Queer isn’t a Choice! Queer is my Family!
Collaborative Performance as Affective Pedagogy

by

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This research documents an applied theatre workshop for youth aged 10-13 and had two points of focus: the first was how young people and artist-educators collaboratively used theatre to learn about themselves, each other, and the world around them; and the second was about how young people from LGBTQ2S+ families used theatre and performance as a form of advocacy by sharing their stories and experiences through their artwork. Working alongside youth participants, this research attuned to the relational aspects of theatre creation by drawing on affective encounters through aesthetic learning. Youth and artist-educators were active agents in the research process guiding the path of inquiry as they shared their stories, wrote songs, choreographed movement, played with puppets, and made books. The applied theatre work was self-revelatory, deeply personal, and created a powerful space for the youth to understand their everyday experiences on their own terms. Applied theatre as an aesthetic and participatory art form materialized in the space between creation, story, and research, building an affective performance that encompassed the stories of participants as depicted through intra-actions, movements, and art.
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Chapter 1: Shattered Glass & Pink Shoes: A Literature Review

Introduction

This research explored the possibilities of using applied theatre as a collaborative artistic dialogue between young people from LGBTQ2S+ families and artist-educators. Over 18 hours, five artists, and two youth, worked together to create theatre and learn from one another. This research had two points of focus: the first was how youth and artist-educators used theatre to collaboratively learn about themselves, each other, and the world around them; and the second was about how young people from LGBTQ2S+ families used theatre and performance as a form of advocacy by sharing their stories and experiences through their artwork.

As a theatre artist, educator, and researcher I believe that drama as a creative form of encounter provides opportunities to engage with embodied ways of knowing through our emotions, senses, and feelings. Working with artist-educators and youth, this research explored the interpersonal and relational aspects of theatre creation by facilitating embodied encounters through aesthetic arts-based learning. Drawing on affect theory—the study of pre-cognitive emotions and their intra-actions in the material world (Ahmed, 2015; Stewart, 2007, Zembylas, 2015) — what follows is a narrative about the possibilities of applied theatre work to support youth from LGBTQ2S+ families in challenging heteronormative2 and cis-normative3 ideas and discourses. In a recent interview, Megan Boler (in Boler & Zembylas, 2016) claims that one of

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1 I use the acronym LGBTQ2S+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and two-spirit) with the intention of including people who identify as transgender, transsexual, two-spirit, questioning, intersex, asexual, ally, pansexual, agender, gender queer, gender variant, and/or pangender. I recognize that the names people use to describe their gender and sexual identities are fluid, evolving, and in a constant state of becoming. I use this acronym recognizing its limits and with deep respect for all names and identities that people choose to describe the ways they are living gender and sexual diversity.

2 Heteronormativity is “a cultural and societal bias, often unconscious, that privileges heterosexuality and ignores or underrepresents diversity in attraction and behaviour by assuming all people are heterosexual” (Taylor et al., 2015; p. 7)

3 Cisgender is a person whose gender identity and expression aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth. Cissexism is the belief or assumption that cis people’s gender identities and expressions are more legitimate than trans people’s gender identities and expressions (hicks, 2018; Taylor et al., 2015).
the challenges in the study of affect in education over the next 20 years will be “to develop pedagogies that can engage emotions and affect as part of the necessary work of ‘critical pedagogies’… that invite students to reflexively re-evaluate closely-held assumptions, values and beliefs within a socio-historical frame” (p. 27). In response to Boler, I turn to gender and sexuality education and applied theatre as critical pedagogies that have the potential to explore the impact of marginalizing affective intensities such as heteronormativity and cissexism in the everyday lives of students with LGBTQ2S+ parents.

**Conceiving the Project**

When I conceived of this research project, my partner was pregnant with our first child and I was eager to understand the world into which we were introducing a tiny human. What would their experience be? How would homophobia and heteronormativity impact their life? While I was excited and nervous to expand my family and become a parent, I was also worried about the impact of putting my Otherness—my queerness—onto my child. Because of the persistence of homophobia and transphobia, and my internalized homophobia and heteronormative upbringing, I did not know what to expect for my baby. As I write this, that first child is five years old. I have since then carried our second child and become a parent again. As my family has begun to embark on a journey with public schooling, I have already learned the ins and outs of navigating institutions and systems that are not designed for my family. The homophobia we face is subtle, yet omnipresent every time we leave our house. My oldest child is aware that his family is different. Whether being confronted about his pink shoes in the sandbox or questioned one day while out flying his kite if he has a dad, our son is already required to have strategies for navigating heteronormativity with his peers and their families. He is reminded daily that the way our family lives gender and sexuality is not the norm.

This research has personal significance for me in that I want to find ways to better advocate for my family and for my children. I want to help the educators that I encounter each
year through my children’s schooling create a space that is inclusive and welcoming for all students. Sharing stories creatively as a way to open possibilities for emotional connections to unfold between individuals is a powerful method for anti-oppression and social justice education (Airton & Koecher, 2019; Boler & Zembylas, 2016; Kumashiro, 2002). Therefore, this project aims to explore the current experiences of young people from LGBTQ2S+ families, and how they can better understand and advocate for themselves through affective relationality and artistic intervention. In what follows, I explore the current social and political context of LGBTQ2S+ families in schools. I articulate the need for young people from these families to engage in a collaborative, open-ended, and affective pedagogical practice by reviewing the relevant literature in the field of gender and sexuality education. I then turn to applied theatre scholarship as a pedagogy that has not-yet been examined in relation to gender and sexuality education and suggest that applied theatre as a collaborative process between artist-educators and young people can facilitate an affective opening for individuals and communities to challenge heteronormativity and cissexism.

**Setting the Scene**

When I arrived at The 519 Community Centre in Toronto on the second day of our applied theatre workshop, the floor to ceiling windows at the front of the building had been smashed to pieces and boards were being installed. The front desk staff wearily shook their heads in resigned disappointment at the situation before us. I overheard other staff members trying to determine if it was someone attempting to steal a few dollars from the onsite café, or if it was a hate crime directed at one of the largest LGBTQ2S+ community organizations in the city. While we all hoped for the former, the knot in my stomach feared the latter. The 519

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4 The 519 is a City of Toronto agency committed to the health, happiness and full participation of the LGBTQ2S+ communities (www.the519.org).
Community Centre sits in the heart of Toronto’s LGBTQ2S+ community, known as the gay village, and while poverty in the area is an ongoing concern, so too is the continued presence of homophobia both within and beyond the boundaries of the village. It was March 2018 and daily news reports of rising body counts were emerging about serial killer Bruce McArthur, who later pled guilty to murdering 8 men with ties to Toronto’s gay village neighbourhood. As I walked into The 519 and prepared for the day, I was overcome with a visceral conviction that this research was important—that homophobia, transphobia, heteronormativity, and cissexism are not solely manifesting as daily micro-aggressions, which is how academics often understand and dissect them (Mathies et al., 2019; Nadal, 2013; Solomon, 2015). They are also substantial acts of violence taking place in our very communities—right here, right now. I entered day two of this project with fear in my heart: fear for myself, for my participants, for my children, and for my community. The immediacy of the need to dismantle heteronormativity and cissexism through a queering of educational spaces is not an academic exercise (Airton, 2013; Goldstein, 2019a; Keenan, 2017). It is a move towards, and a call for, an important cultural shift that demands LGBTQ2S+ people and their families not hold fear in their bodies; it is shift towards building communities that welcome and expect LGBTQ2S+ people (Davies & Robinson, 2016; Haimson & Airton, 2018; Hicks, 2017).

**LGBTQ2S+ Families at School**

Recent studies have suggested that young people with LGBTQ2S+ parents are as well adjusted and psychologically healthy as their peers with heterosexual parents (Biblarz & Savci, 2010; The Vanier Institute of the Family, 2013). Yet, in a national Canadian school climate

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5 For more information on Bruce McArthur see the CBC news article at the following link: https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/bruce-mcarthur-sentence-parole-eligibility-1.5009291

6 Queer educational spaces have educators and students working together to question their taken for granted assumptions about the world by dismantling dominant hegemony and oppressive structures. For more on this idea see the section below entitled “Queer as a verb”.
survey, Taylor et al. (2011) found that youth with LGBTQ2S+ parents are much more likely to feel unsafe at school and are three times more likely than their peers from cisgender families to skip school because they feel unsafe. Homophobia and cissexism continue to be prevalent in public school systems and this leads students from LGBTQ2S+ families to often feel as though they do not belong and that their families do not matter (Callaghan, 2007; Epstein, Idems, & Schwartz, 2013; Gustavson & Schmitt, 2011). Teasing and unwanted questions from their peers about their home lives leads students with LGBTQ2S+ parents to make strategic decisions about how and when to self-disclose about their families, which requires vigilance and a range of self-protective behaviours (Goldstein, 2019a, 2019b; Goldberg & Allen, 2013; McNeilly, 2012). Students with LGBTQ2S+ parents suggest that their peers learn homophobic behaviour at home, and report that teachers often have a lack of knowledge of LGBTQ2S+ issues, which allows homophobia to go unaddressed at school (Case & Colton Meier, 2014; Difficulties in School, 2018; Goldstein, 2019b; Fitzgerald, 2010; Gates, 2012; McCready, 2004; Quinn, 2007; Resistance to Bullying at School, 2018; Short, Riggs, Perlesz, & Kane, 2007; Taylor et al., 2015). These findings suggest a need to talk about school and schooling with young people from LGBTQ2S+ families in order to better understand their experiences and continue to learn how educators can more effectively support them at school. This research project confronted cis- and hetero-normative ideas that manifest in school cultures and addressed the challenges outlined in the literature above by working collaboratively, creatively, and affectively with young people from LGBTQ2S+ families.

**Safe, positive, and queer.** In 2012, Ontario introduced new legislation in response to pervasive homophobia in schools. The Accepting Schools Act requires Ontario school boards to implement an equity and inclusive education policy, including teacher professional development, support for student groups (such as Gay-Straight Alliances), and preventative measures against bullying (Iskander & Shabtay, 2018; Ontario, 2012). This important legislation
was implemented in order to create safe school environments for all students. Goldstein, Russell, and Daley (2007) offer a conceptual framework for thinking about gender and sexuality education in schools: in their Safe, Positive and Queer Moments framework, a safe school is the first step in countering homophobia and transphobia. In order to create truly equitable schooling spaces for members of the LGBTQ2S+ community, they argue that educators must work towards queer moments that challenge institutional heteronormativity, where—building on Adrienne Rich’s (1980) notion of “compulsory heterosexuality” and Judith Butler’s (1990) idea of the “heterosexual matrix”—heteronormativity is understood as the cultural phenomenon wherein heterosexual cisgender identities are assumed, expected, and normalized. Most schools and educators tend to work towards safe moments by employing harm reduction practices such as stopping homophobic violence when it presents itself, or by attempting to cultivate positive spaces by including LGBTQ2S+ representation in classrooms and curriculum by, for example, hanging up rainbow posters and stickers. Safe and positive initiatives are a necessary contribution to gender and sexuality education, but they can sometimes perpetuate feelings of Otherness in LGBTQ2S+ students by drawing on simplistic stereotypes and reinforcing an us/them dichotomy (Airton & Koecher, 2019; MacIntosh, 2007).

Queer moments in schools disrupt heteronormativity by challenging, subverting, and transforming the status quo. By queering school spaces, educators can deconstruct heterosexism and cisgenderism in school systems and address the marginalization of queer and trans bodies. Queering education is a relational and emerging site of disruption that, as Goldstein et al. (2007) argue, “trouble[s] the official knowledge of disciplines; disrupt[s] heteronomativity and promote[s] an understanding of oppression as multiple, interconnected and ever changing” (p. 187). Queer school moments move beyond “the acceptance, tolerance, and affirmation of queer students and educators” and asks both educators and students to transform how gender and sexuality is thought about in the classroom as it intersects with other aspects of identity.
Goldstein et al. tell us,

A queer schools approach would ask us to consider how the sexualities and desires of queer—and straight—students and educators are recognized and acknowledged as well as denied, negated or distorted through normative pedagogical practices. To this end, the deconstruction of heteronormativity would not be seen as an independent and discreet project but rather one that necessarily implicates normative notions of sex/gender, race, class, and religion among other social locations. (p. 187)

The pedagogy and practice of facilitating queer moments in schools continues to be navigated by educators and researchers who are working to understand what queering education looks and feels like in practice (Airton, 2013; Goldstein, Koecher, Baer, & Hicks, 2018; Hicks, 2017). This research study took up this line of inquiry and explored emergent and ephemeral queer moments within the educational space of an applied theatre project. In doing so, this research examined the not-yet known possibilities of translating queer moments into queer educational practices and spaces.

Interviews conducted during Goldstein’s (2019a) study on LGBTQ2S+ families’ experiences of schools across Ontario suggest that, despite the safe schools legislation, outlined above and implemented in 2012, many schools have not taken effective steps towards creating LGBTQ2S+ positive school communities. Rather, most schools are still working towards safe school environments. Key findings from Goldstein’s research suggest that school-wide commitments to the inclusion of LGBTQ2S+ identities are rare and, only one school attended by the 37 families interviewed was found to have created and delivered LGBTQ2S+ positive curriculum. As well, many families reported that their schools were not addressing homophobic and transphobic bullying, with one family choosing to homeschool their transgender child to ensure their safety. These findings suggest a need to explore possibilities for pedagogies that can produce safe, positive, and queer moments in schools. This research project extended this line of
inquiry by examining the possibilities of applied theatre to facilitate queer moments within an educational setting. Then, using affect as a theoretical frame to explore how ephemeral queer moments in schools can be translated into relational educational practices, this research study worked to understand and transform the affective school experiences of young people with LGBTQ2S+ parents as a way to explore how a queer pedagogical approach to gender and sexuality education might operate.

**Queer as a Verb: From anti-oppression education to queer pedagogy**

Deng and Luke (2008) suggest that the most fundamental question of curriculum studies is, “What is worth knowing?” Given the previously cited literature, which reports the presence of pervasive homophobia, heteronormativity, and cissexism in schools, I believe that “what is worth knowing” is how to create educational environments that are inclusive and welcoming of diverse identities, positionalities, and families (Airton & Koecher, 2019; Goldstein, 2019a; hicks, 2017; Taylor et al., 2015). Inclusive educational spaces can be accomplished by systematically working with all students to challenge the ways that dominant hegemonies and oppressive ideas, behaviours, and structures impact students and educators on a daily basis (Goldstein et al., 2007; Keenan, 2017). Therefore, I wish to also ask, “What is worth unknowing?”

Building on the notion of ‘unknowing” as a pedagogical impulse I am interested in shifting queer moments to queer educational practices, and in doing so I suggest that queer is a verb. To queer is an action seeking a reimagining of our current ways of knowing, a reordering of what is possible, and a deconstruction of assumptions about the world. Understood in this way, queer is not only an identity attached to a body, a child, a parent, or an educator, instead it is a way of living that is different, unexpected, and emergent (Airton, 2013; Goldstein et al., 2007). To queer educational practices is a shift towards the unexpected and an openness to
engage in a responsive pedagogy wherein dominant hegemonies and oppressive structures that infiltrate educational spaces are reimagined (Keenan, 2017).

In his extensive work on anti-oppression education, Kumashiro (2002) attends to a dismantling of dominant hegemony and oppressive structures by proposing that cultural hegemony makes only certain kinds of knowing possible, creating boundaries around what is “thinkable”, and around what questions are “askable” within the context of learning (p. 42). Kumashiro claims that educators and students must uncover what is silenced and unspoken, and move towards unlearning by labouring collectively to disrupt the repetition of harmful and violent discourses within the classroom. Kumashiro (2002) suggests that:

The aspect of oppression that we need to work against is the repetition of sameness, the ongoing citation of the same harmful histories that have traditionally been cited.

Although we do not want to be (the same), we also do not want to be better (since any Utopian vision would simply be a different and foretold way to be, and thus, a different way to be stuck in a reified sameness); rather, we want to constantly become, we want difference, change, newness. (p. 46)

Kumashiro calls on students and educators to inhabit the unknown as a site of possibility disrupting the status quo. Change then is not a pre-determined outcome, because imagining a queer futurity based on our available discourses is not yet possible (Munoz, 2009), but rather manifests in unexpected and exciting ways: where we can come to know differently and to live differently. Kumashiro (2000) states, “schools need to queer our understanding of ourselves… Its goal is not, think like this, but think differently” (p.45). Therefore, educators must labour to move and live differently in order to make new ways of being thinkable.

Airton and Koecher (2019) suggest that the ways students are living gender and sexual diversity might not always be recognizable to educators because youth are continuing to push at the boundaries of what is thinkable in terms of gender identity and sexual orientation. Youth are
living in emergent, unexpected, and exciting new ways, therefore, Airton (2013) suggests that when educators focus on queer subjectivity they aren’t attending to a queer pedagogy, which could facilitate a move towards more inclusive school culture. Airton argues that educators need pedagogies and practices that challenge current heteronormative and cisnormative ways of being, not as a response to bullying or homophobia, but as a cultural reimagining, a queering (Airton, 2013). Keenan (2017) extends this thinking in an attempt to name a critical trans pedagogy that supports children in constructing new knowledge. Keenan suggests that, “in my work as an elementary educator, what this means concretely is that, in addition to the necessary work of rethinking bathrooms and the other gendered school structures adults have created and imposed on children, my pedagogy must include free play and experiential inquiry” (p. 552). In engaging an open-ended pedagogy Keenan is suggesting that educators can create space for students to bring their ideas and experiences with them into the classroom:

In trying on costumes, building structures of their own design, and learning to interact with one another without explicit adult direction, free play offers children sites to construct and experiment with the possibilities they imagine and to act out and alter the realities they perceive…. Experiential inquiry—the exploration of problems drawn from experience—allows children to explore the questions they have about the world by engaging directly with it … as children witness situations inside or outside the classroom that they perceive as unfair or unjust, we might ask them, How did we get here? How can we do something different? Both questions offer as many opportunities for research and action as for discussion. (p. 552)

The parallels between what Keenan is suggesting and drama-based pedagogy confirm my impulse to use applied theatre as an intervention tool for providing older children and adults the ability to enter into make-believe worlds. It is within the space of dramatic framing that
participants can engage in free play, try out new possibilities, alter the realities they perceive, and use experiential inquiry as an active and queer pedagogical practice.

My research builds on Goldstein et al.’s (2007) “queer moments”, Airton’s (2013) “queering” and Keenan’s (2017) “critical trans pedagogy” in an attempt to create a queer educational practice that brings adults and children together and creates a space where people can listen to one another, share their experiences, and move towards new ways of being, and living in the world. It is this shift towards new knowledge that is a queer impulse, a queer action, a verb. The literature above cites a call for queering education in response to homophobic and transphobic encounters at school. In this research project, I have extended this line of inquiry by attempting to understand what a queer pedagogy looks and feels like as an intentional, rather than responsive, teaching practice. This research engaged queer as a verb, to facilitate a not-yet-known form of change through applied theatre. As an embodied pedagogical practice, drama inhabits the unknown, providing artists and young people with an open-ended, affective, and collaborative exploration into what else is possible through a rehearsal for living differently.

**Drama in/as (Queer) Pedagogy**

In a shift towards an unlearning of heteronormativity and cissexism, the processes of theatre-making and creation can be used as a pedagogical tool to facilitate a queering of education that engages the body as a site of knowing (Gray, 2019; Manning, 2015). In this research study, I was interested in the way collective creation and devising through applied theatre might open up opportunities for young people and artist-educators to theorize their lives during encounters with one another, and their bodies, experiences and emotions. In this section, I explore how applied theatre might facilitate aesthetic and affective encounters between participants as an approach to gender and sexuality inclusive education that has the potential to queer educational practices. In what follows, I review literature in the field of applied theatre
and build the argument that a collaborative, affective, and process driven approach to applied theatre has the potential to be a queer pedagogical practice.

**Applied theatre: A collaborative process of discovery.** Applied theatre is a form of theatre with educational and social goals that takes place in non-conventional settings, such as schools, parks, prisons, museums, or community centers (Prendergast & Saxton, 2016; Prentki & Preston, 2009; Nicholson, 2005; Taylor, 2003; Thompson, 2009a). In applied theatre, artists often work alongside participants, learners, and/or community members to devise a theatrical performance. The process of applied theatre unfolds through theatrical games and activities, which elicit the emergence of stories that are then translated into a performance. Theatricality in applied theatre often draws on a post-dramatic form with “a variety of genres built around a particular theme” (Prendergast & Saxton, 2016, p. 19). This includes things like “improvisation, role-play, characterization, movement, and voice” (p. 20). Theatricality, then, in the words of Prendergast & Saxton (2016) is “the vocabulary of theatre making” (p. 36) and applied theatre artists bring a recognition of how to use the tools of theatre such as “beauty, harmony, metaphor/symbol” (p.25), tension, and the juxtaposition of “sight/sound, dark/light, movement/stillness” (p. 25) in order to share participants stories with an audience. The work can emerge from the lived experiences of participants thereby building a site of learning about the self, Other, and the world through play-based and discovery techniques (Boal, 2002; Neelands, 2009; Norris, 2009). Fictional framing and critical distance as a way of theorizing about participants’ experiences are commonly used techniques because the dramatic form allows participants to step outside of their experiences and explore them through a new lens or frame, to make connections across experience and to embody ways of living differently (Harris & Farrington, 2014; Heron & Johnson, 2017; Salverson, 2008).

**Potentiality as critical practice.** Participants working with applied theatre move from action, by way of dramatic intervention, to reflection and back again creating a fluid reflexivity
that takes place within and beyond the dramatic action as participants’ bodies move and think together (Collins, 2015; Gray, 2019). This praxis opens up potential for unexpected emergences of the unknown (Sloan, 2018). Therefore, the value of emergent educational moments at the heart of applied theatre are not set or formulated, but responsive and open to what may yet be said or thought. What emerges through the body in a moment of action might look, sound, and feel very different than what is immediately thinkable through language (Gray, 2019). Drama can be a collaborative process of discovery that facilitates affective and aesthetic aspects of learning, which has the potential to challenge conventional and established pedagogical choices by engaging the body in a queer act of (un)learning (Dorsey, 2019; Hughes, 2013). By sharing one’s story and then stepping into or out of that story with our bodies, participants in an applied theatre process are able to see the story anew. Prendergast & Saxton (2016) suggest that, “by participating in building and/or performing a fictional or parallel world, audiences (and players) gain the kind of distance that sets them free from their own bodies, specific situations and lives. It is this distance that allows participants to explore areas that, in real life, maybe remained hidden or unexamined” (p. 235). Applied theatre participants are able to synthesize what their stories mean by putting them in the context of social and political conversations, alongside the stories of other participants. This process facilitates opportunities where participants in an applied theatre process can artistically examine how ordinary affects manifest in their daily lives, and draw attention and awareness to often overlooked or unspoken sensations and intensities that infiltrate bodies as they move through the world (Ahmed, 2015; Sloan, 2018; Stewart, 2007).

In response to Thompson’s (2009a) initiation of the ‘turn to affect’ in applied theatre, Sloan (2018), suggests that affective relationships of theatre-making create a space for potentiality, “A space of potentiality is an approach to constructing a theatre-making experience that combines a particular ethical reflexivity with collaborative creative activity to allow an
indeterminacy that enables choice-making that may lead to a vision or experience of a new way of being-in-the-world” (p. 585). While Thompson (2009a) worked to understand the role of affect as an aesthetic intervention for audiences, Sloan has brought into question the role of affect in the process of applied theatre with the belief that attending to affect as an opportunity for potentiality can facilitate a move towards living differently. This echoes my own work around a participatory aesthetic (Baer, 2017), where I suggest that the ebbs and flows of affective energy work to define our understanding of beauty and in doing so create boundaries around what is thinkable and knowable within the creative process. In Sloan’s (2018) theoretical article she suggests that, “Further practice research might well enable me to elaborate upon the way in which certain creative activities, such as play or physical movement, might enhance liminal potential” (p.594). I take up this call for practice-based research in an attempt to understand how creative activities engage with potentiality as a critical pedagogical practice. In doing so I connect the affective realm of engagement to the work of facilitating critical dialogue around social and cultural conversations and I attend to the ways that affect constrains and enhances the creative process through the intra-action of collaborative creative engagement.

