and larger words.” Another prompt asked students to describe the kindergartener’s reactions to their performance. Students wrote, giggly, extravagant, happy, cute, a bit confused, so adorable …and loud, joy, underwhelmed, and laughing a lot and using their leaf. As Ms. Atkin noted in our post-Project chat, and some students remarked in one-on-one interviews, the state of isolation and seclusion of students from each other during this

time period played a part in making any degree of interaction remarkable if not impactful: any interaction was better than none. Despite missing the benefit of live interaction at various points in the project, the students' comments suggested that they viewed the Project as having positive outcomes. Moreover, the missing aspects of live performance provoked some thinking about how elements like the exchange of emotion between performer and audience impact the performance for the audience and the actor. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, I know that I had taken for granted the unique dynamic that arises in live performance. Its absence only served to mark its importance and underscore that there is no substitute for the interchange of energy and emotion that happens in live, in-person performance.

4.16 Comparing Pre-Project interviews and post-Project reflections

In the period following the performance, post-Project reflections were completed individually in writing or were recorded. They included various follow up questions about students' process and experience of the Project, including some of the same questions that had been asked in the start of the Project. The reflections were an opportunity to gauge where students began in their awareness of and connection to the River and compare it to how they felt at end of the Project. The reflection activity was also intended to have students think about their learning and instances of their experience that were memorable and why. In this section, four participant students' responses to the post-Project reflection questions are discussed and are also compared to their responses to the pre-Project interview questions.

Of the four post-Project reflections of study participants analyzed here, two responses about connection to the River were more specific than they were in their pre-

Project interviews. In the first of these, Avery relayed knowledge that was attached directly to the impact of the dam on the people of the community and Ronnie connected his learning to a visit with one of our local partners. Irene shared a generalized note that the River was once larger, but did not elaborate on why or how that change occurred and Erin outlined the uniqueness of the River and its general historical importance. Irene used possessive terminology in reference to the River - “our River” - which may reflect a sense of affiliation or connection that she felt to the River, and is notable on account of the student’s choice to use a possessive pronoun. The use of possessive language in relation to the River and other aspects of the local Land recurs in other responses from Irene and Ronnie, as discussed below.

In answer to the question, “Do you have connections or feelings about the River or the land around it?” the beginning of the Project, students cited connections that related to family and past times spent on or along the water: “Well, my Grandma literally lives on the water and… we always like to watch the people on the boats or kayaking… through it in the summer” (Avery); and “…the only connection that I have its… the locks that are on it? …it's one of the first locks that I did because, or went through, when I … when I go with my family” (Irene). Other students initially stated that they had little connection to the River, however, nevertheless carried on in their response to share a connection, even if it was general in nature: Erin responded, “I don’t have any connections to it, but it's been there for a long time and it relates to our history.” When asked to comment on the ways in which students thought the River was important, responses in the pre-Project interviews included reference to the general importance of rivers: “I feel like all rivers are kind of important”; the importance of the River in relation to leisure activities: “...it could be a little bit of a tourist attraction”; and the importance of

the River in light of its impact on property values. Post-Project reflection responses to the same question included more specific references to the River's importance as part of Land, connected to wildlife, ecosystems and "...to the people who have lived in Lindsay" (Avery) with respect to memories the River evokes.

Words and phrases that students used to describe the River in the pre-Project interview included: "Nice to look at," "smells like fish," "gross," "good for our environment," "has been here for a long time," and "tourist attraction," with references to specific memories with family on the River. Words used to describe the River in post-Project reflections were in some ways more expansive and a greater number of references were made to the environment and nature. Key descriptions in post-Project reflections included: "unique," "historical value," "holds memories," "helps the land around us… helps the ecosystems…," "new memory," "amazing." A similar number of references were made to industry in pre- and post-Project comments. For the purposes of this analysis, I have interpreted 'Industry' as any comment relating to activities that generate revenue. Comments that students made concerning 'Industry' included comparable mention in pre- and post- Project remarks about the dam and Mill, as well as tourism and property value. Greater mention was made about the town of Lindsay and "people of Lindsay" in post-Project reflections. The remarks that were made about the town in pre-Project reflections were that the Scugog River was located in Lindsay and that the River was "part of Lindsay history." Comments referencing Lindsay by name in post-Project reflections included "how much it [the River] means to the town of Lindsay and how it has lots of historical value," "the River matters to the people who have lived in Lindsay their whole life and it holds memories," "this town is filled to the brim with history," and "this town is so rich with culture and history." Two mentions were

made in post-Project reflections about the learning that took place during the project from/with people: “What I know about the River is basically all I‘ve learned from the actual meeting we had with people,” and “I’ll forever hold a new memory of the River that is shared with my peers about our walks to the River and information we learnt.” One comment was made about Indigenous people and Land by one student in the interview and in the reflection. She wrote, “This project also opened my eyes to the indigenous [*sic*] community and I’ve gained so much knowledge about their lives and culture that I never knew.”

4.17 One-on-one interviews

In the months following the course, I interviewed three of the students from the class about their experiences and take-aways from The Scugog River Project. When asked what the Project was about, each of the students interviewed responded that the Project was about history. Avery and Ronnie elaborated that the project entailed taking history and creating drama from the contents of that history, and teaching it to others. When asked what they would remember from the Project, for Ronnie, it was the stories that stood out, whereas for Avery it was walks, and Erin’s strongest recollection was what she had learned through conducting research. The students who were interviewed also expressed that the Project was about “teaching history to a younger audience,” learning inside and outdoors, and as Avery said, “applying what we’ve learned and the history to a dramatic piece.”

One question asked students to describe community connection. I wanted to hear students’ understanding of what community connection was and what words they would use to describe it. Responses included that community connection felt “great”

(Avery) and was “important” (Erin). Ronnie remarked that working as a classroom community to create the presentation was rewarding, commenting, “the challenge, that drive, it brings that … kind of … victory at the end - that nice, good feeling.” Erin explained her understanding of community connection in the context of the Scugog River Project by remarking that the Project made her feel that “I was a part of … something bigger.” Avery explained the feeling of community by comparing it to the creative community that arises in play productions, in that “everyone has the same interests so there’s so many things that you can bond over.” Avery elaborated, “my sense of community is the people, like, the people surrounding me. How they lift me up, or bring me down.” Avery also described her connection to community in terms of how, in the case of the Scugog River Project, her experiences in and knowledge of the community enhanced her existing relationships, as follows:

> I definitely feel more connected to my Grandma. She’s been in this town for so long and she knows everything. Being able to actually communicate with her about stuff that I’ve learned and how she can add on to that is just great for storytelling because she can talk your ear off for days, but now I can do the same to her. (Laughs). So, it’s pretty nice and even my Dad too… at the Old Mill…the one that burned down, he said that when he was younger he used to load the truck [at the Mill] and go to the farm because he used to work on a farm when he was younger, so, I don’t know, that’s just another way of connecting with my Dad because I learned about it and he actually experienced it.

The connection to community through inquiry into the past also arose. Erin commented that learning about where you are is important for everyone, “not just our school, but other schools are well … where you came from … where your school is, what treaty it’s

on… this building wasn't always here, there was something here before it and I think it's cool to learn about that stuff, like ancestry as well."

The students articulated how the River and Mill held meaning for each of them after having taken part in the Project. Prior to the Project the students interviewed had limited familiarity with the history of the River or the Mill, and as Erin explained:

> ...now I'm going to be connected with it, knowing more of the research and history and presenting it to other people. It kind of, like, makes me, I don't know how to explain it …almost like an expert. Not really an expert, but if you can like, recite something and teach it to another person you clearly know a lot about it and if someone was to ask me about it I could probably answer some questions because the project was pretty big and I think it impacted our class in a way that maybe not other projects did.

Avery remarked on having more knowledge and confidence to share with others as a result of the Project, saying "I feel more educated about it and I could speak on it." Ronnie expressed greater awareness of the River and bridges and the meaning they now hold for him, stating, "I would say definitely it changed my view on how I looked at everything day to day. Rather than it being "oh, I'm just crossing this bridge", it's now "oh, I'm crossing this piece of history that this town is built on." Ronnie also commented on the impact of the Project with respect to engaging with the past, "I believe it was a huge impact on how I see the community and how I think the class sees the community because it's looking at somewhere you normally don't look at and taking into accountability [*sic*] what happened rather than just letting the past kind of sit."

Avery connected learning about community to the memory of conducting the Project with classmates: "… every time I see it [the River] I genuinely do think of our

project …We spent so much time on it and learning about it that I think… Ah! The project we did! … It was fun too.” The students’ conceptions of community connection were varied. Some connections enhanced relationships with people, such as Avery’s connections with her Grandmother, Father, and memories of time spent with friends on the River. In many cases, the connections that students made were intellectual and showed appreciation for the knowledge of what came before. Finally, students communicated feeling a connection that was one-directional in the sense of students presenting to the kindergarten class and reflecting on the connection through care in developing and executing a performance for younger people. These responses impacted my thinking around how the Project might be adjusted to further promote classroom and local community relationships and deepen connections tied to Land.

4.18 Concluding thoughts

Project I revealed that walking outdoors together as a class created space for casual conversation and relationship building through spontaneous conversation. Time and activities felt freer and less structured when we were ‘in the field’ and opened up opportunity for both pro-social and anti-social behaviours to emerge between students. Being along the water as a class served to disrupt familiarity students had with the area and with notions of what we create drama about, which in both cases led to new discoveries. Disrupting the familiar, which sometimes can simply mean visiting known places with different people, can create new meaning. In this case, the people and context of the visits opened up the possibility of understanding a variety of perspectives and broadening the lens to include that which previously was unknown.

Students used more specific language in post-Project interviews to describe the River and its meaning to people and the natural environment. They described the waterfront as an area to be cared for and that its history should be captured in accessible ways and enjoyed by the public. Students demonstrated care and responsibility in grappling with deconstructing the existing School Board Land acknowledgment statement. Developing a class Land acknowledgement held more personal, local meaning for students, and was made clear and understandable for younger students. Through this work students deepened their own knowledge and showed empathy for the younger students. Their choices mattered and they perceived the stakes as high. Their devising work also illustrated that ideas beget other ideas and that devising drama can be a fragile endeavour. Experiencing the loss of performing live heightened students' awareness of what transpires in live theatre and that it cannot be recreated in an online experience

I promptly made changes to Project II based on the experiences and feedback on Project I. For the student actors, the virtual presentation of their drama work limited the human, emotion-filled experience of performing. I wondered, given this feedback, if there a way to work with an audience at our own school so that we could connect in a more immediate way. Another important revelation from Project I came from comments from two students who mentioned that Land nearer to where they live held greater meaning for them than the Scugog River. I wondered if including personal connections to Land near where the students live might enhance the impact of the Project and lead to stronger connections. The experience of Project I resulted in unexpected learning, which in various ways, informed the second part of the study - Project II.

5 Project II

This chapter will highlight specific material from the Gathering, Devising, Sharing, and Reflection components of Project II. This Project included field visits, independent and whole class inquiry, ensemble devising, a virtual performance, and individual written and recorded reflections (see Table in Appendix A). The sections below offer an account of Project II which took place over forty-two-days in a grade nine drama class of twenty-eight students. The course began on November 16 of 2021 and concluded on February 1st, 2022. As with the account of Project I in chapter 4, in this chapter I will describe activities that transpired in class, examine student work, share student debriefs, and offer my own observations. Specific quotations, work samples, and direct observations are drawn from the work of twenty-three student participants. Interviews with three study participants from the grade nine class are also presented in this chapter. A post-Project interview with the partner teacher Mrs. Nyland is provided in the Partner Reflection chapter.

5.1 Local landmarks and Land near you

The entry point for this Project was students' personal connections to Land near them. In addition to considering Land near where students live, I asked them to think about Land and landmarks (i.e. buildings, signage) they pass on their rides to school, and to describe these in detail with prompts in an initial writing activity. Many students in rural communities spend a lot of time on the school bus, and the Land that they traverse is a part of their daily lives. The choice to include students' observations en-route to school expanded the scope of their witnessing in this Project. I also asked students to

share a personal recollection that they associate with the landmark or Land near them.

Figure 31

Student images of Land



Scattered around the room, sitting in dimmed lighting in chairs and on the floor, students conducted this task as a fast-writing exercise, using pen, pencil, or marker on scraps of recycled paper to jot down their impressions. These were handed in and later built upon when students created digital scrapbooks that contained their work from the Project.

Of the landmarks and Land near them that students described, many were forests, specific trees, fields, lakes, and a garden (see Figures 31-33). Vance chose to write about the forest behind his house: “I chose it because it reminds me of my previous childhood years, I have so many memories in the forest whether it be walks, snowmobiling, or four wheeling, ive [*sic*] been in the forest at least 400 times in my life, I can probably walk through it with my eyes closed.” Another student elected to write about a tree on his property: “It has long stretching [*sic*] branches and several large holes in the truck [*sic*]. In the summer it has a large canopy that reaches to the canopies of the other nearby trees. It reminds me that living on this farm is very cool, and that nature is thriving on this land, with the forest out back.” Several students wrote about human made structures such as roads, locks, lights, signage, and buildings, including an old manor, drive-in theatre, schools, a barn,

and stores. The structure that Tom wrote about was a barn that he passes on the school bus: “Barn in a field. Aged with time, planks rotting with history, a glimmer of sunlight glares through the rafters, a rectangular structure, with a cracked old triangular roof. Reminds me of my grandparent’s home” (see Figure 34).

Figure 32

The forest behind Vance’s house



Roma was unsure about how to approach this task, but asked if she could write about a store and her interactions with its owner. She demonstrated confidence and enthusiasm as she wrote about a local convenience store as her landmark and wrote: “I pass Peters [*sic*] convenience. When I pass Peters [*sic*] I always stop and say hi and tell him to have a great day. On the way home I stop in and ask him if he needs help or ask him how his day has been… I have passed Peter since I was thirteen… I’m fifteen lol I’ve also known Peter since I was three…” (see Figure 35). In writing about a place and relationship she knew well, Roma’s connection became vivid.

Figure 33

Tree on student’s farm

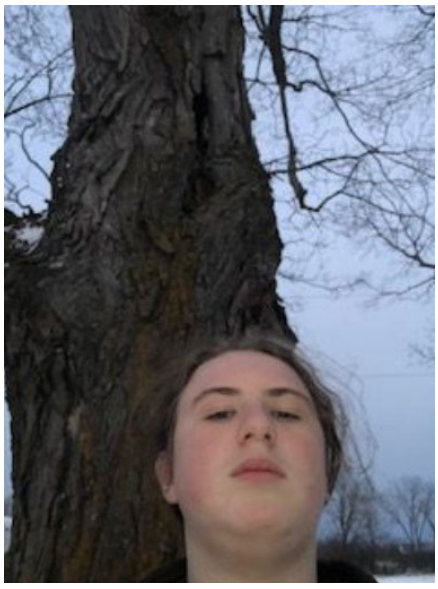


Figure 34

Tom's Quick Writing Response

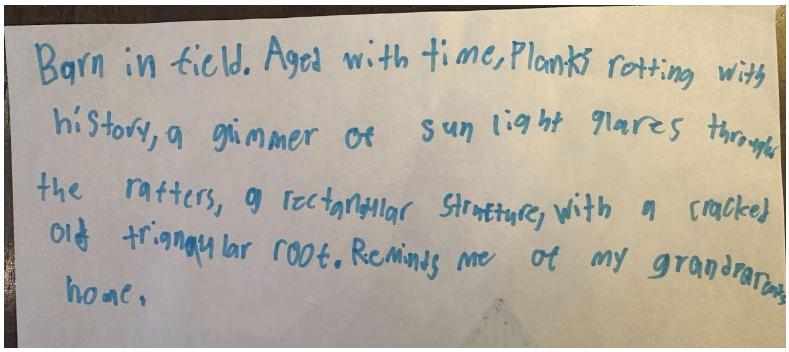
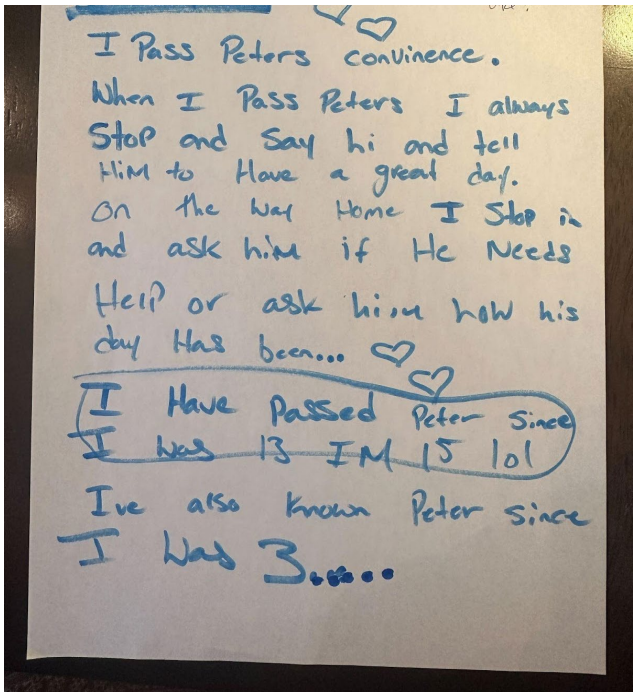


Figure 35

Roma's quick write response writing about a convenience store that is a landmark near her



A handful of students selected human created landmarks to write about but highlighted natural elements in their descriptions that were part of the landmark, bridging both categories. Lisa's choice exemplifies this case:

> The drive- in is a tall rectangular building that is red and white. It has wide red fences around it and in the front theirs [*sic*] a big sign that says ‘Lindsay drive in’ with yellow stars on it and fake cars …. Its [*sic*] located on a big grass field so theirs [*sic*] lots of space in front of it and behind it. Theirs [*sic*] two screens you can watch movies on in there, one in the front by the road, and one in the back by the trees …It reminds me of the time I went for my friend’s birthday and we played on they playground with the beautiful sunset with pink and orange swirling in the sky.

The memories that the students shared in association with their choices were nearly always connected to friends or family. For example, in a second entry, Vance described a river and bridge on Mount Horeb Road, writing, “it’s a bridge you drive on, there's water below it, the water streams north … it reminds me of fishing because I fish with my family” (see Figure 36). Some memories were attached to specific events in the students’ lives. Addison wrote about falling out of a tree on her Grandparents’ property that she often visited, recollecting, (see Figure 37):

> … when I was younger, my cousins and I used to climb it, looking for catarpillars [*sic*] or just hanging out. One day I was sitting on a branch and I accidentally fell backwards. It wasnt [*sic*] extremely high, about 4-4.5 feet up ish. I landed flat on my back and knocked the wind out of myself. I crawled to my older cousin and scared the crap out of her because I was trying to say "Get help, get grandpa!" but i [*sic*] couldnt [*sic*] breathe. She called my grandpa who took his sweet time and i [*sic*] ended up being fine. Its [*sic*] funny to look back on now.

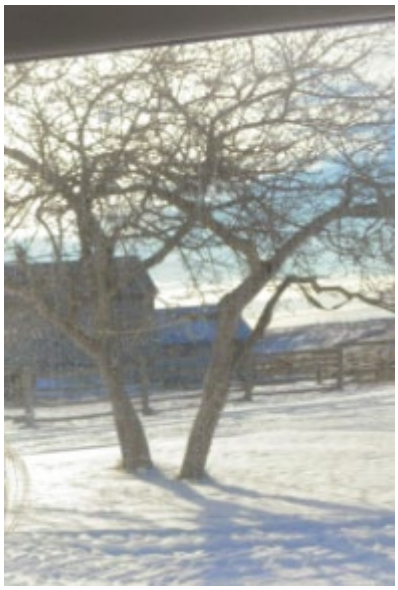
Figure 36

Bridge near Vance's house



Figure 37

The tree at Addison's Grandparent's house



Owen, who was resistant to writing because he felt there was nothing around him that stood out or was worth commenting on, chose the country road he travels on by his home as his landmark and wrote, "The landmark is a long grey highway that stretches across a long flat land mast [*sic*], the land around the highway has homes scattered around but is mostly farming land. When my parents split up, I had to go back and forth from my moms [*sic*] house to my dads [*sic*]. A memory I have … of my landmark is the first time I had to go to see my moms house…" Owen's memory was a further example of instances wherein students expressed that they had little to connection with Land, and then demonstrated otherwise in their work. His recollection wove together Land(marks) with a memory tied very strongly to a period of significant change in his family life and physical surroundings. In this way, Land and landmarks possessed personal meaning in an intra-active way by connecting the more-than-human to a

human experience and story, embedding the physical world in the student's emotional and spiritual reality.

Later, I explained the Project to the class and that we would be using their own connections to Land, our research, and learning from local partners to create a performance, and outlined the success criteria. As a first devising task, students worked together to create a series of tableaux, or frozen images using their descriptive writing as inspiration. They were asked to create one tableau for each person's story, as well as transitions from one 'picture' into the next. As the groups collaborated, I circulated, providing support for those who were unsure, and suggesting extensions for those who felt they were 'done'. Some work was shared in front of the class and we discussed what we had seen. Confusion remained amongst some students about how their writing and somewhat abstract forms of drama would combine to form a longer performance, and one student asked, "What is this 'play' going to be about?" Creating a non-linear anthology through ensemble devising challenged students' prior experiences of drama, which up to this point had largely been confined to memorising and performing a ready-made script. Despite some initial misgivings and confusion, during the debrief of their tableaux creations, students were able to identify 'golden moments' and instances of impactful images in each other's work that could be built upon. Their preliminary writing and physical work through tableaux created a constellation of geographic references that brought their unique observations of place and Land into conversation with one another. Self-selecting what to observe about Land near them lent a quality of authority to each student's offerings as each student was an expert in their own observations which endowed them with confidence.

5.2 History walk

The grade nine class included twenty-eight registered students and twenty-three study participants. The large size of the group made walking trips to the River challenging because an additional staff member was required to leave school grounds to meet school board ratio requirements. The diminished pool of supply teachers and the increased challenge of acquiring teacher coverage for absences to accommodate field trips contributed further obstacles to organising excursions. Despite these barriers, I was able to get permission for two outings: one for the history walk, and the other for a field trip to Ken Reid Conservation Area. An Educational Assistant who I knew well agreed to help out by chaperoning the field trips with me and we negotiated permission with the Principal. The adjusted focus on Land and landmarks near where students lived was therefore a fortuitous change given that the number of walks to the River for observations would be fewer than had been done in Project I.