The process of critical dialogue. Throughout my analysis chapters, I work to understand what happens when we prioritize the process of applied theatre, with a focus on youth participation and without a final performance event or traditional audience. This insular and participatory approach to applied theatre stands in contrast to Prendergast and Saxton’s (2016) belief that, “like all good theatre, applied theatre is for an audience” (p. 20). While I agree that some applied theatre projects rely on audiences as an integral component of the social goals of the project, Gallagher (2016a) and Hughes (2013) offer alternatives for thinking about the social interventions that are made possible within the process of applied theatre. In an analysis of applied theatre work with homeless youth in Toronto, Gallagher (2016a) states, there was never pressure to take shortcuts in order to produce a final performance, and
this meant that we were relieved of the burden to meet another set of expectations. Neither did we feel the adrenaline sometimes experienced as creative energy by those driven by such external expectations. It further meant, importantly that we could focus on critical dialogue about process, a luxury not always afforded to applied theatre interventions (p. 231).

By focusing on process rather than performance Gallagher was able to dive deeply into important critical dialogues through applied theatre. It is this focus on critical dialogue and the resulting depth of engagement that I find compelling when thinking about a process-driven applied theatre project. Harris (2014), suggests that this space, this potentiality of the process to breathe, to start, and stall, and redirect is a form of productive failure and that artist-educators must make space for this process towards the unknown in order to create art work that is meaningful in the lives of participants. This research project was designed with the intention of building collaborative affective artwork as a catalyst for critical dialogue between youth and artist-educators.

Thompson (2009b) argues that when applied theatre practitioners facilitate process-based work within a closed community setting the potential for social change is limited to “tactics” for change, which he defines as individual behaviour change. Thompson suggests that in addition to “tactics” applied theatre artists must work to facilitate “strategies” for change that engage socio-political structures through wider community involvement. Thompson is arguing for a focus on both the process and the performance of applied theatre creating interventions towards a more comprehensive approach to social change. In response, Gallagher (2016a) suggests that we can attend to tactics and strategies for change within process-based applied theatre work. She states, “large structural and political interventions rely on small accounts of positive engagement” (p. 245). I extend this idea through a queer approach to collaborative applied theatre that relies on performance as a form of critical dialogue within the process, while
considering the implications of this work on participants, on artists, and on social change. Therefore, this research extends the line of inquiry into the role of performance in applied theatre work. In doing so I draw on the work of Collins (2015), who proposes a “dialogic aesthetic” through her community-based walking and talking project, and Gray (2019) who engages with an “aesthetic of relationality” in her performance-creation work focusing on narratives of ageing and dementia. In reimagining applied theatre’s attachments to performance and aesthetics through these dialogic and relational approaches, new understandings about collaborative theatre making can be examined and understood in this practice-based research.

In a project working “with young men who have experience with homelessness, sex work, and the criminal justice system” (p.143), Hughes (2013), turned to a queer imagining in the process of creation. She states: “The temptation to identify and fix is replaced here with an invitation to keep company with, stand alongside, be surprised, and revise preconceptions” (p. 145). Through this work “there is no explicit intervention other than a responsive creative and social encounter.” For Hughes this process of inter-action facilitated what she calls a “queer choreography” because “by privileging the creative agency of the young men, and mirroring their provisional and uncertain appearances and disappearances, a spatial practice that is protective, imaginative and hopeful is supported” (p.154). Much like Gallagher (2016a), Hughes found that it was in working alongside participants and by facilitating hopeful encounters that new imaginings were able to emerge and that the potential for change was supported. Hughes (2013) saw this approach to applied theatre as a queer impulse suggesting that,

It may be useful to state that I use the word [queer] here in a way that extends beyond a focus on gender and sexuality, but rather as a word that infers the presence and movement of unseen, non-normative, irregular, unfixed, outcast experiences within the realms of the declared, normative, regulated, fixed and included. … the term ‘queer choreographies of care’ is used to describe the embodied, moving, mimetic and
responsive systems of support exhibited by the … project, which traverse and disrupt normative practices of social work, theatre space and urban space. (p.145)

It was from this same queer stance that I approached the applied theatre work with youth from LGBTQ2S+ families.

A Return to Queer Identities and Queer Pedagogies

Homophobic and transphobic bullying continues to be a concern for young people from LGBTQ2S+ families and communities across the globe (Goldstein, 2019b; Phillips, 2016; Taylor et al., 2015), and while applied theatre artists have engaged queer and trans narratives in an attempt to intervene in school based bullying (Greer, 2011; Houseal, Ray, & Teitelbaum, 2013; Phillips, 2016; Snell, 2013, Terret, 2013), more work needs to be done to facilitate applied theatre work that is for, with, and by individuals from LGBTQ2S+ families (Prentki & Preston, 2009). This research explores the potentiality to reimagine gender and sexuality through emergent narratives that challenge heteronormativity and cissexism, not as an intervention against specific acts of homophobic and transphobic violence, but as a chance to affirm, subvert, challenge, and re-define queer identities, positionalities, and realities by welcoming youth from LGBTQ2S+ families into a project where they are able to determine the scope of their participation.

Prentki and Preston (2009) suggests that applied theatre has three types of participatory transactions; theatre that is created for a community, theatre that is created with a community, and theatre that is created by a community. They argue that some projects will move between these transactions at different phases and that they all have different ways of engaging community narratives towards change. As a project focused on an emerging queer pedagogy, this research engages deeply with a community as a collaborative transaction between artist-educators and youth participants. Dorsey (2019) states that “collaboration [is] one of the arts’ most enduring lessons” (p.398) and suggests that, “true collaboration is a verb not a noun, a
process of engagement, a map more than a destination” (p. 400). I extend this idea of collaboration as an active process of engagement and suggest that true collaboration is a queer imagining of how individuals within an applied theatre project engage with one another.

McGinty (2013) reflects on using a collaborative approach to applied theatre as a way to engage discussion around identity with LGBTQ2S+ young people. She tells us that, “The devising process employed drama games, improvisation, image theatre exercises and creative writing and facilitated discussions, all designed to ensure that the project was about who the participants were, how they were received in the world and what shaped their lives” (p.198). While I took up many of these same activities and objectives within this research, it was through collaboration that the process subverted the hierarchy between youth and adult, participant and facilitator, student and artist, ensuring that anyone present within the room was actively engaged in contributing to the creative work. The welcoming of all voices, bodies, and ideas to the creative entanglement was one of the ways that a queer pedagogical space was intentionally facilitated, and power imbalances were negotiated within this research project. There is a considerable amount of scholarship in applied theatre that explores the distribution of power (Preston, 2009a; Rodricks, 2018; Sloan, 2018), I build on this work by suggesting that collaboration is a queer pedagogical choice where artists work, sit, think, and create alongside young people from LGBTQ2S+ families and in doing so new potentialities are made possible in the lives of youth participants and adult artist-educators (Hughes, 2013; Sloan, 2018). Freeman (2016) states, “[theatre] creates a space where different values and practices can be shared and experienced and, in so doing, where one can imagine in the first place that such is possible” (p. 33) New imaginings through creative encounter offer ways of moving, being, and living differently (Hanrahan & Banerjee, 2017; Phillips, 2016; Rodricks, 2018), and as a way of queering notions of performance, collaboration, and pedagogy (Airton, 2013; Dorsey, 2019; Hughes, 2013; Keenan, 2017).
In the literature above I have reviewed a number of the key debates in the field of applied theatre that centre around participation, aesthetics, ethics, representation, and assessment (Collins, 2015; Gallagher 2014; Goldstein, 2012; Kandil, 2016; Kandil & te Bokkel, 2019; Prentki & Preston 2009; Thompson, 2009b; White, 2015). In this research, I engage with a number of these applied theatre debates while building towards ideas of collaborative performance and queer pedagogy with young people with LGBTQ2S+ parents. In doing so I work to answer the following research questions:

**Research Questions**

(1) How does applied theatre work as a form of collaborative affective queer pedagogy for young people from LGBTQ2S+ families?

(2) How does affect circulate in and through the experiences of young people with LGBTQ2S+ parents?

(3) How do affective moments infiltrate, intensify, and emerge through participants’ daily lives, and what impact does this have on their bodies during the applied theatre workshop?

(4) What are the possibilities and limitations of performance as a political and educational tool for young people from LGBTQ2S+ families to learn about and advocate for themselves?

**Thesis Overview**

In this research project, I worked with young people whose families, identities, and experiences are underrepresented on stage, in research, and in popular culture (Epstein-Fine & Zook, 2018; Goldstein, 2019b). This study provided an opportunity for these young people to learn more about themselves through creative processes and the sharing of their stories. As a queer-identified woman and parent, this research focus emerged from a desire to advocate for LGBTQ2S+ family formations such as mine, to bring that dialogue to the wider educational community through collaborative performance work, and to create positive representations for young people who feel their families are often invisible. I explored how collaborative affective
applied theatre can be used as a form of queer education both in process and performance while working collectively to live differently (Zembylas, 2015). Through a creative play-building process, participants engaged with the unknown in an attempt to live in new ways (Freeman, 2016). In this research, theatricality was used to allow affective encounters to intensify. I write about the ways affect circulates through the creative process and the everyday lives of research participants, and how it governs the body’s ability to move in relation to one another as we navigate globalized social relations in time and space while doing arts-based gender and sexuality education. Through the creative examination of heteronormativity and cissexism as affective encounters governing the experiences of participants (Zembylas, 2015), I show that we can move beyond the ongoing perpetuation of homophobia and transphobia within educational spaces and towards the realization of queer educational practice.

In the next chapter, **Chapter 2**, I explore the theoretical underpinnings of this research by reviewing relevant literature in the field of affect theory. I conclude that through an applied theatre process with children from LGBTQ2S+ families, artists and young people can work affectively and collaboratively to understand how heteronormativity, cissexism, homophobia, and transphobia are circulating in schools while moving towards the actualization of queer educational practices and spaces.

In **Chapter 3**, I describe the methodology I engaged to conduct this research, and explain my data collection methods. I dive into the methodological challenges of using applied theatre as research, and position this collaborative process as a form of research-creation (Springgay & Rotas, 2014). I also explore the role of GoPro video cameras as a way of documenting the research process. Finally, I discuss video editing as a form of data analysis.

**Chapter 4** begins to answer my research questions by examining the role of vulnerability and failure in facilitating affective openings across bodies. Ahmed (2006) uses the term “bodily horizon” to describe “the edge of what can be reached by the body” (p. 552). When
I speak about openings within the body or the bodily horizon, I explore the possibility of disrupting that horizon and restructuring its limits. It is a shift towards new possibilities leading to the ability of participants to move and live differently. This chapter explores storytelling and story-listening as a form of vulnerable performance and works to understand the ways in which gender diversity and sexuality is being lived (and questioned) in participants’ elementary schools. The analysis examines the use of Play-Doh puppets and morning routines as a way of engaging performances of our everyday family life, as well as found-poetry as a collaborative analysis of our time together. Finally, I share youth participants’ individual performances to unpack the roles of vulnerability, collaborative performance, and empathy as key components in the queering of educational practice.

Chapter 5 continues to answer my research questions by suggesting that connection and embodiment lead to affective movement and that this movement can be seen as an affective exchange, which creates a shift towards living differently. I draw on examples such as improvisation games as an integral part of applied theatre work to analyze the thresholds of our available structures of feeling, and then turn to songwriting as an affective process through which participants can articulate themselves and their stories in a way that validates and affirms new possibilities for living differently. Finally, I examine how participants challenged cisgenderism in the ways they move and live when they learned the dance style of vogue.

I conclude with Chapter 6, which summarizes my findings and argues that a queer pedagogy can be manifested through a collaborative, affective, and dialogic approach to applied theatre practice. I also assert that through a reimagining of performance, this research is able to build new understandings about what is possible within and outside the classroom. Finally, I offer suggestions for further study and implications for practice.
Chapter 2: Feeling Queer & Acting Queer: A Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I explore affect theory as a theoretical framework for attuning to the ways bodies move in relation to one another and how this can reinforce oppressive structures such as heteronormativity and cissexism. I connect this reordering of bodies and affective intensities to the idea of queering education as we shift towards living differently (Kumashiro, 2002). Educators do not always know what living differently looks like, instead the goal becomes to facilitate movement towards a not-yet-known difference in hopes for a disruption to the status quo and a new way of being (Freeman, 2016; Sloan, 2018; Zembylas, 2015). Living differently in a not-yet-known way is the objective of queering educational practice because, simply put, queer is a way to live differently (Airton, 2013; Keenan, 2017). I turn now to affect theory to understand the role of pre-cognitive sensations, intensities, and feelings in perpetuating heteronormativity and cissexism. In doing so I will demonstrate that the study of affect can be a form of critical inquiry that has the potential to build new insights into how we can combat marginalizing encounters and move towards living differently.

Technologies of Affect

Affect as a theoretical concept addresses the pre-cognitive realm of feeling and emotion. Following a Spinozian tradition, “affect arises in the midst of inbetween-ness: in the capacities to act and be acted upon” (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 1). It is an intensity of sensation that circulates between bodies, both human and non-human (Massumi, 1995). Affect contributes to a body’s ability to think, feel, and act as it sticks, binds, and pulls apart bodies in a constant and ephemeral state of motion (Ahmed, 2015). “Technologies of affect” circulate through the classroom to (re)produce oppressions. Zembylas (2015) argues that:

theories of affect pay attention to the ‘technologies’ that are being used to establish racial categorizations between bodies, binding them together or apart. Viewing race and racism as technologies of affect captures ‘the ways in which flows of affect coalesce to form a
social phenomenon that is beyond the individual subjective responses, feelings, and sensibilities’. (p. 146)

Here, Zembylas (2015) draws on Foucault’s notion of technologies as a “disciplinary power mechanism… used to achieve particular outcomes… [and] produce… humans as certain kinds of beings” (p. 151). These technologies create limits of what is deemed legitimate. What I find compelling here is how technologies of race, gender and/or sexuality are produced in the affective realm of everyday life, and how these technologies of affect infiltrate and govern our bodies on a daily basis. For example, as heteronormativity, homophobia, and transphobia circulate as affective signs between bodies, they gain affective energy and build intensity creating an elusive energetic power through sensation that both defines and upholds heteronormative ways of being and doing. This leads me to consider that, by attuning to affective and material encounters between bodies, we can “attend to the production of pedagogical spaces and practices that create ways of living differently” (Zembylas, 2015, p.146). We can attempt to diminish the power of marginalizing affects such as heteronormativity by moving, feeling, and engaging in new ways.

Affective intensities impact the body’s ability to move, touch, and feel, and in doing so police the way a body moves through daily life. In order to live differently a collective reordering of these intensities is necessary (Ahmed, 2015). This reordering is an uncomfortable encounter with difference that queers the status quo by putting the body along with desire, touch, emotion, and feeling at the centre of transformation and inquiry. It is by attending to living differently as an approach to queer pedagogy that artist-educators and students can begin to imagine a queer future (Munoz, 2009). By moving and living differently we can make new ways of being, queer ways of being, thinkable (Airton, 2013; Kumashiro, 2000). This research builds on this argument by exploring how engaging the unknown through creative interventions can facilitate participants’ ability to live differently, and that by becoming aware of the ways
technologies of affect impact their daily lives, participants can shift those intensities towards transforming their encounters with homophobia and transphobia.

**Everyday affects.** The study of affect engages a site of inquiry beyond the epistemological question of what a body ‘is’ (as shaped by social structures), by drawing on ontological and material ideas when asking what a body can ‘do’ (Ahmed, 2015; Springgay, 2008; Zembylas, 2015). This is an important shift because, as researchers and educators, we are no longer bound by language’s overwhelming perpetuation of violent and harmful discourses. Instead, we can explore how that violence shifts, evolves, and circulates across and between bodies, finding potentialities for transforming ways of being with one another. “In the bleak, post-post-modernist landscape” (Boler & Zembylas, 2016, p. 22), there is a need to understand how the fleeting intensities of everyday affects can contribute to tangible change. Stewart (2007) suggests the significance of everyday affects,

lies in the intensities they build and in what thoughts and feelings they make possible.

The question they beg is not what they might mean in an order of representations, or whether they are good or bad in an overarching scheme of things, but where they might go and what potential modes of knowing, relating and attending to things are already somehow present in them in a state of potentiality and resonance. (p. 5)

By paying attention to how everyday intensities infiltrate bodies, we open up the possibility for different ways of knowing. Thinking, feeling, being, and living differently creates potentialities for new becomings. I use the word ‘becoming’ to signify an “experience in the making” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 4), an ongoing and emergent cycle of knowing that is never fixed, but rather is shifting and evolving (Kumashiro, 2000; Massumi, 1995). In this sense people, ideas, and identities are always in a state of becoming, because who we are and what we know is always unfolding in relation to one another.

By engaging with everyday affects and the way their intensities infiltrate bodies in a
constantly evolving state of emergence, change as a categorical reordering seems possible. Change is not moving from one way of being to another, but rather recognizing that bodies are in constant transition as they come to know and understand through their interactions with other bodies (Massumi, 1995). Exploring affect in this way without attaching signification and representation makes for a slippery and often elusive site of study. But it is this lack of stasis that makes for an exciting potentiality of emergence. As a site of study, it is this movement that creates openings for a queering of educational spaces. In this research I attended to this movement and explored how a reordering of everyday affects through creative storytelling impacted participants’ ways of engaging with the world around them.

**When affect sticks.** Ahmed (2015) does not believe that affect is stationary and situated within bodies. Rather, she suggests that as affect circulates it attaches itself to signs that are in constant motion with a high affective value. What she means is that signs, such as hate, heteronormativity, cissexism, and racism, are circulated, upheld, and reproduced regularly. Through their ongoing circulation, signs become “sticky”, meaning they bind with other ideas, energies, and feelings attracting new encounters and movements as their affective value multiplies. This stickiness means that signs with a high affective threshold will produce encounters more regularly, governing the relationship of those encounters. Ahmed (2015) calls this “economies of affect” and suggests that signs with a high affective value govern our encounters. As bodies come into contact with dominant signs and objects, they create technologies of affect by continually reproducing things that feel, to use Stewart’s word, “ordinary.” The more these technologies of affect circulate, the more their discursive power builds and they become normalized forms of oppression, producing a society of control. While Stewart (2007) argues that by paying attention to the intensities in our everyday encounters we have the possibility of facilitating openings for different ways of knowing and being, Ahmed (2015) believes when we fail to be attentive to our exchanges, these ordinary intensities gain
affective value as they work to control the ways bodies intra-act through dominant ideologies. My research built on this work by exploring how heteronormativity and cissexism operated as sticky signs with high affective value, how they circulated in and through the lives of participants, how collective creation facilitated openings for new queer moments to emerge, and how we built from queer moments to queer educational practices.

**Locating the affective body.** Seigworth and Gregg (2010) suggest, “the capacity of a body is never defined by a body alone but is always aided and abetted by, and dovetails with, the field or context of its force-relations” (p. 3). Attuning to the movement of ordinary affect provides an opening to understand how these force-relations impact individuals, communities, and societies. In doing so, this research attempts to collaboratively re-invent the potentiality for different kinds of encounters by facilitating an in-between-ness that does not contribute to marginalizing technologies of affect and instead, subverts and disrupts those technologies in an active queering of bodily encounters (Ahmed, 2015; Zemblyas, 2015). In previous writing (Snell, 2014), I drew on McCaskell’s (2005) triangle model of oppression, which explores the relationships between behaviours, ideas, and institutions as they act on and re-inscribe oppression. While this is a powerful and important model, what it leaves out is the role of emotions and affective intra-actions in shaping our behaviours, ideas, and bodies. Ahmed (2006) states that: “the bodily horizon shows the “line” that bodies can reach toward, what is reachable, by also marking what they cannot reach. The horizon marks the edge of what can be reached by the body. The body becomes present as a body, with surfaces and boundaries, in the showing of the limits of what it can do” (p. 552). I use this notion of a bodily horizon to explore the possibility of disrupting and restructuring its limits as bodies come to move and live differently through their intra-actions with other bodies. It is my hope that by examining the way that affect moved in and through participants bodies and experiences I can contribute to this literature on anti-oppression education, by coming to understand and articulate the ways our bodies
contribute to reinforcing and re-inscribing individual and systemic oppressions.

**Material agency.** Scholarship on emotions and emotionality has created a critical point of departure for the study of affect and its relationship to gender and sexuality education that moves beyond language and rationality and instead attunes to how bodies live and move in relation to one another through material entanglements (Ahmed, 2015; Barad, 2003). The current study of affect decenters the human body as a sole site of research and knowledge and instead positions humans as one agential actor in the larger material world. Queering education is not solely about restructuring the way that human beings think and talk, it also engages the way bodies (both human and non-human) intra-act and impact one another. Based on Karen Barad’s (2003) notion of agential realism, materialists frame these relational acts as material agency, wherein all matter has the capacity to act on or intra-act with all other matter (Hultman & Taguchi, 2010; Jackson, 2013; Mazzei, 2013). Barad (2003) states that “the dynamics of intra-activity entails matter as an active “agent” in its ongoing materialization” (p. 822). Here, bodies come to know through their relational experiences with one another, where meaning is produced through our relationship with other beings (Springgay, 2012). We act on people, things, and places and simultaneously they act on us (Hultman & Taguchi, 2010). To further understand this notion of material agency, consider the following:

Agency is a matter of intra-acting; it is an enactment, not something that someone or something has. Agency cannot be designated as an attribute of “subjects” or “objects” (as they do not preexist as such). Agency is not an attribute whatsoever—it is “doing”/“being” in its intra-activity. Agency is the enactment of iterative changes to particular practices through the dynamics of intra-activity. Agency is about the possibilities and accountability entailed in reconfiguring material-discursive apparatuses of bodily production, including the boundary articulations and exclusions that are marked by those practices in the enactment of a causal structure. (Barad, 2003, p. 826-
New materialist scholars believe that matter and environment are influential elements in the ways in which meaning is created (Hultman & Taguchi, 2010; Jackson, 2013; Mazzei, 2013; St. Pierre, 2013). In this sense, “matter does not refer to a fixed substance; rather, matter is substance in its intra-active becoming—not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency. Matter is a stabilizing and destabilizing process of iterative intra-activity” (Barad, 2003, p. 822). For example, the impressions left by bodies in contact are governed by affective intensities, the emergence and exchange of pre-cognitive sensation, and contribute to a body’s ability to move through the world. As bodies encounter one another, they subconsciously adjust to the affect exerted by other bodies. “What is important about causal intra actions is the fact that marks are left on bodies” (Barad, 2003, p. 824). In this research I used these marks/impressions as an opportunity to trace the elusive becomings of affect as it moves between bodies. When an affective impression is left on a body, it is forever changed. The bodily horizon, the threshold of what a body can reach, is no longer the same.

For example, as I walk down the street I might hear birds chirping, smell freshly cut grass, feel the mud on the bottom of my shoe slap against the concrete of the sidewalk, and see the reflection of the sun as it bounces off a car mirror. Each of these intra-actions leaves an impression on my body. They may come in and out of consciousness but my body perceives them as I move through space. If I see someone walking towards me, I will likely step to one side while continuing to walk so that we can pass one another. Here, my body has come into contact with another person and adjusted itself. Without words our bodies have exerted affective energy towards and around one another and responded to that intra-action. But in this example, the material agency of the sidewalk contributes to the encounter because the sidewalk, the bird, the grass, and the light, defines how and where my body is moving through the world therefore governing my exchange with the other person. These intra-actions leave lasting impressions on
Within performance and education spaces there are a number of material bodies that influence and define embodied encounters. For example, the pedagogy we engage, the space we work in, the physical matter that we use to facilitate the work (such as Play-Doh or swords or blindfolds or music or colourful pieces of paper), these things matter to how the work unfolds and the agency of these bodies, as it intra-acts with other bodies, works to define and uphold certain ways of knowing. When affect is exchanged between bodies, and intensities of emotion and energy bubble up from that exchange, bodies adjust, often moving in predictable compositions because of the way affective energy is governing our response to the material agency of the world around us. Ahmed (2006) describes this phenomenon here:

Bodies hence acquire orientation by repeating some actions over others, as actions that have certain objects in view, whether they are the physical objects required to do the work (the writing table, the pen, the keyboard) or the ideal objects that one identifies with. The nearness of such objects, their availability within my bodily horizon, is not casual: it is not just that I find them there, like that. Bodies tend toward some objects more than others, given their tendencies. These tendencies are not original; they are effects of the repetition of “tending toward”. (p. 553)

This notion of “tending toward” is a repetition of our established and known ways of being in relationship to the material world. Creating queer spaces in education requires an understanding of how to transform the exchange of affect so that when encounters occur it can become an opportunity for new ways of being and moving, rather than a perpetuation of technologies of affect. This research playfully engages this idea in an attempt to restructure technologies of affect such as heteronormativity and cissexism and the ways they manifest as everyday affects in the lives of participants. In doing so, this research moved towards understanding how we can push at the boundaries of what our bodies know, rearrange our bodily horizons (Ahmed, 2006),
and produce affective exchanges that are not governed by sticky and marginalizing affective intensities.

**Participatory Aesthetics and a Sense of Wonder**

In response to the ongoing debate around aesthetic assessment in applied theatre (Conroy, 2015; Prentki, 2009a; Thompson, 2009a; White, 2015), I suggested that we consider “a participatory aesthetic, wherein the encounter between participants becomes the gauge for understanding the aesthetic quality of the work rather than a valuation based on a cultural standard of theatricality” (Baer, 2017, p. 110). By prioritizing participants as creative authors, there is an opportunity to “make the familiar strange as participants and audiences attune to the way that affect shifts, pulls, and pushes bodies by isolating the moment of ephemeral encounter and escalating it through aesthetic and creative means” (p. 111). I used this notion of a participatory aesthetic as a guiding principle in how I approached this research project. First, ensuring that authorship and performance was collaborative during all stages of the process, and second not defining beauty by the participants’ ability to create ‘good art’ (Conroy, 2015; Kelman, 2018; Prentki, 2009a). Instead, I saw the goal of the creative work manifest in its ability to produce meaningful and insightful dialogue. Through this creative engagement, participants came to see themselves and their stories in a new light. This understanding of how affective intensities intra-act with our bodies, and our stories, and our ways of living creates space for wonder. According to Ahmed (2015), wonder is the ability to make the ordinary (that which we don’t see) extraordinary (that which might startle us into new ways of seeing and being and doing). Wonder is an expansion of our bodily horizons, a reaching towards new possibilities by recognizing the things and thresholds we take for granted. Ahmed (2015) states:

> What is ordinary, familiar or usual often resists being perceived by consciousness. It becomes taken for granted, as the background that we do not even notice, and which allows objects to stand out or stand apart. Wonder is an encounter with an object that one
does not recognize; or wonder works to transform the ordinary, which is already recognized, into the extraordinary. As such wonder expands our field of vision and touch. (p. 179)

The creative encounter through aesthetic wonder provides opportunities to examine how bodies move in relation to one another and works to understand how heteronormative and cissexist technologies of affect puncture and control the body’s ability to move towards living differently. In doing so, new bodily horizons are reached (Ahmed, 2006). I draw on ideas of both a participatory aesthetic and wonder to examine how participants were able to share their stories and re-imagine their stories from within a theatrical space, building an aesthetic and affective body that engages the thresholds of what is knowable by questioning our attachments to theatre, to art, and to the world around us. In this sense, wonder through a participatory aesthetic, provides insights into how everyday affective intensities are governing our encounters with marginalizing technologies of affect such as heteronormativity (Zembylas, 2015).

Startling Empathy

When engaging social goals within an artistic process we cannot ignore the role of empathy and the contested space empathy has continued to take up in applied theatre writing (Brecht, 1964; Mitchell, 2001; Rivers, 2013; Shapiro & Hunt, 2003; Wang, 2010). One of the arguments against empathy is that it can reproduce a self/Other binary with the belief that empathy has the potential to collapse difference through the assumption that ‘if I can feel your pain I must know your pain’ (Kumashiro, 2000). While empathy is a useful tool for engaging emotions within socially driven theatrical work, it is something applied theatre artists and researchers need to work to better understand. By considering the circulation of affect within the process of applied theatre, this research project extends the ongoing academic inquiry into the role of empathy in art and in social change by trying to understand how artists can engage critical thought and emotions towards action. Gallagher (2016b) suggests that when given the
opportunity to think and feel together, participants and audiences might willingly engage in an exploration of the unthinkable. This collective labouring through affective and relational dialogue is what Salisbury (in Baer, Salisbury, & Goldstein, 2019) calls “startling empathy, which can be described as fragmented moments of recognition and understanding, prompted by an aesthetic intervention into the complex life of another” (p. 424).

Unlike empathy, startling empathy is not passive. Rather, it can be a conversation between the many stakeholders in an applied theatre project who all work together as a community of learners to reflect on their experiences, relationality, and the ways that we can use that understanding to push at the threshold of available ideas, discourses, and ways of being. This reflexivity between participant, audience, artist, and community is a participatory and dialogic aesthetic: it is art, created for the purposes of building dialogue as bodies engage affectively towards new possibilities, rather than for the purposes of being classically beautiful (Baer, 2017; Gallagher, 2016b; Hughes, 2014; Sloan, 2018).

By engaging startling empathy as an affective and dialogic encounter between performers and audiences in this research project, participants were able to share narratives that draw on all four of Kandil’s (2016) approaches to applied theatre. Participants in this research project: informed about their experiences, celebrated their differences, responded to moments of oppression in their lives, and provoked new possibilities for change. By using affect theory to analyze the relationship between emotional attachments within critical dialogue and performance, I am extending Boler’s (in Boler & Zembylas, 2016) call to engage emotions and affect within critical pedagogies towards an understanding of what happens when we build critical queer pedagogy from the site of affective encounter. In doing so I am contributing new understandings about the role of empathy and startling empathy within the process of social change. One of the ways I have engaged this analysis is by using applied theatre as an entry into a structure of feeling.
Structures of Feeling

A structure of feeling is a set of encounters that produces limits around how to operate within its boundaries; this might look and feel like something such as heteronormativity, or cissexism. A structure of feeling affects a body’s ability to move and feel and live creating a threshold at the edges of what is currently known within the structure (Williams, 1977). It is in reshaping the threshold of the structure that new ways of knowing have the potential to be formed. This is not unlike Halberstam’s (2011) notion of queer failure, where in order to push against normative ways of being and doing, we need to articulate new possibilities from the margins.

Williams (1977) believes that art can “be seen as the articulation (often the only fully available articulation) of structures of feeling” (parentheses original, p. 133). Using drama opens up the possibility of physically entering into the structure of feeling and engaging our bodies with the entanglement of ordinary affects through the artistic articulation of those affects. This emergent process works to reveal the unthinkable by attuning to what bodies do in relation to one another by engaging all of our senses – hearing sight, touch, smell, and taste (Prendergast & Saxton, 2016). A structure of feeling by default upholds the status quo, using its boundaries to police what is knowable, thinkable, and feelable within that structure. When we think about living differently, as a form of queer pedagogy, we are working to form a new structure of feeling that challenges and subverts that status quo, while simultaneously working to push and pull the original structure’s thresholds as they evolve and re-form. I am interested in positioning collaborative drama pedagogy as an alternative structure of feeling, an assemblage of “characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought” (Williams, 1977, p. 132). Understood in this way, drama is an exercise in impulse and relationality where the ability to know is an evolving event-in-the-making, and where feeling
and thought are entwined in an emergent and embodied becoming. Drama then, is a relational encounter of intensity manifested through artistic renderings, it is a site of affective encounter that can create openings for not-yet knowable ways of being to emerge. Applied theatre is a wide-open site of exploration. It can be a living, shifting, emergent site of creative inquiry that looks and feels like a “structure of feeling,” (Williams, 1977), where bodies are collectively and individually affecting and being affected.

When taken up with young people from LGBTQ2S+ families, gender and sexuality through drama pedagogy revealed heteronormative boundaries around what is thinkable within and outside of schools – these are the thresholds of a heteronormative structure of feeling. Using drama to facilitate these embodied conversations created an opportunity to engage with these boundaries and experiment with living differently. Aesthetic and affective encounters push and pull shifting intensities between bodies and examine how technologies of affect (re)produce social phenomenon, such as homophobia and transphobia, while queering a site of learning by inhabiting the unknown. In this research I used drama as a structure of feeling to determine the thresholds of what is thinkable. Artist-educators and youth collaboratively worked to push at that boundary through engagement with creative storytelling.

**Summary: Queer is a Way to Live Differently**

Invoking the riskiness of the unknown can be stressful and upsetting for both artist-educators and youth as the push and pull of affect can make learning about oppression and unlearning one’s worldviews an emotional and difficult experience (Boler, 2004; Kumashiro, 2000). The intensities that stick to signs with high affective value—i.e. homophobic and transphobic signifiers, for example—also stick to bodies, and when we try to unstick and disrupt the way marginalizing affective technologies circulate, these processes impress upon bodies creating raw and unsettling transformations (Ahmed, 2015). To risk unsticking affect without knowing where or how these affects will land or move is a leap into the unknown, a
faith in the “space-between,” and a hope for new encounters. Unlearning cannot be done rationally. Instead, artist-educators and students must question what a body can do as we strive to enter a state of constant becoming, collaboratively, through action. In this research I drew on many of these ideas throughout my analysis, exploring how applied theatre works to creatively move towards living differently while simultaneously engaging a queer pedagogy (Airton, 2013; Zembylas, 2015). In doing so, I suggest that participants can come to (un)learn their current ways of knowing by restructuring their bodily horizons through an embodied examination of the ways that technologies of affect infiltrate their everyday lives (Ahmed, 2006; Zembylas, 2015).

In this chapter I have argued that applied theatre has the potential to queer educational practice by attuning to the relational ways that technologies of affect infiltrate and govern daily life. In doing so, applied theatre can take up gender and sexuality in a shift towards new possibilities as artist-educators and youth collectively labour to live differently. In the next chapter, I explore the design of this study by positioning applied theatre not only as a queer pedagogical intervention, but also as a research-creation methodology.
Chapter 3: Bodies moving, & knowing, & becoming: A methodology

In this chapter I explore the methodology and research design that I engaged with this project. I begin with a discussion on applied theatre as research that situates applied theatre as a form of research-creation, participatory action research, and critical arts-based educational research. I build the argument that embodiment is an important form of knowing and that through drama we can engage new possibilities at the thresholds of available ideas and discourses. I then take the time to discuss the challenges I faced with recruitment and how that impacted my research design. I introduce research participants before explaining how I used video as an integral part of my data collection and analysis process.

Applied Theatre as Research

Art making and creativity have a long pedagogical tradition within the classroom and beyond (Ellsworth, 2005; Gallagher, 2014; Goldstein, 2012; Harris, 2014; Springgay & Rotas, 2014). Educators, politicians, and activists have all been drawn to the arts as a strategic platform for teaching and learning (Goldstein, 2014; Sandlin, Wright, & Clark, 2013; Snell, 2013). Young people in particular are drawn to creativity as a way of expressing themselves, uncovering nuanced and exciting ways to speak that allow them to push the limits of language through visual and embodied renderings (Gallagher, 2014; Simon, Evis, Walkland, Kalan, & Baer, 2016; Simon et al., 2018; Snell 2013). Applied theatre practices open up opportunities for people to create together while simultaneously learning about and analyzing their experiences, and then synthesizing their learning and analyses through performance (O’Connor & Anderson, 2015).

Arts-based research uses artmaking and creation as the primary way of expressing, understanding, analyzing, and representing experiences of participants (Leavy, 2015; McNiff, 2008). Belliveau and Lea (2016) state that, “artists have long used theatre as an approach to explore the social world around them” (p. 5) Therefore, folding in the notion of formalized
research simply names a process that is already taking place within applied theatre practice. Helen Cahill argues that applied theatre mirrors participatory action research in that it often “involves a process of inquiry based on a topic theme or problem relevant to the participants” (in Anderson & O’Connor, 2013, p 192). As a research methodology, Applied Theatre as Research (ATAR) closely aligns with critical arts-based research and community-based participatory research (O’Connor & Anderson, 2015). At the heart of participatory methodologies there is an intention to mobilize a process of change while creating a legacy of inquiry through the usefulness of the research in the lives of participants (Fine et al., 2004; Kumashiro, 2002; Preston, 2009a). By working with participants to analyze a situation, identify needs, and then acquire skills to address issues, participants take ownership over research processes and the resulting transformative practices. This mirrors the participatory approach to aesthetic design and theatre creation seen in applied theatre with many of the same potential challenges such as raising questions about power relations, competing ideologies, project agendas/goals, and the lived realities of potential participants (Preston, 2009a).

As a participatory research methodology, ATAR provides young people with the ability to become artists in their own right. Using their personal narratives and experiences as a starting point, youth collaboratively engage in the research processes as experts in their own lives and what their life experiences mean, and how their stories could be translated into performance work. This approach draws on a long tradition of transformative praxis both in applied theatre practice and participatory research that focuses on shared ownership and community-based analysis of social issues (Conrad, 2004; Freire, 2009; Prentki & Selman, 2000). McKenzie (in Prendergast & Saxton, 2016) suggests, “cultural performance is centrally concerned with issues of social efficacy, or social justice – that is to say, how performance positively assists us in understanding ourselves, seeing ourselves, re-forming ourselves in relation to the culture that surrounds us and/or transforming the culture itself through performative actions” (p. 24).
Applied theatre as a form of cultural performance created an opportunity for youth participants and artist-educators to engage deeply in this reflexive work focusing on the self in relation to wider social and political worlds. Anderson and O’Connor (2013) state “what drama and ATAR achieve - and most other research methods do not - are emotional and aesthetic, multi-modal (aural, oral, kinesthetic and symbolic) forms of interaction and representation” (p. 192). It is with this understanding of applied theatre-as-cultural-intervention that this collaborative research methodology emerged.

**Research-Creation**

In recent years, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada has formalized arts-based research methodologies using the term “research-creation.” Research creation is understood as an event that unfolds in the space between research and creation, where creation is an integral aspect of the research process. In research-creation, neither research nor creation are privileged, rather, they work in tandem with one another through the pursuit of new knowledge (Government of Canada, 2012). I propose ATAR builds upon critical qualitative research, which is a form of qualitative research that takes relations of power into account, with the potential to open up new ways of knowing in the moment of the creative encounter (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Leavy, 2017).

Research-creation acts as a site of becoming in the liminal space between knowing and doing. Here, bodies come to know through their relational experiences with one another, where meaning is produced through our relationship with other beings (Manning, 2015; Norris, Fels, & Kandil, 2019; Springgay, 2012). Barad (2003) believes that:

All bodies, not merely “human” bodies, come to matter through the world’s iterative intra-activity—its performativity. This is true not only of the surface or contours of the body but also of the body in the fullness of its physicality, including the very “atoms” of its being. Bodies are not objects with inherent boundaries and properties; they are
material-discursive phenomena. (p. 823)

With this understanding of material agency, post-qualitative researchers remove human beings from the centre of inquiry and analysis (De Freitas, 2007; Mazzei, 2013). Instead, researchers understand that the role humans play in any given experience is relational to the matter that surrounds them. Barad (2003) goes on to say:

We do not obtain knowledge by standing outside of the world; we know because “we” are of the world. We are part of the world in its differential becoming. The separation of epistemology from ontology is a reverberation of a metaphysics that assumes an inherent difference between human and nonhuman, subject and object, mind and body, matter and discourse. (p. 829)

For example, if I were to walk into a room that contains a single table and two chairs, that table and those chairs will work to define how I use the space. They exert their material agency on my body as I subconsciously gravitate towards sitting on one of the chairs at the table. Even if my intention were to do yoga as I walked into the room, this is momentarily delayed as I respond to my intra-action with the table and chairs by moving them, walking around them, and adjusting myself in response to them. Every single object exerts agency on the bodies with which it comes into contact: the carpeted floor, the door, the clock ticking, the thin walls, all invite bodies to respond to them in particular—usually predictable—ways. Each and every body (human and non-human) impacts the experience a body has in any given moment in time, both limiting and creating opportunities for different ways of knowing to manifest.

With this understanding of material agency, it is important to take into account the researcher, the data, the participants, and surrounding matter as these different bodies intra-act through research and creation. Each body comes to be known through its intra-action with the other and this entanglement has been referred to as a mangle (Jackson, 2013). In a mangle, the researcher then is not someone who can speak from a place of inner truth or as a knowing
subject, but rather as a relational being who is created in and through the discourses and materials with which they intra-act (Jackson, 2013; Mazzei, 2013; St. Pierre, 2013). In this approach to research, knowledge production is an entanglement of many elements coming to make meaning through one another (Hultman & Taguchi, 2010; Jackson, 2013). For this research project the material intra-actions and inter-actions of theatre making, and the ways in which theatre creation facilitates certain ways of moving or being were as much a focus of inquiry as the lived experiences of participants. Another implication of doing research from within a mangle results in the emergent and overlapping roles of researcher, educator, artist, and participant. As a collaborative artmaking event this workshop had each person in the room move in and through these roles at different moments.

**Engaging the unknown.** I understand research-creation as a process of queering and unknowing. In order to come to know the world through the material beings with which bodies intra-act, we must first accept that intra-actions are unknowable, evolving, and uncertain (St. Pierre, 2013). Material agency creates unpredictable encounters that emerge through a relational process of becoming (Hendry, 2010; Holbrook & Pourchier, 2014; Mazzei, 2013; Springgay, 2012; St. Pierre, 2013). These relational encounters shift and change from moment to moment as new elements engage, new materials are created, and new understandings become known and unknown. Manning (2015) states, “thought is not what organizes an event post-facto, nor is it what articulates an event in language. Thought, instead, is a key aspect of the appreciation that drives an occasion to express itself as this or that in experience” (p. 60). Following Manning’s logic, creativity—and in this case, ATAR—provides a space where knowing, responding, and reflecting can occur alongside an embodied experience. We can think in the act of being and doing, rather than doing first (data collection), and then thinking second (data analysis). This embedded approach to meaning making within the research process is common in collaborative and participatory research methods (Fine et al., 2004; Leavy, 2015; McNiff, 2008; O’Connor &
Anderson, 2015). It is in attuning to this emergent experience through our bodies that new knowledge can be made possible. Consider the following:

Actor 3 points at Actor 1.

Laughs.

Crumples over with laughter.

Repeat.

Actor 4 kneels below Actor 3.

Sobbing uncontrollably mirroring crumple of Actor 3.

Repeat. (Snell, 2014, p. 78)

The above vignette is an example of research-creation from the project Solitude and Solidarity that engages in a politics of sensation. As the two actors act out this vignette, their bodies crumple in unison with one another, they become entangled and the space between them infuses with intensity. Their movements are inseparable from one another as the sounds of laughter and crying overlap creating an unexpected soundscape. As the gestures and sounds repeat over and over, it is impossible to tell where one actor ends and the other begins. They escalate and deescalate, matching each other in speed and volume without once directly addressing one another. Their bodies have entered an intricate dance, up and down, constantly in movement. What this means is less interesting than how this moment produces new thought through the process of becoming. The bodies speak to one another through movement, opening up spaces for possibilities for each actor to affect and be affected, while simultaneously interfering with one another through acts of spontaneity. This spontaneity as it emerges, entangles, and intra-acts with other bodies in movement is an example of relationality. Here, relationality emerges through embodiment, and knowing unfolds through the body as it moves in relation with the wider world. In what follows I will begin to connect this new materialist approach with the embodied practice of queering educational spaces as I strive to make tangible changes in the
material lives of LGBTQ2S+ youth and families. I do this by examining the ways technologies of affect impacted on participants daily lives and then explore how youth participants and artist-educators worked collaboratively through an applied theatre process to transform those encounters towards new potentialities (Sloan, 2018; Zembylas, 2015).

As a theatre artist, I am trained to use my body as an instrument, and as a way of knowing and of being. Much of theatre school is spent learning to be present in our bodies, learning to listen to our impulses, and engage authentic movement through pre-cognitive embodiment. It is through sensations that bodies learn, and where the openings made possible from an affective theoretical frame can be explored. Embodied relational experiences are in a state of becoming, shifting from past, towards the future, while only ever existing in the moment (Mazzei, 2013, Springgay, 2012). If we pay attention to our affective engagements, we can create (do), research (know), and analyze (make meaning) simultaneously (Manning, 2015). This embedded approach is defractive in nature, where to interpret an event defractively is to allow intra-actions to bubble up, overlap, act, react, and change directions (Barad, 2003; Hultman & Taguchi, 2010; Jackson, 2013; Mazzei, 2013). Researchers can work to make meaning from the centre of the mangle, not knowing which direction our inquiry will go, or what will unfold as we attempt to understand the layering of intra-actions that influence any given moment of our research-creation process (Jackson, 2013; Mazzei, 2013). This research study engaged young people and artist-educators in collaborative theatrical activities as part of the research-creation methodology.

**Collaborative Applied Theatre**

This project centered participatory and collaborative processes as a research-creation methodology, which positioned young people and artist-educators as co-investigators and co-creators in understanding their life experiences through their intra-actions, ordinary affects, and entangled encounters (Anderson & O’Connor, 2013). The creative process unfolded during a
three-day applied theatre workshop with youth (aged 10 and 13) who have at least one LGBTQ2S+ parent. Together artist-educators and youth developed performance work that drew on the life experiences of these young people.

I chose to use applied theatre as a research-creation methodology for a number of reasons. Most importantly, I am responding to a call from Lather and St. Pierre (2013) who assert, “the ethical charge of our work as inquirers is surely to question our attachments that keep us from thinking and living differently” (p. 631). Using applied theatre practice as a research methodology questions these attachments. Unlike positivist research traditions, which privilege knowing over being, drama requires us to be in our bodies, and to be aware of the ways in which our bodies move and respond as we strive not only to come to know differently, but to live differently, as we aim to produce affective economies of change (Ahmed, 2015).

Belliveau and Lea (2016), “encourage artist-researchers to position their art-making not as an appendix or a companion piece, but instead at the heart of their research” (p. 189). It was in taking up this call that I engaged as an artist, educator, participant, and researcher within this project. Working collaboratively through an applied theatre process meant that creation became a proposition for knowing as it evolved from our intra-actions with personal narrative, material objects, and other moving bodies.

It is impossible to know exactly how the creative process will unfold, and as post-qualitative researchers suggest, it is important that we do not try to predict outcomes, but rather, enter into the mangle and allow intensities to bubble up (Jackson, 2013; Lather & St Pierre, 2013; Manning 2015; Springgay & Zaliwska, 2015). Kumashiro (2000) might say that we should strive to occupy the “space-between,” working together through what is unknown. To use applied theatre as our meeting place meant that we used improvisation, games, storytelling, play, movement, fictional framing, process drama, and other theatrical techniques to facilitate our encounters, while simultaneously working towards a collective goal of creating performance
work. In the next section I discuss how this research-creation process unfolded in practice.