As with the senior class, the grade nines were excited to leave school grounds on the day of the field trip, November 30th, 2021. They were asked to capture images of our walk of things that were of interest (see Figure 38). Our group met with Ian McKechnie near the Carew interpretation sign on the west side of the Scugog River. The cold snow underfoot did not seem to diminish spirits and the class listened attentively to Ian as he once again recounted stories connected to stops along our route. During our first stop, students made audible noises in recognition of hearing their towns' names mentioned during Ian's discussion of steamboat traffic that once ferried tourist passengers to places like Bobcaygeon, Fenelon Falls, and Coboconk. We heard about the wool mill as we walked by the converted factory, and then Ian pointed across to the other side of the River and spoke about the role of trains in the 1800s (see Figure

39). He outlined the various routes that would run through Lindsay and noted a location on the east side of the River where soldiers from the 109th battalion were sent off for training and service in WWI. Ian McKechnie elaborated on the wider implications of railroad development, noting that the settlement of communities such as Lindsay “came about largely through the displacement of other people…” (Ian McKechnie, Tour commentary, November 30, 2021). This theme was continued at the Purdy’s Mill plaque where Ian retold the story of the damming of the Scugog River, the resulting mosquito

Figure 38

Photos taken by students during the history walk



Figure 39

Students assembled in Carew Park along the Scugog River



infestation due to standing flood water, and sickness that subsequently plagued the community, causing many, including the Anishinaabek, to leave. As the bells rang out from St. Andrew's Presbyterian church, and wet snow started to fall, Ian McKechnie told the students about the citizen uprising and destruction of the dam. We carried on to the Old Mill, the last stop on our tour. Students pulled on their jacket sleeves to cover their cold hands, shifting their weight from one foot to the other in an effort to keep warm as they heard about the Sadler Needler Mill and its role in the early days of settlement (see Figure 40). We said our goodbyes and thanks to Ian McKechnie and hurried to meet our ride, with a requisite pause at the playground before boarding our bus back to school (see Figure 41)

When asked the next day what stuck with them from the history walk, students made repeated mention of soldiers boarding the trains and the wool factory. Students commented that it was "nice how they have signs up in the park, talking about the locations' [*sic*] background." Remarks were also shared about the cold weather that

Figure 40

Ian McKechnie and students at the locks along the Scugog River



"made learning difficult." The history walk created an opportunity for students to connect local stories and histories to place and Land. While ultimately, we mainly used students' own stories from where they live to devise a drama performance, spending time along the water and learning about the community in which their school is located was important in order to create living memories of the Land our school occupies and its history. Connecting stories to place and Land during the walk also provided scaffolding

Figure 41

Students on playground apparatus after history walk



for students' own research and documentation of nature near them, landmarks, and recollections.

5.3 Role Play - Town hall meeting about Arts and Heritage on the Scugog River

As with the town meeting hall role play in Project I, this activity was used as a tool in the grade nine class to better understand a variety of perspectives and discover details and issues surrounding the River. I explained that a meeting had been called about creating installations that would impart some cultural and historic information along the waterfront in Lindsay. The class brainstormed who the stakeholders in this discussion might be and included in their list the mayor, who facilitated the meeting, City counsellors, contractors, designers/artists, an historian, business owners, an Ecologist from Kawartha Conservation, residents, artists, a person in charge of Heritage for City of Kawartha Lakes (CKL), a person in charge of Arts for CKL, a person in charge of tourism for CKL, and a person representing the interests of local Indigenous community. Similar to the senior class, the question of how to ensure that the meeting had representation of Indigenous voices without having a non-Indigenous student take on the role of an Indigenous person was a challenge. This question was put to the class and it was decided that while it wasn't appropriate for a non-Indigenous person to speak for the Indigenous community, that someone could be responsible for flagging instances where we would need to go back to local Indigenous communities for consultation and guidance. This moment provided an instance of students applying the practice of not speaking for others, specifically Indigenous people, and acknowledging what we do not know.

The meeting was brought to order by Addison who played the part of the mayor. The students were seated with the members of ‘town council’ positioned in front of the assembled stakeholders who faced them in a horseshoe formation. An initial proposal was made that a series of interpretive signs with photography be built along the waterfront. Addison facilitated the conversation with skill, acknowledging the people in the gallery who wished to speak, calling on them to make their points, and validating their contributions by summarising what had been offered, pointing out that the ideas were worthy of consideration, and by asking questions. The unspoken protocol of behaving in a respectful way in the fictional town hall meeting was observed by all and the practice of raising hands to speak was followed in ways that it often was not during regular class time. Addison had strong verbal skills and used heightened vocabulary in an effort to reflect her role as mayor throughout the discussion. Her suspension of disbelief laid the stage for the world of adult decision making which inspired a high level of investment from her classmates.

During the fifteen-minute role play the students showed sharp focus. Even students who were not speaking listened and did not draw attention away from the conversation. The grade nine discussion centred largely on the practical aspects of the installations and how they would be experienced by the public, as opposed to concern for the content of the installations. Key ideas that emerged from the town hall meeting were the cost of the proposed installation to taxpayers, accessibility, the impact of the installations on the natural environment, as well as the importance of the site-specific experience of the installations. The latter two aspects of the meeting bear further discussion here.

Students' deliberations involved thinking about viewers of the installations who might be excluded from experiencing text-focused installations. One student noted that any kind of installation with writing might be challenging to read for people with vision issues, or not accessible at all for people who are blind. Another student suggested that information on the proposed installations could be provided in alternative forms such as voice recordings and images. The idea of providing information in braille for non-seeing visitors was also suggested and explanation of braille was forthcoming by peers to inform students who were not familiar with it. Quick Response (QR) codes were proposed for their capacity to lead users to audio recordings and images at the click of a button, however, students also raised the point that not everyone has phones. It was put forward that the demographic of phone users with the technical knowledge to scan a QR code are mainly younger phone owners who might not be inclined to learn more about the topic of local Heritage by engaging with the QR code option.

Students identified that immediacy was a key aspect of the culture and Heritage installation experience and that the viewer should be drawn in by images and text on site, in the moment, in order for the installations to be compelling. Further, students noted that relying heavily on QR codes might exclude older viewers who are unable or uninterested in learning how to access the information through the codes, as well as younger viewers who do not have personal devices. Addison suggested that the length of the text on the installations would need to be easily understood by all, commenting, "... is there any way to shorten how much information [there is on the signs]? Obviously, you want it to be accurate, but is there any way to make it more understandable for [everyone]… Because if it's too long, too complicated then it's very hard to get the point across…" The students' discussions around accessibility revealed their ability to think

broadly and inclusively about barriers that the hypothetical installations might present to others. The idea of one student often sparked a related thought from another, or provided a perspective and learning that was perhaps new and instructive to their peers. This aspect of the discussion gave rise to the group being thoughtful about the people who would visit these installations and revealed their awareness of diverse needs in nuanced ways.

Concern was also raised about the impact of the installations on the natural environment along the River. Aurora's thoughts about the number of signs proposed echoed these concerns, "I just feel like fifteen [signs] is going to, like, clutter the area… and take away from the nature" while another student communicated that being on site was key to experiencing both nature and the human history of place. The use of a QR code on the installations was suggested as a cost-savings option to minimise the text on signage, thereby making the installations smaller and less expensive. Usher felt that this would diminish the experience. He explained:

> The walk is actually in nature … we see all these buildings and stuff and it would be nice to actually read the history off that and actually see [where the buildings were situated]… [and] have a nice view of it while being in nature, I don't think standing with a QR code on your phone and reading it at home you'd be able to have that image in your head of like, 'oh that's awesome' and seeing where it was actually built…

The influence of the history walk from the previous day was evident in the students' feelings that 'being there', on site, was important. Usher's comment reflects his understanding that Land, place, and story are strongly connected and that students are impacted differently when in the places where (hi)story took place. As noted

previously, the ‘awesomeness’ of experiencing a story on site has an ephemeral quality. The Land, buildings and/or their remains, and the (hi)story of the site work together, adding layers that are sensory and connective: we stand in the place where others stood, we can imagine the damp of the snow in late November in years past making the work difficult for the people along the water. The activation of imagination through engagement with surroundings and story brought the people and events of a time long past back to life, however briefly.

In this whole class role play, students wrestled productively to consider different ideas, ways to problem solve, and reach consensus. The benefits of hearing each other’s thoughts and ideas in this forum setting were three-fold: the role play was generative, clarifying, and forced students to articulate their own positions. The forum style discussion also clarified key ideas in inconspicuous ways which was essential for students who were unsure or confused about the concepts or details under discussion, or who required more listening time in order to find their own entry points. By speaking aloud in class, students also had the benefit of hearing peers use their own words to articulate thoughts, as opposed to an adult’s. Finally, the town hall meeting strategy challenged students to explain their positions. Speaking in a group setting allows for immediate feedback about what students understand. Listeners nod, make eye contact, and may add on to what has been offered up for consideration. This provides the student speaker with validation for the idea contributed, or forces them to refine and explain their position more fully.

The whole class role play was also a gauge of community. Who speaks and who does not? How are the ideas that are shared received? How does the group contend with ideas that are not accepted, or are perceived as valuable by only a small

contingent of the group? As the teacher, I put structure in place for the conversation such that there was a moderator (the mayor) and each student had a role from which they considered the question before the group. The fictional role of each student provided an element of safety through which to engage in discussion: the views they offered were not necessarily their own, but belonged to the character they were playing. Whether the students' own thoughts and those of the character align, no one really knew. In this case, the fiction of the scenario as a town hall meeting with a formality of procedure provided structure and expectations around the interactions that, in turn, informed the respectful and productive quality of the conversations on which most students were focused. The premise of the discussion as a town hall meeting allowed the class to act 'as if' they were a community of stakeholders discussing a community issue, yet gain the very real benefits of being heard, contributing, and demonstrating care by listening to and engaging with others. The exercise of doing the pretend exercise became part of the history and community building of the class.

5.4 Territory and Land Acknowledgement

Our discussion about territory and Land acknowledgements began with the same formative assessment activity as in Project I - a game of Atom to create random groups in which students responded to prompts. This activity played out quite differently with a larger group of grade nine students than it did with a smaller class of senior students. The volume of bodies and voices in the room made the activity a challenging one to facilitate: I needed to recapture the students' attention continually, as spontaneous side chats would erupt during times when groups were asked to share with the whole class what their group had discussed. I was nervous to conduct the conversation, unsure

about how it would go, and mindful of not wanting to say the wrong thing with respect to Indigenous histories, treaties, and Land. I was also aware that I may have to navigate challenging viewpoints. While the conversation was productive in many ways, I rushed through it, attempting to balance classroom management with listening to students' comments as they spoke about their understanding, experience of, and ideas surrounding territory and Land acknowledgements.

The energy was very high as the students meandered through the space. When I asked students to discuss what the purpose of a Land acknowledgement was in their groups, one student in the sea of moving bodies asked, "What is a Land acknowledgement?" He was not alone. A number of students were unclear about what a Land acknowledgement was and I decided at that moment that we would need to have this part of the conversation together. I put the question to the class and a few students raised their hands, one of them explaining that a Land acknowledgement was, "acknowledgement of the Land that Indigenous people used to live on." While I could have clarified that Indigenous people still occupy the Land, the student correctly offered that the acknowledgement identified traditional territories which was a step in the right direction. I went on to clarify the point that Indigenous people still live on this Land later in the class. The students also pointed out that we hear the acknowledgment on the morning announcements. Having established a reference point for the topic under discussion, students proceeded to talk with each other in their groups about the purpose of Land acknowledgements. When we gathered to discuss answers, students responded that the purpose of Land acknowledgements was "to acknowledge and respect", "to respect", "so we know", and "to respect the land we're in." There was general consensus and we moved on to the next question.

Students walked and regrouped, then were asked to discuss if the Land acknowledgment that we hear on our school announcements is effective, if people listen to it, and if they think students know what it means. I observed as students organised themselves and tackled the question. In my experience, conducting a movement-based activity to create randomised groups tends to prompt interesting dynamics in a few ways. Students often begin walking near people they know, such that when an 'Atom' number is called, they gather with friends and, depending on the number called out, other students join the group as well, who may not share the same immediate circle of friends. Based on their level of confidence and degree of interest, students who are not as close with the majority of the students in the group may or may not share their views on the question asked of them aloud. Ideally in this activity, everyone in the group shares their thoughts. It is not unusual for a leader to emerge who explicitly asks everyone to contribute their ideas. In some cases, however, the loudest voices dominate the conversation, quieter students are not invited to offer their responses, and little exchange occurs. When the responses from the small groups are discussed with the whole class, it is another opportunity for ideas to be challenged, or built upon, even if that discourse has not arisen within the smaller groups. In this circumstance, the opinions shared in the groups served to reinforce each other. Most of the groups in the class had a similar understanding, with one exception. When one group reported to the class that they didn't really listen to the land acknowledgment on the announcements because they didn't care and weren't interested, several students in the class had a very strong reaction:

Isaac: Whoa….

Teacher: Sorry, what's the first part?

Amy: …like… we don't care?

Teacher: And why don't you care?

Amy: Because we're not interested into [*sic*] the subject, or we don't … haven't learned about it and we don't want to know more.

Cerise: It's very important!

Oakley: (In agreement) Yes!

Teacher (repeating and clarifying what the students had said): So, you're not interested in anything to do with uh…'First Nations things'… so you don't listen?

Amy: Yeah.

Lisa: Geeze!

Oona: Oh, my Lord…

Teacher: Okay… umm… (to the class) is that a problem?

Multiple voices (emphatically): Yes.

Teacher: Why?

Sound bites unable to be ascribed to specific speakers: "Because they founded…", "...because it's important…"

Teacher: Put up your hand if you want to answer… wh... Why… why is that a problem?

(Inaudible chatter)

Teacher (selects Isaac who has his hand up to speak): Okay… Isaac?

Isaac: It's disrespectful because they're letting us on their land.

Teacher: Okay. (selects Lisa who has her hand up to speak) Lisa?... (chatter) (Teacher addresses class) Guys! Listen to Lisa please?

Lisa: We need to respect the fact that they live on this land too. (chatter)

Oona: That's not the point I was getting at, but okay …(inaudible)

Teacher (To the class): Did everybody hear that? 'Cause that was really good, Oona. (chatter)... Shhh (instructing students to be quiet) … listen (indicates for Oona to speak)

Oona: So, we kind of took the land from them…

Teacher: Okay, thanks. Any other thoughts on that one? Something I heard over here (pointing to one side of the class) I think, with Oakley, was it? That, somebody said, you hear it [the Land acknowledgement] every day so you kind of tune it out and it doesn't really mean anything because you just hear it and it just, you know… goes into the atmosphere because you don't…

Oakley: It goes in one ear and out the other.

The responses from the handful of students who chose to engage, challenged the views that Amy shared on behalf of her group. The reaction of the students who spoke in response to Amy's comments was decisive and it was clear from Amy's body language and subsequent silence that she had not anticipated opposition, or was uncertain about how to respond to her classmates. Amy often shared her opinions with confidence and was not one to disengage when confronted with views that differed from her own. The difference in how she responded to pushback in this case was notable. With the intention of wishing to keep the conversation productive and not punitive, I moved the discussion on to students' ideas about how Land acknowledgements might become more meaningful. In future work, Amy's responses to Land acknowledgment remained focused on outdoor adventure and presence of wilderness and revealed limited explicit understanding of colonialism or reconciliation. Amy was, however, able to generate

ideas about what would make territory and Land acknowledgments more meaningful to students when we arrived at that part of the conversation as a class.

Students' understanding of colonialism, reconciliation, and Land acknowledgements are often informed by their exposure at school and messaging from home. This means that classes often represent a wide range of learning around these concepts. Based on the number of students in the class, there was a greater variety of understanding and exposure to territory and Land acknowledgments and concepts of colonialization than in the senior class. Amy's classmates provided information for her group to consider and their strong response was unexpected. In subsequent experiences, similar in nature, where a student expresses their disinterest in the topic of colonialism and Land, and claim it has nothing to do with them, I continue to respond with questions. In this situation above, however, I framed the question as a problem, which reflected judgement instead of curiosity. An important part of this learning is to engage students in thinking about their thinking, and to reflect on feelings that arise. Having these conversations in ways that allow students to learn without experiencing shame and blame is important in order for them to remain open to information, perspectives, and realities that may be new to them.

Our class conversation continued with students offering ideas for how to make Land acknowledgements more meaningful. Students commented that the words of the Land acknowledgement go "in one ear and out the other," and that "it's so repetitive that people just block it out." Suggestions for how to "change it up" included creating a song to sing, posting something at the front of the school that students could physically see every day, and that teachers should "say more about what it actually is and how it impacts our lives." Some students felt that asking Indigenous guest speakers into the

school would be a good way to make Land acknowledgements more meaningful. One student suggested, “If they came in the school and explained it to us it would make it interesting.” Amidst my attempts to address various ongoing disruptions in the classroom during the conversation, the dialogue continued and I asked students if they thought it was fair to put the responsibility of teaching non-Indigenous people about Land acknowledgements onto Indigenous people exclusively. The exchange carried on as follows:

> Several students in unison: No!
>
> Amy: I feel like it *would* be… Wouldn’t they want us to know what happened?
>
> Odette: Isn’t there a Reconciliation Committee at the school? Couldn’t they do a presentation?
>
> Teacher: Ah … yep, okay, Aurora? (Aurora indicates that she wants to exit the class to visit the washroom). Can you just wait… Okay. Alex, go take a lap. (Some students use of the strategy of taking ‘a lap’ in which they walk one ‘lap’ of the school hallway as a break from sitting still and listening, and then return to class, presumably prepared to refocus)
>
> Alex: Okay.
>
> Teacher: Aurora - go ahead [speak].
>
> Aurora: What if they wanted us to learn it… what if they wanted to be here?
>
> Teacher: Okay… I wonder if it’s our responsibility as well to understand the history that we don’t know. Uhhh… Maybe that‘s part of our responsibility … uhhh… as well. Yes? Eden?
>
> Eden: Isn’t it a good thing to have someone who knows about it come … (indistinguishable chatter)

Teacher: Great clarification … great point.

Othering, divisive terms like 'us' and 'them' were used frequently in these discussions. The assumption also appeared to be made (incorrectly) by a number of students that there were no Indigenous students in our class and that Indigenous people exist separate from them. Language such as this signalled some students' lack of exposure, and to an extent, highlighted a tendency to mythologize Indigenous histories and people. Students articulated interest in having Indigenous people speak at the school and concern was shown about the authority of the information. Aurora made an important point that we include Indigenous people in a discussion about how our class might go about learning more deeply about Land acknowledgments instead of making unilateral decisions without consultation. It was also interesting to note that the students phrased their comments as questions. This conversation was concluded by having students view the York University video, *Understanding the Land Acknowledgement* (York University, 2019) and identifying new language, words, and concepts that stood out, or were new to them (see Figure 42).

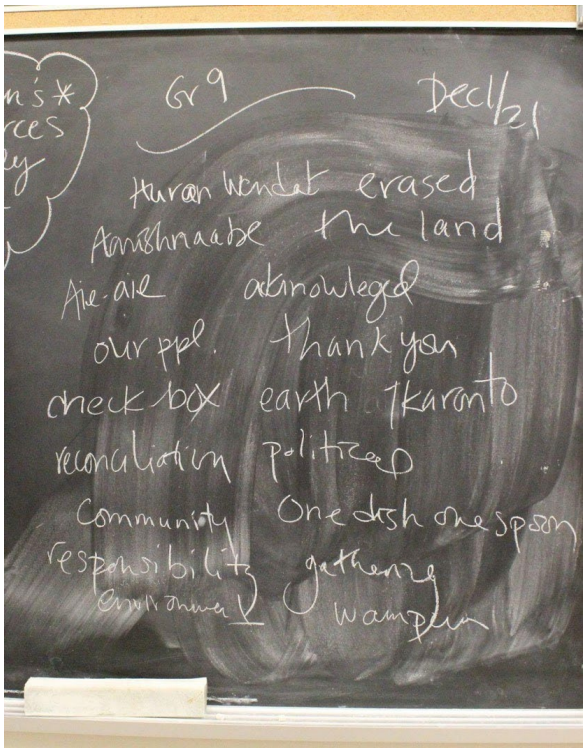


Figure 42

List of new language and concepts

It is difficult to know how and when work of this nature resonates with students. Some students demonstrate growth in the depth and breadth of their understanding over the duration of a unit of study, and some students' learning might be activated many years down the line. At the very least, however, challenging pre- or mis-conceptions and creating space for learning affords students the opportunity to pause, engage in considering ideas or facts that may be new to them, and wrestle, in the short and long term, with ideas that they perceive as challenging or disruptive to their existing understandings. Navigating whole class conversations entails safeguarding the dignity of all participants. The teachable moment these exchanges provide involves direct instruction and sometimes redirection to avoid shame and blame seeping into the conversation, which shuts down listening and learning. The discussion activity that took place around Land acknowledgements in Project II was challenging for me to facilitate effectively because of needing to balance classroom management with providing a chance for students to share their thoughts, and moderating the conversation to ensure it remained productive. Executing a whole-class discussion with twenty-eight fourteen-year-old students who may not be interested in the topic is a challenge often faced by high school teachers.

As with Project I, students in Project II met with Cultural Archivist Jack Hoggarth from Curve Lake First Nation Cultural Centre in the outdoor classroom. On December 2nd, students listened to Jack speak about Anishnaabe history on local Land and share Indigenous teachings, specifically about the interconnectedness of humans and Land. Jack's talk on this visit also touched on reconciliation and intergenerational trauma. He spoke at length about colonisation and its impact on Indigenous people and local

communities as a whole. It was a frigid day and a light snow began as students sat listening to Jack Hoggarth on the semi-circle of boulders.

Earlier that day we had put together a tobacco tie and I outlined for students that we did this to recognize the local tradition of the Mississauga's to present a tobacco offering when asking for teachings. There was silence and close observation in the class as the tie was assembled. When I asked if students had any questions, Isaac raised his hand and asked if it was okay that we were creating a tobacco tie and wasn't this engaging in the ceremony and traditions of the Anishnaabe which only members of that community should do. I thanked him for making such a great point, and responded that the tobacco offering was a recognition of local Indigenous protocol and was a gesture not only in recognition, but to acknowledge the time and value of the knowledge we would be receiving. We talked about the tobacco tie as a gesture of reciprocity that we could offer Jack. Another student asked if we would be smoking the tobacco. "No, we won't be smoking the tobacco," I responded, and explained again how this type of tobacco was considered a medicine and was often used as an offering in Anishinaabe cultures. A third student raised their hand to ask if I was allowed to bring tobacco into the school. At this point I noticed that there were a couple of students holding their phones in ways that suggested that they were filming what was transpiring in class. The period was nearly finished and the bell was about to go, signalling students' ten-minute break. I was not certain if the two students were recording, and not wanting to draw attention to them and away from the task at hand, I carried on with the tobacco tie and concluded the activity. The bell rang and the students dispersed for their break.

This incident amplified my concern about whether I was going about addressing this material in an appropriate way or not. I had several years of learning from

Indigenous teachers and awareness of protocol that I had internalised and incorporated into my practice. As a non-Indigenous person, however, I was mindful of treading carefully and did not want to engage inappropriately in cultural teachings. I suddenly felt even more unsure about my approach and began second guessing what I was doing. Making mistakes and correcting them is part of this learning, however, having those potential mistakes recorded for broadcast was very uncomfortable. I waited until the following day to reinforce to the class that recording anything in class without everyone's permission was not acceptable. Recording on their phones is a common impulse for students that, as I explained to students, requires consent in a classroom setting where we are learning because everyone should feel that they can make mistakes in class without it being captured for consumption elsewhere. Prior to that particular day, my concern had been for students recording other students' work, not students recording my teaching. However, as the class sat in the outdoor classroom listening to Jack Hoggarth, the discomfort of the earlier moment in class passed. All of the students sat in the outdoor classroom, snow falling around them, attending quietly and respectfully to the knowledge and stories that Jack Hoggarth shared.