**Recruitment and Design: A collaborative approach**

I began recruitment in November 2017, with a one-week workshop planned for March 2018 during the Ontario public school system’s Spring Break vacation. Recruitment for the study took place through a number of local organizations that offer programming for young people with LGBTQ2S+ parents, including The LGBTQ Parenting Network (https://lgbtqpn.ca/), The 519 Community Centre (https://www.the519.org/), and The Ten Oaks Project (http://www.tenoaksproject.org). I asked that these organizations send out my call for participants through their networks and I visited programs that were taking place at The 519 in order to speak about my research. I also distributed the call through my own networks. The response to the project was overwhelmingly positive, I had a number of educators, social workers, parents, and youth reach out to me. There was a lot of interest in both the one-week workshop and an ensuing performance.

In the days leading up to the workshop I had 6 young people committed to participating. These youth ranged in gender identities, racial identities, age, and family formations. The workshop was planned and artist-educators were scheduled with this group in mind. The diversity of artist-educators’ identities intentionally mirrored aspects of the young participants’ positionalities. In the week leading up to the workshop, however, participants began to withdraw. Some provided reasons: they would be spending time with family out of town.

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7 The LGBTQ Parenting Network is a program of the Sherbourne Health Centre in Toronto that supports LGBTQ parenting through research, training, resources, and community development.

8 The 519 is a City of Toronto agency committed to the health, happiness and full participation of the LGBTQ2S communities.

9 The Ten Oaks Project engages and connects children and youth from LGBTQ+ communities through programs and activities rooted in play. Based in Ottawa the Ten Oaks Project has a provincial reach with their summer camp programming.
instead; they decided they wished to take the time to relax and hang out with friends; or they no longer had any friends who were going to participate in the workshop. This was not unexpected because in my experience with youth programming, there are always some people who withdraw at the last minute.

As an experienced facilitator I intentionally center participant decision-making in my approach to applied theatre. This means that the structure, content, and modes of engagement are collaboratively constructed between participants and artist-educators. Therefore, when it became clear that the adults would outnumber the youth in this collaborative work, which was a shift in dynamics from the original vision for the project, I touched base with the six other people involved. With their support and feedback a revised workshop schedule was created. This 3-day workshop led to a new research design that was responsive to the needs of participants and collaborative in the ways that it unfolded. Over 18 hours, five artists worked with two youth to create, learn, laugh, and play together.

In an era where arts education is continuing to be under-funded, I have often found myself as an artist-educator expected to meet substantial performance outcomes after only a few hours with students. Working hastily does a disservice to both the artwork and the potentiality of the creative process to facilitate any form of meaningful or critical dialogue. Having the ability to slow down, to focus on relationship building, and to dive deeply into a three-day process, provided important insight into what is possible when we invite young people and artist-educators to work together in an immersive way and when we provide the space for an open-ended exploration. Youth participants and artist-educators were invested, committed, and had stories they wanted to tell. The applied theatre work was process-driven and self-revelatory. It was deeply personal and it seemed to be an important and powerful space for youth participants to come to understand their experiences. Working within a site of cultural reflection, participants and artist-educators worked collaboratively to build queer educational encounters,
thinking and working together in a way that provided insights into what it means to engage collectively in a process towards the unknown.

Figure 1. Sasha and Bianca

**Youth participants.** The selection criterion for youth participants was that they were between the ages of 10-16 years old, and that they had at least one parent who identified on the LGBTQ2S+ spectrum. My recruitment methods sought participants whose families were “out” in their school and community settings because I wanted them to feel comfortable sharing their experiences with the potential of building performance work that might become public. I was also interested in young people who were eager to engage in a performance creation process and had an interest in the arts. The two youth participants who completed the workshop were Bianca and Sasha. Bianca was 10 years old and in grade five. She lived predominately with her two

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10 Pseudonyms (chosen by participants) are being used here to protect the confidentiality of youth participants. Photos of all participants (youth and artist-educators) are included throughout the narrative. These images create a boundary around confidentiality as participants are identifiable in the photos. All participants (and their parents)
mothers, but also spent time with her father and his fiancée. Bianca describes herself as “warm, poofy-haired, tallish, dramatically beautiful, musically gifted, and quirky.” She identifies as mixed-race. Sasha was 13 and in grade 8, and she lived with her two mothers and two brothers. Sasha describes herself as “weird, unique, and amazing.” She identifies as White.

Both participants have similar family formations in that they spent most of their time in a household with two mothers. This is not representative of the diversity of LGBTQ2S+ identities and families, yet I continue to frame this research using the language of LGBTQ2S+ families because gender and sexuality are not always knowable, nameable, or fixed identity categories. Rather, these categories are fluid, shifting, and constantly becoming (Airton & Koecher, 2019; Goldstein, 2019a; Keenan, 2017). I cannot claim to know how these young people or their family members identify on a day-to-day basis, not during the fieldwork, and not now as I write about them. Not only are gender and sexuality fluid, they are also intersectional and overlapping (Crenshaw, 2016). Just because a child refers to their parent as “mom” does not indicate that person’s gender identity or sexuality. My two participants responded to a call for “young people from LGBTQ2S+ families” and I honour the freedom that this acronym allows for my participants to freely choose how they identify themselves and their families without me labeling them. In doing so, I do not attempt to generalize the findings of this study to all LGBTQ2S+ families, but instead explore the experiences of these two particular youth participants through artistic intervention.

**Artist-educator participants.** As the researcher, I took on many roles throughout this project. I coordinated the workshop and was the lead facilitator. I am an applied theatre artist and have worked with many different communities and youth groups to create art around social issues. Here is the biography I used during recruitment:

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consented to the use of photos in research dissemination. The consent form with options around confidentiality is available in Appendix B.
Pamela Baer, is a theatre artist, queer mom and PhD candidate in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Pamela has been creating socially driven theatre with youth for the past ten years, including writing curriculum for drama and film camps, training and supervising artist facilitators, and generally enjoying the process of collaborative creative discovery with people of all ages (Recruitment Flyer, 2017).

Through these experiences, I have come to know that it can be challenging to navigate the research and facilitation needs of a project when creating art with a group of people. I also recognized that while I am a queer parent, I do not have LGBTQ2S+ parents, this insiderness-outsiderness created a unique position from which I approached youth participants and artist-educators (Acker, 2001; Humphrey, 2007). I came to know through my own embodiment whilst embedded within the creative work, taking on the role of “doer” (Gallagher, 2008) within the research process where I worked to make meaning from the centre of the mangle (Jackson, 2013). Rodricks (2018) draws on Collins’ (1990) outsider-within concept to express his desire to facilitate his theatre-based research project himself stating that he, “saw [his] capacity to work, create, and perform alongside participants through these embodied social practices as a strength” (p. 393). I came to a similar conclusion for my own positionality within the project, and at times moved between the roles of artist, researcher, and participant, collectively and collaboratively working through the process of applied theatre alongside participants.

Queer artist and activist, Sadie Epstein-Fine co-facilitated the full 3-day workshop with me. Sadie identifies as a queerspawn11 and is a Toronto-based, professional theatre artist with a focus on artistic direction and performer-created devised work. This meant that I was able to draw on Sadie as a resource for all three days of the workshop as we navigated the needs of the

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11 Queerspawn is a term used by some individuals who have LGBTQ2S+ parents to describe themselves (Epstein-Fine & Zooks, 2018; Epstein et al., 2013, hicks, 2018).
project and the direction of the activities together. Below is Sadie Epstein-Fine’s biography:

Sadie Epstein-Fine is a second-generation queer artist and activist. Sadie has trained in devised theatre, dance, stage combat, playwriting, directing and performance and her work reflects and is a fusion of that training. Recently Sadie's work has focused on creating site-specific immersive shows, including SCAT, about queer, trans and women's experiences in bathrooms, housed in the Queen West Community Health Centre, and Eraser, about growing up in the Toronto District School Board, performed at Westside Montessori School. Sadie is continuing to develop Eraser in association with Theatre Direct Canada. Other companies that Sadie has [worked with] include Nightwood Theatre, Buddies in Bad Times, Canadian Stage, Theatre Panik and Epigraph Collective. Sadie co-edited an anthology with Makeda Zook about the experience of having LGBTQ2S+ parents (published by Demeter Press, 2018). Sadie has also been teaching theatre to young people for many years, and has worked extensively with Cityview Alternative School and The Linden School. Sadie has led workshops in devised theatre, playwriting and stage combat (Nov. 2017).

Figure 2. Sadie and Bianca laughing.

Having Sadie bring her experience of being a child of LGBTQ2S+ parents meant that she was able to draw on her own experiences throughout the workshop in a way that elicited stories from, and connections with the youth participants. In a review of the feminist literature on
insider and outsider roles in research, Acker (2001) suggests that regardless of an individual positionality and the possibilities/limitations that may emerge as a result, the researcher must work alongside participants throughout their research process. As researchers “we can reflect about whose standpoint -- whose "side" -- we wish to privilege” (Acker, 2001, Conclusion, para. 3). During the planning, the facilitation, and now the analysis of the applied theatre workshop I have been acutely aware of a desire to work “alongside” participants (Gallagher, 2016a; Hughes, 2013) and to privilege the relational emergence of knowledge through the affective encounters between youth, artist-educators, and myself as researcher. Each person brought their own unique positionalities to our work together and everyone (youth, artist-educators, and myself) engaged as outsiders-within the process of creation (Collins, 1990). As a community between Sadie, Sasha, Bianca and myself emerged over the course of the full workshop, guest artists also navigated their role in the group dynamics joining us for half day workshops in specific art forms. benjamin lee hicks is a visual artist who did a found poetry and bookmaking workshop. Kate Reid is a singer-songwriter and she did a songwriting workshop. Twysted Miyake-Mugler is a dancer and introduced the group to the art of voguing. It was important to me when choosing the artistic team that they represented a diversity of gender identities, sexualities, cultural backgrounds, and art forms. It was essential that youth participants saw themselves represented in the leadership team no matter how they identified. I was lucky to find talented artist-educators who were willing to share themselves and their artistic practices with us. Here is a little bit more information about this team of artist-educators:

benjamin lee hicks

benjamin lee hicks is a visual artist, elementary school teacher and graduate student. They taught JK-grade 6 classrooms in the Toronto District School Board for 8 years prior to beginning graduate work in Curriculum Studies and Teacher Development at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto in September 2015.
benjamin has written and designed curriculum materials for elementary schools on topics of sustainable community building, queer/trans inclusion and arts-based activism. www.benjaminleehicks.com (Nov. 2017).

Figure 3. benjamin facilitating found poetry and book making.

Twysted Miyake-Mugler

Twysted Miyake-Mugler got his start with dance at the age of 8, where he was in a hip hop dance group at Firgrove community centre, in Jane & Finch. This is where he found his passion for movement, and artistic expression. He was introduced to dancehall through a competitive dance group formed by him and his friends called “Dream Team”. At the age of 16, he was introduced to an entirely new form of dance that embraced the femininity of black gay men, something he had never been exposed to before: The art of Vogue. Twysted began teaching himself how to vogue and connecting with the international ballroom scene. He joined the Canadian House of Monroe as a founding member, and competed at his first ball in July 2008, where he won the “Virgin Vogue” category at Detroit Pride. Since then he has won balls locally & in Western New York, and is now a Canadian ballroom pioneer organizing balls in Toronto & Montreal. In January 2013, he was inducted into the NYC Iconic House of Miyake-Mugler as the First International member (Nov. 2017).
Kate Reid

Slam poetry meets folk music and LGBTQ-themed tunes in professional queer-musical-activist Kate Reid. Based in Toronto, Ontario, Kate holds a Master of Arts from The University of British Columbia's Institute for Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Social Justice. She is a guitar-playing, harmonica-slinging singer-songwriter, and bona-fide storyteller with rapid-fire delivery. Prior to becoming a professional musician and completing her MA, Kate earned a Bachelor of Arts from The University of Guelph, Ontario in 1994, and a Bachelor of Education from The University of British Columbia in 2000. She has more than twenty-five years experience teaching and working with youth, including at-risk youth, and differently-abled children, youth and adults. She combines musical activism with teaching by facilitating workshops, and delivering keynotes and concerts for schools, community agencies, and professional organizations. Kate is especially passionate about using songs to facilitate discussion with youth around
gender and sexual identities. She is currently working on her PhD in Education with the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto. www.katereid.net (Nov. 2017).

A **dramatic workshop.** The workshop took place during March 2018 at The 519 Community Centre in Toronto, Ontario. The workshop operated similarly to that of a drama-based day camp, where youth participants arrived in the morning for a full day of activities and exploration. Drawing on my experience as an applied theatre facilitator the workshops involved drama games, improvisation, storytelling, imaginative play, movement, and other drama activities. The workshop also involved group building exercises and storytelling through various theatrical techniques, such as puppetry, movement, tableau, improvisation, and personal masks. We also engaged play-building and performance work, while collaboratively coming to understand the unique experiences of youth participants. The creative decisions were a form of collaborative theorizing and analysis (Belliveau & Lea, 2016). Specifically, the youth participants, Sadie, and I noted moments of heightened intensities and movement, asking ourselves and each other what moments provoked sensations and feelings and why. Our schedule was flexible and responsive to participants, as an artistic team we had some activities

*Figure 5. Kate facilitating song writing.*
planned, but as a collaborative process, we worked collectively to use performance as an emerging way of knowing and being (Belliveau & Lea, 2016; Gray, 2019; Sloan, 2018).

**Community performance.** My initial vision for this project included a multi-day workshop and a final performance. The workshop would be a chance to connect, devise, and share stories; a generative play space in which we could create material for a performance. The performance created by students for students would then tour to schools, providing a peer-to-peer educational event about the experiences of young people from LGBTQ2S+ families. At the time of planning the workshop, I thought this final performance was important because it would allow me as a researcher to examine the ways in which performance could work as a form of advocacy for LGBTQ2S+ families within schools. I also assumed it would be an important artistic outcome for participants eager to share their work with a wider audience. However, given the large commitment that would be needed from participants to reach a public performance, the final phase was always an optional component for participants and was dependent on their desire to put in the time and energy needed to move through a process of collective creation to a refined performance.

On the final workshop day, Bianca, Sasha, Sadie and I discussed continuing to explore together and moving towards a future performance. The idea was that if people were interested in continuing with the project we could begin rehearsals in order to prepare for a performance. Everyone was in agreement that if an opportunity presented itself, we would be in touch and see if there was a desire to continue our work together. A few months later that opportunity arose. Sadie was having a book launch for her new book *Spawning Generations* (Epstein-Fine & Zook, 2018) at Toronto’s local LGBTQ2S+ bookstore, Glad Day Books and the opportunity to perform an original song from the workshop in front of a large community audience emerged. When I invited the youth participants to perform at this event, Bianca was busy performing slam poetry at a school event that same evening, and Sasha admitted she was too nervous to present
in front of an audience.

While it was exciting that this opportunity had materialised, it became clear that the process-driven applied theatre work had provided Sasha the ability to participate in the project on her own terms. She could engage in performance as a tool to build community, share her stories, and validate her experiences. For Sasha, who finds performing publicly to be too stressful, this workshop created a space where she could engage in applied theatre practice, not as something that needed to be for an audience, but as a set of private events and encounters that was safe-enough to allow her to dive deeply into a meaning-making process through collective creation. The idea of a public performance was scary, risky, and unnecessary for her. This reaffirmed the need for this research to engage in the process of applied theatre as an important site of cultural reflection.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

The workshop, including the sessions facilitated by guest artists were all filmed and photographed. Portions of the video data were later identified as moments of affective intensity and transcribed. Additionally, all creative work done by participants was a key component of both the data that was created and collected, as well as the analysis. As a participatory methodology, a large portion of the analysis work took place *with* participants: we used theatre to discuss, learn about, and understand participants’ life experiences. Data was collected, not as something to be later mined for insight by me as the researcher, but as a rendering of our collective meaning-making, and as examples of how we were/are attempting to live differently. Analysis unfolded alongside participants as we came to know one another through ephemeral moments of encounter and intensity. We collectively responded to the research questions as a proposition for creative exploration and in this written account, I am taking what emerged during the workshop and putting that into conversation with theory as a continued evolution of emergent knowledge production.
Throughout the 3-day workshop, I debriefed and analyzed participants’ experiences with them. At the end of each day, we reflected on moments that stood out, how participants felt about these moments, and how these moments impacted our bodies. We also discussed how we were able to move past or hold on to these moments, and what these moments might mean outside of our work together. During these reflexive sessions, I looked for how participants engaged in the creative process to enhance their own learning—about themselves, each other, and theatre. I did this by identifying key moments in which participants (youth and artist-educators) began to reflect upon and question or reconsider their own stances on the issues we were exploring, and by considering the relationship between the embodied, aesthetic, and affective creative learning experience in shaping a queer, exploratory, and anti-oppressive environment for participants.

**Using GoPro cameras.** I documented the entire workshop with three video cameras - two GoPro cameras and one 360-degree camera. Within the research-creation process these cameras became independent bodies within the space. They were not positioned on a tripod in the corner as an unbiased and distant observer, but instead the cameras were attached to our bodies, and positioned in the middle of our group circles. Participants, researchers, and artists took turns wearing the GoPro cameras, most often strapped or clipped to our chests. This meant in addition to capturing visual and audio data, the cameras were also capturing the movement and the breath of the person wearing the camera. As we jumped, the camera jumped, as we slouched the camera slouched. This became an important component of staying connected to the bodies of participants and researchers once I began reviewing the footage. The energy and all that it reveals about how affect is circulating in any given moment is captured through the ways these two cameras move in unison with the bodies in the room.

Despite being strapped to a human body, these cameras are their own bodies with their own gazes. While I am hesitant to equate the body of a camera to that of a human, I think it is
important to note that the way the camera witnesses and engages with the world is unique to its own embodiment. One of the interesting things about most GoPro cameras is that they do not have a screen or viewfinder through which a filmmaker looks in order to accurately shoot the scene they aim to capture. In this way, GoPro cameras are very different from conventional cameras. They are intended to be worn and therefore have limiting—yet also, as I found out, intriguing—ways of seeing what is being captured in the moment of recording. As the group introduced themselves on the first morning, the way that the camera was strapped to a particular body, combined with how the person wearing the camera was sitting meant that the camera captured not the faces of the people sitting around the table, but rather, their knees under the table. While limiting in some ways, these kinds of filming angles opened up opportunities to witness the research event from a very different perspective. As one of those knees began to bounce nervously under the table, I was provided insight into the affective relationship participants experienced during this encounter of introducing ourselves on our first morning together. It was by paying attention to the cameras as independent bodies that intra-act with the other bodies in the room that I was able to focus much of my written analysis on investigating an embedded layer of data—the movement of bodies from unexpected camera angles—that took place during the workshop. Instead of later mining this footage for moments to analyze, I used the GoPro footage as a way of capturing the embodied and creative analytical work that had already taken place.

The 360-camera is a newer technology that uses two fisheye lenses to capture footage in 360 degrees. It is a camera that is coming into greater use by documentarians in order to capture events from within a mangle of encounters rather than recording the singular gaze of a traditional camera. The 360 camera captures everything that takes place in the room. This provided a way of accessing inter-actions and intra-actions as a direct call and response. In reviewing footage, I was able to visibly witness affect move from one body to another by seeing
the *impressions* that affect left and/or the impact it had on bodies as bodies reacted in response to affective exchanges. This meant that I could witness the point of affective departure from one body, while simultaneously watching it land on another body across the room. Positioning the camera in the middle of a circle and being able to see the movement of everyone around the camera provided access to the ways bodies moved in relationship to one another.

**Video editing as analysis.** When it came time to engage with the analysis and writing of this dissertation a tension emerged between the collective methodologies of applied theatre as research and collaborative research-creation, and the independent nature of writing a thesis document. As I mention above, the cameras I choose to use played a large role in the way that I collected my data and how the analysis work unfolded. Because of the unique nature of the footage, that is, its ability to capture affective intensities through embodied movement, I was able to re-immerses myself in the workshop many months later as I sat in front of my computer. Harris (2016) states, “Perhaps the greatest strength of choosing video as method is its flexible and almost limitless potential for gathering, analyzing, writing up, and disseminating the research findings” (p.5). While the method of video was not a primary point of encounter or methodology in how I engaged with participants, there is no doubt that it became an important part of how I made sense of and analyzed the research many months later. As a filmmaker with extensive experience in crafting documentary style narratives through video editing, I began to sort the footage into different timelines in my non-linear digital editing software. I spent time cutting, organizing, and juxtaposing, sounds and images. These different timelines do a kind of coding work as I sort and classify the footage. Building on Pink and Mackley (2014) who suggest that video enables researchers to engage the senses, I argue that while the timelines provide specific types of entries into the footage, they do not do so in a linear way. Sometimes, the clips that were being sorted were only a couple seconds, sometimes only a few frames. These instances of movement, energy, exchange, and analysis go beyond thematic classification.
Instead, they are groupings of affective material encounters. For example, I have one timeline for each of my participants and while more traditional pieces of data found their way into these timelines, such as stories about their families and their experiences, I also have footage of moments when their bodies were engaged and disengaged, moments of participants moving towards or away from certain objects and others, and moments of participants’ smiling and jumping. What became interesting as my analysis began to unfold was the relationship between the clips within a timeline. I began to wonder, “How did bodies in movement confirm or conflict with what was being said through language?” For example, a fleeting image of a sun-streaked page turning in a book populates the movement timeline and it sits beside a clip that shows our attempts at mastering a voguing dance routine. As I watched these clips in relation to one another the following questions emerged for me: “What is the affective relationship between these things? How did we come to understand that relationship within the workshop, building upon, and moving between these instances? Does that translate to an important insight about applied theatre or queer pedagogies?” It was from this questioning, multi-sensory, multi-perspective stance that I approached the writing in my analysis chapters (Harris, 2016; Mitchell, 2011; Pink & Mackley, 2014)

Instead of transcribing three full days of workshop from three different cameras, I chose to watch all of the footage, to make notes about movement and intensity, and then do selective transcription. While transcribing words that have been spoken during data collection phases is fairly routine, it was the description of the multi-layered movement and the ways our bodies spoke to one another during the workshop that was particularly challenging to capture in the written form. I have tried my best to use detailed descriptions of movement, yet they continue to feel flat on the page. It is for this reason that despite having detailed field notes and selected transcriptions, I found that sitting with the footage, and the artistic artifacts, and then reviewing and remixing them, and putting different pieces of data in conversation with one another, and
then finally, rearranging these data pieces in my editing software that I was able to do the bulk of the analysis work for this research. I was able to return to the ideas, revelations, and the ways we came to know as a collective by being present with that experience over and over again by viewing these data pieces several times. Circling back to the footage as I wrote became an important process in my analysis work, and more helpful than my attempts to simply work from the transcriptions and my field notes, which often felt as though they flattened the experience of the applied theatre work. It was from within the footage that I have written a narrative account of the participants learning journey, based on key affective moments identified by participants within the workshop.

Summary

Five artists worked with two youth over three days. We created songs, learned to vogue, made books, wrote poems, played with puppets, danced, and laughed. We agreed to jettison the idea of putting on a formal performance for audiences. We shared our stories and our bodies encountered one another through the act of performance. Applied theatre, in this case, emerged in the space between performance and workshop. Youth participants and artist-educators heard one another, worked together to uncover stories and create art that is both a piece of advocacy and a piece of self-discovery. Nicholson’s (2016) work about memory and Collins (2015) work around dialogue, argue that applied theatre isn’t defined by performance events, rather it is embedded in our everyday. Understood in this way, applied theatre is a dialogic exchange of story and affect (Gallagher, 2016b; Hughes, 2013; Sloan, 2018). For this project, applied theatre practice relied heavily on ideas of dialogue, of connection, of relationality, and of encounter. The art that was created through this applied theatre project is not about complete or finished outcomes, but rather about being in process together. Throughout my analysis chapters I work to understand what this means in practice, and the implications it has on youth participants, on artist-educators, on social change, on education, and on understanding the role of performance
in applied theatre work.