During Project II, as noted above, students assembled their ongoing work in a digital scrapbook using Google Sites, which is a website-building application that is part of the Google Drive platform that our school board uses. In their scrapbooks, students recorded descriptive writing and uploaded photos, wrote about Land near them, and responded to reflection questions throughout the unit. One series of questions that students were asked to reflect on in the Digital Scrapbook guided them through thinking about territory and Land acknowledgements with the following prompts: Where do you live? (Town, Treaty, Traditional lands of…); What is your personal connection to the

natural world where you live?; What is your responsibility to the place where you live, the environment, and the people? The idea that a Land acknowledgement includes both territory information of a factual nature as well as personal connection to Land were important components integrated into prompts for students' reflection questions. Students' descriptions of their connection to the Land where they live in the context of the Land acknowledgement were often vivid, referencing visceral and sensorial responses to the natural world and being outdoors. For example, Usher wrote: "I love seeing the veiws [*sic*] and beaing [*sic*] outside breathing in the fresh air of nature as thats [*sic*] where I am happy." Addison wrote: "When I go outside I take it all in. In the summer I will take out a towel and sit on the grass just laying there, or in the winter i [*sic*] will just plop in the snow and let the smells and sounds captivate me." Lennon reflected on her connection to water, writing, "the waves crashing ashore are calming and clear my mind of any worries…" Most students responded that they felt a responsibility to care for the environment, to keep it clean, and prevent littering and pollution. A third of the students mentioned protecting animals as well as caring for people as part of their responsibility to Land. A little under a quarter of students felt that knowing the history of colonialism on the Land was part of their responsibility to Land, place, and people.

Several students explained that they felt connected to Land when they used watercraft, four-wheeler all-terrain vehicles, played golf, and engaged in other outdoor pastimes. I asked the students who use ATVs to explain a bit more about how they connected with nature while riding, wanting to understand further. A handful of students in the class chimed in and said that they liked the feeling of the air as it rushed past their faces, the look of the trees, and the smell of being outside. They said it helped them

clear their heads, similar to how Lennon described her connection to water. In many cases, it was clear that the natural world was an ongoing, integral part of their lives as people who live on farms, in rural settings, or near forested areas.

Isaac's reflection demonstrates the seamless presence of the Land in his everyday life and read:

> I live on treaty 20 the Aanishnaabe [*sic*] Mississaugas land. My connection [to] the natural world is that I go outside a lot and am in natural [*sic*] I fish, swim, boat, and just go for walks with my dog in the forest. When I look outside I see lots of trees, and animals. My responsibility to land is to keep it clean and not destroy natural [*sic*] and animals. It is also to know what land we are on and understand who owns the land.

Students' descriptions demonstrated a connection with Land that was specific and that held significant meaning for them. Many of these written responses formed the basis for the drama work that the class ultimately created, and were included verbatim in the performance.

5.5 Nature near me: Developing soundscapes and photoscapes

Project II was forced to halt on account of my absence from class due to pneumonia, the two-week Christmas holiday, and a mandated COVID-19 school closure. Our class excursion to Ken Reid Conservation area was postponed twice for the same reasons, and ultimately was cancelled because we could not secure time away from class so close to the end of the term. While the omission of the Ken Reid field trip was a loss, the focus in class at that time became supporting students in their return to in-school learning and completing course expectations.

On our scheduled first day back for face-to-face instruction, the City of Kawartha Lakes experienced an ice and snow storm, causing classes to go online once again. We had waited so long to re-engage with the Project work that I decided, despite the cancellation, that we needed to start. For our mandated online learning that day I asked the students to document the weather event by creating sound and photo scapes of nature near them, thinking that this work could become part of our devising. Students captured images of the Land under a blanket of snow, described the sounds they heard, and provided a photo of something they found interesting. The images students shared depicted an array of outdoor scenes, highlighting fields, barns, animals, and elements of their home environments (see Figures 43 and 44). Collectively, the photos created a collage that offered glimpses into the identity of the students, their spaces, and Land around them across the larger local community.

Figure 43

Image taken by student on snow day



Figure 44

Image taken by student on snow day



Accounts of the snowfall included descriptions such as: “This snowbank looks wavy and smooth. You can see these dunes in the snowbank from the wind blowing all the snow around,” “Very fluffy and powdery and tall … very tall,” and “3 things I heard were the whistle of the wind, the crunch of the snow when I walk on it and I heard the brap of snowmobiles ripping around on the lake.” Students wrote about memories connected to the snow and cold that were also detailed and specific, such as Usher’s recollection: “The ice cracking is loud and sharp. It reminds me of the time where I was skating and I heard that sound while playing hockey on my lake.” Tom listed “Howling wind, flurrys [*sic*] of snow, a crackle of a fireplace” as sounds he heard and wrote, “The fireplace reminds me of home.” Different parts of what the students wrote and took photos of that day became part of the final scene in the drama they ultimately created.

Figure 45

Wording of invitation for Mrs. Nyland’s class

Monday, January 24, 2022

Dea[redacted] class,

This is Ms. Kennedy’s Grade 9 Drama class! We would like to invite you to be our audience for a play that we are making. This play is about our community, landmarks, structures, nature, memories, and experiences living in the City of Kawartha Lakes.
We would like you to take a look at the outdoors surrounding the school and describe some of the natural things you see so that we can use it in our play! We will create a scene from what you give us that we will all perform together as part of the play.
We look forward to hearing your descriptions and seeing your pictures!

From your friends in Ms. Kennedy’s Grade 9 Drama Class

5.6 Mrs. Nyland’s Class: an invitation

The drama students in Project II connected with Mrs. Nyland’s class as the partner class for this work and chose to reach out to them with a video invitation. The invitation started as a letter that we drafted as a class, the content of which was then

turned into a video, edited by a student, and forwarded to Mrs. Nyland and her class (see Figure 45). Part of our conversation prior to creating the video involved discussing how Mrs. Nyland's class might be included in a way that would allow them to feel involved in the drama performance as they watched, since they would be watching from their own class, and could not watch the performance in our drama class due to COVID-19 restrictions. The suggestion decided upon was that Mrs. Nyland's class would be invited to contribute their observations of the outdoors around our school to our devising, and that the drama students would work to integrate their observations in some way.

Figure 46

Student video of invitation for Mrs. Nyland's class



Working with the students' idea to make the invitation to Mrs. Nyland's class into a recording, I initiated brainstorming with the class about how to organize the invitation video. This opportunity to plan was met with silence from the class. It was not an unusual occurrence in this class for creative conversations to be stilted and class conversations about creative choices often required considerable scaffolding. Eventually, students decided to divide up the lines of the written invitation and walk into

the frame of the recording to say their portions. A small group of students volunteered to share the job of delivering lines, running lighting, sound, and conduct the editing. A song was chosen to play in the background and we decided that the video would end with students dancing across the frame to the music (see Figure 46).

Students demonstrated confidence and authority in selecting a song to dance to. There were ideas and enthusiasm for this task, perhaps because it was recognizable, as many students were used to selecting background songs for social media posts, and were excited to pick music they liked.

The video invitation was shared with Mrs. Nyland's class and the next day, a team of five students met face-to-face with her class in the outdoor classroom to give examples of the process that our class had followed, which included walking outdoors, taking photographs or creating drawings, and writing descriptions of things they noticed in the natural world. The drama students explained that we could have our class incorporate the images and descriptions of Mrs. Nyland's class from their outdoor walks into an aspect of our performance and teach Mrs. Nyland's students the spoken word, soundscape, and flocking, such that when we performed our final production, Mrs. Nyland's students could participate in the vocal and physical part along with the drama students.

Mrs. Nyland's class walked outdoors daily as part of their regular class routine and so the idea of adding their observations and descriptions to our drama worked seamlessly into their class plans. Over the following days, a team of drama students conducted visits with Mrs. Nyland's class outdoors and in one of the school's gym spaces to share a form of coordinated drama movement called flocking that the drama students were working to create based on their descriptive writing (see Figure 47).

Figure 47

Drama students teaching Mrs. Nyland's class how to do flocking



Flocking is a coordinated movement where students stand in a 'V' or diamond shape and perform poses or movements in particular sequence. In the case of our performance, the flocking movements were coordinated with spoken soundscape derived from student writing about Land near them. While I had initially planned to have the drama students create spoken word, soundscape, and flocking with contributions from Mrs. Nyland's class, Mrs. Nyland's class took greater creative initiative than anticipated by building their own soundscape and flocking sequence which my students then incorporated into their work. This approach meant that our final product would be co-created and performed which made working together more reciprocal and interactive.

I chose to send a delegation of five drama students to work with Mrs. Nyland's class for practical and pedagogical reasons - it would be overwhelming for my large class to descend upon Mrs. Nyland's eight students and, given that movement in the

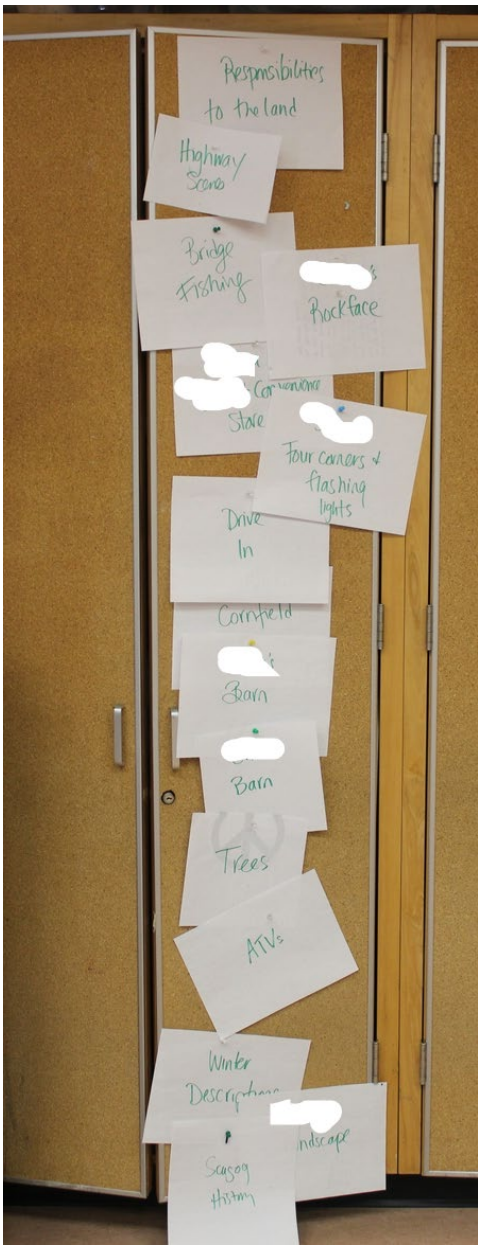
halls during classes was strongly discouraged at the time, the smaller group was more feasible. There was a core team of student delegates who met with Mrs. Nyland's class, with a couple of students who would alternate. The experience of leadership, sharing information about their own process, and providing instruction about a particular form of drama appeared to have been a positive one, and these students returned to class enthused.

5.7 Bringing it together: adventures in devising and performance

Upon our return to school after the extended break, the drama students picked up where they left off with the tableaux work that they had begun the previous month. We expanded the tableaux work into scenes, and students made choices about how to combine different descriptions of Land and landmarks in an effort to physicalize these on stage. In some cases, the students' descriptions of Land and landmarks near them inspired full scenes with dialogue, but in all cases, students worked together in small groups to incorporate their initial writing into performance, using different forms of drama. We brainstormed forms such as choral reading, tableau, silent scenes or mime, monologue, coordinated movement, and students applied one or more of these, as they saw fit. After a few classes of devising experimentation, we wrote down each scene treatment that had been created and deliberated over which ones we would use and how to order them (see Figure 48). We also thought about what kind of drama structure we could use to tie the scenes together as a cohesive whole. The students worked in groups to think of common threads between the scenes and ways they could be woven together. Oliver suggested that Owen's description of the country road his house is on could form the basis for a road trip story, such that "when he passes each place he has

Figure 48

Experimenting with scene order



a flashback to a memory which is the scene." Lennon identified common elements such as barns, motorised vehicles (car/ATV), lakes, and trees in different scenes that could be used as a way to structure the piece. Aurora suggested a flow from one scene setting to the next where the end of one scene would start the next and initiate the transition to a new setting to weave different scenes together seamlessly. After thinking about what scenes felt like opening scenes, middle scenes, or ending scenes, and grouping them together, a structure based on seasons emerged. Rhonda offered to create a slide show that would announce each season and that included photos the students had taken of their chosen landmarks and Land near them, and Oona was put in charge of finding sounds to enhance each scene. Amy asked to be the lighting designer and operator.

The 'Barn Trilogy' was a strong example of bringing together scenes that various students had created from the fast-writing exercise and reflections, and connecting them through the common thread of a barn. Alex had written about a corn field near his house and, working with a team of other students, added performable elements to his

recollection such as creating corn rows using actors' bodies and inserting moments of action (two kids playing tag) into his original piece of writing. These elements of the ‘Cornfield’ scene formed the first in a trio of scenes that composed the Fall portion of the presentation. Figure 49 provides excerpts from the script and images that document the action on stage as well as the projections.

Tom’s description of the barn he passes on his way to school served as a transition from the cornfield scene into a scene about the farm that Hannah lives on. Originally, the students had choreographed the building of a barn with their bodies for Tom’s scene, such that the components of the barn (walls, roof, etc.) were formed by students’ bodies progressively, with the barn built by the end of the narrative. This use of dramatic form in the context of farm life was reminiscent of Theatre Passe Muraille’s *The Farm Show* and was a dynamic way to bring focus to the barn as a character in the storytelling (Johns, 1976). They negotiated and changed this approach, however, in favour of building the barn as part of Hannah’s scene since it corresponded well and could evolve in more compelling ways as Hannah told her story. Changes and ongoing editing in instances such as this required significant flexibility on the part of the students, and the Fall trilogy was a strong example of students adjusting original plans to better serve the group. These scenes were also illustrative of the decision we made that the performance roles that students took on didn’t have to be the ones they had written. In some cases, students wished to perform their own narratives, however, in other cases, the class accommodated students who were performing other jobs such as lighting, or stage management, or who were no longer coming to class for COVID-19 related reasons, and played roles they had not themselves written. In the barn series of scenes,

both Tom and Alex's narrations were performed by other students. The second and third scenes in the barn trilogy are outlined in Figure 49.

Another example of collaboration through integration of multiple pieces of writing into one staged moment was the 'ladder' scene created from recollections written by Roma and Lynn. Both students had written about convenience stores they pass each day. Lynn had conducted research about the main street on which a local store was located and the archival photographs she included in the projection slides showed the evolution of the street over time. Ladder scenes are characterised by the repeated pattern of one actor's concluding word or syllable and the other actor's first word or syllable being the same. The effect is that the dialogue of the scene is passed from one actor to the other through a series of connecting words or phrases. In this scene, the ending word of each actor's line segment coordinated with the first word of the next actor's line, both actors voicing the shared word, establishing seamless crossover between the monologues. I worked with Lynn to bring the two pieces of writing together, and another student volunteered to step in for Roma who had not yet returned to class after lockdown. Oliver offered to play the role of Bob, one of the convenience store owners. Our stage managers and stage hands created a make-shift service counter for Oliver to stand behind and placed a penny candy shelf in front of it, stocked with samples of candy. The effect of the set and props along with the bell sound that Oona played lent realism to the scene. Considerable coordination was needed for the actors in this scene to memorise their parts and say their shared lines at the same time. Despite the frustration evident in rehearsal, both students persisted in their efforts and performed the scene successfully.

Oona's rock face scene entailed students representing a car on stage using bodies as doors and seated students holding flashlights as headlights. This scene was about a rock formation that Oona has passed since she was very little on her way to her Grandparent's cottage. Oona was not keen on performing and took on a role as sound operator in order to participate in a non-performative way as technical crew. When given the choice to have someone else perform her piece, Oona was undecided about whether to perform her narrative herself, or ask a classmate to do it. In the end, she stepped away from sound for that scene and performed the piece herself. In her reflection on the experience, Oona wrote, "...i [*sic*]… learned how to stay very still and not laugh… it is very hard for me not to laugh in situations like that. i [*sic*] also learned to think on the spot because i [*sic*] forgot a whole line and instead of stopping getting nervous i [*sic*] just kept going and no one even noticed." Oona was not alone in conveying trepidation about performing live on stage, but persevered despite her fear, as many others also did.

In the planning stages of our work, the class discussed how we might go about performing for Mrs. Nyland's class, given the restrictions that prevented them from watching as an audience in our class. Would we film the entire presentation and forward it or perform live? Would we live-stream or try to perform outdoors? Students made lists of the pros and cons in groups and we discussed what to do. The appeal of filming the production and sending it digitally to the other class was initially a popular idea. Students liked the option of being able to do multiple takes, edit, and add special effects. There was concern about memorization and 'messing up' in a live theatre performance. The point was made by a couple of students during the discussion that being afraid of 'messing up' wasn't a good reason not to try and perform live. In their

small group discussions and in the whole class chat, students articulated that a ‘pro’ to performing live was “making it feel like an actual theatre as much as we can.” The approach we took, in the end, felt like a mix of both film and live performance as I filmed on my cell phone which broadcast the live performance in real time to Mrs. Nyland’s class via Google Meet on February 1st, 2022. Masks impacted audibility, and by using a hand-held camera I was able to move amongst the actors and get closer when necessary, in order to manage sound to some degree. Further discussion on students’ comments about how technology impacted their experience is provided at a later point in this chapter. Oona’s Rock Face scene is highlighted in Figure 49.

The last scene of the performance was Winter and brought together writing that the drama students had done on the snow day in mid-January with contributions from Mrs. Nyland’s class. Our descriptions, sounds, and movements were integrated and performed together and as Mrs. Nyland’s students watched on computers in their own classroom, they performed the soundscape and movement moments alongside the drama students. The final scene transpired as follows:

> Sc. 13 Winter Descriptions (Last scene of the performance)
>
> *Blue lights up, Ms.Kennedy’s class is lined up at the back of the stage. The actors in Ms.Kennedy’s class move into ‘V’ as they say their lines. Mrs. Nyland’s students stand at their desks/computers and act their motions/say sounds as indicated below.*
>
> Iris: The snow swirling in every direction. Some of it finding the ground, the rest rushing around in the air.
>
> Oliver: I hear the snow: *(everyone does sound)* Shuushha-Shuushha-Shuushha
>
> Everyone: Wind… swoosh

> Axel: And a shovel hitting the ground
>
> Lisa: … the whistle of the wind, the crunch of the snow when I walk on it and I heard the brap of snowmobiles ripping around on the lake.
>
> Lennon: I haven't seen this much snow in it feels like forever. Mounts [*sic*] of snow pile up on the stairs masking their existence. The tree tops are covered with snow. *(tree pose - this one Mrs. Nyland's students do alone)*. The wind *(everyone shows falling hands going from on high to low)* is carrying the snow from those treetops *(everyone - arms sway back and forth like wind)* into the air. There is a loud rumbling sound of a snowblower and a faint sound of birds chirping. *(Arms down… chins up)* The snow falls and hits my face covering my hair in snowflakes, giving me a snow shower.

On this last line, standing in a 'V' formation, students tilted their faces up to the imaginary sky, depicting the snow hitting their faces. Oona, who was in charge of sound, played bird song and a soft wind effect during this last moment. Amy, who was in charge of lights, had created an effect that cast a cool blue colour over the stage. At the final line, I stopped the meandering camera work to sit in a chair positioned in the audience facing the stage so that stage managers Eden and Oakley could sprinkle 'snow' (an effect achieved with dried potato flakes) in front of the camera. Figure 49 documents four performance moments from Project II and is found on the proceeding page.

Figure 49

Project II – Four Performance Moments

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Sc. 2 Rock

Image of rock face on Google Maps is projected. Two actors sit in ‘car’ SR.

Speaker: The landmark that I chose is a big rock face on highway 11 on the way to my cabin. It is really, really huge - very tall. It is black and grey and has granite in it and it is very beautiful. It is right off the highway to the right heading north. It reminds me of my Grandpa's horses because I would get so excited to see them. It also reminds me of my Grandpa. He would always tell me stories about the rodeo because he was on the circuit all his life with his horses and his truck and trailer.

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Sc. 3 Lynn and Roma’s Convenience Store

Iris: Every day after school, I stop into a store on the way **home**.

(Sq 5 ding of the door going into the store)

Lynn: **Home** for me is Omemee. On the main street there's a store. It's pretty **old**.

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Iris: **Old** cracks, and chipped off paint make up this store. After school I stop into the convenience store and see if the owner, Bob, needs help with anything.

Oliver: “Anything would help me **out**”.

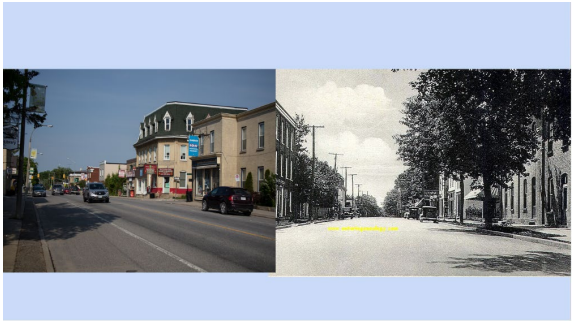
Lynn: **Out** here in Omemee, we have a Circle K right on the main road. The building is very square and small, and the roof sits kind of low. At the front of the store it has a big red coloured sign saying Circle K. Subway used to be inside the store but now it's gone, so half the store has blue tarps covering where Subway used to **be**.

Iris: **Be**side the convenience store there’s a park. In the summer people pick up big freezies from the cooler and eat them on the swings. When I was a little kid I used to get together all the loose change I could find to buy penny candy. Gobstoppers, Swedish berries, licorice… they had little brown bags that you could fill with what you **like**.

Lynn: **Like** every Circle K it used to be Mac's Milk Convenience. Omemee actually used to be called Williamstown in 1821. Then in 1840, the name changed to Metcalf. In 1857 the town name was changed to Omemee because whe it was discovered both of the other names were in use else**where**.

Iris: **Where** the Convenience store is now used to be a field. This area of town has become built up over time with new subdivisions and roads…but Bob’s still here. *Waves at Bob as he leaves the store.* Bye Bob!

Oliver: See you later, kid!
(Sq 6 door dinging again on the way out)





Sc. 6 Cornfield

Corn actors sitting on the ground in a ball. There is orange paper on the ground SL.

Narrator: Near my old home, there was a cornfield. In the fall, me and my siblings and friends often played here as we waited for the corn to turn browny yellow which means it's ready to harvest.

Corn actors start to grow to stand up position.

Narrator: A constant wind blows.

Sq # 9 Wind sound

A boy and a girl run on from SL, over orange paper, weaving through and around the corn actors.

Boy: I'm coming to get you!

Narrator: … one calls. They carry on, laughing. They are a boy and a girl. There I am. The corn is swaying back and forth in the wind.

Corn actors start swaying

Narrator: There was an old barn. *Corn actors gesture to UL*

Girl: I'll race you!

Narrator: One shouts

Boy: No fair!

Narrator: The other shouts in turn. And off we go, leaping and shouting and laughing on our way to the barn.







Sc. 7 Tom's Barn

Actors US with backs to audience.

Speaker: (CS) A lone barn in a field. Aged with time, planks rotting with history, a glimmer of sunlight glares through the rafters. A rectangular structure with a cracked old overhanging roof, some mystery behind it. Reminds me of my grandparent's home.



Sc. 8 Hannah's Barn (excerpts)

Actors start on the side of the dark stage.

Hannah: A landmark that means a lot to me is a barn on my family farm.

(Sq when it says building the barn & putting the bars together play hammering and working sounds)

Hannah: This farm is important to everyone in my family. This barn is another extension to the farm. (a collage of family photos appears on the screen behind Hannah). I remember having the whole family outside building this barn, putting all the bars together, nailing wood on, creating the doors.

My Grandpa didn't prioritise school very much when he was very young. He dropped out of school in grade 10 because his Father, my Great Grandfather, passed away from a heart attack in the barn. He took everything he learned from his dad in the 14 years, and worked hard to have a successful farm.



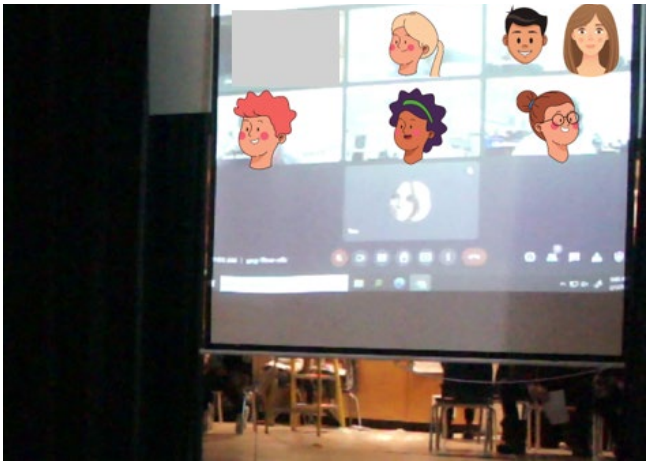




After the bows were taken to applause, Annabelle from Mrs. Nyland's class thanked the drama students on behalf of her class. We changed the view on our projector to share the Google Meet screen, allowing the drama students to see the students from Mrs.Nyland's class (see Figure 50). The drama students were relieved that the performance was complete and Mrs. Nyland's class made some brief complimentary comments, but became quite shy in the moment, so Mrs. Nyland suggested that we say goodbye for now and share our thoughts on the experience at another time.

Figure 50

Mrs. Nyland's class at the end of the performance



5.8 Post-performance reflections

After the performance, students responded to a number of reflection prompts that asked them to think about specific aspects of the process and product of the Project. The section below captures students' thoughts about performing virtually, working with local partners and with peers, outdoor experiential learning, conducting research and making observations about where they live, and feelings of connection to place. While all students were asked to respond to these reflection questions in writing, and their

answers were chatted about in class, the activity took place on the last day of school before the ‘quadmester’ ended, and several students were not in attendance, having been signed out by parents that day. The written responses of thirteen students are considered in the sections below. The section below also includes the post-course interviews conducted on April 14th, 2022 with Alex, and on May 24th with Eden, and Oliver. As mentioned previously, these students were chosen to interview because they indicated an interest in discussing the work of the Projects on their consent forms and had responded to a follow up email confirming they interest in speaking with me.

5.8.1 *Working virtually with a partner class*

A number of drama students commented that despite the live-ish element of performing for an audience that was watching from another classroom, the absence of an audience in the same room made them feel that they were performing for the camera as opposed to a live audience. In a post-show reflection Usher wrote: “... we didnt [*sic*] get that feeling of beaing [*sic*] on stage with people watching. I felt that it was annoying for the audience to watch because they couldn't hear and it may have been glitchy. It negatively impacted the play and it would have been wayy better with a [*sic*] in person audience on both ends.” Lisa felt that the performance “...was a bit less ‘professional’ in a sense that we didn't have a real audience to go around and look at while performing.” She commented as well, however, that the performance “... was also less stressful since we couldn't see the people in the audience watching us when we performed.” The combined elements of being filmed for a live audience watching the performance in real time had some benefits according to Odette who commented:” We were able to do more without them [the audience] in the class. We were able to successfully use our

snow affect [*sic*]. But I feel if it was in person they would be able to connect more and hear us better." Aurora's opinions were divided and she remarked: "i [*sic*] still believe we should have done a video but it was fun to talk with them after too!"

Most of the drama students felt that interacting with Mrs. Nyland's class was an important aspect of the production and a number of them commented that the interactive elements that included Mrs. Nyland's class, both in the process and performance, helped to make up for the lack of audience present in the room. Several students wondered if the contributions of Mrs. Nyland's class helped her students to understand and feel more engaged with the material and create greater anticipation in "wanting to see when their part would appear." Vance thought that Mrs. Nyland's class's involvement "... was important to give our viewers some interaction to be more linked to the play to understand better." Odette felt similarly and commented: "it is easier to connect when you are a part of it [the production]." Some students remarked that having an audience raised the expectations and pressure to perform in a way that was motivating. Moses shared: "... acting for people … you don't know… it made it [the atmosphere] more tense but that makes you want to do better" and Amy shared that having Mrs. Nyland's class as an audience was important "so we could properly experience what it really feels like to perform." Lennon wrote that having Mrs. Nyland's class as an audience was one of the most important aspects of the production, "because it allowed us to be able to show off our drama skills we've learned throughout the class to other students." Hannah and Usher recognized that the involvement of Mrs. Nyland's class enhanced their work, writing, "I think it added to the project and was super important" (Hannah), and, "I thiught [*sic*] it was important because it included another class and made it interesting for us … They did a good job with their sound

effects and flocking! It was cool to see what they came up with and it had a positive impact on the play!" (Usher).

5.8.2 *Learning from local partners: Impact*

In reflection responses completed at the end of Project II, students wrote with significant gratitude about local partners and learning outdoors. Amy commented that she thought it was kind of the community partners to take time to speak with our class. Similarly, Oona wrote: "i [*sic*] thought it was pretty cool that they took a bunch of there [*sic*] own time…to be able to learn about all of the history." Odette felt that it was valuable to learn from community partners, and reflected: "These people we learned from knew alot [*sic*] about what they were teaching us which was very important. It is important for us to know about the land surrounding us." Lisa noted the usefulness of outside expertise, writing: "It was helpful to learn from people who are passionate about what they are talking about. It helped to make the land acknowledgement and description about nature after learning about the land and how it came to be." Other student comments addressed the personal significance of listening to local partners, such as Aurora who wrote: "It was cool to learn about my First Nation heritage." Beyond the novelty of learning outside of the classroom, meeting with and learning from local partners grounded the information shared in 'real world' experiential learning for students. Walking together and experiencing talks as a group forged new memories, exposed perspectives, and grew understanding of the land, people, and histories.

5.8.3 *What did you learn over the course of the Project?*

Students remarked on knowledge, techniques, and skills that they acquired throughout the Project, such as learning about line memorization, physicality on stage,

organising props and scene changes, as well as writing lines, deciding on blocking and editing those choices. As Hannah wrote, she learned “to not fall in love with your first great idea. You may have a good idea, but with practice and thinking deeper, you may have even better ideas.” Lisa felt that focus was something important that she learned, writing: “... you really have to pay attention and make proper notes to know when and what time you are suppose [*sic*] to say [something] or put on lights. Attention is very much required.” Vance wrote that he learned “Good ways to memorise lines or other things, to act better, to work with people better.”

Working with others and the importance of communication was a take-away that recurred in student feedback. Odette wrote: “I learned how communication is key. Whenever our class lacked communication while working on the production people got frustrated and there was error.” Lennon’s comments elaborated on the theme of working with classmates and she felt that she could “better understand my classmates and there [*sic*] connections to the natural world as well as there [*sic*] memories. For me I thought that was a much better way to come together as a class and connect on a deeper level.” Some students also identified that it was the first time they learned about Land acknowledgements and what they mean. One student stated, “Before I came to [this school] I had never heard a land acknowlegement [*sic*] and until this project I did not understand what I was hearing daily.” Another student commented, “I learned where our land came from, how we've missed [*sic*] used it and how it never was ours in the firt [*sic*] place.”

In their reflections, many students commented on the enjoyment of performing with friends and making new friendships. Oona wrote that she would remember “probably the friends i made a lot …i will definitely remember them” and Lennon wrote:

Something I will remeber [*sic*] from doing this project would be laughing and having fun with many of my classmates on stage. Throughout the production rehersels [*sic*] we shared many laughs from people mispronouncing words, to the sound a fourwheel [*sic*] makes… I loved being under the stage lights with my friends, the lights beeming [*sic*] down on our faces, and the butterflies we got as we were about to begain [*sic*].

Students mentioned the pressures of live performance and their experience of having a group rely on them to do their job. Aurora shared that she would remember that "it was really stressful to get everything done, but it was really fun with everyone as well." Amy, who designed and executed the lighting for the Project, reflected, "I had a lot of responsibility to not mess up any performance with the lights and I enjoyed it." Thoughts were also offered about relying on other students, about which Odette wrote that she would remember "how important showing up and communication is. Because I was the person who has to fill in for people that were missing I relized [*sic*]how important it is to show up daily."

5.8.4 *What was it like to investigate where you live?*

Words such as "cool", "interesting", and "fun" were repeated in students' replies to what it was like to investigate where they live. In contrast, one student responded that they found the project boring because they were familiar with everything they were learning about. Students commented that the experience opened up new conversations with family members, such as Mona who wrote: "I really enjoyed it because I liked learning about my family history and past because I thought it was really interesting to know and learn." Odette also described learning more about her family and shared: "While investigating I interviewed my mom. I had never talked to my mom like that

before about where we live. After the interview my mom continued to tell me stories about her childhood and experiences with the lake." Having occasion to take notice of things previously unnoticed was also reflected in Lynn's response:

> Usually you just think of land as land - you never think of the history and the specific things about it. But with this project it opened my eyes to how much our land is important and how many stories it holds… I found it very eye opening because I never really … investigated places by me, I usually just past [*sic*] by them and don't think twice about them. But after sitting down and finding out all this information it was pretty cool.

Mrs. Nyland provided similar comments, writing,

> You take nature for granted. Every day we walk around the perimeter of the school and we do not stop and watch the sway of the fields or the change of blue in the sky. Going through this process has made all of us more in tune with the beauty that surrounds us. A sound of a cardinal, sparkling blanket of snow on the ground, the season changing. It was nice to notice.

Many students felt that they learned new things about where they live through the Project. As Hannah commented: "Land holds so many memories that most people don't know about." Students also learned about the places where others are from in the class and their stories, which forged social connections within their community of peers.

5.8.5 *Do you feel a greater sense of connection to the place you live after this Project?*

Half of the participants responded that they felt a greater sense of connection to where they live after the Project. Reasons students gave for not feeling a greater sense

of connection included that they did not find out very much information about where they live, or that they already felt a sense of connection so the Project didn't impact their feeling of connection to a significant degree. Students who stated that they did feel more connection after the Project gave reasons that centred on learning more about their home, the history of where they live, treaty information, and who lived on the Land. In retrospect, the concept of 'connection' may have been somewhat abstract for the grade nine class and responses may have been impacted by lack of clarity in what the term 'connection' referred to and could include.

On May 24th, 2022, I interviewed Oliver and Eden about their experience in Project II. I invited them to conduct the interview together if they wished, with the thought that a conversational approach between the three of us might generate more thoughts and remembrances and lower the intensity of a one-on-one interview. This approach was successful in that the two students remembered different things and were able to comment on observations made by the other. I asked them if their connection to community (classroom, school, or community beyond our school) had been impacted in any way by the work of the Project. Oliver felt that learning about his classmates' stories did impact his sense of classroom community: "I think you get to, like, learn about other people in the class's experiences. And I think that's pretty interesting." Eden agreed, remarking: "I definitely felt like, after getting to know the play I got to know other people and, like, where they came from and what the land means to them." Eden also felt that connecting with Jack Hoggarth and learning more about the history of the people and the Land was important, "… so that we know where everything came from and like, we, I guess, don't take it for granted …We can tell other people and like, kind of spread the word." Oliver concurred, adding: "Yeah, like, we can use it [knowledge of the past] to

treat the land better, sort of… and respect the people who originally owned it before it was taken."

Alex was another student with whom I conducted a post-Project interview, and he expressed feelings of connection that arose for him: "… would the River be an example, I guess?... the connection was like, I guess was appreciation or something … I don't know… I didn't really have too much of a connection, but I guess I have appreciation towards the …how they [the Mississauga] came up I guess." In this excerpt Alex refers to the Anishnaabe and local history in relation to the Scugog River. Alex demonstrated uncertainty about how to answer the question, however, in his response, he qualifies the type of connection that he experienced, which was appreciation. Alex's answer reflects some of the confusion that the term 'connection' may have presented to students, despite the indications through various answers to other questions that illustrated that connections of various types had been experienced and identified by students.

5.8.6 *Learning outdoors: further thoughts and observations*

As addressed above, most responses by students about learning outdoors were very positive, revealing that students had enjoyed being outside as part of their learning. Amy wrote: "I thought that it was really enjoyable, especially that it connected with our projected [sic] so we can also get a better understanding and see the outdoors. It had a big connection to our project so we could relate to it a lot." Lisa's response spoke to her appreciation of experiential learning as helpful: "I loved it! Even though it was very cold, I learn more from being outdoors and really picturing what the land used to look like." Hannah identified the experience of going outdoors as unique, and wrote, "It was a

different experience. Learning outside was something that most people can't experience. It was fun and enjoyable.” Embarking on this initial field trip with such a large group of students whom I did not yet know well was daunting. Their attentiveness and engagement during the trip and their comments afterwards were testament to the impact of learning outside the classroom, which made taking the additional risk and effort that accompanies field trips worthwhile.

During the post-Project interview, Oliver and Eden also spoke about the impact of outdoor learning and field trips on them, specifically in light of COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions within schools. I asked them how they felt about going outside to learn and our conversation continued as indicated below:

> Eden: I liked it. I feel like it was a nice break. I feel like everything especially with semesters now is really strict. I like that we got to get out and do something.
>
> Teacher.: Even though the weather wasn’t great?
>
> Eden: Yeah. Yeah.
>
> Oliver: Same as her… yeah. I hadn't been on a field trip [in high school], so it felt kind of new… Yeah. I hadn’t been on a field trip in a while…
>
> Teacher: And was that a good new, or just sort of… what was your thought about that?
>
> Oliver: It’s good. Pretty good.
>
> Eden: It was, like a good break, after COVID and everything.
>
> Oliver: Yeah, and being inside a lot.

Almost every student who participated in Project II offered positive feedback about learning outdoors and going on field trips. Despite the physical discomfort of walking in wet, cold, weather, or sitting and listening to talks in freezing temperatures as snow fell,

students communicated gratitude for being taken outdoors and for learning experiences that took place outside of the classroom.

5.9 Concluding thoughts

My goal in this Project was to understand students' experience and their perception of nature near them and (his)stories that emerged as a result of their learning throughout the Project, and if these contributed to their own identities and sense of being part of a community and place. The responses garnered from students' reflections and observations showed that on the whole, most students felt that they learned more about where they live and nature near them, and that they acquired greater knowledge of the places that their classmates were from. The stories students shared with each other through their inquiry increased the sense of connection that many students felt towards each other. They enjoyed being outside and demonstrated care and appreciation for the knowledge imparted by local partners and the time they spent with the class. In written responses from thirteen participating students, they expressed that working with Mrs. Nyland's class was an important part of their experience and that the process of devising and executing an original production was personally challenging and gratifying. They conveyed strong awareness of the impact that performing for others had on them, and identified the shortcomings and unexpected benefits of working virtually instead of performing in the same room as their audience. Significant growth took place with respect to students' ability to work as a team and in recognising the importance of showing up, listening to each other, and the integral role that each student plays in the devising process.

Adjusting the focus in Project II to incorporate Land near where students lived led to greater breadth of observation and storytelling that was more personal in nature because it was connected to students' lived experience. Students had the benefit of spending time together along the Scugog River and learning about local histories from local partners alongside their own inquiry, which served as a connecting point for individual contributions that made up the final presentation. Key moments of productive disruption were seen in the Land acknowledgement activity and the town hall meeting role-play offered insights into how students approached a community issue, both in the concerns they raised, and how they conducted the conversation. The visual representations, writing, and performances of students in telling the stories of Land near them vividly depicted awareness of and connection to the more-than-human that make up their individual histories.

In the chapter that follows I will draw together the findings from Projects I and II, contextualise recurring themes within specific conceptual frameworks, and theorize broader learning that has arisen from the material and observations acquired over the two Projects.

6 Partner reflections

As outlined in earlier chapters, four local partners and two teacher partners contributed to the Projects of this study. I interviewed Jack Hoggarth, from Trent University and Curve Lake First Nation, Ian McKechnie, local historian, writer, and museum studies specialist, as well as the two teacher partners who participated the Projects, Ms. Atkins and Mrs. Nyland. While I conducted interviews with local partners who interacted with the students in both Projects, the contributions and insights of Dave Mowat and Brett Trugunno inform this study as well, as noted in various places throughout this work. Local partners played a significant role in this study by sharing their knowledge with students, answering questions, and spending time together outside. Partner teachers facilitated the participation of their students as audience members and, in the case of Project II, ran parallel activities with their own students that contributed to the final performance. This chapter provides insights that arose in post-Project conversations with partners and offers broader thoughts on work of this kind in the context of education, Indigenous and Land-based pedagogy, and community-based projects. I have included long quotations in sections of this chapter in order for the thoughts of local partners to be presented in their own words.

6.1 Ms. Atkins, Project I partner teacher, kindergarten class

In the twenty-minute follow up interview about the performance in Project I on October 12, 2022, Ms. Atkins recounted that the virtual visit with the senior drama students had been a positive experience for her kindergarten students, noting that watching a performance was a new opportunity for most of her students. In addition to

the novelty of witnessing live performance, albeit over Google Meet, the isolation imposed by COVID-19 restrictions and the practice of cohorting has, within schools, also meant that most elementary students were rarely able to interact with people outside of their immediate class, let alone anyone from outside the school. At this time, students were cohorted by restricting the contact that students in one class had with students in another: for example, pairing specific classes together who would consistently have recess at the same time, or at the high school level, restricting the number of courses students took to two a day. Ms. Atkins said:

> It was nice for them to have some interaction … I think it was really very positive. I mean, obviously if it had been in-person it would have had a very different impact on them because I don't think they've experienced [a play] … they haven't even had a concert. We didn't even have assemblies [this year]. They have no understanding of what that means. So, in a way, it was like a good introduction …

Ms. Atkins identified the leaf puppets as a highlight of the presentation, sharing that "They loved the interactive piece with the leaves and that they had something to connect them in this space [the kindergarten classroom] to that space [the drama classroom]" and that "they had a responsibility as the audience to participate in a certain way, which I think kept them engaged." The kindergarteners' role in manipulating the 'puppets' according to the directions of the wind also conferred upon them a task beyond passively watching, which kept the students in the moment and attuned to the performance.

When I asked Ms. Atkins if the kindergarten students had recognized that the material of the story was local and part of their community, she answered that they had

understood to a degree, and that “[at] our school most of the people, the families here don’t have cars. They really do live in this ten-block radius, so they know a lot about the River. They spend a lot of time down there. So, for them it was a really interesting fit.” Ms. Atkins felt that while students may be familiar with Old Mill Park, they did not necessarily connect the park and playground they know well to the remnants of the Old Mill building that sit just beyond it. Further, it was a new concept for the students to learn that the remains at the edge of water had been a building that housed a business that ground wheat into flour. The leap to make that connection, Ms. Atkins said, was “a bit over their heads in terms of age and stage.” She suggested that a future project might start by approaching inquiry on a smaller scale, choosing a starting point that the students would be familiar with, and involving them more immediately in the inquiry process; “even the history of this building [their school] … And maybe find out from them what they’re most curious about.”

The pedagogical approach of asking students what they want to know more about is one I believe in and often practice, and yet, I had not included the kindergartener’s curiosity in the Project. I had curated experiences and inquiry activities for my own students from which I had asked them to devise a drama that they thought might appeal to younger students. The realization of how much richer the Project might have been had we begun by connecting first with the kindergarten class felt like a lost opportunity. Had the Project transpired during ‘normal’ times, our class would have met up face-to-face with Ms. Atkins’ class a number of times as part of the devising process. These interactions would have informed the direction of our work authentically and created space for new discoveries, which undoubtedly would have made the final drama equally meaningful to all. We might have met together at the Old Mill Park or perhaps

conducted a series of online meetings with the kindergarten class over the project. Any degree of connection as part of the process would have enhanced the sense of relating to others through the topic we were investigating.

Ms. Atkins also offered the idea that researching local history could start with the history of the students' own families in relation to the physical environs of the neighbourhood, "…because there are so many families here that have been here for generations, there's a lot of richness." I wondered if family stories about the area could serve to connect the elementary students even more deeply to their neighbourhood while at the same time forge new memories and connections for both the younger and older students together through their experience of devising a drama about it. There is little shared geography between the kindergarteners and drama students because the high school students are bussed in from across all of the City of Kawartha Lakes. Their familiarity and memories of place and Land, in many cases, lay elsewhere and are not attached to Lindsay, the Scugog River, or areas neighbouring the partner school.

The feedback I received from my students about connection to place, Land, and community revealed that while they had developed connection to the River by acquiring greater knowledge about it from local partners, in many cases, they did not necessarily feel a greater connection to the people in our class, Land or the kindergarteners. In the first iteration of the Project, the audience was not invited into the Creative Process to help inform and shape the storytelling in advance of the performance. The devising of the story was created with the kindergarteners 'in mind' and their interaction was relegated to the completed performance when they were invited to respond to prompts by the actors. In future, I wonder if refocusing the project towards being in service to the storytelling of others might set the stage for developing a greater sense of community.

Perhaps working alongside the kindergarten students to help them tell their stories about the area would lead to forging even more meaningful relationships grounded in familiarity and knowledge of Land while also engaging in the vulnerability that accompanies rendering shared stories into performance.

6.2 Mrs. Nyland, Project II partner teacher, high school, composite grades

In a twenty-five-minute post-Project interview with Mrs. Nyland on September 10th, 2022, she shared her observations about the collaboration between her class and mine, and commented on how the drama students' interaction with her students had unfolded. The scaffolded approach that the drama students took in working with Mrs. Nyland's students had positive results. This entailed modelling what a coordinated flocking movement sequence might look like and asking the other students to follow a similar pattern, but with their own ideas for movements. Mrs. Nyland explained that the drama students would show an example of flocking, and that her students would have questions that the drama students would answer. She felt that when some of her students were nervous or self-conscious about trying the flocking movements, watching older kids motivated her class to engage. When I asked Mrs. Nyland to describe how the drama students interacted with her students, she explained that they were patient and acted like teachers. She elaborated as follows:

> They were taking it upon themselves to show and … creating a space, a safe space, for them [my students] to learn … this is sort of like a 'challenge by choice': if you would like to participate this is what we're doing and … and then it was like back and forth … they were all in because they saw their peers doing it.… they went with it, but they added on to it and they collaborated and it made it

> their own. It was a real group effort and they had never seen that before. So that's why they were so engaged and being able to explain it through movement … and it felt like a dance.

Mrs. Nyland said that the audio and video issues experienced while watching from her class at the beginning of our rehearsal and in the final performance required some adjustments and problem solving, but that in the end they could see and hear relatively clearly. Despite what is lost in taking in a performance virtually instead of in the same space, any contact is better than no contact. Similar to Ms. Atkins' comments, Mrs. Nyland said that her class was very grateful to be a part of something, and that "It gave us something to look forward to, something to be proud of, and something to share with our peers." Being a part of the Creative Process was also meaningful for Mrs. Nyland's students, and she commented: "You have given us an awareness of procedures and expectations. It was fun to watch you and your lovely class at work, adapting, constructing and deconstructing. It was wonderful to see imperfection evolving into perfection!" Mrs. Nyland conveyed her students' feedback after the presentation as well, remarking that "we did a little chat and they enjoyed being part of the drama class. They felt included and … I think they learned a lot …They were proud of themselves ... They got a kick out of the fact that they came up with … that little segment ... of movement. They liked that."

Mrs. Nyland spoke about learning in and about the outdoors with her students and about communicating that learning through drama. She remarked that it was a new experience for her students to engage in interpreting nature through movement and said that it "brought some movement to their [the students'] … thoughts. And they were able to articulate how wheat moved in the wind and … how the sun affected the wheat …that

was creating a lot of conversation that we don't normally have." Echoing the observation made by Avery in Project I, Mrs. Nyland reflected that experiencing the outdoors for a unique purpose with different people forged new meaning and memories. She commented: "... you gave us something else to think about other than what we already experienced."