Using applied theatre as research, I have learned the arts provide an opportunity to work with research participants to explore personal stories through creative and embodied ways of being. The process of creating in community allows for stories to emerge while exploring the interactions of a social context. These relational encounters become momentarily encapsulated in an aesthetic rendering, providing insights and becomings that move between the affective and the political. It is important to note that the affective and the political are not two distinct emergences but rather are interconnected and overlapping, which can be seen throughout my analysis chapters as participants shared their stories through creative mediums and engaged both the affective reality of their experiences and the political insights that their stories hold. These artistic imaginings provide us with important opportunities for reflexivity in the moment of creation. I believe that researchers need to continue to explore the multiple ways that we can investigate constantly evolving, shifting, and moving relationships. Research-creation through dramatic encounters is one way to dive into this type of investigation—to come to know differently through the body and through sensation. In the following chapter I begin my analysis and explore how encounters with vulnerability and failure created opportunities for new bodily horizons to emerge as participants created and played together (Ahmed, 2006).
Chapter 4: Vulnerability + Failure = Openings

In this chapter, I will explore how encounters with vulnerability and failure within collective creation punctured participants’ bodies creating opportunities for new bodily horizons to emerge. In this and subsequent chapters, I use the term, “punctured” to describe the immediate embodied reaction that participants’ bodies had when they came into contact with something that challenged and destabilized their current way of being or knowing or doing. I argue that these openings facilitated moments of connection and sensation, which led to new ways of being. When participants came into contact with new ideas, people, narratives, or affective intensities their bodily horizons were punctured and then reshaped or reformed, leading to a change in the threshold of what is reachable by their bodies (Ahmed, 2006, 2015). In this research, connection to other bodies facilitated the restructuring of participants’ bodily horizons and was built by engaging in collaborative theatrical activities and storytelling. The notion of expanding and reshaping a bodily horizon through connection is mirrored by Kushner (2016), he states, “I seek out theatrical experiences that markedly pull me from my human isolation in this precise way, that bring me into myself and so into the world” (p. 96). He goes on to say, “if we make full use of its virtues, theatre will remain the act of much mingling; it will endure as that magnificent intervention through which we can and do whet our humanness” (p. 97). It is through a punctured bodily horizon that youth participants and artist-educators were able to engage vulnerably with one another, to seek out their humanness within and through their encounters and come to a deeper understanding about their own experiences and the world around them. In this first analysis chapter, I explore how embodied mingling through collaborative artmaking facilitated these openings and challenged heteronormativity and cissexism as a result. In doing so, I will answer the following research questions: (1) How does applied theatre work as a form of collaborative affective queer pedagogy for young people from
LGBTQ2S+ families?; and (2) How does affect circulate in and through the experiences of two young people with LGBTQ2S+ parents?

To begin my discussion, I explore the ways in which watching the online videos from the LGBTQ Families Speak Out Project\(^{12}\) engaged the bodies of participants, facilitated a dialogue about being a member of an LGBTQ2S+ family, and some of the implications of being out as a LGBTQ2S+ family that can emerge at school (for example, homophobic/transphobic bullying). I then move to an activity that worked to (re)define family through the use of Play-Doh. The proposition in this activity positioned Play-Doh as a material body, which opened up more possibilities for participants to see themselves and their families anew by making the familiar strange (Ahmed, 2015). Next, I explore the ways in which found poetry was employed as a collaborative analysis technique. I also situate the notions of vulnerability and failure as key components of queering applied theatre for young people with LGBTQ2S+ parents. Finally, I discuss the experience that youth participants had when creating their personal masks in a reconceptualizing of applied theatre performance as a collaborative and affective event-in-the-making.

**Storytelling and Story-listening as Vulnerable Performance**

Coming out is a political act, one that resists the status quo and marks LGBTQ2S+ people in their difference (Baer & Baer, 2015; Khayatt & Iskander, 2019). It can be a necessity due to a culture that assumes heterosexuality and cisgender identities (Epstein-Fine & Zook, 2018; Jiménez, 2016), but it can also represent a celebration of new identity. Coming out in any context requires vulnerability as we make the private and intimate aspects of our identities public (hicks, 2017). Anyone who has ‘come out’ knows it is by no means a singular act; rather

\(^{12}\) The LGBTQ Speak Out Project is a research project led by Dr. Tara Goldstein at the University of Toronto. The website for the project (www.lgbtqfamiliesspeakout.ca) hosts over 300 short video clips from interviews with LGBTQ2S+ families.
it is something that is negotiated on a daily basis with each new encounter or environment (Goldstein, 2019b). For LGBTQ2S+ families, the matter of coming out, and/or outing our children in the context of school is an ongoing negotiation (Goldstein, 2019a; Gustavson & Schmitt, 2011).

On the second morning of the applied theatre workshop, the group watched a number of video clips of interviews from the *LGBTQ Families Speak Out Project* (2014-2020), which is a video-interview project about the experiences of LGBTQ2S+ families in schools throughout the province of Ontario. The website for the project hosts more than 300 short video clips and spans a wide range of experiences (www.lgbtqfamiliesspeakout.ca). In using the videos as a provocation in this theatre workshop, I was interested to see if youth participants would resonate with anything that people said in the videos, and if this impacted youth participants’ interpretations of their own experiences. The videos we watched spoke of being out in different ways and led to a group discussion about the difference between being out as a family, being outed, and not being out.

After viewing each video, there was an outpouring of stories from youth participants about their own experiences related to the peoples’ stories recounted in the videos. The youth became emboldened and excited to share anecdotes about their encounters with outness. In a way, the videos named and validated the youth’s experience, creating opportunities for participants to feel supported and understood by LGBTQ2S+ community members who shared similar experiences. When youth participants witnessed someone sharing a story that resonated deeply with their experiences, there was a pointed shift in energy within the room. The connection with another person’s story, the understanding of that story, and the validation of their own stories through the witnessing of that story being told punctured their bodies,

13 For a complete list of the videos we watched and links to those videos, please see Appendix A.
multiplying new openings across their bodies, as they began to make sense of their own experiences through the experiences of others. In this case, the puncturing of participants’ bodies through their engagement with the *LGBTQ Families Speak Out Project* videos created a bodily disruption—an opening—through which new possibilities were imagined and new bodily horizons were reached (Ahmed, 2006). These openings provided space for youth participants to build resiliency in a reclaiming and recognition of their bodily horizons as they came to see their own stories anew through the act of story-listening. My understanding of resiliency here builds on that of Gallagher, Starkman, and Rhoades (2017) who suggest that creative resiliency is:

Something well beyond an individual set of coping mechanisms gleaned for psychological endurance in an unending cycle of systemic inequality. Creative resilience, … encompasses the individual and group act of using drama to expose, critique, explore, claim, articulate, and rehearse strategies of survival and resistance. Creative resilience, then, becomes a practice for real-world resilience, which has applications well beyond the imagined and enacted scenario. (p. 226)

The act of story-listening was an active and dialogic engagement in understanding the role of youth resiliency within and beyond the bodies of participants. Specifically, in the examples that follow, I take note of how the videos we watched led to a validation of experience for the youth participants, and how the resulting conversations created openings through which participants reimagined their own narratives. It is in this critical reimagining that youth built their own understanding of resilience by engaging with storytelling as a site of creative resistance to heteronormativity and cissexism. Creative resiliency, as a site of cultural resistance was emergent for youth participants as they moved towards and away from both story-listening and storytelling.

In the first video that we watched from the *LGBTQ Families Speak Out Project*; we saw a high school student named Dale discussing his reluctance to disclose his family structure
unless he notes the presence of social cues to do so. He also makes a claim that bullies get more confident as they get older and move up through the grades. Both Sasha and Bianca empathically agreed with these statements by nodding along as they watched the video. Then, they carried out a discussion about their own encounters with bullies and homophobia. After disclosing about their own experiences of being victims of bullying at school, Sasha had trouble finding the words to express her thoughts and ideas about these encounters. Here, she is trying to find language in the face of homophobia:

Sasha: …The people at school, everybody knows, at least everybody I hang out with knows I have two moms. Um, I don’t really talk about it a lot. It is not really a topic people really ask about. Except for my friends. They don’t really ask a lot of questions. It feels good that my friends know that it is there, but also that they are okay with it… And um, just to like meet people who at my school who don’t really accept them it kinda gives them that feeling of ooo ooo ooo hmmmmm. The first thing I say to them is why?

Bianca: There is a boy on my bus who is also in my class and he was bullying me about having two moms. It was a while ago 1) he had a super crush on me so I just ignored him for the rest of the year and 2) why does this make you feel good about yourself?

Sasha: Because it probably doesn’t. (Video Transcript, March 14, 2018)

Perhaps what Sasha is trying to say is that when she is faced with homophobia, she confronts people with a question. Yet, this is not clear. What is clear is that it is an emotionally charged encounter that she is describing, and it is this emotional charge that Bianca picks up on as she describes her own encounters with bullies. The room felt as if a big breath had been exhaled and our bodies began to move towards one another. Youth participants sat up straighter, reached their hands in the air, and found connection through their excitement at having their experiences
recognized. As words tumbled out and overlapped their affective intensities were meeting and reforming. In witnessing a vulnerable story - even one in an online video, the youth participants were deeply affected. Behar (1997) believes that when you write vulnerably it creates an opening for people to respond with vulnerability. In the case of these videos, the stories being written are those of vulnerable encounters with the school system, and this affective performance of vulnerability created an opening for participants to engage with their own performances through storytelling. Inspired by Dale’s video, participants shared their anger at being repeatedly singled out with homophobic responses to their family formations. The work of engaging with vulnerability is risky and the outcomes are unpredictable (Ahmed, 2010; Behar, 1997). The unstickling of affective signs from within participants bodies held a risk that the openings it created were too big or too raw which could lead to feelings of shame, disempowerment, anxiety, and/or fear (Boler, 2004; Brown, 2010). These negative affective intensities could also lead participants to separate themselves from the event, story, or encounter, minimizing the potential impact (Prendergast & Saxton, 2016). So, although participants responded immediately and passionately, they also quickly drew back into themselves and there was a collective inhale at the realization that they were performing their vulnerability publicly. The riskiness of these vulnerable openings manifested through the bounce of a knee under the table, or the stumbling over words in trying to talk about experiences, and finally by the silence that overcame the group after a few simple utterances. This leads me to believe that their vulnerability and their storytelling felt raw and scary in those moments.

When Sasha circled back later in the day to this same story about encountering homophobia, it sounded like this, “When someone says, “I don’t like LGBTQ people,” my first response is to ask a question back. Why? Tell me why? What are you afraid of?” (Video Transcript, March 14, 2018). In having the story circulate, move between bodies, and create new
openings, the narrative shifted from one of vulnerability to one of empowerment. Critical theory and applied theatre have become suspect of the term empowerment arguing that often projects with goals of empowerment reinforce, rather than disrupt, social power dynamics (Ellsworth, 1989; Preston, 2009a; Rahnema, 2009; Rodricks, 2018). In the case of Sasha, her empowerment was not a pre-determined project goal, nor was it facilitated as an attempted form of liberation, instead Sasha independently reordered her affective relationship to a single story bringing about a fleeting and perhaps ephemeral moment of standing in her own power. Sasha’s unclear moment of confrontation when being questioned about her family (“And um, just to like meet people who at my school who don’t really accept them it kinda gives them that feeling of ooo ooo ooo hmmmhhmm.) became more pronounced as she gained confidence in her vulnerable performance (my first response is to ask a question back. Why? Tell me why? What are you afraid of?”). The openings created within her body through the witnessing of someone else’s story facilitated recognition and validation of her own stories. As a form of creative resiliency that “allow[s] youths to define positive outcomes on their own terms, and in the context of their own lives” (Gallagher et al., 2017, p. 220) this process emerged as a “strategy for survival and an act of resistance” (Rodricks, 2018, p. 398). When stories circulate affectively outside of a storytellers’ body and then find their way back the stories, their meaning, and the teller are forever changed. They cannot be the same, having encountered and engaged with other bodies. For Sasha this appeared to be true even if the empowerment and resiliency of her story-listening and storytelling was ephemeral. The affective impressions left on bodies, through this initial encounter, was a fleeting form of change that momentarily challenged the ways that marginalizing technologies of affect impacted participants bodies (Zembylas, 2015).

“I Like Explaining My Story”

In another video that we watched, LGBTQ2S+ parent Karleen discusses the challenges of unintentionally outing her children because of her butch gender presentation when she drops
them off at school. Bianca nodded along to the video and through her affective intra-action with story-listening, and the intensity with which her body responded, it appeared that her bodily horizon was being reconfigured as openings multiplied across the threshold of what is knowable for Bianca’s body. The impressions left on Bianca’s body both during and after her encounter with the video demonstrate how her bodily horizon was shifting (Ahmed, 2006). Bianca leaned into the video, she pulled away from the video, she empathically agreed with the video through a repetition of head nodding and audible sighs. Her movements, and the resulting impressions, indicate that there was an affective exchange between Bianca and the video. Her words confirmed that this video resonated for her while also expanding her bodily horizon to incorporate a story that upheld and confirmed her own experiences with homophobia and heteronormativity. Bianca’s bodily encounter was a moment of validation and witnessing through the act of story-listening. Below, both participants respond to Karleen’s narrative:

Sasha: I moved to Mississauga when I was in grade 5 – worst years of my life. When I started talking to other kids and making friends I told them about it, I forget why and I was going on a trip and they asked me, I can’t remember the specific words, but basically, did they ask specifically about my mom and my dad. I said my dad is not coming, it is just my brother and my mommy and my mama. So, they got confused about that and then the next day I didn’t see them. So… and from there on I started getting bullied about it and yeah.

Bianca: Yeah, they called Alicia my Dad. ‘Cause it happens all the time so I nicely explained to them that my mom and dad got divorced and that my mom had a girlfriend and she broke up with that girlfriend and pretty much just explain my life story and they are just like “Yeah, but she looks like a boy.”

Sasha: And like it doesn’t matter what gender she looks like.
Pam: Do you feel like you have to explain your whole life story a lot?

Both: (nodding) Yes.

Sasha: I like explaining my story.

Bianca: I don’t think it is a bad thing. I think it is a good learning opportunity. I feel bad for the kids who like don’t understand that. Because it is not them at all. It is like their parents or guardians or whoever is at home who is teaching them or not teaching these things. (Video Transcript, March 14, 2018)

The idea of having to repeatedly tell their life stories is one that participants accepted as a part of daily life. Through reflection both participants see this experience as one that makes them unique and allows them to educate their peers.

As shown in Figure 6, participants returned to this idea when brainstorming lyrics for an original song. They said, “Being gay doesn’t have to come from somewhere, but being queerspawn you have to explain your whole story.” In this cultural moment youth participants felt that gay identities didn’t require an explanation as to how you became gay, but that they

Figure 6. You have to explain your whole story.
were repeatedly expected to share how they were conceived, who they considered family, and many other intimate details about their lives. This was an everyday encounter through which their bodies and families were being marked as queer failures, which I discuss in the next section.

“This is a Very Different Type of Story”

Halberstam (2011) describes queer failure as both a result of, and antidote to, cis- and hetero-normative culture believing that “gender trouble of the butch variety is very often at the very heart of queer failure” (p. 96). To understand how gender expansive identities are at the heart of queer failure, I turn to Butler’s (1990) notion of performativity. Performativity, as understood and described by Judith Butler, is the notion that gender is constructed through repetitive, unconscious acts and produced through cultural discourses acting on our bodies. Individuals are not performing gender per se, but rather, “discourse [ideas], power relations, historical experiences, [and] cultural practices” act on individual bodies, and are repeated and reinforced through individual performances (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 72). People are simultaneously produced by and re-producing cultural understandings of gender through their behavior and actions. Therefore, gender performativity is not a performance by an individual; instead, gender performativity produces our subjectivity, and individual agency is restricted to the choices made available through citational cultural practices. In other words, identities are limited to the discourses available. Through performativity, gender binaries and static gender categories become defined, policed and upheld by heteronormativity, or in Butler’s words, the “heterosexual matrix,” which is “that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized” (Butler, 1990. p. 151). Therefore, to identify and present at the threshold of available discourses is a failure to live up to expected norms. This failure marks LGBTQ2S+ people in difference but also presents a resistance to the status quo by offering an alternative way of living. Ultimately what makes Halberstam’s (2011) theory of queer failure so
compelling is that in failing to present our identities and our families in terms that are intelligible in relation to cultural norms, LGBTQ2S+ people and families represent both a failure to assimilate and a call for rethinking power dynamics that govern performativity. Both participants felt this tension strongly in their encounters with their peers. They experienced the shaming of their families by bullies, yet they also redefined the spaces they occupy, just by being themselves and by being proud of their family formations.

When Bianca tells a story about mistaken identity between her gender non-conforming mom and her cisgender father, it reveals that even when young people demonstrate their openness to non-normative family structures and gender identities, they continue to operate within a cultural framework that reinforces queer failure. Here is Bianca’s narrative:

Bianca: I was talking to this kid and this kid asked about Alicia and asked if she was a boy… He was asking if my mom was a boy and I had to do the whole thing again [tell my life story] and this other kid I guess overheard and he was like: “Oh that is cool that you have two moms. That is very interesting.” And then my dad came in with my dad’s fiancée, who I call Squishy. So my dad and Squishy came in and the kid who overheard the conversation came up to my dad and asked if he was my mom. And then my dad was like: “I have a beard and a mustache child.” And a bushy beard too. He had a big bushy beard at the time. And this kid was like: “Oh so you are Bianca’s mom.” (laughter) (Video Transcript, March 14, 2018).

Motherhood is often perceived to be a womanly identity because femaleness manifests itself in the act of bearing children (Lubbe, 2013). LGBTQ2S+ parenthood turns this assumption on its head and disrupts notions of femaleness and mothering as heterosexual identity categories (Rich, 1980). The subjectivities of LGBTQ2S+ parents become produced and Othered through the cultural norm of Mother/Father, while the queering of these roles draws attention to the citational practices and norms that define parenthood (Gallagher & Fusco, 2012). In the video
interview that we had watched, LGBTQ2S+ parent Karleeen described how she picks up her children from school and the other children stare and ask questions, in that moment these children are both policing and reinforcing femaleness as a fixed category. In this instance, Karleeen is simultaneously recognizable and unrecognizable as a woman and as a parent. The moment of performativity then becomes not Karleeen performing a gender expansive identity, but rather how the children at school constitute Karleeen—they mark her and her family as different, or, as Halberstam might argue, as failures. This is mirrored in Bianca’s story about being repeatedly asked about the gender identity of her mom, Alicia. The way that Karleeen and Alicia are read as a male/female interrupts the status quo, while the questions posed by the children all work to fix Karleeen and Alicia’s subjectivities through an agreed upon norm. By presenting in gender non-conforming ways at their children’s school Karleeen and Alicia expose the citational practices of normative parenting identities. By not presenting as female, it is assumed that they cannot be mothers. But, if neither are mothers, who are these two people collecting their children from school? These questions expose the assumption that mothers are supposed to be female and female-presenting, and that parental roles are limited to mother and father couplings. The gender presentation of one individual—Karleeen or Alicia— influences the performativity of the whole family. Each member of the family is implicated in exposing cultural discourses of gender through their relationship with one another, the school community, and wider societal assumptions. As children grow, so will their ability to think through and decide how they want to be seen by the world. Parents with expansive gender presentations engage an entire family in the reproduction, disruption, and exposure of normative parenting roles. Cultural influences and discursive practices produce a context in which families are defined and measured, whether they want to be or not.

Bianca further explores the heteronormative failure of her family dynamic in a story about her 8th birthday party and the assumption that her moms’ friend, Travis was “the dad:”
Many years ago when I was only 8 – it was at my 8th birthday party and there was apple bobbing and an ice cream bar that I made myself. And all the children at the birthday party saw some guy who looked old, even though he was probably younger than most of my moms. [The kids said] “Can you tell the dad to get us some ice cream? Can you tell the dad to help us with bobbing for apples? Can you tell the dad to do this? Can you tell the dad to do that?” [It was] my mom’s friend Travis. (Video Transcript, March 14, 2018)

It was unimaginable to the other children that there would not be a father at Bianca’s birthday party. When Bianca mimics her friends by saying, “Can you tell the dad to do this? Can you tell the dad to do that?” she is both amused and infuriated by this narrow definition of family and parenthood. As these repeated citations of failure circulate during the party, and then again upon the retelling of the event, Bianca’s bodily horizon is being punctured by affective intensities again and again (Ahmed, 2006). Her vulnerability created openings where the threshold of what she knows could be reimagined. These openings produced through failure are ones that seem to have had a lasting impact as she attempts to lightheartedly share this story. In our three days together, Bianca’s story of “the dad” was one that she told on three separate occasions and referred to numerous times. It is clear that the affective intensities of this story are “sticky” (Ahmed, 2010), meaning they bind other ideas, energies, and feelings to them.

In thinking about the circulation of affect, I draw on Ahmed’s (2015) notion of “economies of affect.” Ahmed does not believe that affect resides within bodies, signs, and objects but rather is in constant circulation between and amongst them. She states, “signs increase in affective value as an effect of the movement between signs: the more signs circulate, the more affective they become” (p. 45). The circulation of affect attaches itself to signs that are in constant movement and they gain affective value as they are circulated more and more. This stickiness means that signs with a high affective threshold will produce encounters more
regularly, governing the relationship of those encounters. Therefore, the way that bodies intra-
and inter-act in the affective realm becomes determined by dominant signs and objects creating
technologies of affect through what feels ordinary (Zembylas, 2015). Ahmed uses the example
of hate as an affective economy. She explains that when hateful encounters are perpetuated, they
work to “materialize the very surface of collective bodies” (p. 46). As hate circulates through
speech, emotion, and action, it produces an affective economy that is both material and social,
where the subject is simply a momentary landing point, not a destination or point of departure.
Hate becomes more powerful as its circulation increases. This produces a society of control
wherein, for example, signifiers of race or queer sexualities, which often have high affective
value, impact our intra-actions. Expressions of hatred based on these signifiers become
normalized forms of subjugation as they circulate between bodies. Ahmed believes through our
inattentions that which is seen as ordinary, in fact, gains affective value as it works to control
bodies through dominant ideologies and technologies that govern our encounters. In Bianca’s
example about “the dad,” the affective value of normative parenting roles and what is expected
at children’s birthday parties produces the queer failure of Bianca’s family. With its sticky
affective value, this encounter is one that has created openings within Bianca’s body. These
openings produce bodily sensations as the affective intensities circulate within and beyond her
body, creating momentary and ephemeral opportunities for further encounter, for learning to live
differently, and for using failure to create new openings through which affective signs can shift
and change. Furthermore, by not having a dad at the party, Bianca’s body was not the only body
being punctured. The realization that Travis is not Bianca’s dad reintroduces affective intensities
that shift this familial failure towards an opportunity through which the thresholds of what
defines family and whom can be a parent can be expanded. Queer failure then, is the ability to
live at the threshold or on the margins of the normative and to affectively invite others to join us
there.
Online videos as affective signs. Stories of, by, and for marginalized communities are largely missing from popular culture and are an important part of validation, community building, and connection (hooks, 2009; Howley, 2010; Prentki & Preston, 2009; Robson, 2013; Snell, 2014). These stories contribute to an “unsticking” of dominant affective signs by creating new and emergent reiterations from the margins (Ahmed, 2015; Halberstam, 2011). Because young people are spending more and more time in online digital spaces, their sense of self and their identities are being defined and redefined by their encounters online (Harris & Farrington, 2014). As seen above, when middle-school aged children begin to exercise their independence and experience their identities as separate from their parents, engaging with online texts that validate and affirm their experiences, and then, telling their own stories can be integral to their ability to navigate outness at school. By aggregating diverse queer stories through participatory media as a public performance, public pedagogy can be engaged as a site of community, connection, and validation. This can be seen in Sasha’s final take away from the week:

Sasha: Um... like, ... I liked watching those videos of other people’s stories of like how hard it was for them. ... (Video Transcript, March 15, 2018)

For Sasha, this story-listening was an important part of the safe, positive, and queer space that I was striving to create (Goldstein et al., 2007). She was able to hear her story through the words of other people and to see herself and her experiences affirmed. For Sasha this meant that she didn’t feel alone in her struggles at school, that she could bring more of herself into the space, and that there was a good chance that those of us in the room would understand her stories. The videos that we watched were a performance through which normative stories of family, relationships, desire, gender, and sexuality were disrupted. The encounters between these videos and the participants created openings. Both Sasha and Bianca moved towards and pulled away from these videos as they engaged in a dance with vulnerable performance through story-listening. The videos, as an affective provocation, punctured the participants’ bodies creating
opportunities to circulate their stories as affective signs and see them anew. In the space between the videos and their bodies, they were able to wonder about what else is possible in the world while building connection with one another and working towards living differently (Kumashiro, 2002; Zembylas, 2015). The notion of living differently engages queer failure as a possibility for a futurity where queerness and marginality are welcomed alternatives (Halberstam, 2011). By facilitating a safe, positive, and queer moment (Goldstein et al., 2007) through dialogue with the videos’ participants were able to build a strong sense of connection with one another, they were able to find important connections to their own lives, and they were able to begin to imagine what else might be possible as they reflected on their experiences.