Mrs. Nyland remarked that creating a performance based on students' observations of Land from various local places was a way of building relationships based on a shared, Land-based experience, and built "community within the classroom because it shows similarities and also highlights differences. Everybody comes with different perspectives and I think that when you shared it, it got each student sort of vulnerable and it showed authenticity." Vulnerability was evidenced in drama students' sharing their memories, their writing, in offerings during the devising process, and in performance. Many drama students in both Projects were wary of sharing their thoughts throughout the Creative Process and their ability and willingness to devise and perform in front of each other and an audience at the end of the Projects indicated significant growth. Mrs. Nyland's observations illustrate that students' demonstration of vulnerability was encouraging to their peers and inspired others to take chances as well.

6.3 Ian McKechnie, local historian, Projects I and II

Ian is a local freelance historian, writer, and museum studies specialist whom I met more than ten years ago on a project with the Lindsay Gaol and Museum. As mentioned above, Ian and I have done a number of projects together based on local sites and history with students and community organizations. Ian's passion for learning

and sharing the (his)stories of local people and places is contagious, and it is hard not to be drawn in to his accounts of the past. While in previous projects my students and I had worked closely with Ian, during COVID-19, interaction within the school was limited, a factor that impacted our usual working partnership. In the Projects of this study, his contributions, though limited on account of COVID-19 safety protocols, provided fulsome and engaging historical background which was invaluable to students' learning.

Ian and I conducted an hour-long follow up interview on September 14th, 2023, outside, near the remains of the Sadler Needler Mill along the Scugog River, and one of my first questions to him was what value he felt came from working with students on local story telling. Ian responded:

> I think the right word here is joy. There is a real joy in that process of collaboration. There is excitement that's palpable. Whether you're in the theatre or outside […] there's a sense...this energy, a synergy that's […] taking place among them [the students]. And that's not something that you really get […] simply by walking through a museum and looking at stuff in glass cases or even just pouring over books. But when these students are out there, whether walking through an historic site [or] being on stage at a local theatre… they are taking ownership, they are engaging with each other in a way that, ah… the seams of creativity just get burst and it's wonderful to see.

As a local partner, Ian has provided guidance with primary sources, offered historical insights, and delivered feedback to students as they created their work. On some occasions, students have developed work that Ian has written himself, adding another fold to the creative relationship. The generosity and commitment of local partners such as Ian and of students as they work collaboratively to serve the stories of local people

well has been a unifying factor in this work. Moreover, projects such as these often create bonds between community partners such as Ian and students, and between students and the people whose stories they have learned, that endure long after the project has ended.

The relationships that arise between community members and students through collaborative projects are renewed when they wave hello as they pass each other on the street, when they connect for new opportunities, and when they exhibit familiarity and belonging on visits to the sites on which we have created work. Ian spoke about the impact that local drama projects have on relationships between generations, noting:

> … any time you can get young people together with older people and their paths can cross through telling stories on stage, in drama, in a way that might, for example, rekindle some memories for the generation or two that's older than them, that's very important […] for building community. It brings together generations in a way that you don't often see elsewhere. And I think we're very good, too good, at segregating generations saying, 'the older people feel like this and the younger people are like this.' And that doesn't happen, can't happen, when you are doing historical drama - you need both […] Edmond Burke said that society is a contract between those who are living, those who are yet to be born, and those who have died, and I think that's one of the, perhaps the most important aspect of […] of drama based on local history: we are taking the stories of those who are no longer living in our midst and we are retelling them, and sharing them, and shaping those [stories] for those who are alive. And hopefully, those who participate in that process, whether it's adults, or most importantly, students, can take those experiences, those stories, and impart them to the

> generation that will come after. And I think that's one of the most meaningful and most powerful […] aspects of these stories.

Some of the student reflections mentioned earlier echoed these sentiments, supporting the notion that new connections are forged by sharing family history and memories.

Ian is often in the audiences of project performances we have done together and hears feedback from the community. I was interested to know his experience of hearing others comment on watching the students bring local stories to life through drama. He has said in the past that his hope is that people who watch will empathize with whatever a given character is going through, and take that forward in different ways that perhaps make their community a better place, or that simply inform how they are in the world. The impact of these local drama projects has also been to inform local people about histories they may not know. Ian commented:

> There is often an element of surprise because, most of the projects that I have done, working with local high school students, have focused on stories that either had not been told, or had only been told in a kind of marginal sort of way. So, not only are students learning about this for the first time, in many cases, [so too] is the wider community. Even people who have lived in the community for years, decades, generations…some of these people have not heard these stories and often one of the common comments that you'll hear after a production is 'I never knew and I've lived here for my whole life' and 'I've never heard that story or heard about that particular person or situation'. So, there's a real kind of […] public education to this too. Students are being educated through drama, they are also learning about history, and they are also teaching it through their

> performance to the wider public in a way that a single writer or museum curator or historian cannot do by themselves.

Ian's ongoing support of community storytelling projects in many forms and with various partners illustrates the potential for community collaborations to have long lasting, meaningful impact. Ensuring that non-dominant narratives are uplifted to be part of local (his)story sharing is an important focus for cultural and Heritage projects presently, in order to confront colonial histories and broaden the diversity of stories that are told.

6.4 Jack Hoggarth, Assistant Professor, Chair of Anishinaabe Knowledge, Trent University, Projects I and II

I conducted a thirty-five minute follow up interview with Jack Hoggarth on November 30th, 2023 at his office in the Chanie Wenjack School for Indigenous Studies at Trent University. My first question to Jack was what he wished non-Indigenous teachers would keep in mind when approaching histories of the Land and Indigenous material in their classrooms. Jack discussed the importance of teachers and students doing their own learning about Indigenous histories in advance of Indigenous guest speakers visiting the classroom. He said that historical narratives are often written from a colonial standpoint and that the histories of colonized people must also be sought out. He underscored the centrality of oral histories in connecting people to Land and that part of forging a connection to Land and the people whose stories are braided through the past, present, and future, is standing in the places that are important to those histories. He remarked, "There's a different style of learning when they [students] are out on that Land" and that the multidirectional and multisensory learning that takes place on Land helps students build identity. Jack spoke about the importance of

integrating experience on Land as part of learning and that reconnecting, or introducing, students to Land as “original teacher” is a gift of lifelong learning. He reflected that ‘land as original teacher’ is a universal teaching and that “it’s not just First Nations people that can connect to the Land. It’s everybody.”

I asked Jack about his thoughts surrounding what knowledge non-Indigenous teachers should be mindful of engaging with, and which should be reserved for Knowledge-Holders or Elders to share. He explained, “There’s two different types of versions of stories within our language - there’s aadizookaan that talks about a very sacred teaching, then there's the bimaadiziwin [that] talks about a personal story, or just something like a loose story.” Sacred stories have layered meanings and reflect complex cultural knowledge that may be unknown to non-Indigenous educators. Jack said that while there are many sacred stories that are best shared by Indigenous people with deep cultural knowledge, that the three that stand out to him are the Creation story, Migration teaching, and the Seven Grandfather Teachings. He suggested that reaching out to the local First Nations is the best way for teachers to ensure respectful engagement and sharing of information. Jack also felt that the history of Residential Schools is another area in which authentic voice is essential:

> The Residential Schools experience was very traumatic for people. It was essentially cultural genocide that was committed by the Canadian Government. So that’s where you bring in the authenticity […] School Boards now are bringing in [..] authentic voices so that the true learning can take place, so that the students are hearing first hand from […] survivors from Residential School, or someone who has been impacted through generational trauma. There’s nothing wrong with going into historical research with the students on Residential

> Schools. Covering issues like Duncan Campbell Scott, Egerton Ryerson, going through why Residential Schools were formulated and made, and created, to address the 'Indian problem' and go through all of these things leading up to bringing authentic voice in. I think that's where the balance is - you can get your students ready through what's available.

Quality, Indigenous created education materials as well as resources that have been developed alongside Indigenous Knowledge-Holders and Elders have become more readily available in recent years, provincially in Ontario, and elsewhere (Decolonizing Water, 2026; The Witness Blanket Teacher Guide, 2022; The National Centre for Collaboration in Indigenous Education, 2020). This material allows educators to expand their knowledge through audio, visual, and text- based resources made available through organizations such as the First Nations Métis and Inuit Education Association of Ontario (FNMIEAO) as well as the First Nations University of Canada, and continue their own learning that can then be integrated into practice.

Striking a balance between the positive, affirming contributions of Indigenous people and examining difficult histories was also a takeaway from my conversation with Jack Hoggarth. He relayed that we are in the truth phase of Truth and Reconciliation, which is necessary before any reconciliation can take place, and that while the truth of Indigenous people in Canada is very hard, that it must be shared. Alongside this, however, Jack said that "… sometimes what I find is [that] students get burdened down in the […] negative connotations to the history of our people and what we've gone through […] It's important to touch upon those good things with our people [as well, and], to celebrate them." He pointed out that the success stories of Indigenous

contributions in government and in education, among other areas, are an example of rising above generational challenges and creating a new path forward.

Jack spoke about gauging student learning and understanding using learning portfolios as an example of holistic evaluation in education. Offering his approach with the university students he teaches as an example, he explained, “through those learning portfolios I see where they [students] start out from in the beginning and at the end of the course, I can see their growth.” The portfolios allow for introspection and critical thought surrounding the content of his courses, but also invite students’ lived experience and feelings about their learning into the assessment of knowledge. Jack remarked that, generally, students now learn more about Indigenous histories and worldview in elementary and high school, but that it is also important for them to think about what they’ve learned and what it means to them:

> I have seen in the schools where they’re bringing in the authentic voices, they’re bringing in our people, [and] our people are within the textbooks now, our history. But I think […] the most important thing, is to have those students reflect. To have those students engage with introspection [and] to look within themselves because when we talk about pedagogy and pedagogical approaches, Anishinaabe way is we don’t [just] think from up here [gestures to head], we think from here [gestures to heart]. We look to our spirit and that’s where we let it flow from.

Jack went on to say that while sometimes students’ reflections are surprising or shocking, that looking back on their expressions of learning over time inevitably demonstrates growth and evidence of learning, which in his view, is an act of

reciprocity: “If you want to talk about reconciliation, those are the first steps towards it […] to have that awareness within our schools, within our students.”

Conclusion

Partner interviews with teachers reinforced key ideas that emerged from the Projects, such as centring student curiosity and the meaningful impact of including the student audience in the Creative Process. Both partner teachers provided thoughtful ideas for future investigations and projects with students. Ian McKechnie highlighted the relationship building that takes place in drama projects based on local history and the long-lasting impression that is made through local storytelling. Jack Hoggarth underscored the importance of experiencing Land, respectful engagement, and growth as measurement of learning. The wisdom offered by local partners contributes to the discussion and analysis of the findings which are presented in the next section.

7 Discussion and Analysis

This chapter discusses findings in response to the research questions of the study which centred on learning more about the experience of students involved in Land-based drama inquiry with local partners, and its impact on students. The findings are framed using the central pillars of the study: Land, Community, and Drama Pedagogy, with an additional section discussing the role of disruption in this research. Consideration is given to the impact and significance of learning on and about Land in partnership with peers, family, and local people, recognizing others through similarities and differences, as well as the opportunities and implications of autobiographical material as the source of drama work. Also addressed is the use of digital technology in the drama classroom, literacy, and the role of drama in climate education.

7.1 Land

“Land holds so many memories that most people don't know about.”
- Hannah, Project II.

Taking notice and building connection

In this study, students’ research into local history and Land, coupled with teachings by Jack Hoggarth, impacted students’ level of knowledge and awareness of Indigenous people on local Land, of the damage caused by colonialism, and of ongoing responsibilities to Land and people. The students’ experience of learning through the act of conducting research into Land that they traverse in their daily lives reflects Margaret Kovach’s belief that relationality and reflexivity in research “allows for a holistic way of knowing” (2021, p.34). This idea is extended, in this case, to the experience of

high school students in the Projects, as they reinforced their connection to Land and to people, and had the opportunity to reflect on their connections by taking time to be outdoors, notice their surroundings, remember past experiences, and talk with people in their lives about Land near them. There was a difference in the way students spoke about treaties, traditional territories, local Nations, and the Scugog River specifically before and after the project, marked largely by exhibiting greater confidence in facts and concepts by the conclusion of the Project. Lennon from Project II wrote, “I feel greater connected [*sic*] to the place I live because now I can see and understand where the land I walk on came from and who it was taken from as well as that it was never mine in the first place.” Dismantling colonized thinking is a long-term endeavour, however, small moments such these offer promise for incremental change.

Expanding the classroom to include Land as a physical site of learning positioned the more-than-human as the experience of our focus and pedagogically signalled to students that the study of and within the natural world was important. In both Projects, effort was exerted to spend time along the River which required special permissions, additional transportation and accompaniment, and the physical task of taking our bodies away from the school building and into outdoor spaces that we had not inhabited together before. This additional collective labour, alongside explicit instructions for students to take notice of Land, observe carefully, and document their experiences, both in writing and photographically, centred the more-than-human world as the focus of students’ work, as opposed to relegating it to a backdrop. The observations made by some students about the value they derived from being on specific sites bears witness to a heightened awareness of how being on Land and in a specific place has irreplaceable impact. As living beings, we are always part of Land, however, extending

that cognition through tangible experiences in the outdoors created lived experiences and increased students' knowledge of Land in a way that was locally specific and tied to shared memory. Students listened to stories and knowledge shared by local partners in outdoor settings where their senses were engaged in multiple ways (touch, smell, sight, and hearing), a byproduct of which was their increased engagement, demonstrated through the curiosity and noticing of their surroundings in new ways. Further, walking along the River and Mill while learning about the (his)stories of these places led to making the places and their stories concrete which, in turn, made them hard to un-know and less abstract. This approach puts Land-based learning in dialogue with Dorothy Heathcote's aim in drama work to provide "a sense of authenticity and responsibility for students," in that students' experience of and learning about Land together as a class, and independently, informed the drama that they would subsequently develop to share with an audience (Heathcote, 2003, p. 16). The pedagogical approach of these Projects to have students experience Land themselves and translate that learning through drama for others, provides multiple layers of learning: experiential Land-based, collaborative creating, and performance for others.

In post-Project reflections, most students in both Projects commented directly on their increased knowledge of Land, appreciation for the teachings of local partners, and enjoyment of being outside, though not all students reported feeling greater connection to Land as a result of the Projects. While the term 'connection' was not explicitly defined, many students equated 'connection' to Land with knowing about the history of the Land, as well as stories. Lisa, for example, wrote, "I know the history, who this land used to be owned by and what treaty this land is. This makes me feel more connected to the land." Half of the respondents in Project I expressed a connection to the Scugog

River and half of the participants in Project II expressed feeling *greater* connection to local Land after participating in the Project. It is unclear without further inquiry, whether students who did *not* report a greater sense of connection to local Land felt so because connection was already present and was not further enhanced by their work on the Projects, or if their connection to local Land simply remained unchanged. Despite this, the ability for most students to devise personal Land acknowledgements that descriptively accounted for Land that was important to them, and to recount their memories tied to Land, indicated the presence of connection irrespective of that connection being greater or unchanged by their engagement with their Project.

Student responses to pre- and post- Project questions highlighted students' perceptions of their knowledge of and connection to Land, as well as changes that transpired over the course of the Projects. Sharing encounters and memories in class underscored for some students that they didn't feel they had family stories tied to Land in the way their classmates did. In post-Project reflections in Project I, some students shared that they had stronger memories and connections to bodies of water where they lived, than they did to the Scugog River. Time spent together on excursions during the Project, however, led some students to reconsider the ways in which they, personally, had developed relationships with Land and history through their own experiences during our work. In Project I, for example, Ronnie commented that he did not have significant personal stories of the River, but that the Project had impacted how he saw the River and community, implicating himself in the past, present, and future of the Land. He remarked: "I would say definitely it changed my view… it's looking at somewhere you normally don't look at and taking into accountability [*sic*] what happened rather than just letting the past kind of sit." Avery shared that the River held new meaning for her

commenting, “any time I pass it … I see the river and I just think, ah! The project we did.” In this instance, experience on Land and learning influenced students' awareness of how they might be connected to Land in new and different ways that they had not previously considered.

Land and language: Claiming connection/setting apart

Analysis of the thematic content and phrasing of students’ responses to pre- and post- Project questions highlighted occurrences wherein students used possessive pronouns, or conveyed group ownership of specific features of the Land and local geography. Instances of possessive pronouns in relation to Land were heard in comments such as the following: “I know that our river was man made,” “rivers are freshwater, so it’s good for our environment,” and “it helps the land around us, it literally helps the ecosystems of our lands.” Expressing collective possession also occurred in relation to history and references to existing businesses and physical buildings within the town: “I don’t have any connections to it, but it's been there for a long time and it relates to our history” and “... this town is filled to the brim with history. We have things like The Grand [restaurant] or obviously the Mill, you know the dam, everything.” While perhaps unintentional, students’ use of possessive terminology in this context, prompts consideration about the meaning of their choice of wording. As discussed earlier, the use of possessive language might suggest an affinity towards the subject the students referenced, or a desire to draw association, indicating a willing claim to membership in a group - perhaps the classroom community, or the geographic community of Lindsay and/or the Kawartha Lakes, or even the community one belongs to by virtue of being human. Phrases such as “our River,” “our environment,” “our lands,” however, also

invite speculation about use of possessives as indication of colonial authority and human subjugation of the natural world in relation to self.

Non-Indigenous students' use of 'us' and 'them' when referring to themselves and Indigenous people respectively, was another instance of language drawing attention to students' possible understandings and perspectives. In Project II, during a discussion about Land acknowledgements, various students spoke quite passionately to a classmate in an effort to explain the importance of Land acknowledgements. The students at different points said:

Isaac: It's disrespectful because they're letting us on their Land.

Lisa: We need to respect the fact that they live on this Land too.

Oona: So, we kind of took the Land from them…

The othering, binary 'us' and 'them', revealed an assumption on the part of the students that they could claim whiteness, or non-Indigeneity, as a unifying identity in the class. In fact, there were two students who self-identified as Indigenous in the class, and still others who identified as non-white, second-generation immigrants to Canada. The non-Indigenous, white students' assumption points both to a lack of awareness and to centring whiteness, reflecting, as Lois Campbell writes, "whiteness and colonialism as the normative default" (2021, p. 136). In the moment of the Land acknowledgement activity, I did not directly address the assumption by some students that the class was comprised exclusively non-Indigenous people, but did have occasion to do so in a subsequent class. When I raised the idea that we could not assume that there were no Indigenous people in our class, one student, in the moment, chose to self-identify as Indigenous which provided an authentic moment of recognition.

The othering use of ‘us’ and ‘them’ may also reflect students' awareness of Indigenous people through a largely historic lens that mythologizes Indigenous bodies on Land and in communities, as opposed to awareness of Indigenous people as part of the contemporary world and local geographic community. Students and teachers alike may come to Land-based learning, understanding colonialism, and Indigenous knowledge from different kinds of exposure, much of which may be derived from abstract academic learning that is lacking because it is not local, personal, or learned in partnership with Indigenous people. Learning about the presence of Indigenous people locally and researching the colonial impact on Land and people was new information for many students in these Projects. When new learning is experiential, occurs in the company of others, is rooted in local Land, and takes place with informed Indigenous partners from the local community, learners’ own identities, histories, and memories become braided together in the present with those they learn with and from. This pedagogical approach can be situated alongside Kate J. Cassidy’s observations that in the context of community building, students see “individuality and relationships as intertwined” (Cassidy, 2019, pp. 153-154). Project I and II findings relating to language highlight the need and opportunity to increase the awareness of non-Indigenous students, specifically, about language, assumptions, and the divisiveness that binary terms such ‘us’ from ‘them’ can convey.

Listening and relating differently on Land

Leaving school grounds in these Projects was a novel experience for students and they expressed gratitude for being out of the class and away from school. Hannah’s comment, as noted earlier, is illustrative of some students’ feelings that learning

outdoors was special and that new things can be learned by being outside. An air of possibility presided during our walks. There was a sense of freedom and anticipation - a heightened energy that was not present in the classroom. As highlighted in chapter five, Eden from Project II remarked, “I liked it. I feel like it was a nice break…I like that we got to get out and do something” and her classmate Oliver remarked that being on a field trip was a new experience. The limited movement of students and staff and the restrictive nature of our physical existence in the school building during COVID-19 could be stifling at times. In post-course interviews, students’ remarks reinforced the positive impact of being outdoors as part of learning. They recollected in their reflections the cold, wet weather of the late fall and winter, but qualified those observations with remarks about the outdoor ventures being a favourite part of the Project.

Various studies have emerged since the COVID-19 pandemic that point to the beneficial value of outdoor activities and exposure to nature on social well being and resilience in students (Jackson, S. et al., 2021; Mann, J. et al., 2022; Roberts, A., 2020; Zhang, Y. et al, 2020). The lightening of student mood - both reported and observed - as well as student reflections about being on the Land, away from the classroom, support these findings. Time spent outdoors was welcomed in both classes and the change in environment impacted how students interacted with each other and with me. While this quality of liberation diminished once back in the classroom, students recalled those times outdoors with fondness and appreciation for the opportunity to be outside and learning from local people and Land. The positive impact on student outlook and interactions brought about by being outdoors with others is an important finding for the wellness benefits it appears to provide.

In recent years, Ontario teachers, schools, school boards, and the Ministry of Education - in theory if not always practice - have focused on the need to give explicit attention to student well-being in schools as well as recognizing the holistic nature of well-being. As far back as 2016, the Ontario Ministry of Education drafted a memorandum to Directors of Education across the Province entitled *Promoting Well-Being in Ontario's Education System: Engagement Paper*, requesting that school boards and other provincial stakeholders provide responses to help define well-being, offer ideas for how to promote well-being in classrooms and schools, and how success in reaching those goals might be measured (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). School Boards and other provincial stakeholders in education such as teachers' federations, Universities, and the Ontario Public School Board Association, provided feedback to this call, and in many cases, developed models to help conceptualize well-being and elements contributing to it. The conceptual model "Feed all Four" created by Trillium Lakelands School Board (TLDSB) was one such offering, developed using Maslow's hierarchy of needs alongside the Anishinaabe Medicine Wheel to represent the role of "mind, body, spirit, and emotions" as integral to student well-being and reflective of these elements as relational (see Figure 51) (TLDSB, 2016).

Currently, the Ontario Ministry of Education articulates a position on student well-being and mental health that aligns with that created by TLDSB, presented through the document *Stepping Stones: A Resources for Educators Working with Youth Aged 12 to 25*, published by the Ontario Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. This 2024 model is based on an understanding of well-being in which "the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social domains – are interrelated and interdependent, and all are subject to the influence of a person's environment or context" at the center of which

Figure 51

TLDSB Feed all Four



is “a sense of self, and/or spirit – that connects the different aspects of development and experience” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2024). The integration of mind, spirit, body, and social connectedness supports the foundational elements of Land- and Arts- based pedagogy in general, and recognizes learning as a holistic enterprise. It is imperative that local school boards and the Ministry of Education consider that class size and funding for Arts education has very real consequences for student well-being and that complying with these policies and pedagogical frameworks has a profound impact on student success.

Another outcome of time spent on the Land was seen in the informal conversations that occurred spontaneously on walks outside of the class. The sole task for students on these outings was to walk together, take photographs as they were so compelled, and listen to the offerings of local partners. Students asked questions at times, but this was not an expectation articulated to them, and their questions arose

spontaneously from conversations. I found myself listening differently to students on these walks. As the boundaries of our class expanded, the intense focus on ‘work’ changed, as did the nature of our exchanges. Discussions had a relaxed, easy quality. When walking with the class, engaged in moving together, our conversations took on a meandering quality, with various students joining in, sharing their views in an impromptu way. The walks afforded both myself and the students an opportunity to talk and laugh, again forging shared memories as we got to know each other better. Experiencing the familiar with new people recreated the spaces we visited, imprinting understandings and meanings of Land with knowledge of the people with whom the spaces were experienced, and the physical experience of walking on Land, creating “new awareness, understandings, and relationships” (Ritenburg, 2014, p. 68).