Vulnerable performances created an opening that led to connection, across human and non-human bodies in the room. The outcome of sharing these videos was unpredictable and provided an opportunity for participants to sit in the uncomfortable space between past and future, knowing and unknowing, same and different, old and new (Kumashiro, 2002). This “space-between” is where affect resides and where change and disruption can manifest in unexpected and exciting ways: it is a space in which we can come to know differently and to live differently (Zembylas, 2015). In showing videos to participants, I did not know how they would respond or if they would connect with the stories being told. This leap of faith towards an unknowable outcome is risky as both research and pedagogy. Yet, if queer pedagogy strives to deconstruct the self/Other binary by tuning into how bodies move in relation to one another through affective encounters producing a not-yet knowable difference, then we must engage with this riskiness as a way of facilitating queer educational practices and spaces (Airton, 2013; Keenan, 2017; Kumashiro, 2002). The encounter between the videos and participants facilitated openings through an unsticking of vulnerability and led to a not-yet-knowable difference. The intensities that stick to signs with high affective value also stick to bodies, and when we try to unstick and disrupt the way marginalizing affective technologies circulate, it can create holes in
our bodily horizons that feel like a raw and unsettling transformation (Ahmed, 2006, 2015; Boler, 2004). To risk unsticking without knowing where or how affect will land or move is a leap into the unknown, it is a hope for new encounters (Zembylas, 2015). The videos engaged deeply with this approach and the participants’ bodies began to move and intra-act differently.

In *Figure 7*, participants responded to the question “What do you want people to know?” and the response showed a desire to challenge a heteronormative understanding of family. Participants said “Not just one kind of family exists. All the different ways queer people make families.” As a stated goal for the applied theatre workshop, participants wanted to work collaboratively to build a wider understanding about the many different types of families that exist within the LGBTQ2S+ community. In the next section, I explore our starting point for the workshop with participants’ introductions to their families. This initial introductory exercise was a site of queer possibility offering participants the opportunity to describe themselves and their familial connections on their own terms. The activity engaged queer pedagogy through its use of open-ended intra-actions wherein participants could a) bring more of themselves to the classroom, and b) deconstruct heteronormative familial relationships as they engaged in a performance of the everyday.

*Figure 7: What do you want people to know?*
Introducing Our Families

On our first morning together, I asked each person to create Play-Doh versions of their families. In the videos from LGBTQ Families Speak Out Project (Goldstein, 2019a) participants spoke about family tree activities being alienating for young students. Yet, in a workshop with a goal to uncover experiences that have emerged because of these familial differences, it was important to talk openly about our family structures and to work together to (re)define family. In an expansion of the way family is usually talked about I wanted to explore how to invite a conversation about family that centered the experiences of participants and allowed them to define family on their own terms. In doing so, I hoped to see how participants talked about their families, and to begin to think about how those identities move through us on a daily basis. My co-facilitator, Sadie, had this to say about her experiences with family tree activities:

Sadie: We have all these ways that the school system is very narrow. In grade 3, I had to make my family tree and I went to a very progressive school, where they were very accepting of the fact that I had two moms. But also … my godparents were my third and fourth moms, and they had a son, and he was my brother and that was just kinda how our family worked. So, I put him on my tree, just kinda off to the side because he didn’t share my parents. And, I was told I wasn’t allowed to because he wasn’t part of my family because “This is what your family looks like.” And, I was like, “You are telling me what my family looks like?! Sorry. Like, I am telling you what my family looks like.” And, their response was like, “Well you can’t just have everyone put their best friend on their tree.” And, I was like, “Well, why not?” And, their response was, “Well, if I let you do it then I will have to let everyone do it.” “Well, then let them put their best friend on their family tree. Let them put their neighbour on their family tree.” It is that sense that “This is the right way to do it,” and it is going to cause mayhem if suddenly those structures that we believe are true
As an example of queer failure, Sadie’s family structure queered the way in which family was defined. Because her family consisted of connections that did not fall within the normative understandings of “family,” her family failed at being a family and she failed at the family tree activity. Sadie’s family did not “fit in the box,” or rather, her definition of family was beyond the threshold of this teacher’s fathomable definition of “family.” Instead of allowing her to define her family on her own terms, Sadie was told by her teacher who was allowed to be in her family. By attempting to assimilate Sadie’s family into the structure of the tree, her teacher was avoiding what she considered to be the potential anarchy (of queer failure) taking root amongst other students who might also include their best friends in their family trees. This teacher, without knowing it, blocked the affective signs of queer possibility from advancing through her classroom. Sadie’s failure was left to fester as a marginalizing affect within her body instead of opening up possibilities of doing things differently, of queering classroom activities, and of resisting heteronormative intensities from overpowering our understandings of ourselves.

In our workshop, each person took a ball of Play-Doh and worked it in their hands, creating intricate details to represent the people they considered family. As an independent body, the Play-Doh held an important role within this proposition around defining family. It is a malleable material that is easily manipulated. It is a material that is familiar and strange at the same time. It is open-ended, in that the creative possibilities are endless, and for many people, it holds an emotional memory connected to play and discovery. By using Play-Doh as a malleable creative material to (re)define family all of these connections were entangled in a moment of becoming. Each person’s family could look and feel differently. In this part of the workshop, the Play-Doh itself was an opening through which vulnerable stories and failed artistry emerged. It was a queering of the family tree activity that Sadie (and likely, others) have previously found so alienating. The group worked in silence as we shaped and reshaped the Play-Doh.
We then took turns introducing our families. Everyone was animated and excited to share, laughing at how they had chosen to depict their family members. Nervous giggles at the imperfect Play-Doh figures pierced the air as family members were introduced and webs of connection across youth participants and artist-educators was drawn. My family was small and nuclear, consisting of me, my partner, and my kids and my cat, while Sadie, my co-facilitator had a sprawling extended family full of beautiful and unique connections including a range of parents and siblings connected through experience and support as much as through blood and home.

Working with Play-Doh provided an opportunity for wonder (Ahmed, 2015) through which we could examine those closest to us using puppets. By situating the body in the middle of the creative entanglements of working with Play-Doh, there was an opportunity to make the familiarity of ordinary affects strange, to attune to the way that they shift, pull, and push our bodies by isolating that moment of ephemeral encounter and escalating it through aesthetic and creative means, opening up space for Ahmed’s (2015) notion of “wonder” which “works to transform the ordinary… into the extraordinary… by expand[ing] our field of vision and touch” (p. 179). The aesthetic encounter with everyday experiences and ordinary affects provided space for change to occur. It created an opening in which we can notice bodies move, touch, and see in relation to one another. As a form of gender and sexuality education working to create queer schooling moments, this figurative distancing through aesthetic renderings (Goldstein et al., 2007; Keenan, 2017; Snell, 2013; Snell, 2014) opened up possibilities to understand how heteronormative technologies of affect impact the body’s ability to ‘be’ and ‘do’ (Zembylas, 2015).

When Sasha presented her Play-Doh family, she was nervous – her leg was bouncing, her voice cracked, and she tripped over her words. She was the last person to present and began with her friends from school. Then, she slowly and nervously introduced her immediate family.
The tension and energy radiating from Sasha seemed to indicate that as she discussed more and more intimate relationships she became more and more nervous. In these moments, she seemed to be vulnerable. In dissecting how Sasha talks about her family, it is obvious that she does not often do this in public spaces. She discusses the queer elements of her family through language that feels safe. She refers to having two moms as “it”, as if it is a thing that is separate from her.

Here, I have broken down this pattern of Sasha’s explanation:

I don’t really talk about it [having two moms] a lot.

It [having two moms] is not really a topic people really ask about.

It feels good that my friends know that it is there [I have two moms], but also that they are okay with it [having two moms].

I do like talking about it [having two moms], and I do like love that my family is one of those families [LGBTQ families] that you don’t see a lot where I am and I like it [having two moms].

When I started talking to other kids and making friends I told them about it [having two moms]. When I am in public I usually call them by their actual names.

My background, my family. I have two moms and um. We are open to it [having two moms]. … Um. Yeah.

I have experienced both – like when I am proud and happy. And then, there is times when I am like, “Nope. Nothing is going on there.” (Video Transcript, March 13-15, 2018)

For Sasha, defining family on her own terms was terrifying. She had been bullied at school due to her family formation and had become quite guarded. Brown (2010) contends that vulnerability is something that we fear because we worry that it will lead to isolation and shame. But in fact, vulnerability is something that builds connection across bodies (Behar, 1997; Salverson, 2016). It creates an opening in our bodily horizon where others can enter. For Sasha,
that riskiness in trusting a new group of people with her vulnerability was palpable, even with the aesthetic distance of Play-Doh in a room full of supportive people. So, while most of us experienced wonder through the (re)creation of our families as Play-Doh puppets, for Sasha, presenting her family was a vulnerable site of queer failure (Halberstam, 2011). Through her daily experiences, the heteronormative and homophobic technologies of affect had penetrated Sasha over and over again, becoming a part of the way she interacted with the world (Zembylas, 2015). This internalized homophobia became apparent through her affective performance of her family through Play-Doh.

Sasha’s overwhelming vulnerability shifted when I asked each person to perform their morning routines using their Play-Doh figurines as puppets. Their performances took me by surprise because the youth participated in this activity wholeheartedly. The fear of disclosure had dissipated, and now the focus became a rendering of the mundane and the quotidian through fictional performance. Returning to Ahmed’s (2015) notion of “wonder”, where the familiar becomes strange through an aesthetic and collaborative encounter with creation, these performances built energy and engagement through dramatic exaggeration. Kröger & Nupponen (2019) suggest that, “A puppet conveys emotions and thoughts through movement” (p. 393). While Smith (2015) claims that, “puppets have their own power as uncanny and metaphorical objects” (p. 535). Embodying family members through Play-Doh puppets provided new insights into the relationships within each person’s family. In providing participants with the ability to first create puppet versions of their family members and then bring those family members to life as a puppeteer, the notion of wonder was extended for both performers and audience members.

Bianca did two performances of her family’s morning routines, one at her father’s house and one at her mother’s house. Her time with her dad was low key and relaxed, and juxtaposed beautifully with an intense and chaotic morning with her mothers. In a simple performance of the everyday, Bianca provided insight into her relationship with all of her parents based on her
reactions to each of them and their reactions to her and one another. Her moms were both
dramatic while being highly invested in each other and in her. They had opinions about what she
should wear, with whom she should be friends (her mothers directed her away from the bullies),
and who should drive her to school. Hugs, kisses, and overt expressions of love were abundant,
but so too, were the conflicts of being a pre-teen. “Why do I have to wear these weird clothes?”
was uttered in a whiny voice of dissatisfaction with parental choices.

Mom: You look fabulous.

Bianca: Mom, I don’t like this outfit. (Video Transcript, March 13, 2018)

Drop off at school with her father was a direct and simple goodbye:

Papa: “Ok go to school, bye.”(Video Transcript, March 13, 2018)

Yet, with her mothers, it was full of hugs, kisses, and words of advice. An improvised dance
emerged as the Play-Doh performers moved around the table.

Mom: Now get out of the car, um, are you forgetting something?

Bianca: Oh, my backpack.

Mom: Bye sweetie. We love you.

Ma: You forgot to give us a kiss

Bianca: Oh, I’m sorry, I’m sorry.

Bianca: Goodbye.


Bianca: What is it?

Mom: Don’t talk to me in that tone young lady.

Bianca: What would you like, mother dear?

Ma: Give me another kiss. (giggle)

Mom: You have a nice day now and remember wash your hands and there’s… you have
your keys right? Oh, did you forget your keys?
Bianca: *unclear*

Mom: Remember to wear your jacket outside, it’s very important, it’s very cold today.

Bianca: Uh, yeah, I have my keys.

Mom: Let me see, yep, these are your keys. Now put them back in your backpack and have a really nice day.

Ma: And remember to tell Ms. Green about that form. Yeah, we signed that last night and I put it in your backpack and wrote in your agenda and have a great day.

Mom: Give me another kiss.


Mom (to Ma): Honey, look at that Erin girl over there, she is so nice … (to Bianca) it would be great if you hung out with Erin and not that loser girl anymore.

Ma: We do not approve of her.

Mom: Hey honey. Have a nice day. (Video Transcript, March 13, 2018)

Location and time were represented through a written note on the table as Bianca moved through her story. There was a moment when she transitioned from her dad’s house to her moms’ house and the simple act of moving the apostrophe on her location note to signify two mothers was a queer act of rebellion against the status quo, a moment in which her family was defined and then redefined by punctuation. Bianca has a dramatic flair and her performance of her morning routines had the audience – Sasha, Sadie, and myself—crumpling over in laughter. This laughter encouraged her to go further with her depictions. As a form of puppetry Bianca’s emergent performance “exist[ed] in relation to the diverse identities of the group members, affect[ed] the bodies of the people involved as audience members … and involve[ed] them in processes that produce[d] opportunities for … resistance” (Smith, 2015, p. 535). As the audience responded and Bianca’s narrative became more comical, the simple act of re-creating a morning routine became an act of resistance to the status quo. Her mothers’ as puppets brought
their own energy into the room in a tangible and embodied way and this created an affective exchange in and through the performance, the audience, and the material bodies of the puppets. While this performance was true-to-life in that it was based on the experiences of Bianca and her parents, its realness emerged through the resonances between the embodied puppets and the everyday. Gallagher and Jacobson (2017) state, “To judge theatre of the real… according to its true-to-life-ness is to delimit its potential resonances… Theatre of the real’s enactive potential lies precisely within its multiplicity, fluidity, and incomplete or refracted reals” (p. 52). Bianca’s enactment of her morning highlights the potentiality of truth to be an emergent becoming (Ellsworth, 2005; Prentki, 2009b). Her aesthetic rendering of her real-life experiences is an “amplification of ‘real life’ through its aesthetic representations” (Gallagher & Jacobson, 2017, p. 52). The realness of this performance lies in both the amplification of her relationships, but also in her very real feelings and emotions about those relationships. Hanrahan and Banerjee (2017) state that, “drama provides a uniquely engaging and therapeutic way to reflect on, express and explore experiences” (p. 35). Through Play-Doh puppets Bianca was able to engage affectively with an embodied realness of her everyday life, to reflect on that experience, and to have her audience feel the resonance and importance of her family in her life.

All four group members were engaged in sharing our morning routines. It felt intimate to have a window into such a private yet mundane routine. In performing our everyday, we were creating openings in which we could build connection with one another while also understanding the relationality of our families and their dynamics. We become accustomed to our daily encounters and to the way in which affect manifests and intra-acts with our bodies on a regular basis. As defined by Stewart (2007) these are ordinary affects that:

- are the varied, surging capacities to affect and to be affected that give everyday life the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies and emergences.
- They’re things that happen. They happen in impulses, sensations, expectations,
daydreams, encounters, and habits of relating, in strategies and their failures, in forms of persuasion, contagion, and compulsion, in modes of attention, attachment, and agency, and in publics and social worlds of all kinds that catch people up in something that feels like something. (p. 4-5)

Understanding how this “something that feels like something” produces a “society of control” (Deleuze, 1992) is ultimately what many applied theatre projects are trying to do by drawing attention and awareness to often overlooked or unspoken sensations and intensities that infiltrate the ways that bodies move through the world. In diving deeply into an affective performance of the everyday in the form of morning routines, the relational encounters that shape participant’s bodies on a daily basis were brought to the surface. The intensities, the sensations, the compulsions, and the failures of their intimate family relationships emerged. Waking up in the morning is private and vulnerable; we have yet to prepare ourselves with our public masks, we need time to wake up and prepare the performance of how we choose to share ourselves with others (Ellsworth, 1997). The morning routine performances were an opening of wonder as similarities and differences pulled and pushed us around the table (Ahmed, 2015). Our Play-Doh families moved in relationship to one another, and although Bianca’s moms didn’t interact directly with Sadie’s moms, for example, they did intra-act through an exchange of energy and through the performance of the ordinary (Stewart, 2007). The stories of these families came into contact through the act of storytelling and story-listening. This intra-action destabilized internalized homophobia by validating and uplifting each of these important and beautiful stories, allowing them to speak to one another within the creative space of the workshop. As a queer pedagogy the open-ended, creative, and collaborative process facilitated a space where youth and adults could listen to one another, share our experiences, and move towards new ways of being in the world as a site of potentiality (Airton, 2013; Goldstein et al., 2007; Keenan, 2017; Sloan, 2018). We collectively reflected on this exercise later that day through found
Writing Poetry as Collaborative Analysis

We were lucky to have the talented visual artist and educator, Benjamin Lee Hicks do a workshop that involved both found poetry and bookmaking. As an art form, found poetry is accessible, relatively easy, tactile, and it can be collaborative. Benjamin began by having the group create a poem about the first morning of the workshop. Everyone was asked to generate words based on our experiences and stories and then write them on little pieces of colourful paper. We then worked together to order those words into a poem as seen in Figure 8.

*Figure 8: Lots of happy laughter.*
and transcribed here:

The joy of learning and sharing stories together
Creative artists have energy from cookies
So many moms in the morning
Relatable discussions
Justin Timberlake has awesome music
Hilarious morning routines from play-dough life interpretations and improv
Interpretation of moms’
More sharing with our friends
Funny school moments
Family drama routine and thoughtful discussion
Dad’s memory changes
Lots of happy laughter (Transcribed Image/Poem, March 13, 2018)

As an arts-based analysis of our morning together and a co-construction of meaning making when it comes to understanding how the work is being taken up by participants it is clear that laughter, sharing stories, and thoughtful discussion, built connections between and across the bodies of participants and artist-educators. Prendergast (2015) suggests that “Critical poetic inquiry invites us to engage as active witnesses within our research sites, as witnesses standing beside participants in their search for justice, recognition, healing, a better life.” (p. 683). This initial poem provided artist-educators and youth participants the ability to witness one another’s experiences and work alongside each other through a collaborative writing process (Dorsey, 2019). When everyone’s hands were busy it allowed us to be meditative and reflective while still sitting in community. To write, think, and create together is a different type of affective performance, one of quiet reflection and silent connection. The movement of words being shuffled around the floor on tiny pieces of papers held an attractive energy that brought people
together as we silently picked up words, passed them around, tried them out, replaced them, and created new words, thinking and speaking as one without talking— an embodied dance of collective writing. While our first poem was a reflection on the time we had spent together, the second poem shifted towards what participants wanted to say next, building upon the process of collective writing towards a “search for justice, recognition, healing, a better life.” (Prendergast, 2015, p. 683).

With the second poem, there was no proposition as to what it could or should be about, rather it emerged from the same pile of words and with very little discussion amongst youth participants as they wrote the poem together. Vulnerability and failure were easily navigated through this activity as the riskiness of positioning and re-positioning brightly coloured paper required a very different type of bodily opening than a spoken dialogue. Here, the found poetry exercise created an opportunity to explore ourselves and each other in relation to a pile of words on brightly-coloured pieces of paper. These bodily openings emerged as each word punctured participants’ bodies, and then took on new meaning as it was physically moved around the floor and came into contact with other words and bodies. The dialogic engagement of this arts-based activity was one in which suggestions through the placement of a little piece of paper could inspire new ideas. Here is the poem that emerged from this unspoken dialogue between participants:

Hugs and love make a family
Queer unicorn excluded by bullies
The rainbow celebrates pride and joy
Uniqueness is welcomed by everyone
We will be included
At home
At school
And in our community and hearts
Elephant & mermaids tell off bullies with happy sparkles
Apart we are sad
Together, non-judgment and advocacy make learning (Transcribed Image/Poem, March 13, 2018)

In the words of youth participants, this poem suggests a call for inclusion, community, and advocacy. As a collaborative process, this poetry writing provided an opportunity to create a collective story through which everyone could feel ownership and authorship. Prendergast (2015) states that, “Critical poetic inquiry never flinches from catching and voicing hard and shining truths about the way things are, and surrendering to songs about the ways they might become” (p. 683). Through this process participants were able to reflect on their experiences with homophobia while simultaneously looking towards community, support, and the possibility of a more just future.

Figure 9: Poetry, paper, and people.

Like any form of pedagogical practice, how these interventions unfold sometimes (re)produce marginalizing affects in the same moment they work towards disrupting them (Breed, 2009; Preston, 2009a). As seen in Figure 9, participants moved paper around on the
floor, sitting, standing and adjusting as needed, in a collaborative approach to poetic inquiry. By centering youth participation and providing opportunities for Sasha and Bianca to facilitate their own aesthetic tellings, this process of found poetry worked to mitigate the risk of reproducing affective currencies of marginalization (Ahmed, 2015; Zembylas, 2015).

Art for social change is often cited as a way to bridge empathetic understanding, to see the world from another’s point of view (Mitchell, 2001; Rivers, 2013; Shapiro & Hunt, 2003; Wang, 2010). However, this can reproduce a Self/Other binary when it positions an audience as us and the story subject as them, which can contribute to the repetition and circulation of harmful discourses and affective encounters. Kumashiro (2000) states,

In order not to reproduce normalcy schools should engage students in the process of separating the normal from the self, significantly changing how they see themselves and who they are. To put it another way, schools need to queer our understanding of ourselves. By this, I do not mean that we should see the Self in the Other, or the Self as the Other, but that we should deconstruct the Self/Other binary (p. 45).

Two decades ago, Kumashiro asked educators to consider queering understandings of self, yet critical and affective pedagogy that creates space in order to do this work is largely still missing from the literature in gender and sexuality education and applied theatre. Using poetic inquiry in her classroom, Davis (2018) had this to say: “The space shifted to allow room for innovative peer relationships, political dialogue, and joy in the classroom that did not occur in any other classes” (p. 116). While some educators are beginning to create spaces where students can attend to queer pedagogy through relational and aesthetic encounter, Davis is suggesting that this approach to pedagogy continues to be located at the margins of educational practice. In response, this exercise which used the artistic form not only as a site of empathy (which I explore later in this chapter), but also one in which we can complicate ideas, feel with and through one another, attune to the way that affect is circulating through bodies, and respond
with a willingness to explore the unthinkable. As a queer pedagogical practice found poetry engaged artists and youth “to be critically thinking agents that co-construct knowledge and decode oppressive forces with each other and educators” (Davis, 2018, p. 115).

In applied theatre, the artist is rarely a sole muse. Rather, the artist is a community of learners who work together to reflect on their own experiences and knowledges and transform harmful practices by engaging with what is silenced, hidden, or unsaid (Kim, 2009; Sloane & Wallin, 2013; Winston & Strand, 2013). This reflexivity provides space for artists to engage with an audience in a raw and gritty approach to artistic creation. It is the difference between a play that tells a story through a traditional aesthetic and one that reaches out beyond the frame of the stage through a participatory aesthetic (Baer, 2017). Found poetry is an example of the ease with which a participatory aesthetic can emerge. Davis (2018) suggests that “through collaborative classroom norms and pedagogic practices, students can recognize their own ideal personal narratives and create them alongside other students in ways that disrupt oppressive and/or stereotypical identity prescriptions. The co-construction of self and the classroom space allows these students to transcend identity barriers assigned to them more easily” (p. 127).

Found poetry as a pedagogical proposition provided the space to work alongside one another, to challenge one another’s ideas, and to allow an emergent self to materialize in relation to one another (Keenan, 2017). Much like Davis’ approach, the second poem draws on the lived experience of participants while engaging a collaborative art making that is not polished and complete, but rather a process of performance, creation, and presentation that builds on Keenan’s (2017) critical trans pedagogy and is designed to ask questions, open up dialogue, and reveal what is often unspoken or unknown.

Prendergast & Belliveau (2013) suggest, “Poetry has key elements of metaphor in the form of imagery, and rhythm in the use of repetition, line breaks, and even in the visual appearance of words on the page. We turn to poetry because it allows us to express something
that feels inexpressive in prose” (p. 202). When creating this poem, Bianca embraced this open-ended imagery and expression when she suggested that the bullies should be murdered. The rest of the group thought this was a bit harsh and the decision to “tell off” the bullies emerged. Both of these ideas offer insight into the complicated feelings that participants have in connection to being bullied. But this doesn’t become a sticking point, or a singular story of hardship about being bullied. Through this poem, participants do not dwell on their individual stories or hardship, give affective energy to the reproduction of marginalizing discourses, or add currency to oppressive affective signs (Ahmed, 2015; Salverson, 1999). Instead, they ask for things to change. The form of found poetry is an articulated mash-up of ideas allowing space for the complicated relationship between exclusion and inclusion to emerge as a celebration and call to action. Davis (2018) found that, “Identity construction for youth is not finished at the completion of a poem, but that poems, like identity, are constantly being reshaped, and as such are never fully complete” (p. 127). With found poetry this reshaping occurred alongside youth participants as we worked collaboratively to move words around and try them in new places, allowing new meanings and new ideas to emerge in-between bodies. The poem brings together the key elements of applied theatre and anti-oppression education, as a form of gender and sexuality education, through its participant-driven and collaborative renderings. As a queer pedagogy, this type of participant-driven process provided opportunities for narratives that engage across areas of anti-oppression education which I explore in the next section.

**Anti-oppression education and applied theatre.**

Applied theatre and anti-oppression education share many commonalities. They both strive to raise awareness about injustice, shift ideas and understanding about marginalization, celebrate difference, and imagine a world that is more equitable. Kandil (2016) writes that applied theatre approaches social justice work in four ways either by **responding** to injustice, **informing** audiences about injustice, **provoking** new ideas, or **celebrating** difference. Applied
theatre will often engage with all of these approaches at the same time through complex and multi-layered work. When working through found poetry with participants, it became clear that Kandil’s (2016) four approaches to applied theatre resonated with the four approaches to anti-oppression education identified by Kumashiro (2000) in his substantial literature review of anti-oppression education practice. Consider the following:

We will be included
At home
At school
And in our community and hearts (Transcribed Image/Poem, March 13, 2018)

In this excerpt, participants are sharing stories that respond to their bullies, and their encounters with homophobia and cissexism. This response is a juxtaposition to their lived experience where participants demanded safe and inclusive educational spaces for themselves, which is a key feature of what Kumashiro calls “education for the Other.” Then in the same poem, participants offer stories that celebrate their differences, which mirrors Kumashiro’s idea of “educating about the Other” in a way that is not in opposition to heteronormative values, but rather, is a call for new ways of seeing the world through an uplifting queer positionality. This is articulated in this portion of the found poem below:

The rainbow celebrates pride and joy
Uniqueness is welcomed by everyone (Transcribed Image/Poem, March 13, 2018)

By allowing themselves to be vulnerable and offering solutions from the margins, participants are provoking new possibilities. The idea that uniqueness is welcomed and celebrated is a radical notion based on the realities of participants’ experiences in elementary school. This provocation and shift towards what is possible is what Kumashiro calls education that is “critical of privileging and Othering.” This can also be seen when participants say,

Elephant & mermaids tell off bullies with happy sparkles.
In order to understand the hierarchies and relationality of their own positionalities, participants had to express their ideas within the realm of fantasy. Where they sometimes struggle to stand up to bullies, elephants and mermaids have the magic of happy sparkles to engage bullies in a reordering of power and privilege. Finally, participants used their stories, and their art, as a way of informing about and advocating for change:

Apart we are sad

Together, non-judgment and advocacy make learning (Transcribed Image/Poem, March 13, 2018)

These lines offer possibilities about education that “changes students and society” (Kumashiro, 2002) through a deconstruction of queer realities. They reimagine the fantasy of elephants and mermaids and situate the narrative within the reality of their lives. This queering of arts-based inquiry engages Kumashiro’s (2000) call to “explore the difference produced in the unknowable” (p. 46) through a “yet-unexplored perspective on anti-oppression education” (p. 47) by using found poetry as a dialogic opening for young people to navigate vulnerability, failure, and advocacy. Davis (2018) had a similar experience in her classroom stating, “Middle school, the black hole of life, a place brimming with possibilities for great success or epic failure conceived in the adolescent heart, is one significant location to examine identity development as a political project in which poetry serves as a tool of social justice and liberation” (Davis, 2018, p. 115).

The invitation of words on brightly-coloured pieces of paper on the floor provided an open-ended space for a powerful call-to-action to emerge in the form of poetry from the voices and experiences of young people. As a pedagogical approach, poetic inquiry was a queering of traditional approaches to educational practices providing a space to explore and interpret participants’ life experiences while translating that into an affective form of gender and
sexuality education (Airton, 2013; Keenan, 2017). As we finished off our found poetry and booking making workshop artist-educator benjamin had this to say,

I am taking out lots of energy, … you guys gave me lots of energy, thank you, sparkly energy, colourful energy and … good imaginations. Thank you. Awesome. (Video Transcript, March 13, 2018)

benjamin’s reflections on our time together suggest that energy was an important component of the creative work that we engaged in, the sparkly and colourful energy they refer to are an interesting affective observation, because it indicates that this foray into poetic inquiry provided benjamin with a substantive affective response to the imaginative possibilities provided by young people through the collaborative artwork. benjamin’s gratitude for the energy and imaginations of youth participants suggests that the collaborative artmaking was beneficial for benjamin. As a critical-trans pedagogy (Keenan, 2017), this co-intentional learning event meant that adults and youth moved together towards the unknown through the process of inquiry and found it to be mutually beneficial, energizing, and “awesome”.

Sadie had a similar experience, she said, “I am taking… found poetry and inspiration for artmaking and doing something new” (Video Transcript, March 13, 2018) The first day was inspiring for Sadie as an artist. Sasha also reflected on the experience saying, “I am taking home the excitement for tomorrow and I love this.” Creating poetry together opened up the potentiality (Sloan, 2018) for the adult and youth participants to collectively navigate their generational differences and the associated power dynamics of a workshop setting by collaboratively entering into an open-ended process of creative discovery (Keenan, 2017). Despite the important advocacy work that the poem does as a finished product, it was through the creative process and the resulting affective encounters that participants were excited, inspired, and energized. Towards the end of the workshop, Sasha and Bianca again took the lead
in collaborative artmaking as they worked towards personal mask performances which I share in the next section.

Figure 10. Together, non-judgment and advocacy make learning.

**Personal Masks as Affective Performance**

Personal masks were the final individual performances on the last day of the workshop. They were a chance to create a piece at the end of three days together that emerged from writing prompts where each person engaged in self-revelatory work. It is important to note that the reference to mask in the name of this activity is connected to the idea that our stories are always a mask that we wear, rather than to a physical mask creation or performance. The writing
prompts for this exercise were:

   This one time when…

   Something that was life changing…

   Something that was really hard… (Journal Transcription, March 15, 2018)

After each prompt, the group wrote in silence for 5 minutes allowing the writing to go in any direction with the goal to simply keep putting words on paper. It is my belief that as a community-based artist, as an educator, and as a researcher it is important to make myself vulnerable if and when I am asking participants to make themselves vulnerable. By modeling vulnerability, an invitation of openness and respect is created. If only participants are being asked to engage with bodily openings through self-revelatory work, a significant power imbalance is reinforced within the workshop dynamic. Being vulnerable in community together minimizes the fear of exposing our inner selves. This exercise took me out of my comfort zone as the prompts brought up experiences with my partner and with my family that felt relevant and worth exploring. But I was left with two questions, “How much do I reveal in this setting? Can I explore this self-revelatory work about the complexity of marriage and long-term relationships in a way that is appropriate for young people?” (Field Notes, March 15, 2018). As I worked through these questions and created a performance piece about my relationship with my partner, Sadie, Bianca, and Sasha created their own pieces. While everyone in the space performed a personal mask, it was the work of youth participants that was the most compelling when I was reviewing the footage, their performances engaged deeply with vulnerability, their nervousness was palpable. The adult performers (myself and Sadie) had more experience drawing on personal narratives to create aesthetic works and therefore our performances didn’t engage in the risky and relational to the same extent. Our affective performances were more guarded, more incomplete, with less space for interpretation or discussion. Therefore, I have chosen to analyze the youth performances, in their messy, aesthetic, and collaborative meaning making below.
During this creative process, Sasha seemed eager to share her story of hardship. She had discussed and embodied moments from “the worst year of [her] life” throughout the three-day workshop, and it seemed she wanted to continue to explore the period of her life when she moved to a new school and was bullied for having two moms. She wanted to take this opportunity to share more of this story and dive deeply into an analysis of her experiences through her artwork. But, she didn’t seem to know where to start. Her creative process involved a lot of starting and stopping, sitting down in quiet reflection and then engaging in unrelated conversation. In Figure 11, Sasha is working diligently on her script for her performance. Her raised shoulders and tapping pencil suggest that she is holding her story within her body and that the act of putting it on paper is one full of affective intensities. My co-facilitator, Sadie, coached her through the writing process gradually. While Sasha appeared to be nervous to share her story, she also appeared determined to transform her experience into something new that facilitated connection, validation, and empowerment. When it came time to perform, Sasha sat
with a red balloon as she read her final script which is transcribed here and seen in Figure 12:

This balloon represents acceptance. And acceptance is the glue that holds us together. Just keep that in mind. Moments! Moments in time that are one of a kind. But only some you actually keep. And those are special ones. And for me there’s a couple, like when my life changed when my two moms got married, and it was hard adjusting to my new mom even though I didn’t call her mom, and then as I grew up I also started to realize that people say stuff like: “How is your mom and dad doing?” And then I told them my situation, and not that that was hard enough for a 6-10 year old, I had to adjust to that feeling of.. oh.. with no acceptance at all. (Video Transcript, March 15, 2018)

Figure 12. Sasha’s journal.

Sasha’s performance is deeply personal and still in a process of becoming. Through her monologue, she is trying to make sense of this shift in her family formation and how dramatically it changed her life at home and at school. When her mother got married to another
woman, it was a defining moment in her young life and evinced a tension between her love for
her family and her celebration of her queer identity. Her deeply wounded soul from extensive
bullying and exclusion was haunting for an audience. As a performance event, this monologue
and balloon were still in process. They were an affective rendering of a story in need of
circulation. The affective intensity of this performance had the audience reaching towards
Sasha, engaging with her pain, her aloneness, and her sadness. Her performance was not
polished, complete, or rendered in a way that would extend to an accidental audience, that is, an
audience that is unknown to the performer, topic, or issue (Prendergast & Saxton, 2016). Yet,
with this intentional audience—people who had spent a few days getting to know Sasha—this
performance provided openings through which we could build understanding and conversation
between people. In this case, it was a way for Sasha to continue to work through her life
“moments” to try to understand what they mean to her now, many years later, and to understand
how they have shaped her identities and relationships.

Figure 13. Sasha’s vulnerable performance.

As a participatory aesthetic of affective performance, Sasha’s performance was one that
had engaged deeply with the idea of acceptance. It opened up space for questions to surface,
such as, “What is acceptance? What does it mean? Where is acceptance found? “How does
acceptance (or lack thereof) impact us? Her performance drew on and displayed affective connections and embodied dialogues about how acceptance (as represented by the balloon and seen in Figure 13.) is important, necessary, and yet also fragile.

Sasha’s work was generative and powerful on both a personal and community level because it created an opening in which she could move towards vulnerability and the other people in the room and consider some of the ways in which she could live differently. Kushner (2016) states, “Theatre is of vital importance today because it slows our pace – it requires us to take the time to actively piece together another’s narrative. Theatre publicly invites us to be listeners, thinkers, and feelers within a general social climate that tends to dissuade (if not sabotage) reflection, breath, and critical thinking” (p. 87). The slow pace of creation, the invitation to breathe together, and the reflective performance provided space for Sasha to build an engaged sensation as a political act of becoming (Ellsworth, 2005; Prentki, 2009b). As a signifier of love, and a proposal for more acceptance, the balloon held a powerful space and represented a shift towards new possibilities, new sensations, and new ways of being. As a form of queer pedagogy, self-revelatory work is one that shifts the thresholds of possibilities by engaging from the margins before drawing affective intensities inward and then pushing them back out with new affective currency (Ahmed, 2015; Zembylas, 2015). This outward momentum through self-revelatory performance is an example of the deeply personal work on a political stage. The story is personal but the medium is public. This move between the personal and the public has the ability to influence change in both locations as it queers our relationship to ourselves, the world around us, and our understandings of performance. Sasha’s monologue about acceptance, celebration, and difference, facilitated an exchange of sensation creating opportunities for a relational shift in knowing and living differently (Kumashiro, 2002; Zembylas, 2015).
The role of empathy. It could also be said that as an audience we felt empathy towards Sasha, her story of hardship, and her desire for change. We affectively reached towards her, understanding her emotions through our own experiences, and in doing so we were momentarily transported to her world (Nicholson, 2005). Yet, empathy, as it is elsewhere (Boler & Greene, 1999) is a contested term in applied theatre. The controversy lies in empathy’s relationship (or lack thereof) to action and change. Recent arguments believe that empathy can hinder social change by collapsing difference, and simplifying complex ideas and situations into that of feeling (Baer et al., 2019). This argument dates back to Brecht (1964), who believed that when audiences are too emotionally invested in and empathetic with the characters on stage, it becomes impossible for them to engage in critical thought. Brecht believed that audiences must contextualize the experience of the individual within the social and political moment in order to facilitate social change. For Brecht, this became the rationale behind many of his aesthetic departures from modernism, including epic theatre and the alienation effect. Brechtian approaches to figurative distance through critical thought, and Freire’s (1996) goals of critical consciousness, can be seen in contemporary applied theatre projects across the globe and have been used as core principles for applied theatre facilitators who work to ensure their performances are addressing wide reaching social goals (Prendergast & Saxton, 2016; Thompson, 2009a). While critical thinking is an important goal of applied theatre work, prioritizing it over empathy relegates the role of emotionality and affect as unimportant factors in facilitating change. What if we did not dismiss empathy as “too emotional” but rather, took a feminist stance and saw emotions as valid and important ways of knowing (Boler & Greene, 1999, Campbell, 1994, Jaggar, 1996)? Applied theatre performances with intended social outcomes must find ways to balance and layer these different impulses.

For Sasha, her mask was personal, and it was also an invitation to engage in empathy through performance. Salisbury (in Baer et al., 2019) suggests that this emotional labour on the
part of the performer is a form of “startling empathy,” where the emotional labour that is involved in empathy is not the sole responsibility of the audience, but rather it is a dialogic exchange between performer and audience. Startling empathy departs from traditional empathy in that it is an active form of emotional engagement rather than a passive recognition of similarity. So, while all of us in the room could empathize with Sasha’s story about her mothers’ getting married and shared the realization that the world is unkind to people with diverse gender identities and sexualities, it was in the space between Sasha and her audience where empathy became a way for us to relate and engage with one another. Her call for acceptance had a lasting impact on us because of the emotional connection that she facilitated between us through her performance. This dialogic exchange of empathy emerged through the rendering of a collaborative performance between audience and performer. This notion of relational aesthetic (Gray, 2019) —listening and responding with our minds and our bodies—is a queering of theatrical and educational spaces, and of what it means to do gender and sexuality education work through performance. This was not a performance offering a simple message or a muted call for acceptance. This was an embodied exchange of affect that led to a not-yet knowable way of being and doing.

**Emergences in the moment of performance.**

Like Sasha’s performance, Bianca’s performance was also collaborative in the way that it was delivered. Bianca’s mothers had expressed concern about Bianca being bullied for having lesbian moms and were grateful for a space where Bianca could explore and connect with others who had similar experiences. They felt that the three-day workshop was timely in terms of Bianca’s experiences with homophobic bullying at school. When it came to the personal mask exercise participants were given the opportunity to create a performance about anything of their own choosing. They were invited to follow their own creative impulses based on the writing prompts. Through this work, Bianca had other fears emerge around her family formation that
had nothing to do with having two mothers.

Figure 14. Bianca’s original script.

Bianca’s personal mask performance created through song and puppetry showed a vulnerable ladybug terrified of being abandoned by her father when he meets and marries a cow, named “Moo-lisa.” The performance had two versions, one where the father and daughter never meet the cow and they happily play board games together, and a second where the ladybug daughter is forgotten as the father and cow head off in a hot air balloon. The planned version of this performance, as rehearsed by Bianca and scripted in her journal (Figure 14.), included only the first version with the father and the daughter. In this version, the daughter accidently cuts off the father’s mustache and then he bans her from using scissors. Salverson (2016) discusses the power of being seen when engaging in applied theatre work about trauma. She states, “it was difficult for the students and the audience; it stirred things up, was unfinished, probing, visceral, and angry. This kind of dramatic enactment illuminates disturbing corners of our lives but it does more than this – it helps us feel” (p. 156). For Bianca, the vulnerability of performing her story helped her feel, but the incomplete and probing performative inquiry also helped her think.
Through the act of being seen, and having her story witnessed, Bianca was able to transform that story into an emergent and relational narrative that examined her feelings in the moment of performance. When the planned version ended, this is what transpired:

Bianca (as Moo-lisa): I will pause the story here and tell you what would happen if I came in at this moment.

Moo-lisa: “Hello my name is Moo-lisa”.

Papa: “Hello Moo-lisa”.

…

Moo-lisa: “I love you just the way you are.”

…

They get in hot air balloon.

Daughter: “What about me? What about me?”

Papa: *(singing)* “Oh, I can show you the world. Shining, shivering, splendid! Tell me Moo-lisa, when did you last let your heart decide?”

Daughter: “I have had enough of this.” *(Destroys hot air balloon).* “Hahaha. This is what happens when you ban me from using scissors.” *(Moo-lisa falls to her death.)*

Papa: “Moo-lisa! Nooooooo”…

Daughter: *(singing)* “Papa, I do not appreciate that you took my love of scissors away from me. … You have caused me so much strife.”

Papa: *(singing)* “But Moo-lisa was to be my wife.”

Daughter: *(singing)* “Oh papa, I did not know. I am sorry….”

*(Papa grieving Moo-lisa)*

Moo-lisa: “But I did not come into the story. So, it actually went like this.”

Papa: “Oh darling, we are at the hot air balloon place but the people here were not too careful, so let’s just go home and play board games.”

Daughter: “Ok”

The end. *(Video Transcript, March 15, 2018)*
Through affective performance and improvisation, Bianca began to connect her larger life experiences, fears, and ideas to an emergent becoming (Ellsworth, 2005; Prentki, 2009b). Her rehearsed performance held only a fraction of the aesthetic impact of her final performance because by introducing the character of Moo-lisa, Bianca used performance work to navigate her feelings about Moo-lisa, her father, her own role in his life as his daughter, and her relationship to the newlyweds. Her deepest fears around being abandoned by her father were not scripted or known through cognitive thought. Instead, they were an affective rendering that manifested—as unexpected and messy as they were—in the moment of performance. The performance created an opening where she could be vulnerable, sing loudly and with passion, and follow her impulses, which meant cutting up balloons to release her frustrations. Bianca approached her performance with “the impossible bravery and willingness of the clown” (Salverson, 2008, p. 246) where she was able “to step out from behind a mask of solidarity and to engage with Others, to approach [an audience] with a vulnerable availability that makes witnessing an active and transitive encounter” (p. 254).

The riskiness of this type of performance facilitates a connection to both the performer and the performance through engagement with the not-yet known becoming of difference (Kumashiro, 2000). Because of its relationality, this emergence of the not-yet knowable outcome in the moment of performance is one of the most profound and dialogical components of a participatory aesthetic. The performance itself is not fixed: it remains open to possibilities and new ideas (Baer, 2017). When applied theatre works to create openings in this way, where performance is not an end product but rather a process-driven creative entanglement, the possibilities are limitless (Keenan, 2017; Sloan, 2018). Performance, as an undetermined outcome, is a queering of what it means to make theatre that is relational, affective, and constantly shifting. Salverson (2008) describes how this phenomenon of foolish witnessing through relational vulnerability unfolded in her work, “She does not know the outcome of her
engagement, but she is available to their request to reveal more of herself. She responds without hiding what makes her vulnerable. She discovers it is this very vulnerability that allows them to step forward to her” (p.252). As a form of affective sensation, the emergent performance of Bianca’s relationship with her father opened up a sensory exploration of possibility that was deeply personal and yet also relational. Feeling fed by the exchange of energy with the audience created a relational and participatory aesthetic of playful discovery (Baer, 2017; Gray, 2019; Keenan, 2017). Therefore, by paying attention to her body, and following her performative impulses, the story that emerged from Bianca was one that was unexpected.

Figure 15. Following performance impulses to reveal the (un)known.

In Figure 15. Bianca is attempting to navigate these impulses as she performs, she has puppets, and scissors, and a balloon that all require her hands. This had not been the case in rehearsal and here she is trying to figure out how to physically represent the shifts in her narrative in the moment of performance. As researchers, artists, and educators, when we hold space for the unexpected we create openings for new ways of knowing, and being, and doing (Airton, 2013; Keenan, 2017).

Attuning to the creative process as a relational and collaborative, performance enables artists to respond to emergent tensions of applied theatre practice by insisting the affective realm
of theatrical encounter is as important to the personal and political work of applied theatre as any other component (Gallagher, 2016b; Thompson, 2009a). During the creation of personal masks, the applied theatre work was self-revelatory, deeply personal, and created a powerful space for the youth to understand their everyday experiences and identities on their own terms.

Performance provoked an ephemeral exchange of affect with no clear demarcation between artist and audience. This re-imagining of performance provided new insights into aesthetics, participation, and authorship because these components of applied theatre that often sit in tension were no longer at odds with one another, but rather, worked together by moving in and through one another to explore and analyze participants’ lived experiences. By situating the participants’ bodies in the middle of a creative entanglement, there was an opportunity to witness and validate narratives in the same moment they emerged. This queering of performance allowed the tensions of collaborative performance to surface by creating differently—participation guided the aesthetic choices rendering authorship as emergent. Applied theatre as an aesthetic and participatory art form materialized in the space between creation and storytelling building an affective performance that was not limited to the stories the youth told, but rather, encompassed the stories they live as depicted through intra-actions, movements, and art.