Learning outdoors, the more-than-human, and walking/traversing

Students’ experience in Projects I and II involved individual and collective attentiveness to what they saw, heard, smelled, and felt while outdoors, observing the world outdoors. As we walked en-masse along the River, the weather required us to watch our footing along the path we followed. We each experienced the snow and rain that fell on our faces and jackets, and how the precipitation impacted the sound that our steps made. Students generally exhibited heightened energy during our time outdoors, however, they were also able to focus their attention on our walks, narrowing in on things they observed and listening to local partners. As Shawn Wilson writes, knowledge “is held in the relationships and connections formed with the environment that surrounds us” and that “by reducing the space between things, we are strengthening the relationship that they share” (2008, p. 87). Being on Land together

played an important part in the quality of students' initial engagement and in "reducing" the space between ourselves as a group and the Land we occupy (Wilson, 2008, p. 87). Multiple moments of collective and individual focus and noticing occurred as students walked, had thoughts, and stood in silence, listening to our guide's words as well as the sounds of the River and the falling rain and snow. The impact of collective moments of focus on students' connectedness was important and will be examined further in the Community section of this chapter.

The dualism of being both together and separate at the same time in the experience of walking is artfully shared in the article *Loop (a geography)* by Lorimer and Wyllie (2010), cited in Springgay and Truman (2018, pp. 36- 37). *Loop (a geography)* is an account of the walks of Lorimer and Wyllie towards the same destination and offers thoughts on the listening body's inhabitation of the landscape through walking, but also, as they write, that: "this exposure of bodies to each other, this sharing and partaking means that being is first and foremost being-with, a concrete relation-between" (Lorimer and Wylie, 2010, p.7). These walking moments during the Projects assembled to form a shared event. The "concrete relation between" could be seen in this way to transpire between students, the local partner, and myself, as well as through our relation to Land (Lorimer and Wyllie, 2010, p. 7). While students learn in classes together everyday, there was a different quality to our group, the ways we related in those moments, and to the learning while on outdoor field trips. The difference of learning outdoors opened up new possibilities

In Project I, one student's experience of our field trip was impacted by their recent injury that required them to walk with crutches and a cast. This situation highlighted for me the need to consider more thoughtfully how students with disabilities

might participate in Land-based learning, especially in field trips away from the school grounds. Since conducting the Projects profiled in this dissertation, I have had occasion to work more closely with students who have mobility disabilities, some of whom use wheelchairs. These experiences have created the opportunity for me to reimagine drama activities and spaces with accessibility in mind. Students in wheelchairs experience being together in outdoor spaces alongside their peers, moving through these spaces, albeit differently. Chandler et al (2019) cite Eliza Taylor's (2010) view that accessibility and walking highlights the interdependence of all walking and that specific conditions or supports are required to execute the act of walking such as "ground, shoes, social support" as well as external conditions like clear pathways (Chandler, 2019, p. 90). Chandler et al point out that the act of walking, or traversing, for disabled people often requires "foresight and planning. Such planning also frequently involves other people who perform acts of support comprised of affective and/or material labour … supports that are often obscured or taken-for-granted in normative life" (Chandler et al, 2019, p. 90).

Springgay and Turner attend to accessibility within critical walking methodologies, writing that as methodological approaches, they "resist inclusive, equal, and depoliticized accounts of walking and movement" and that while the use of the verb 'walking' is often ascribed to the "act of bipedal movement," that "disability scholars and activists also use the term when describing their use of mobility devices such as wheelchairs" (Springgay and Truman, 2022, p. 172). Considering the encounters of disabled students in traversing Land is an important contour of walking methodologies that amplifies the experience of disabled people and affirms the belonging of all bodies on Land. Inclusion and accessibility are part of my thinking when planning for student

encounters on Land and I continue to learn from these experiences Universal design and accessibility in public spaces is an essential part of ensuring inclusion for all people.

7.2 Community

“A community is interconnected, helping each other and working together.”

Tom, Project II.

“A community has meaning, history, and chemistry!” Usher, Project II

Relationality and the motivational pull of caring for others

Part of my pedagogical hope in this study was to have students take notice of Land near them, thereby fostering greater connection to Land and inspiring investment in their drama work. Students’ connection to Land, as detailed above, was demonstrated in various ways and to differing extents. Their investment in collaborative drama work seemed motivated more by creating drama work to share with others, than by inspiration to share specific aspects of the Land they studied. Students in Project I, for example, showed significant investment in grappling with the creation of a Land acknowledgement for the kindergarten class. ‘Getting it right’ was a motivating force and students showed care in deliberating over what their young audience would understand. The senior drama students became self reflective, questioning if they were effectively conveying the concepts underlying relationship to Land. Concern was also shown by this class about the world of the story they created, and much time was spent discussing whether the younger students had reference points for the material in the drama students were creating and how they could make it more engaging.

In a similar respect, drama students in Project II who worked with Mrs. Nyland’s students demonstrated leadership and patience as they explained the technique of

flocking. They outlined the approach they had used in creating their own work and came back to the drama class with ideas for how to improve their meeting next time. During the Creative Process, students showed care in questioning the quality of the listening and viewing experience of Mrs. Nyland's students, given that they would be watching the performance from a remote location and not present in the room. Drama students in Project II also suggested that a video invitation would be a more engaging choice for Mrs. Nyland's students, rather than simply writing a letter. In both classes, students demonstrated that work in service to others motivated their devising, encouraged them to think about the experience of others, and engage in empathetic thinking. This class's focus on the accessibility of the hypothetical waterfront installation in the town hall role play was another instance of demonstrating awareness of and concern about inclusion.

In Project II, not only did drama students share their work and invite Mrs. Nyland's class to conduct their own observations of nature near them, but the partner class's creative work was incorporated into the anthology in a moment of co-performance. The exchange of creative ideas – like a dance, as Mrs. Nyland expressed - and offering of perspective gave greater meaning to the project with respect to content as well as the experience of working with others, as students attested. The sharing, teaching, and reciprocity that transpired between the two classes increased the drama students' investment in their work and altered the creative output in meaningful ways. Especially at a time when students were experiencing ongoing COVID-19 restrictions surrounding their contact with others, the moments of exchange brought an element of human contact and connection that broadened the impact and experience of the students' drama work.

In both Projects, the students' investment of creativity, thought, and execution, reflects, as Noble has suggested, how connection is built incrementally and through "embodied labour" which inspires students to feel "empowered to take up civic space" (Noble, 2015, p. 34; 2019, p. xviii). Extending this theory to the context of drama in particular, I posit that 'closing the Creative Process circle' through a period of reflection and feedback about the drama work is an essential component of its affective force and long-lasting impact. The time limitations imposed during the Projects curtailed the usual post-performance period in which students reflect with the audience about the experience, and in subsequent classes, articulate in discussions and writing, the impact it had on them and others, as well as takeaways from the experience. While students learn at all points of the Creative Process, looking back at the conclusion of the drama offers a different opportunity to examine learning. As David Booth writes, it is looking back in reflection that "provides opportunities for children to revisit and rethink their thoughts and observations" and that "the thought and language that occur after the drama may be as important as the learning that happened during the development of the drama (1994, p. 92).

Students showed care in their interactions with local partners and in each visit demonstrated attentiveness and curiosity. Even students who often struggled to focus and listen for longer periods did so without incident when a local partner was providing a talk. The physical discomfort of rain, snow, and cold, was rarely, if ever, commented upon during our outdoor excursions and did not impede the students' ability to attend to the discussions in the moment. In one instance, that of Jack Hoggarth's visit in early December of 2021, the weather was threatening freezing rain, and a student asked if we should call Jack Hoggarth to see if it was still a good idea for him to come, thinking

of his safety on the journey to and from Curve Lake. It is worth noting that students who were not overly interested in the subject of our work, *did* care that local partners who had specialized knowledge were spending time talking to the class. The information and the 'event' of the visit took on meaning because of its interpersonal nature. Being on specific sites, outdoors, in the community outside of the school, provided occasion for students to be in relation with specific elements of Land, with each other, and with the local partners who spoke to us. Student reflections connected being outdoors with learning and with the opportunity to understand varied perspectives and histories. These experiences had impact on the drama students and they, in turn, acted upon the experience and knowledge by sharing it with other students through their drama work.

In their discussion of reconciliation and relational ethics in education, Styres and Kempf state that "land-centred education embeds students, instructors, and community in the ethics of relationality within land-based pedagogies and practices, which are the impetus for respectful reconciliation education" (2022, p. 155). They also cite Wildcat and colleagues in asserting that "we need to move from talking about the land within classrooms to critically engaging in dialogue with and on the land in physical, social, and spiritual contexts" (2022, p. 155). Listening to teachings on Land with the knowledge that the information imparted was their responsibility to share, transformed student learning from intellectual to experiential. Inviting a Knowledge-Holder into the class impacted the depth and breadth of students' perceptions and knowledge of the subjects we were studying. The presence of local partners influenced students' awareness, in many cases, of what they did not know. Fitting together students' personal, lived experience with that of others (Project II) and devising a 'story world' from their interpretation of local learning (Project I) resulted in work that depicted the co-

existence of multiple narratives, some of which were familiar to students and some of which were new.

The coming together to create a drama based on multiple histories, experiences, and learning was the seed of relationships - of students to each other, to Land, and to local people. This relationality, as Lauren Tynan writes, “is how the world is known and how we, as Peoples, Country, entities, stories and more-than-human kin, know ourselves and our responsibilities to one another” (2021, p. 600). Relationships are not instant, however. They grow over time, sometimes imperfectly. Barad reminds us that “the world and its possibilities for becoming are remade in each meeting” and as such asks, “How then shall we understand our role in helping constitute who and what come to matter?” (Barad, 2007, p. 11). Education that looks beyond the classroom in experiential ways, places value on listening to others’ stories, and invites new knowledge and diversity, has the potential to inform and transform beliefs about who and what matters in meaningful ways.

Community through shared stories: Clarity and illumination

Emily Style asserts that knowledge and learning is personal and that a balanced education should reflect a curriculum that includes “knowledge of both self and others [and] clarification of the known and illumination of the unknown” (Style, 1988, as published on Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity – SEED - website). I would argue that the context of learning about local places and people with knowledgeable partners and classmates provides a specificity that creates connection for students through both the stories imparted and the experience of the shared moment. The shared moment connects students to the people around them which roots the ‘clarified

known' and 'illuminated unknown' in their memory of lived experience which is deep and long-lasting. These types of shared moments broaden the concept of community to reflect the multiplicity, fluidity, and brevity that can characterize moments of felt community in ways that differ from a more permanent or fixed concept of what it means, or feels like, to experience community.

Recognition and amplification of students' unique stories of Land as shared with each other creates an opportunity for students to identify with or to be learners about the lives of others. Style's concept of curriculum as a window that enables a glimpse into the realities of others and as a mirror that can reflect and affirm students' own lived experience and identities is one that is meaningful in the context of projects that focus on education through experiential and story-based learning (Style, 1988). Children's Literature scholar Rudine Sims Bishop expands on this concept and writes that literature,

> transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books. (Bishop, quoted by McNair and Edwards, 2021, p.207)

While Bishop references written literature here, which is the focus of her work, I think the spirit of her comments holds true for stories that are part of an oral and performative story sharing as well. The diverse perspectives that students, their audiences, and local partners bring to collaborative drama learning provide varied entry points through which to identify. As Jonda McNair specifies, "As there are multiple aspects to our identities, consequently there are a number of ways in which we can see ourselves reflected" (2016, p. 379).

The classroom ensemble: Dissonance and perseverance

As mentioned in chapter four, the ensemble devising process, as much as it can energise and inspire, is also fragile. Drama work over the Projects of the study required that students have a measure of trust in each other, and in me, as their teacher, leading the Project. During the Projects, students exhibited small moments of trust which led to productive improvisations, sharing of writing, offering ideas, and trying new things. However, there were also instances where trust was not present and when students' behaviour elicited feelings of mistrust, disappointment, and fear of judgement. In Project I, this was seen in the aftermath of the confrontation between students about displacing the neighbourhood cat during one of our walks. This event created distance and, despite attempts to bridge the divide, the dissonance persisted for the remainder of the course, impacting the ability of students to further build relationships with one another. In both Projects, critical feedback given by students during devising, or pointed comments made in frustration with classmates, at times, damaged the development of trust and a culture of care within the class. There were instances when some students did not contribute or did not want to participate, even when encouraged by their classmates. In both Projects, some students were very invested in their work and others were decidedly ambivalent.

Despite these moments of resistance and apathy, most students persevered in their preparations for the performance, and all students ultimately performed for their intended audience. The digital, audio, costume, prop, lighting, blocking, and acting elements that students organized were realized and the respective classes crossed the finish line together. Accomplishing the performances may have been a point from which to further build trust and care within these classes, however, the limited course timeline

meant that the drama classes would terminate shortly after the final performance and everyone would move on. Ideally, in ‘normal’ circumstances, students would have multiple occasions over the course to work collaboratively, share their work with others, and experience everyone in the class striving for mutual success. As Ellsworth and Winnicott discuss, “encounters with the ‘not me’” and response to those encounters “change both the inside of the self and the outside of the social environment” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 60). Prolonged and repeated exposure to collaborative projects in which students rely on one another and experienced success, in my experience, diminishes that relational space and forges greater trust and connection.

In the drama classroom, community is often built by students experiencing challenge and succeeding with the help of classmates. Despite the time crunch and abbreviated time together, providing a meaningful and engaging performance for other students was a strong driving force in both classes which resulted in drama students presenting a committed performance that conveyed a unified front, if only briefly in performance circumstances. For some students, in setting aside differences, dislikes, or negativity for the sake of executing a performance for younger students or peers, they enacted the practice of ‘fake it ‘till you make it’. In doing so, students had a team experience, that, even if it was purely performative, allowed them to experience what being part of the team felt like as well as the reward of others’ appreciation for it.

7.3 Drama pedagogy

“Doing our project in class… it just … all came together and I was a part of … something bigger.” - Erin, Project I.

“This production would have been a lot worse if there weren't a lot of laughs and fun involved.” - Usher, Project II.

Multiplicities and interconnectedness: implications for creative output

The simultaneous together and apartness of the students’ walks were echoed in other parts of the Creative Process. The stage, most significantly, became an important space through performance, where, in executing work together, students moved, spoke, bore witness to, and expressed themselves independently and as an ensemble. Focus and engagement flowed back and forth between the singular and the whole, creating and re-creating an iteration of ‘concrete relation-between’ that, while distinct from that experienced on walks, shared similar qualities. In both Projects I and II, students’ encounters with the Scugog River, and stories of structures and Land near them, were shared in writing, embodied drama work, and through talk. As Aukerman and Jensen write, “... sharing, whether in writing, talk, or some other medium, provides glimpses of the humanness that we need to see in each other, stories that highlight both our multiplicity and our interconnectedness” (2020, p. 105).

As they worked together to create scenes and make decisions about their work, students in Project II, in particular, asked questions to be sure their understanding of a detail from a classmate’s story was correct, and made comments such as “I know that barn” or “I’ve been there.” Acknowledgement of similar experiences or familiarity with places established moments of recognition between students based on something shared. Recognition of peers also occurred through exposure to experiences that were different from their own. Stories about relation to Land were unique to each student and the personal nature of the stories held peers’ interest. As Eden and Oliver remarked,

sharing personal stories connected to Land allowed students to learn more about their classmates through the stories they contributed. Exposure to narratives that diverged from their own experience opened up new ways in which students could know each other and "reflect and refract their concepts and working theories of the world" (Gain and Aitken, 2022, p. 114). Gain and Atkin amplify this idea in their observation that "participants need to understand the understandings of others to successfully negotiate and move the shared experience forward" (Gain and Aitken, 2022, p. 114). Piecing together scenes, differing in form and content, by multiple students in Project II created a drama that proved to be sufficiently expansive to contain significant difference while presenting as a cohesive whole.

Although students' descriptions and observations were individual in Projects I and II, their individual work became shared and part of the collective, in both content and performance. An example of this could be seen in students' attentiveness to and respect shown towards Hannah's story about the Land on which her family lives and farms. Classmates showed particular care in their devising with the material Hannah had written about how her Great Grandfather had died of a heart attack in their barn, and how her Grandpa had left school in grade ten to continue agricultural work on the Land. When Hannah arrived in class with a collage of photos of her family to add as a projection during the scene, students asked about the photos and gave Hannah positive reinforcement for sharing them. This particular moment was significant for a few reasons. Hannah demonstrated vulnerability in bringing photos of her family to add to the scene: she showed trust and her classmates responded with appreciation and interest. Hannah's understanding of Land near her was strongly rooted in her family relations and their relationship to Land, which she claimed as part of her personal

narrative. In bringing this story to the class and incorporating it into their creative work, Hannah's story became part of the class's story in creating their LandForms production. This example and others support Aukerman and Jensen's suggestion that sharing personal narratives can lead to a kind of engagement that inspires curiosity, questions, and that, over time, "could become generative spaces for a sense of classroom belonging" (2020, p. 105).

Student inquiry into Land opened opportunities for connection with family members by sharing stories and memories of the past, further linking Land to personal and family histories. In a number of cases, the conversations led students to new or deepened awareness of how their families were tied to Land. Students commented that they had conversations with their family members that they hadn't previously, and that asking family members to share their stories was a new experience. For instance, in Project II, Mona commented that although she was familiar with the Land occupied by her grandparents' farm, learning more about it provided the chance for her to learn new stories and see things she had not previously paid attention to: "I interviewed my Grandparents and Uncle and they got out lots of pictures and talked about what they used to have to do [on the farm], like put hay up to the barn." Several students reflected that they knew more about their families after the Project and that family members had continued to engage in conversations, recalling stories of Land.

Sharing lived-experience and family stories through drama infused student voice with "agency and authority" and added to the students' understanding of each other and of themselves (Zatzman, 2005, p. 97). The retelling of peers' stories by other bodies, and the interpretation of scenes through the sound and lighting design choices that students made, reshaped the original narratives, rendering them something new.

Students claimed their family knowledge and offered it as a contribution to the group's work, which further enhanced the meaning of the Project. When material from students' own memories and field trip experiences were rendered performative through the devising process, the concept of the body as archive, as discussed by Helen Nicholson and Belarie Zatzman, became evident, illustrating the witnessing of memory and of story that takes place through performance (Nicholson, 2003, p.90; Zatzman, 2005, p. 99).

Autobiographical sources: Opportunities and limitations

The application of drama pedagogy in both Projects entailed having students consider the Land around them and tell how it was part of their personal stories and/or the story of humans and the more-than-human along the Scugog River. These stories were told in very different ways over both Projects although, in both cases, the resulting drama reflected Booth and Lundy's understanding of Anthology, containing "a dramatization of several selections representing a variety of material", assembled in "dramatically effective order" (1983, p. 95). In the first Project, a linear framework was created (the leaf's voyage down the River) into which students inserted fictional scenes based on their research and collaborative learning. In Project II, students' lived experience and memories were the basis for a drama collage centred on the theme of local Land.

The contribution of students' lived experience as the source material for devised drama allowed students in Project II to create work based on existing knowledge: these scenes were their stories. Using personal memory and lived experience influenced student investment and authorship in their work. Autobiographical sources also

permitted students to self-select Land and landmarks near them that were meaningful, or at least familiar. Using real material from students' own lives, however, raised questions about how the strategies and conventions used in drama pedagogy are engaged with differently when using autobiographical sources. Students demonstrated greater interest in directing the performative renderings of their own stories than they had with other purely fictional work over the course. They sought consent to artistically mold the stories of their peers and combine multiple works, a process that led to sharing authorship and creative control. At the same time, editing, suggesting re-wording, or re-ordering felt like a more delicate job when working with students' lived experiences and family stories. I'm uncertain if such care is taken or considered when working with the drama of a "story world" with content based in fiction (Edmiston & Towler-Evans, 2022, p. 106). In addition to approaching students' autobiographical material with great care, I did not feel I could work with students' storytelling to interrogate perspective, deepen understanding, and/or reveal impacts in the same way that I normally would with source material that is not personal. The work of these projects was not cloaked in the guise of metaphor or fictional role play, which, as Shulamith Lev-Aladgem writes, creates a "protective frame" for drama work (2010, p. 38). Centring students' lived, autobiographical experience as a source of devised drama created potential for students to be more vulnerable and exposed, and possibly less free to 'try on' ways of thinking different from their own, than if they were playing a role other than themselves.

Some of the improvisational work that was part of the Creative Process, did provide students the opportunity to examine perspective in varied roles. In both Projects, students took on fictitious roles in the town hall meetings and acted in improvisations which provided an opportunity for them to voice a point of view that was

not necessarily their own. Some students chose to perform their role-play characters in ways that were quite different from their own personalities, choosing wording, perspectives, and physicality that reflected a playful element to their engagement that was not present to the same extent when performing their own stories. These instances of role-play provided perspectives that were, in many cases, new to students and offered fresh insight.

In early writing, Boal outlines his concept of 'metaxis' as "the state of belonging to two different autonomous worlds: the image of reality and the reality of the image" (Boal, 1995, p. 43). The concept of 'metaxis' frames the practice of working within the fiction of drama to grapple with real world problems (Boal, 1995, p. 43). The two 'worlds' of metaxis have often been interpreted and applied by drama practitioners as the world of fiction (the world of the created drama in which a role is played) and the 'real' world (the world of the class and the student themselves) (Allern, 2001, p. 81; O'Toole, 1992, p. 16). David Booth deliberated on the division of self and role, writing:

> In drama, there is the *self* that one begins with, and the *other* that one takes on. At times, the *self* is the motive force of the drama, dictating words and action from personal background and from a particular value system; at other times, the *adopted persona* is dominant, presenting a complex subject to explore through talk and drama. (Booth,1994, p.21)

Susan Davis and Gavin Bolton also examine the parallel existence of self and role in their discussion of Vygotsky's concept of "dual affect" wherein students experience both affective and cognitive responses through play, or drama, which can even be contradictory to each other (Bolton, 1986, p.122; Davis, 2015, pp.68-69). As Davis writes, "participants may feel things they may not feel in real life, with the dramatic

frame both protecting them, and/or protecting them into the emotional experience" (2015, p. 68). Bolton specifies that there are practical and non-practical ways of experiencing that are distinct, but never completely detached from each other, and explains that the structures or frames we use in drama are purposeful in both containing emotion and in possessing "'regulating valves' for channeling emotional expression" (Bolton, 1986, pp. 121, 123). A by-product of this duality is freedom to explore a situation or role within a fictional frame.

The adjustment I made in Project II to work with students' real world personal connections to Land was made with the thought that students' investment in their drama work might be greater when working with lived experience and memory of the places they were from; however, doing so significantly altered the type of drama we created. Whereas the drama work created in Project I centred on a fictional premise of the adventures of a leaf down the River and was inspired by real experience and research, the devised work in Project II showcased varied connections students themselves had to Land, making the focus local and personal to each student. This choice diminished the creation of a *fictional* world on the stage that had existed in Project I, and Project II instead became an assemblage of Land-inspired drama that was largely celebratory of real-life, and a witnessing of memories tied to Land that made limited use of a fictional frame. As a first iteration, raising student consciousness about Land and communicating connections through drama was a productive beginning, however, building in a fictional framework that allows for greater exploration of Land, relationships, and place is a key step. For example, taking inspiration from Oliver's suggestion to weave student writing together through the premise of a local road trip would have allowed students to

integrate their own descriptive writing and memories of Land into a created story with the freedom to create characters and explore varied situations.

The work of devising with students, whether using fictitious or autobiographical material, involves tact and mindfulness on the part of the educator to ensure the material that students choose to contribute does not overly expose them to vulnerability. Drama pedagogy that invites the exploration of lived experience and prior knowledge can be powerful and affirming, but can also make students particularly prone to over-sharing or contributing stories that they are still processing. While it is desirable for students to contribute ideas, experiences, and stories that are meaningful to them, this invitation needs to be accompanied with discussions about boundaries and exercising judicious care in their selection of contributions. As educators, we must also avoid placing students in a position of feeling they need to speak for whole groups or communities with which they identify, or work through trauma as the focus of the drama work. Drama pedagogy is distinct from drama therapy, and while educational drama work may have therapeutic benefits such as working as a team with others toward a shared goal, exploring thoughts and feelings about an issue, catharsis through connection with a character's experience, or perhaps gaining new insight into a challenging perspective, the drama classroom is a public place of collective learning which operates very differently from a therapeutic space.

The challenges that accompany non-fiction content and role also prompt a re-consideration of how drama educators approach the use of techniques that aim to have students 'step into the shoes' of others. Role play and writing in role have, in the past, been integrated into drama work as a means of understanding the positions, concerns, and experiences of characters that may be different from our own. However, when used

to have students represent marginalised characters whose experience the students do not share, these practices become problematic. Studying plays in classroom settings and having students read roles of characters whose identities are different from their own exposes students to perspectives in a way that can affirm and normalize diverse identities. This practice differs significantly from having students perform roles that appropriate identities. In the field of education, there is a deepening understanding of appropriation of voice, and in drama education in particular, there is a growing awareness of the limits and problems with drama conventions that have been implemented in the past. Further deliberation and sharing of pedagogical praxis with educators and artists is needed to continue decolonizing drama conventions and actioning inclusionary practice.

Project II merged storytelling derived from the lived-experience and students' memories of Land with the pedagogical strategies of the Commission Model. This starting point of personal narrative brought immediacy and authentic connection to students' work and presented new ground for understanding the intersection of drama as a storytelling medium and students' experience of Land. Student inquiry through their own research, field trips, and learning from local partners completed the remaining elements to the approach I will term Land-inspired drama pedagogy. Huber et al forward the concept of "narrative inquiry" in education, and outline the significant value and impact of narrative inquiry as one that "opens possibilities for shifting stories, and therefore, lives, connects us with the knowing of many people whose thinking in relation with story, narrative, experience, and lives shapes our thinking and living as narrative inquirers" (2013, p. 213). Huber writes about the process of education as one that unfolds "over time, through interactions, across generations, and embedded within

place or places" and that by "thinking narratively we sense responsibilities and obligations to children, families, and communities" (Huber et al, 2013, p. 227). The integration of student narratives about Land into both the process and the performative allows for students to share parts of themselves and their experiences that, in turn, can collectively build meaningful understanding of Land that is specific and tied to people. As part of Land-inspired drama pedagogy, using lived-experience as a starting source for devising is an assertion of the presence of Land in students' lives in ways that confer agency and value to their stories as part of knowledge, local Land, and community.

Literacy, affect, and devised drama: Reading, writing, and performing texts

Lenters and McDermott suggest that affect, embodiment, and place are generative to the development of literacy pedagogy that looks beyond strictly reading and writing, to approaches that include "meaning-making associated with visual, auditory, spatial, and gestural modes of communication" (2020, p. 5). Their view of literacy is one in which the body and mind work "in tandem as an important site of learning," sees affect as "felt responses [that] initiate the process of understanding and responding to literacy encounters," and in which literacy is "inseparably entangled with place […] as formed through ongoing relationships among things, people, and events, materializing in space and time" (p. 6). This concept of literacy takes into account the complexity and interconnectedness of meaning making and communication which broadens opportunities for students to interpret meaning and demonstrate learning.

The exercises in the Projects of this study reflected learning acquired in school, through lived-experience, and existing prior knowledge acquired outside of school, including literacies that were non-text based, sensory, and grounded in relationship to

Land and people. This expansive take on literacies created various entry points (creative, embodied, written, spoken) and honored different ways of knowing as well as offering choice. Students' creation of photo collages in Project I highlighted their perception of aspects of the world around them and what they found interesting, appealing, and provoking. In Project II, students' descriptive writing and photo taking in the aftermath of a winter storm reflected their choices about how and what to represent about Land near them in that moment, and the impact of the storm as it changed the appearance of their surroundings.

In the process of developing scenes and weaving them into a cohesive performance, students engaged a number of literacy modalities. Making decisions around how to develop and organize the performance components, considering audience, intention, and language, and interpreting texts are formal literacy skills that students engage with consistently in drama work (Ontario, 2007). Further, role play and collaborative devising provide built-in scaffolding for learning because they involve students working through their knowledge and understanding, thinking, and application aloud in student-friendly language. This practice allows for formative understanding to be checked and provides an inconspicuous opportunity to reinforce the learning of students who may be at a different point in their understanding. Holistic approaches to literacy through drama is an underused strategy that is inclusive and can accommodate diverse learner needs and strengths, while providing multiple entry points and modalities for constructing and communicating meaning.

Digital drama: being together apart

Conducting drama over Zoom in these Projects brought attention to how the presence of an audience impacts the experience of performing as well as the role of 'spect-actors' in the Creative Process (Boal, 1992, 2002). Catherine Heinemeyer conceives of storytelling as a triangulated interaction between the storyteller, the story, and the audience, and writes that when stories are performed for an audience, that they "take shape in negotiation with the listener" (2020, p. 11). She illuminates this point through her observation that a teacher's telling of the "The Three Little Pigs" to a class of pre-school children is sure to be impacted by the children's "physical responses to the images forming in their minds; through their bestowal or withdrawal of attention, their laughter, interruptions and questions; through their memories of pigs previously seen, wolves previously feared and versions previously heard" (2020, pp. 11-12). I would add to Heinemeyer's observation that the shared space between the storyteller and the listeners also contributes to the experience had by both and to the creation of meaning.

The work of these Projects highlighted two discrete instances of engagement with the Storyteller-Audience-Story triangulation: one that occurred in the devising process and one that occurred during performance for an audience. Often in the devising part of the Creative Process, students co-construct the form and content of the drama, serving as both audience and storytellers, "affecting and affected bodies at once" wherein "the intra-actions between ideas, bodies, feelings effect change" (Booth, 1994, p. 12; Hickey-Moody, 2015, p. 65). In this phase, the story is continuously shaped by self-reflection and group/teacher feedback, negotiation, editing, and refinement. Interaction with the audience as part of devising, and during the performance itself,

impacts the experience and meaning of the exchange. The remote performance and unusual circumstances under which the Projects of this study took place highlighted the role and importance of physical presence by its absence.

The interactive nature of the drama that Project I students created for the kindergarten class relied on audience participation at various points, which was difficult to execute online and reminded me of the challenge of teaching drama online during lockdown. Spontaneous building-onto of ideas through impromptu contributions is impacted by the collective energy of the group, and depends, in part, on non-verbal invitations to offer an idea. The encouraging nod of the head, affirming eye contact that gives confidence to others that their thought will be worthy, the act of looking expectantly at students in a way that conveys that the responsibility of creation lies with everyone in the group - all are essential and recurring moments in group devising and performance, and all are incredibly hard to recreate over Zoom. The intangible and physical distance that characterized ‘being together apart’, once again brings to mind Shawn Wilson’s observation that “by reducing the space between things, we are strengthening the relationship that they share” (2008, p. 87). The distanced version of being together in the online performance of Project I in particular, where the performers spoke directly to their audience, and asked for their participation, underscored the importance of people gathering together in a shared moment. Much like the experience of being on Land is irreplaceable, so too is the experience of being together with people, attending to the performative offerings of others.

Imagined futures: implications for drama as part of climate education

My interest in developing a Land-inspired drama pedagogy in the Projects of this study was inspired by an urgency for students to learn about local Land, history, and original people, and to recognize their own relationship with them. Storytelling and drama are impactful methods through which to learn about local Land and people because they draw affective responses. My hope is that learning with and from Land and people, and spending time among both, will form authentic relationships and a culture of care that will help sustainability and encourage thoughtful consideration about how we exist in the world together, even if this work remains largely unresolved and incomplete. As Kathleen Gallagher writes,

> making something of our talk, staying with the very real feelings of guilt, judgement, anger, helplessness, and fear by creating something together from these often-unsustainable and anxiety-producing affects, moves us beyond talk and towards action, even if only initially in its imagined form. (2024, p. 23)

I contend that building new relationships through the action of creating something together forges important connections that generate feelings of community, belonging, and, as local partner Ian McKechnie noted, joy. Australian scholar Christine Hatton echoes Gallagher's perspective on the potential of story, and "the power of storying as an act and stories as a poetic capture" (2024, p. 345). Hatton highlights the perspectives of Chao and Enari who write that story and imagination "can make us believe in, and achieve, better shared worlds. As such, stories constitute powerful instruments for collective action amidst rampant destruction, and its rippling effects across species lines" (Hatton, 2024, p. 346). Identifying productive, sustainable ways forward, Hatton champions the transformative potential of educational drama as the

“radical agential approach we need to work in truly transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary ways in these challenging contexts” (2024, p. 346). The braiding together of the fictive with the real, of Land with story, of individual with the whole, and of lived experience with traditional modes of learning, dismantles siloed approaches to education and recognizes the inherent interconnectedness of knowledge and learning which informs sustainability.

7.4 (Mostly) Productive disruption in the classroom community

“I grew up walking down the river with my grandma so I’m very familiar with the sightings, but walking with my class was a different experience as I got to see it through their perspectives.” - Avery, Project I

“If you’re so used to being a community, having plays in front of people […] you can’t even do that anymore really.” – Erin, Project I commenting on the impact of COVID-19

Devised drama in the time of COVID-19

Conducting this study during the COVID-19 pandemic presented unanticipated challenges and outcomes with respect to the development of a collaborative classroom culture. Both Projects took place during a time of sharply reduced course delivery timelines, when fear and uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic was ongoing, and with intense COVID-19 protocols in place within the class and throughout the school. Beyond the practical challenges of attending and conducting class during COVID-19, were the individual situations from which students and teachers were emerging, that impacted learners individually, and our class collectively. Students, for example, had spent an extensive time away from face-to-face learning and ‘normal’

classroom environments. In the various learning models used during COVID-19, students largely worked independently. Even when working in groups, students did so digitally, or with social distancing protocols in place. My colleagues and I discerned a distinct reluctance across grade cohorts, especially younger grades (nine and ten), to take risks, contribute aloud in class, or collaborate both during and after COVID-19 lockdowns. I posit that the lack of physical togetherness and absence of live, interactive elements of classroom learning since March of 2020 contributed in no small part to students' performance and behaviour in the classroom during this time and in the years immediately proceeding the pandemic.

The above observations of students as they adjusted to a return of face-to-face instruction, were corroborated by educators in my broader school board and beyond: observing that more students struggled with self regulation, social skills, and mental health generally, than they had pre-Pandemic (Davis, G. and Lothian, R., 2024; Fraser Mustard Institute for Human Development, 2021, p. 4; Fray, L., Jaremus, F., Gore, J. et al., 2023, p.9). The return to school was not a return to 'normal' and the ongoing adjustments to protocols and changing learning situations that were part of school life at the time, were continual disruptions to the lives of students. A subsequent consideration is that as a practitioner, I was familiar and confident with devising and collaborative drama work, but not all of the students were. Embarking on a creative project that involved significant uncertainty during a period that itself was marked by uncertainty may have contributed to students' tentativeness to engage in devising work.

In conversations about their time over the COVID-19 lockdown, students shared experiences that varied considerably. Some students reported enjoying the time away from the intensity of school and social pressures, some expressed feeling a lack of

connectedness to classmates and the subject matter which was exacerbated by attending online classes filled with cameras off and blackened screens. Still others characterised the time as lonely and described days filled with long walks to escape home. All of these circumstances are part of what students brought to their work and relationships in class during Projects I and II. Their experiences varied significantly which makes it difficult to draw definitive connections between the experience of the students over COVID-19 and the tentativeness, struggles with social interactions, and resistance to engagement that some students displayed. It is also possible that the lack of cohesion and challenges may have occurred even in 'normal', pre-COVID-19 times: sometimes students and classes simply fail to develop and buy into a classroom community culture. As discussed in the methodology chapter, the heightened expectations placed on myself as the classroom teacher, acting also as researcher, was part of the Project I and Project II terrain. The students in both Projects were unique from students with whom I have conducted this type of work before: they had and were continuing to live through an unprecedented time in their school lives. When plans did not unfold as I had seen them do previously, the disruption created confusion and challenges for how to work differently but achieve similar learning outcomes, and do so within very tight timelines.

There are likely many reasons why the classes in Projects I and II did not come together in the same way as so many had in the past. While the relationship between COVID-19 related factors and the experience and outcomes of the Projects remain unclear in some respects, accounting for their contributions to the classroom landscape is a key part of this Land-inspired drama pedagogy and are important to note. In the time since this study was conducted, I have taught numerous drama classes that have

undertaken ensemble devising projects and have found that students' capacity to work collaboratively and take risks has improved with increased distance from the time of the pandemic. Despite the observed differences of the classes in this study from previous norms, their work and thinking offers insights into students' perceptions and experiences as they engaged in learning with and from the Land and human history through the lens of drama during that specific moment in time.

Through my experience with quadmesters and an earlier schedule of 'octomesters' (one subject all day for twenty-two days), I came to realise how imperative periods of reflection are to the development of student work. The abbreviated course delivery in Projects I and II highlighted that while sometimes deadlines can help focus work, when deadlines are too short it can leave insufficient time for ideas to develop: the essential period of experimentation and of trial and error diminishes or disappears completely. The process of developing projects over the usual time allotted for courses not only allows for devising and performance plans to settle into students' minds and muscles, but also creates the opportunity for questions and ideas to surface, and for problems to be worked out. These observations reinforce, in particular, 'Elaboration' time in Heathcote's Teaching Cycle, during which students' ideas are permitted to consolidate, gestate, and mature, and during which students come to 'own' their work (Midland Actors Theatre, 2024). Students may be capable of devising or rehearsing work quickly, but the depth of their learning and thinking, the process of refinement, investment in performances, and development of commitment to their work are sacrificed when the process is fast-tracked.

Disrupting perceptions: making the familiar strange and seeing anew

The Projects profiled in this research contain a number of instances that demonstrate the generative capacity of disruption. In both Project I and II, students commented that they saw familiar outdoor spaces differently after exposure to the stories articulated by their peers and local partners. In Project I, Avery described seeing the Scugog River in a new way on account of the stories and observations shared by classmates and that these new perspectives added to and expanded her impressions of the River. Avery's comments and subsequent work also revealed a particular openness to and awareness of the impact that others' experiences could have on the group's development of the drama performance and of students' ideas about one another. She saw connections from which to draw meaning and these informed her perspective in productive ways. Avery's perception of new perspectives as positive demonstrated an embrace of disruption to her existing knowledge in a way that transformed her learning (Anderson and Justice, 2015, p. 416).

In Project II, students reflected that they became aware of their classmates' (his)stories by sharing writing about Land and structures near them, which complicated perceptions and deepened students' knowledge of each other. As students' unique skills and abilities emerged over the devising process and were contributed to the performance, there were instances where preconceived judgements that students may have made about one another were reconsidered. This was seen in the case of a student whose struggle with regular attendance was a frustration for their classmates, but whose engagement and spirited performance in the final presentation was an undeniably key contribution. This student's contribution impacted how they were treated in class in a positive way, evidenced by feedback and classmates affording the student

more attention during conversations about creative directions of the work. This phenomena was seen again in Project II when class motivation, impacted by the dismissive and disruptive attitude of one student towards devising, changed when the student took ownership of a technical task for the project and became an invested, creative contributor. In this case, not only was the student perceived differently by the class, but the class was also positively impacted by observing the investment of this student in the work of the group.

The disruption of uncertainty also challenged relationships and the quality of interactions within the classes in this study. The students and I asked questions and made observations with no blueprint for what we would discover or what we might create with it. This foray into the unknown represented an element of risk and its progress and productivity depended on students' willingness to take part and make contributions. Some students found mapping our own way exciting, but the open-endedness of the Projects proved stressful to others, or fuelled frustration, which they expressed throughout the process. Often, in devising, the energy of sharing ideas and the excitement of building onto compelling improvisations propels the Creative Process forward; when the time to develop work starts to run out, and students become increasingly aware that they will share their drama with others, motivation and collaboration grow. If there is reluctance to share ideas or experiment with form, however, the energy and interest on which the process depends lags, thwarting the development of both the work and of community culture within the class. As director Julie Taymor has said, "anyone who creates knows that there's a point where it [the creation] hasn't become the phoenix or the burnt char" (2012). Devising original drama work occupies the in-between space to which Taymor refers and is characterized in part

by the considerable uncertainty that comes with devising as a collaborative, creative endeavour. It is in this liminal space of exploring and experimentation, of perceived high stakes (performance) and the challenge of working as a group to build something from nothing (devising/creation process) that valuable learning takes place.

A final observation of disruption occurred when attention was called to that which was previously unseen or unnoticed, expanding students' awareness of the more-than-human world. Looking at and experiencing familiar surroundings in new ways, especially when these experiences were tied to newly shared family stories, was a recurring theme in students' comments. In an age when our news, general information, and awareness of events around us are curated by algorithms that reinforce existing thinking, disruption that prompts re-thinking and reflection takes on even greater importance. Further, explicitly encouraging students to look closely, notice more carefully, and respond thoughtfully when their existing perceptions were destabilized, modelled a practice of confronting new perspectives or ideas with curiosity. Kathleen Gallagher speaks to this challenge and the wider opportunity it presents for education, specifically in the context of climate crisis and writes,

> …the drama classroom does very practical work when it invites players to consider the wider political implications of making art or performing a story, to sit with the trouble of conflicting perspectives, and to forestall the race to meaning. The value to climate education of a drama pedagogy that privileges the ensemble is in how it can articulate paths towards thinking about any action differently – through respecting the place of the uncertain, through interrupting social givens, through taking feeling(s) seriously, and through play. In such a context, we come to know, and feel, what it means

> to *act in concert* with others, which is to say, both to act and to be a witness and a support to the actions of others. At its very core, a drama-making process can turn abstract global realities into approachable local stories to be shaped and shared with others. (Italics original) (2024, p.47)

Valuing difference, listening, and encouraging curiosity are increasingly essential tools as students navigate real-world relationships and problems in the midst of popular-culture and political narratives that support binary mindsets that reduce or refuse complexity. Practicing productive engagement with challenging realities and conflicting perspectives through collaborative ensemble drama creates an invaluable educational opportunity with meaningful immediate and long-term outcomes. The findings discussed here will be consolidated in the next chapter.

8 Conclusion

If I have any teaching wisdom, it is that I have learned to know

the struggle is the learning process;

and the skills of teaching lie

in making this time slow enough for enquiry;

interesting enough to loiter along the way;

rigorous enough for being buffeted in the matrix of ideas;

But with sufficient signposts seen for respite, planning,

And regathering of energy

To fare forward on the way.

It is therefore, dear [researcher], my task as I see it

To arm myself well for this struggle,

So as to lead my class well into this forest of ideas,

Where light, dark, soft, hard, shallow, deep elements wait so that we

Can carry well-guarded

The questions to which we have as yet no answers.

The present time will provide the time to wander and press,

Not the time that we must arrive.

Arrival are those moments of being able to demonstrate our knowing,

And the wandering is the time of learning.

(Dorothy Heathcote, 1978, pp. 4-5)

This writing by Dorothy Heathcote captures well the importance, and even welcome, of not knowing in the process of learning. As Heathcote articulates, the learning lies in the time of wandering and in the struggle of the endeavour. She acknowledges the coexistence of not knowing with having a plan of action, and the equal importance of guideposts along with moments of unsurety. In this vein, I remember David Booth once remarking that children need to know what they are doing at all times. By this, he didn't mean that they need to have all the answers, but that they needed to know why they were engaged in a task, as well as its purpose. These words continue to resonate and, in times when fast and finite answers are valued more than nuance and complexity, are important reminders that incompleteness, discomfort, and uncertainty accompany the process of learning. These feelings are especially notable in learning about colonization and making changes, in thought and action, to decolonize.

This dissertation investigated the experience of students engaged in Land-based pedagogy and drama with an aim of understanding how outdoor experiential learning alongside local partners, research into local Land, and devising drama for others, impacted their connectedness and belonging to their classroom, school, or local communities, and their understanding of local Land and human history. Decolonizing methodology guided this work, informing research practices and pedagogy through an ongoing focus on Land, reciprocity, relationships, interconnectedness, and critical examination of colonial power structures. Experiential education on Land and learning with local partners, peers, and family members also constituted a decolonizing approach. The study reflects an Arts-based methodology, integrating the Creative Process and phases of gathering, devising, sharing, and reflection into the inquiry framework, which allowed for observation and collection of information about student

learning and experience in multimodal ways. Taking inspiration from Heathcote's Commission Model, this study also integrated Lyn Fels' concept of performative inquiry and Jonothan Neelands' framework for active inquiry which grounded the research in a flexible and emergent pedagogical approach that was student-led (Heathcote, 2003; Fels 2012, p. 51; Neelands in O'Connor, 2010, p. 25). The seldom combined methodological approaches implemented in this work offer a contribution to research in education that centres Land, Indigenous knowledge, experiential and community-based local learning, while realizing the rich source of student learning and understanding that drama pedagogy offers.

Findings from this study revealed that many students acquired new information about local human history and ecology. They gained an understanding of colonial history, treaties, Indigenous territories and people, which informed their creation of personal Land acknowledgments recognizing their own relationship to Land. Students spent time walking together and learning from local partners outdoors: an experience for which many students expressed gratitude. Memories, detailed observations of Land, and family stories about the places where students live were shared through writing and performance, which revealed student connectedness to both Land and people. In their collaborative devising, students demonstrated concern for their audience and were motivated by the occasion to share their learning and stories with others. Though instances of working as a collegial and caring community within the classroom were at times fleeting, students nevertheless showed the ability to transform their independent research and writing into a cohesive assemblage of various dramatic forms. They demonstrated curiosity about the stories of others and exercised literacy skills in their interpretation of material and in communicating meaning.

Like many students in Ontario, the students discussed in this study were at different places in their learning about Land and colonialism. Some students had access and the opportunity to gain significant knowledge about colonialism, Indigenous territories, and teachings, and others had very little. This work highlighted that understanding the purpose and characteristics of Land acknowledgements was an opportunity for growth, as was learning about local traditional territory, and protocols such as offering tobacco ties when requesting teachings. Education about Land, colonialism, and Indigenous knowledge through hands-on research, listening to local partners, and experiential learning, was embodied learning and linked knowledge to people and Land. This authentic learning provided students with increased confidence and language with which to discuss new and difficult knowledge. These learning opportunities are significant because they equip students with information and experiences on which to build further knowledge to inform their ongoing interactions with these topics in productive ways. Gaining insights into what students understood about local Land, colonialism, and Indigenous knowledge also revealed gaps that future pedagogical approaches can aim to address.

Another finding of this research is that relationships and community are built by *doing* and by spending time listening to, and talking with, others. People and Land cease to be abstract ideas when they become known through lived-experience. Students came to know Land and people through learning about family stories, their having their own experiences, learning from local people, and memories shared by peers. In these Projects, research and time spent together on Land were also ways through which students internalized knowledge and forged connection. How knowledge

is gained and meaning is made has implications for effective pedagogical practice, education towards environmental sustainability, and wellness.

The Scugog River and LandForms Projects reflected the concerns, circumstances, and urgencies of the time in which they took place. Constraints imposed by COVID-19 served to highlight the special qualities of meeting in person and of live performance that cannot be reproduced online. Despite limitations, participants in the study, partner teachers, and their students, expressed appreciation for the chance to connect with others through drama, albeit in a distanced way. Spending time outdoors provided a reprieve for students from the physical restrictions in place at school. Even in cold and wet weather, learning outdoors was a highpoint for students and they captured images of Land that were relevant to them for various reasons, which they contributed to the devising process. Having worked independently in relative isolation over lockdowns, some students were challenged by the demands of working with others in ways that required them to collaborate, negotiate, and take risks. In spite of reluctance on the part of some students, moments of cohesion occurred and students performed as an ensemble for others in both Projects.

The outcomes of collaborative, project-based learning that involve the world outside of the class were well known to Dorothy Heathcote, whose Commission Model offers an example of pedagogical practice that focuses on providing students opportunities to develop a sense of active citizenship and accomplishment which promotes feelings of inclusion and agency (Heathcote and O'Neil, 2015, p. 4). She hoped that involvement in authentic learning would positively alter the learners' sense of themselves and their relationship to their world (Heathcote and O'Neil, 2015, p. 4). I propose that this type of learning forges relationships with people *and* with Land in long-

lasting and meaningful ways because of the affective impact of acquiring knowledge through experiences. Stories connect students to local people, family members, and peers, and as Fitzsimmons Frey writes, “The core stories we tell ourselves matter – they get under our skin and into our bones because we believe them into being, becoming part of who we are in deep and profound ways” (Fitzsimmons Frey, 2020, p. 41).

Students’ feelings of accomplishment and contribution to group goals also forges connection which can have positive implications for self-worth and feelings of belonging. Pedagogy for sustainability, especially in the Arts, aims to build connectedness and calls for holistic approaches to teaching and learning “where factual knowledge is combined with critical thinking, action, participation, emotions, future visioning and identity construction” (Cantell et al, 2019, as cited by Lehtonen et al, 2020, p. 3). Lehtonen et al argue that a starting point for climate change education lies in recognizing interconnectedness among living things and dismantling binary, dichotomized thinking that is unsustainable, such as the separation of mind and body, reason and emotion, individual and social (2020, p. 3). This thinking aligns with a focus on decolonizing education and implementing learning from Indigenous knowledge as part of pedagogical practice.

The work presented here contributes a unique methodology that combined drama and Land-based pedagogies with learning from local partners. Land-inspired drama pedagogy invites students to consider their lived-experience of Land as well as new learning, as they work collaboratively to share that knowledge through devised drama. The stories that emerged in this study from students’ discussions with family members and time spent on Land with local people, built familiarity and diminished the separateness of students from Land and from their own history and experience, creating

a throughline from the past to the present and beyond. Connectedness to people, place, and Land has the potential to work against isolation which has important implications for increasing students' positive feelings about school and learning, encouraging pro-social behaviour, and impacts health in communities. Drastically diminished funding for subject areas that are well suited to educating for well-being in explicit and implicit ways - namely the Arts - is an area of ongoing concern across Ontario as Ministry funding for education continues to decrease (CBC News, 2024; People for Education, 2018 and 2019; Tranjan, 2025). Evidence based research that illustrates the efficacy of pedagogical practice that positively impacts multiple areas of student learning and well-being supports the urgent need for continued funding for the Arts as a mandatory part of the Ontario curriculum.

The nature of drama is collaborative and requires ongoing interaction between people through the devising process and through performance. As such, COVID-19 health and safety protocols placed significant restraints on this study with respect to interacting with others. In similar projects I have initiated since the time of COVID-19, I have been made keenly aware of how ongoing meetings with the younger audience informs student devising and builds community through students getting to know each other over time. In educational drama projects, engaging with the audience from the beginning by learning about what interests them as well as including them in the devising process makes drama work of this kind even more impactful for both the audience and the drama students creating and performing the work. As students from the Scugog River and LandForms projects articulated, there is no substitute for performing live for others in the same space, and the limitations of COVID-19 provided occasion for students to recognize the unique value of that aspect of performance.

My experience through the Projects described here, and others since conducting this study, have also provided me with growing confidence in facilitating Land-based learning with students and local partners. Learning with and from Land and Indigenous knowledge, and dismantling colonialist approaches is a long-term project that is always incomplete. And yet, it is incumbent upon educators to enter into this learning with students, even if it is imperfectly. Despite the fear of misstep, identifying gaps in knowledge and endeavouring to learn more is the role of teachers. The field of education uses the phrase ‘growth mindset’ with great frequency, however following up mindset with action is how growth is realized. Modeling curiosity over judgement, and commitment to lifelong learning are essential to professional practice, from pre-service onward. I look forward to leading more Land-inspired drama projects and continuing to learn about integrating critical questions surrounding Land, power, and colonialism into locally focused, experiential drama work. Integrating work of this sort into pre-service teacher training and Additional Qualifications courses for in-service teachers is a potential future direction through which to mobilize the findings of this study.

The storytelling that emerged in both Projects of this study was an opportunity for students to notice Land and become reflective of their relationship to the natural world, as well as to learn of the relationship that others have to the Land and places they inhabit. These were fruitful beginnings and useful starting points. A possible next step for my research lies in extending these approaches and learning more about implementing drama as a means through which to examine the difficult history of colonialism with respect to local Land, to continue to garner understanding of students’ perceptions of Land, and to use metaphor and fictional frameworks to an even greater extent in exploring those relationships. The impact and influence of this type of learning

on students over the long term is also an area for further discovery. Often in education, we cannot know how, when, or if students' learning resonates in ways that are meaningful because connection to the lessons and knowledge sometimes comes after the initial learning. Understanding more through further study about how students' perceptions of their learning with and from Land and Indigenous knowledge, emerges and changes over time, would provide greater insight into students' process of learning, particularly when learning about culturally specific, and difficult knowledge.

Speaking at the Leaders in Indigenous Medical Education (LIME) Network Conference at the National University of Australia in 2022, Eve Tuck posited that an important question for her to ask of herself as a researcher was "What are my theories of change?" (Leaders in Indigenous Medical Education (LIME) Network, 2024). This is a useful question for educators and the education sector as a whole because it also asks us to think about how, and indeed, if, we are educating students to grapple with change, knowledge, and uncertainty in productive and ethical ways. As we navigate a future that at present feels full of change, characterized by divisiveness, conflict, intensified marginalization of vulnerable populations, environmental crises, and even helplessness, education can provide a much needed space in which to learn how to meet the challenges of uncertainty. Working alongside students to acquire knowledge, have meaningful experiences, unpack perspectives, and examine ideas, we must also develop awareness of *how* to learn and listen and encourage curiosity, as we lead students through new terrain.

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Appendix A

Detailed components of the inquiry framework

	Project 1	Project 2
Gathering	• Field visit 1: Initial walk along the river, photo collection, follow up assignment • Field visit 2: Historic River Walk w/Local Historian • Field visit 3: Scugog Bridge - Aquatic Biologist • Field visit 4: Outdoor Classroom - Cultural Archivist • Independent Inquiry 1: Fact Finding research into the Scugog River through consulting Primary Sources • Whole class Inquiry: Discussion surrounding meaning, purpose of land acknowledgements, developing personal/class land acknowledgement	• Field visit 1: Historic River Walk w/Local Historian • Field visit 2: Outdoor Classroom - Cultural Archivist • Independent Inquiry (I.I.)1 : Research Scugog River using Primary Sources • I.I. 2: Reflective writing, observation of 'nature near you' and local landmarks, photo collection • I.I.3: Interview with family, friends, or community members about local nature or landmark • Whole class Inquiry: Land acknowledgements, key words, using movement to express the purpose and content of land acknowledgements
Devising	• Whole Class: Improvisational process drama • Small group: Generating performance possibilities • Whole class: Brainstorming story framework, considering characters, and perspectives, creation of specific land acknowledgement • Pairs/Individual: Script writing • Small groups: Capturing film of scenes and creating slides • Whole Class: Rehearsal and revision of script	• Whole Class: Improvisational devising • Small group: Generating performance possibilities • Whole class: Brainstorming story framework, creation of specific land acknowledgement • Pairs/Individual: Script writing • Small groups: Combining scripts and devising staging • Whole Class: Rehearsal and revision of script/staging
Sharing	• Letter of invitation and provision of leaf puppets • 'Virtual Visit' with kindergarten class	• Video invitation to partner class, outdoor visits, collaborative devising of flocking and spoken word • 'Virtual Visit' with partner class
Reflection	• Whole class: Gallery walk of observations • Individual/Pairs: Written and recorded reflections • Individual: Interviews	• Individual: Written reflections • Individual: Interviews

Appendix B

Project and Assignment Descriptions

The Scugog River Project

This year the Grade 11/12 culminating drama project will be to share with a primary class through drama, the stories, information, and impressions that you have acquired through time spent along the Scugog River, learning from local partners, interviews you have conducted, and research you have done.

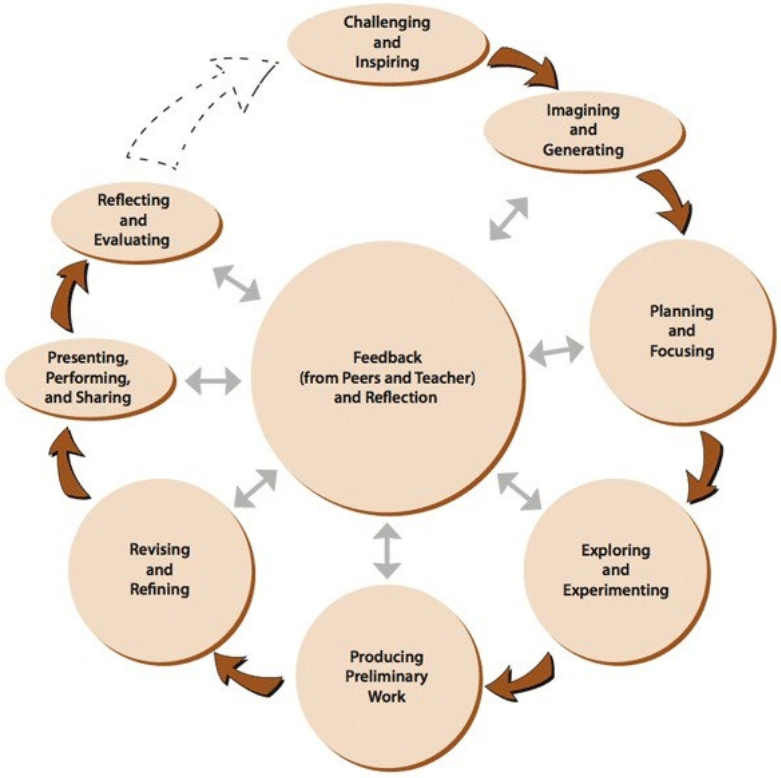
Parts of the Project

1. **Gather information and have experiences**
   You will learn about the human and ecological history of the River through:
   - Research
   - Doing a photographing tour by the River
   - Listening to local partners who join us on site visits or online
   - Interviewing friends and family
   - Your own experiences during field visits

2. **Building/Creating**
   - We will experiment and improvise with various forms of drama (tableaux, voices in the head, corridor, flocking, scenes, monologues, etc.) to explore what aspects of the story of the River we find interesting, have the most dramatic potential, and significant 'take aways' for our audience.
   - We will learn about our audience and brainstorm ways to connect our learning to their learning and think about ways to share in engaging ways
   - Decide how we will work to put together a presentation that contains performance as well as opportunities for interaction with students on Google Meets

3. **Share**
   - We will share our work with students and lead an interactive workshop

4. **Reflect**
   - We will debrief on our experience, reflect on the process, feedback, and outcomes



Using the Creative Process, we will build a collaborative project that uses multiple media to tell stories about the Scugog River and the people who have lived around it.

We will also devise interactive drama activities to engage the Primary students in active drama learning.

We will plan on-site filming of certain segments of our performance on _____, _____, and _____, and if necessary, _____. The presentation to the Primary class will take place on Wednesday, November 10th.

Components that will compose your evaluation for this project:

- Scugog walk Day 1 Photos
- Scugog walk Follow Up Assignment
- Classroom activities such as the town meeting role play, research session with info posted around the class, brainstorming and planning as a class
- Contributions to writing, acting, prop creation, costume gathering
- Filming, creating visuals for presentation, voice recording, rehearsal of script
- Execution of plans on the day of the Google Meets visit/presentation
- Reflection activity in class

See Google Classroom for Evaluation Rubric

LOCAL: Community, Land-based Devised Drama Project

Grade 9 Project Description

In this project we will use your observations of landmarks and the natural world where you live as well as our experiences on outdoor field trips/experiences as the basis for our drama. Using these as sources we will devise original work using different forms of drama as well as images, music, photos, and video. We will experiment, rehearse, edit, and refine our work, making a polished multimedia presentation that will be part film, part theatre, part photo essay, and part interactivity.

You will assemble writing, research, photos, interviews, and reflections on the Digital Portfolio you create on Google Sites and these will serve as our source for creating different pieces of drama that we will weave together into one presentation.

As part of our work, we will also develop something to share with our audience before they come, an activity for them to take part in during their visit to our class, and a post-show activity/material as well.

Components of the Project

1. The Digital Portfolio
2. Creating and Performing the drama
3. Creating and Conducting pre and post show activities/communication with the invited audience

What to expect/how we will work

At different times during the project, you will work independently, in small groups, and as a whole class ensemble. While some people will ultimately help fulfill technical roles, each student will be involved in creating the drama, experimenting with different forms, and the editing process. This means that you may be an actor, a props maker, or provide ideas for staging and lighting at different points. Creating original work is very rewarding but also requires skills in listening, negotiation, patience, and diplomacy. Everyone is expected to contribute ideas and assist in refining and improving the final product. Please see the evaluation criteria on Google Classroom for specific success criteria for the Digital Portfolio and Devising Process.

Appendix C

Pre- and Post- Questions and Interview Protocols

Project I - Student Pre-Project Interview Questions

1. What do you already know about the Scugog River?
2. In what ways do you think the River is important or matters?
3. Do you have any recollections about the Scugog River or the land around it?
4. Do you have any feelings or connections to the River or the land around it?

Project I – Student Post-Project Reflection Questions

1. Which of the interactive elements of this Project do you think were the most effective and why?
2. Share your thoughts on how field trips along the River and guest speakers impacted your experience of the final project. You can touch on how they contributed to your experience in positive ways or ways that were challenging for you.
3. From your experience and observations, what skills are required for performing/presenting in an online format versus live? How was the dynamic between the audience and actor different or not online? How did the online format impact the product you created?
4. What do you know about the River? In what ways do you think the River is important or matters? Do you have any connection or feelings about the River or the land around it?

Project II – Digital scrapbook entry prompts

Entry #1: Description of Landmark

> What is your landmark and where is it located?
> Describe your landmark with as much detail as possible. What colour is it? What material is it made of? Is it old? How can you tell how old or new it is? Describe a memory involving this landmark or discuss what it reminds you of.

Entry #1A: Upload image or video of landmark

Entry #2: Conduct some research into the landmark. Find two or three facts to share about its history. Remember to include where you found the information. This may be photos or other types of historic information.

Entry #3: Description of wildlife/plant life (nature) near you

> What is your chosen bit of nature and where is it located?
> Describe the nature you have chosen with as much detail as possible. What colour is it? What does it look like in particular seasons?
> Describe a memory involving this nature or discuss what it reminds you of.

Entry #3A: Image of you with wildlife /plant life

Entry #4: Interview with parent, grandparent, community member, or business owner, etc. about the landmark or wildlife/plant where you live. The goal is to find out what someone older than you knows about the landmark/nature near you. Some questions we discussed in class are listed below which you are welcome to use, but don't need to.

> What do you remember about the landmark/nature?
> How long has it been there?
> What is your strongest memory associated with the landmark/nature?
> What history do you know about it?

Entry #5: Three photos along the Scugog River OR Three archival photos (if you did not attend the field trip).

Entry #7: Reflection on the meaning and presence of 'community'

Entry #8: Reflection on Ken Reid Conservation Area

Project II Post Project Reflection Questions

1. What three things did you learn while doing this project?
2. What is something you will remember from doing this project?
3. What was your favourite part of the performance?
4. What is it about the part of the performance that you mentioned above that made it the best in your opinion?
5. What was it like to investigate where you live (that you had to describe it, learn about it as part of putting the drama together)?
6. Who did you interview and what was it it like to interview someone about the landmark or nature near you?
7. Do you have any greater knowledge of where you live after having done this project? If so, in what way?
8. Do you feel a greater sense of connection to the place you live after this project? If so, in what way?
9. What did you think about the experience of learning outside and taking outdoor field trips as part of this project?
10. What did you think about learning from other people in the community (Ian McKechnie the historian, Jack Hogarth from Curve Lake First Nation) as part of putting together a drama presentation?
11. Part of our project involved interaction with Mrs. Nyland's class. Was this aspect of the production an important one in your opinion? Why or Why not?
12. Our class had to operate under the protocols put in place on account of COVID. What are your thoughts on how did having to perform through Google Meet for Mrs. Nyland's class impacted the experience of performing and watching theatre?

Student Interview Protocols

1. What stands out to you about the Project. What do you remember most and what was the take-away?

2. If you had to explain to someone what this project was about as a whole, what would you say?
3. Do you think it's important to learn about where you live? Why or why not?
4. Of the scenes that you created, which was your favorite?
5. Do you think working on this project impacted the classroom community or your experience of being in the class?
6. Did this project impact your feelings about the community in any way?
7. How did creating drama for the audience you performed for impact your work and/or experience?
8. How did having to work online and distance impact your experience?

Partner Teacher Interview Protocols

Project I

1. In what way do you think your students were impacted by the Scugog River presentation and performance?
2. How did the local nature of the topic presented affect your students and in what ways?
3. Do you think it's important to tell stories about the Land and people where we live? Why or why not?
4. What was most notable in your students' follow up commentary or response to the performance?
5. Could you say something about the nature of how community arises in the drama classroom versus other spaces in education?

Project II

1. What observations can you share about your students' experience connecting outdoor learning to drama?
2. What impact did you observe or did students share with you about the outdoor component of your classroom practice? Describe what your practice was.
3. How did our work together differ from or compliment what you were already doing?

4. Why do you think local outdoor learning is important?
5. What was most notable in your students' commentary during the visits and after the performance?
6. Can you describe from your perspective the collaborative activities our students did together?
7. How would you describe the drama student leaders work with your students?

Local Partner Interview Protocols

Ian McKechnie – Local historian

1. You have participated in many projects based on the history of place. Thinking specifically about youth, high school students in particular, what you have observed about students when they engage in learning about history that informs their creative work?
2. What have you observed of students through their engagement with the Creative Process in this type of project?
3. What is your experience of leading students through local walking tours?
4. What would you say the value or the takeaway is for you in making connections between students and the community generally, or with you, specifically? Do you have a sense of if or how this work impacts the community?
5. How would you characterize the process and the product that ultimately results from this work? How would you characterize the process?

Jack Hoggarth – Cultural Archivist, Curve Lake First Nation

1. How do you wish teachers would approach incorporating histories of the Land and Indigenous material into their classroom practice?
2. What do you see as markers of success or achievement in students' understanding and appreciation of Indigenous histories and knowledge in the classroom? After working with students, what makes you feel that students have internalized key ideas?
3. Why is being on the Land an important part of educating youth?

4. How do you think working in relationship can be managed without imposing the burden of educating non-Indigenous children and adults on Indigenous partners?

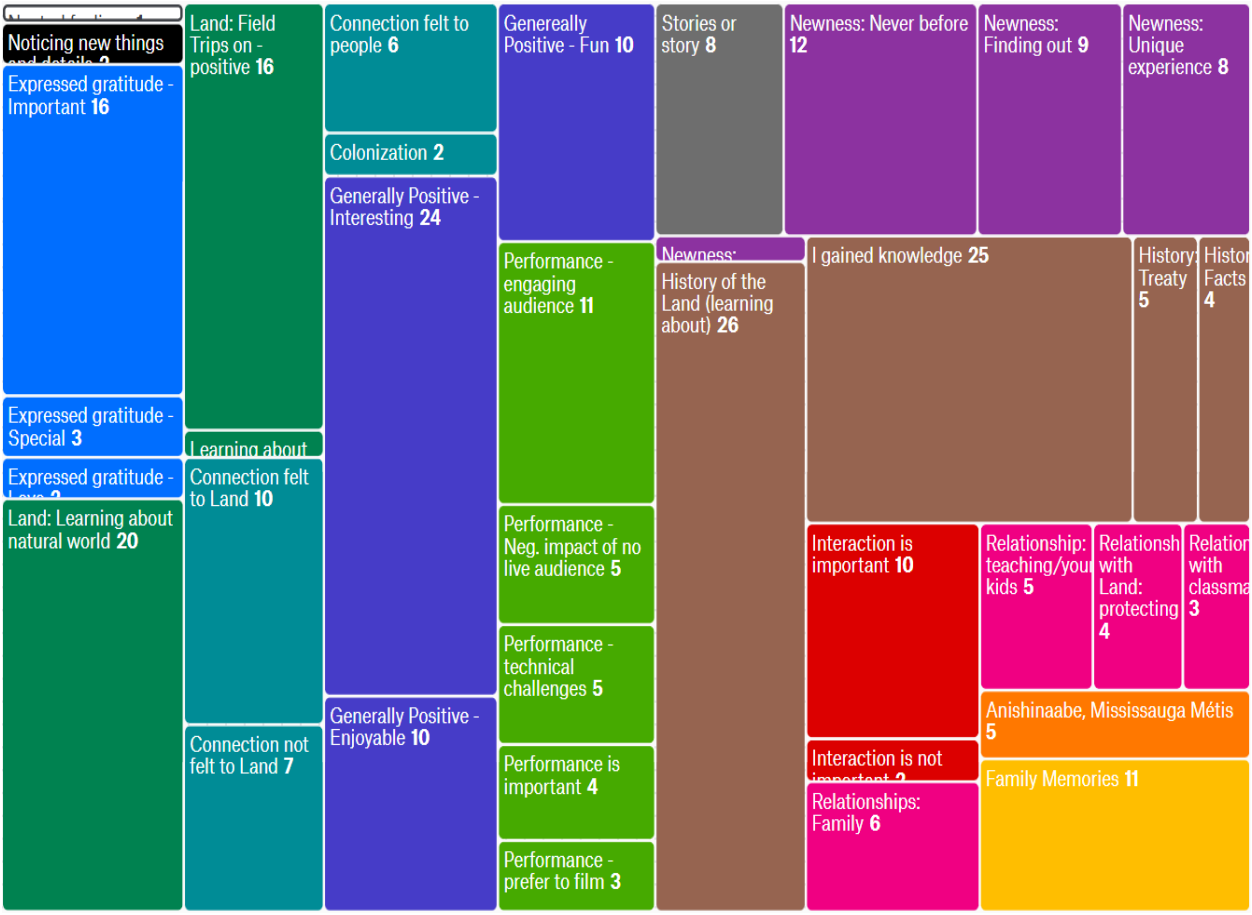
Appendix D

Thematic Coding

Student Participant Post-Project Reflections and Interviews

Projects I and II

Tree Map Representation



Appendix D (con't)

Bar Chart Representation