Summary

In this chapter I answered the following research questions: (1) How does applied theatre work as a form of collaborative queer pedagogy for young people from LGBTQ2S+ families?; and (2) How does affect circulate in and through the experiences of two young people with LGBTQ2S+ parents? Through story-listening as affective performance, Play-Doh puppets, found poetry, and personal masks, this chapter provided insight into how collaborative applied theatre worked as a form of queer pedagogy for young people form LGBTQ2S+ families while demonstrating how affect circulates in and through the experiences of youth participants. In this
chapter, I have demonstrated that through a collaborative approach to applied theatre, vulnerability and failure created openings for participants, facilitators, artists, and researchers to connect, move, and live differently (Kumashiro, 2002; Zembylas, 2015). I explored how affect circulated in and through these moments of vulnerability and failure both in the creative work and lived experiences of participants. I then demonstrated how openings across participants’ bodies created the potential for the emergence of new bodily horizons, and how participants used those openings to better understand themselves, their experiences, and their families as they worked to play and create together (Ahmed, 2006). I also discussed how these punctured bodies are an essential component of queer pedagogy as they facilitate moments of connection and sensation leading to living differently (Airton, 2013; Keenan, 2017). Finally, I introduced collaborative performance as an affective practice with the belief that in queering our creative and emotional approaches to vulnerability, failure, connection, and embodiment, we work towards an understanding of how to strategically and deliberately facilitate queer pedagogy as a site of embodied potentiality (Sloan, 2018). In the next chapter, I move into a discussion about how embodiment and connection between and across bodies, led to movement. This movement continued to open up possibilities for living differently as a form of advocacy and change.
Chapter 5: Connection + Embodiment = Movement

In this chapter, I will explore how connection between bodies facilitated affective and embodied movement within this applied theatre project. I will demonstrate that bodily openings from vulnerability and failure (as discussed in the previous chapter) had participants moving both towards and away from one another while facilitating recognition of their similarities and differences. Recognition became a building block for participants to understand themselves as individuals, and as agents of change, within the wider world. Participants’ stories were told through voice, movement, and performance and by sharing moments of intensity through everyday stories, the body of both the teller and the listener were punctured (Ahmed, 2006). In what follows I explore how critical awareness and action emerged through structured and unstructured movement by creating openings for living differently and building an embodied understanding of queer pedagogy as something that can and does occur within the affective realm (Manning, 2016).

In this chapter I address the following research questions: (1) How do affective moments infiltrate, intensify, and emerge through participants’ daily lives, and what impact does this have on their bodies during the applied theatre workshop?; and (2) What are the possibilities and limitations of performance as a political and educational tool for young people from LGBTQ2S+ families to learn about and for themselves? I begin with a discussion about drama warm-up and improvisation activities as a form of collective movement. I propose that these activities are a large component of applied theatre work in and of themselves, not necessarily as a building block towards larger goals of applied theatre such as community-building or performance creation (Campano et al., 2010). I then turn to movement as a way of analyzing the thresholds of a structure of feeling (Williams, 1977), and position songwriting as an affective practice through which we can understand everyday life, build connections, and facilitate new becomings (Ellsworth, 2005; Prentki, 2009b). Finally, I explore the dance form of Vogue
Femme as a way of restructuring the ways that bodies move and challenging cisgenderism by engaging differently (Manning, 2016; Zembylas, 2015).

**Warming up Our Bodies**

*I stand in the middle of the room. Blindfolded. Holding a foam sword. The participants are attaching clothespins to my body. I am completely at their mercy. I wait patiently until one of the young people gives me the signal. Finally, we are ready to begin. Everyone takes a step back and I lift my sword. I am surrounded by three eager bodies competing to see who can collect the most clothespins without getting hit by my sword. I hear someone tip toeing towards me. I swing with all my might hoping to connect with a body, any body. Someone drops to the floor and the room erupts in laughter. Someone on my other side grabs at a clothespin and I frantically try to regain my position and swing my sword in that direction. This goes on for a few minutes; me swinging, hitting, laughter, clothes pins flying, bodies moving, coming towards me, avoiding the sword, dropping to the floor, crawling, bending, swinging, leaping, lounging, rolling, ducking.*

*(Field Notes, March 14, 2018)*

Drama-based workshops, such as may happen in applied theatre, rely heavily on warm-ups, games, and improvisation as an important component of building community and facilitating connection between participants (Blatner, 2007; Neelands & Goode, 2000). These games work to break down inhibitions through embodied movement. Using play, participants come together and engage their bodies in connection. Often, there is little need for words because that connection is being built through the relationality of bodies in movement. These games do important work in undermining power relationships between artist-educators and participants because during these games, we are all participants. In the example above, I am blindfolded and actively swinging a foam sword at my research participants—children. This is an unexpected relationship between researcher/facilitator and youth participant, where the power roles are subverted through the intensity of physical encounter. It is a leap into the unknown and an example of how to queer researcher-participant relationships within an applied theatre workshop. The power of playing together creates affective movement—we breathe deeply and in unison, we laugh, and we become unstuck from our established ways of knowing and being. Playing creates opportunities to engage in an un(learning) of established ways of
being in relation to one another—especially within the workshop dynamic. Approaching one another in this way creates space where we queer our pedagogical space through collaborative play (Keenan, 2017). When engaging with the data from this project, I was not surprised to see that these games tended to create movement and energy. This is often their purpose. But, I was surprised to see that the more structured improvisation games like Elevator or Park Bench seemed to be very important contributors to facilitating queer moments and queer potentiality (Airton, 2013; Goldstein et al., 2007; Sloan, 2018).

Structured and silly improvisation games are, admittedly, not my favourite pedagogical tool, and one that I do not often offer to a group without having them requested. In my experience, I have found that they are overused in drama classrooms as a device to fill time and entertain students. The work that emerges often results in what Brook (1996) calls “deadly theatre,” meaning it is uninspired, often times boring, and rarely viscerally engaging to an audience. In suggesting that improv games often lead to deadly theatre, I do not discount the importance of improvisation as an essential tool in devising, collective creation, and applied theatre. Generative improvs that explore a theme or idea are a form of physical brainstorming and are serious work, they engage trial and error as a way of playbuilding, and often sit at the heart of applied theatre creation (Gray, 2016; Norris, 2007). However, the games that the youth participants were drawn to during this workshop and the ones I am referring to as “deadly theatre” did not contribute to the thematic dialogue of the workshop. They did not engage any type of reflective or generative process. They did not work to build dialogue or contribute ideas. These games were simply for fun, and were not something to which I paid much attention during the workshop. The youth facilitated and carried out these kinds of games usually while I was charging camera batteries, and changing SD cards. Yet, when I watched video footage while making notes on movement and energy, the improv games that I dismissed in the moment as filler were important if not integral to vulnerability, connection, and movement throughout
the workshop. This suggests that as researchers and educators our valuation about what matters is often different than what participants or students might find compelling, interesting, or important.

In conducting my analyses, I spent considerable time with the footage of these games trying to understand what it was about them that created so much energy amongst youth participants. For example, *Park Bench* is a game in which one person sits on a park bench, and another person approaches them, attempting to make the first person so uncomfortable that they get up and leave the bench. This was done through actions such as singing Justin Timberlake songs, pretending to vomit, invading personal space, or participants dragging themselves across the floor. What emerged from this data is that these improv games seem to be a form of productive failure: because they opened up a space to try out the unexpected without the risk of needing the unexpected to succeed. The notion that failure can be productive has been written about in applied theatre. Hughes (2013) states, “artists make use of the generative capacities of failure to create points of encounter, extend worlds of relationship, express compassion and posit the possibility of a queer and queering practice of performance” (p.153). Hughes suggests that to creatively fail is an active queering of performance by situating the relational possibilities of failure as a form of compassion and potentiality (Sloan, 2018). This echoes, Halberstam’s (2011) notion of queer failure which “offer[s] more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world” (2–3). Failing at performance, at theatre, and at improv, can be productive because it creates a space where new emergences can become possible. During improvisation games, youth participants were able to extend their relationships with one another and the wider world in surprising and cooperative ways. While educators and students continue to resist failure as a generative or productive practice (Gallagher, Mealey, & Jacobson, 2018), artists contend that “failure, as integral to foolishness, holds the potential to be productive. Failure [is] an integral part of performance-making” (Gray, 2019, p. 13). Therefore, these games
were fundamental in building connection within a group setting. As a performer in an improvised scene, actors must work to expect the unexpected, be responsive, live in the moment, move in relation to the offerings of one’s scene partner, while also taking risks during performance. The failure of these improvised performances was witnessed by an audience and became a collective failure through which bodies moved together. Understood as a productive failure of collective movement, improv (in any form) is a queering of how we can come to learn—not just about ways to theatrically engage, but in the way we allow this unexpectedness to create openings in our bodies (Ahmed, 2006). The ability to say “yes, and…” as required in any sustained improvisation game, is an invitation for bodies to move towards one another. This facilitated riskiness through which bodies connected created energy that was an essential component of both queer educational pedagogy and applied theatre. Energy as a form of affective movement transformed the ways in which bodies engaged. These improvisational games had participants moving from performer to audience and back again, and with such a small group, this movement was done quickly and the roles between on and off stage were blurred. There was little time to think between scenes as audience members offered suggestions to the characters and the dialogue of laughter was built through the group.

If I extend the offerings of applied theatre as a socially driven performance practice to include process-driven improvisation games as a form of performance-based anti-oppression education, having one participant act upon another in silly ways (eg. pretending to vomit on another participant) demonstrates how those two bodies connect and engage through affective performance. In that moment, the participants are not Sasha and Bianca, rather, they are two people navigating an uncomfortable encounter on a park bench. They are caught up in the absurdity of the moment, and by moving towards one another during the scene, their current way of being and moving becomes unstuck. Salverson (2008) proposes that “clowns hurl themselves forward into failure” (p. 246). In the improvisation games, youth participants, and
artist-researchers, took on the role of the fool by responding to the unexpected in surprising and often comical ways. Gray (2019) tells us that “foolishness can be understood as engaging bravely, vulnerably, experimentally with a willingness to be wrong and try anyway” (p. 12). It was in the willingness of performers to keep trying, to change tactics, and to attempt a new approach when their idea was not working that engaged a foolish energy during the improv games. When the signs that attach themselves to our bodies become unstuck in a foolish way and our vulnerabilities emerge, performers, youth, and artist-educators, can start to move together towards new encounters, new ways of being, queer ways of being (Ahmed, 2015; Airton, 2013). In this sense, “foolishness … like imagination, opens up potentially productive options that are unknown” (Gray, 2019, p. 13). Through the affective encounter of laughter, happy tears, and comedy, the foolish performance of improvisation was an affective language that opened up uniquely queer ways of being in community. In the next section I continue to explore movement as a queer way of being.

**Bodies Connecting Through Movement**

Movement has the ability to drill deeply into our bodies and allow the intensities that build in us to become loosened, shift, and emerge anew. Throughout the workshop, the group engaged in movement in a number of different ways. This allowed us to connect to ourselves and one another, and to understand the unspoken thresholds of our daily encounters. Movement became a necessary way for the group to bond, focus, engage, and become. The reflection below follows the completion of an impulse-based activity where we collectively moved around the room, stopped, started, walked, ran, and laid down on the floor:

Bianca: Calmness. I feel calm.

Sasha: Kinda like going how your body wants you to go and then you are doing that and that is calm. You aren’t doing what you have to, you are doing what your body feels it
wants. And, you’re doing that.

Pam: I feel connected to all of you. I think there is a magical quality to that type of energy exchange that is beyond what is conscious. I feel more in my body … I feel more connected to my body and to the space and to the people in it and to the energy that is moving throughout it.

Sadie: I feel great. I also feel connected to this group now. I need to connect in an embodied way. That is for me where my power comes from. It’s a body language. And that is the language I feel most comfortable speaking in. Um, so, and it is how I begin all my devised processes. …It allows us to really be in the room together and to lose what maybe exists for us out there, which can often stifle creativity in an artistic practice.

(Video Transcript, March 14, 2018)

In the excerpt above, each person speaks to a sense of feeling calm and feeling connected to one another, the room, the work we are doing, and our bodies. Research-creation is a process of engaging affect through material intra-actions and defamiliarizing data by reframing, unknowing, and becoming as researchers explore an entangled process of meaning-making (Barad, 2003; Springgay & Rotas, 2014). This is what this exercise accomplished: it reframed our understanding of language, connection, and knowing. Sasha stated, “you are doing what your body feels it wants.” As students, educators, researchers, and artists, listening to the desires of our bodies within educational spaces is limited. To take the time and pay attention, to follow our impulses, and then allow those impulses to be a language through which we can speak to others in the room is an incredible queering of educational praxis because it is situated within and between our bodies. When bodies come to know through their relationship with one another a mangle of meaning is created (Jackson, 2013).
It is from this mangle of embodied encounters that I am interested in invoking Williams’ (1977) “structures of feeling” as an important analytical framing. Williams suggests that being and knowing in the present moment is affected by material encounters and that “although [affect is] emergent or pre-emergent, [it does] not have to await definition, classification, or rationalization before [it] exert[s] palpable pressures and set[s] effective limits on experience and on action” (p. 132). Therefore, a structure of feeling as a set of entangled, affective, and embodied encounters produces control and governance around how to be and operate within its structure. The structure of feeling itself affects a body’s ability to move and act creating a threshold at the edges where something new has the potential to be formed. It is at the threshold that the structure of feeling moves in a constant state of becoming (Ellsworth, 2005; Prentki, 2009b). By pushing against this threshold, like we did in the above movement activity, I believe we can gain new insights into how the structure of feeling operates, providing a deeper analysis into normative and marginalizing negotiations and emergences taking place within that structure. The structure of feeling as a site of inquiry intensifies tensions within an applied theatre process providing insights into participants’ lived experiences and creative processes.

To better understand this emergence of queer possibilities from the margins of what is currently knowable, I present a series of diagrammatic cuts into the data that demonstrate the embodied thresholds of the structure of feeling. Diagrams, according to a Deluzian understanding, are not representations of experience/thought/data on a graph or chart, but rather are “self-organized enfoldings … expressed as an open process that is emergent, vital, and abstract,” (Springgay & Zaliwska, 2015, p. 3). Diagrams then, are not representations of something that has taken place or become known, but an emerging process of knowledge production. Diagrams do not make sense of an event, but rather are their own event in the making (deFreitas, 2012). According to Springgay and Zaliwska (2015) “diagrams are not representations of thought, but thought itself” (p. 139). The diagrams that I examine here are
embodied moments within the creative process, and while they are represented on the page through the written word, it was the experience of bodies moving together that facilitated new understandings. Therefore, these embodied movements, presented here as a diagram, are producing new thought in the moment that they unfolded. In the examples that follow, I have cut into these diagrams creating a new and evolving exploration of the diagram as living data, where “cutting is a process of entering data in order to disrupt stratifying tendencies” (Springgay & Zaliwska, 2015, p. 137). Through this cutting practice, I am interfering with the diagram as a determined and complete piece of datum, and instead am exploring a point of affect and sensation that exists in movement within the larger diagram—a site of becoming or what Springgay and Zaliwska (2015) call “data-in-the-making” (p. 137). These cuts are not digital cuts into the video of the workshop (although they could be), instead they are cuts into the completed diagram as an experience of embodied potentiality (Sloan, 2018). The cuts are snippets of our time together that are being examined and explored in conversation with other cuts. They are a snapshot of a bigger diagram. Consider the following embodied diagrammatic cuts:

**Cut 1: The Bully**

An empty chair sits in the middle of the room. This chair is our bully. Bianca immediately gets up, kicks the chair over, yells, “Screw you” and continues to kick the chair. Sasha then gets up and nervously returns to her script: “Why don’t you like LGBTQ [people]?” Then Bianca jumps up again and begins to kick the chair over and over again, she then picks up the chair, smashes it on the floor and finally goes to throw the chair out of room before Sasha stops her. (Field Notes, March 14, 2018)

**Cut 2: How you feel when you get questioned about your family**

Sadie: “Uhhhhh”, prickled hands, movement up in protective stance, stutter sound, awkward face—gritten teeth, tilted head, scrunched eyes.
Sasha: “EEEYE”, both arms raised above head.

Bianca: Exhale with “aaaaah,” sigh, hands in front and open palms up—sing songy.

Pam: Arms flap down to side, body deflates. (Descriptive Video Transcript, March 14, 2018)

**Cut 3: That moment you are about to say something back to someone when you are mustering the courage to respond**

Bianca: Chest pushed out, staccato walk towards another person, chin high, arms in bodybuilder pose, threatening and ready for a fight.

Pam: Um… head scratch, nervous, big fast breaths.

Sadie: Big breath in through grated teeth, arms stretch out in front and then above head—a feeling of, “This again.”

Sasha: Arms flap, boots clomp—marching. (Descriptive Video Transcript, March 14, 2018)

**Cut 4: Moments when you feel pride in your family**

Sasha: “Woohoo,” small jump arms up, excited face, big smile.

Sadie: Arms spread, head nodding, smug face of satisfaction—owning the space.

Pam: Little happy dance, quick feet movement, “boop-bee-boo”—swinging side to side, loopy.


Each of these diagrams provides insight into a heteronormative structure of feeling. Without being asked to make sense of their experience through words or thoughts, participants and facilitators engaged directly with what their bodies do and feel when affective intensities infiltrate their everyday lives (Stewart, 2007). What this juxtaposition of diagrammatic cuts means is less interesting than how these moments produce new thought through the process of
becoming and in relation to one another (Springgay & Rotas, 2014). The bodies speak to one another through movement, opening up spaces for affecting and being affected while simultaneously interfering with one another through acts of spontaneity. This spontaneity as it emerges, entangles, and intra-acts with other bodies in movement is an example of how we make meaning through bodies in relation to one another (Springgay & Rotas, 2014). These diagrams provide insight into this relationality.

In the first diagram, Bianca was able step into an imagined response and allow her body to impulsively do what she wished it could in moments of confrontation. This aggressive, embodied engagement is a push-and-pull at the threshold of available responses: it is an imagining of what she could do or would do if her queer failure, cultural learning about non-violent responses, and vulnerability were not governing her response. In the second and third cuts, we hear and see a series of sounds and movements that are defensive and deflated in nature; an exhaustion in response to the repetition of defending one’s body, family, and place in the world. In contrast, the fourth cut demonstrates moments of release, pride, and freedom. These movements demonstrate the thresholds of everyday affects on LGBTQ2S+ bodies, shifting the narrative of defeated queer failure and the impact of heteronormativity to the emergent possibilities that are available when one feels confident and secure in one’s world. The fourth cut provides insight into the importance of living differently as an effect of engaging queer moments in education (Goldstein et al., 2007; Zembylas, 2015).

In all four of the diagrammatic cuts above, our bodies work to both uphold and define the threshold of the heteronormative structure of feeling, while also reimagining that threshold by queering the way our bodies are impacted by and engage with the structure. The gritted teeth, the long exhales and grumbled sounds, the tightness in our bodies demonstrates that we are not comfortable living at the threshold of the structure of feeling. Yet, the circulation of heteronormative and cissexist affect positions our bodies at the margins. In our moments of
pride, freedom, and release, it is possible to live and move differently, and to find pockets of support that push the status quo outwards towards new horizons, creating new thresholds (Williams, 1977). Through these acts, our bodies are influenced and influence each other: we move collectively towards action as we reimagine a structure of feeling that allows us to jump and dance to freedom. Or, create a site where, in the words of participants, we can sing, “Wahoo!”

As a site of inquiry, this framing provides opportunities to explore how the articulation and circulation of affective encounters bind together, and where there is space for new imaginings (Sloan, 2018). A structure of feeling offers a framing for studying the circulation of technologies of affect by examining the thresholds of the structure as they are articulated, intensified, and impressed upon through dramatic encounters (Williams, 1977; Zembylas, 2015). Here are two prompts used to dive more deeply into the embodied understandings of participants’ experiences:

**Prompt: Think of one story that you told today. Think of one movement that sums up that story for you.**

Bianca: Scooping ice cream, spreading it all over her face.

Pam: Lunge forward, arms in front, arms spread to side and back to centre.

Sasha: Step and reach forward, pull arms back to chest and hold tight (Descriptive Video Transcript, March 14, 2018)

**Prompt: Now tell that story in 5 movements. Capture the feeling of that story rather than what actually happened.**

Bianca: Poking someone on shoulder, point, phone, arrival with mustache, ice cream scooping, ice cream on face.

Pam: Shrinking, knees drop four times followed by lunge forward, arms in front, arms
spread to side and back to centre.

Sasha: Looking around, searching, arms to chest, hold tight. (Descriptive Video Transcript, March 14, 2018)

In this exercise, I found Sasha’s movements particularly compelling. Sasha mentioned being bullied when she was in Grade 5, and described her struggles coming out to friends, and felt very alone during that time. She said: “In grade 5, a group of friends were mean.” Yet, her movements here offer a profound analysis of that experience. The reaching, the searching, and a tight hold in front of her chest offer a sense of loneliness, and a desire for connection and to protect herself and her heart. This experience was three years ago, yet in embodying her relationship to the story, it was evident that the pain and resiliency that emerged from that moment in her life were still fresh and impacted her body’s ability to move through the world on a daily basis.

This work materialized from the lived experiences of participants thereby building a site of learning about self, Other, and the world through open-ended, play-based techniques (Keenan, 2017). The use of fictional framing and critical distance as a way of theorizing about participants’ experiences are commonly used techniques because the dramatic form allows participants to step outside of their experiences, explore them through a new lens or frame, make connections across experience, and embody ways of living differently (Prentki, 2009a). This embodied movement shifted the structure of feeling through which we experience the world. Participants moved from action—by way of dramatic intervention—to reflection and back again, creating a fluid reflexivity that takes place within and beyond the dramatic action as participants’ bodies moved and thought together.

This praxis, the act of moving between reflection and action (Freire, 1996), opened up potential for unexpected materializations of the unknown—a reimagining of the thresholds of experience (Williams, 1977). What emerged through the body in a moment of action looked,
sounded, and felt very differently than what was immediately thinkable through language. Drama, as an entry into a structure of feeling, can be a collaborative process of discovery that engages with the affective and aesthetic aspects of learning, potentially challenging conventional and established pedagogical choices by engaging the body in a queer act of (un)learning. Keenan (2017) suggests, unscripting as a form of critical trans pedagogy that challenges the gender binary. In arguing for a queer act of (un)learning through an applied theatre pedagogy, I am suggesting that participants can enter into an embodied unscripting process by “experiment[ing] with the possibilities they imagine and… act[ing] out and alter[ing] the realities they perceive” (Keenan, 2017, p. 552). This dramatic reinvention of our collective encounters with the margins of the status quo operates in creating bodies that move and perform the potentialities of change (Sloan, 2018). A queer act of (un)learning, as a queer pedagogy, builds an educational practice that deconstructs dominant structures of feeling in the same moment that we push at their boundaries, facilitating a not-yet-knowable transformation to how technologies of affect circulate in and through our experiences (Zembylas, 2015). In the next section, I explore how a songwriting workshop had participants shift from embodied movement to poetic language as way of analysing their experiences, while we collaboratively laboured to understand affective queer pedagogy in practice.

**Songwriting as Affective Practice**

“I want you to let the music carry you somewhere. For me, music takes me to a place in my mind, and in my body, and in my heart.” These were some of Kate Reid’s introductory words when she joined our group as a guest artist. As a songwriter and educator, Kate had previously created an album entitled *Queer Across Canada* (Reid, 2013) where she interviewed LGBTQ2S+ youth and families, and wrote songs about their experiences. After she introduced herself, Kate sang a couple of songs from the album. The witnessing and validation work that had begun with the *LGBTQ Families Speak Out* videos (see chapter 4) continued through Kate’s
performance. The music, sound of her guitar and voice, along with her lyrics, permeated the room and engulfed the group. Everyone sat in a trance with goofy smiles on our faces as we were transported to another world.

There is an ongoing debate about the role of transformation in applied theatre work (Preston, 2009b). Nicholson (2005) argues that transformation is too permanent a change to measure within the scope of this work, and instead suggests that transportation—a more ephemeral and less fixed form of potential change—might be more accurate. In her book, The Gift of Applied Drama (2005) she says, “[Transportation] is about travelling into another world, often fictional, which offers both new ways of seeing and different ways of looking at the familiar” (p. 13). Therefore, through an ephemeral encounter with dramatic and artistic worlds, participants and audiences are transported with the hope that they will return back to their lives, not transformed into new beings, but instead carrying new gifts. Kate’s songs provided participants with the gift of hearing stories that mirrored their own experiences.

As a folk singer-songwriter, Kate is a storyteller, and the stories being told in her songs connected to the stories that had been circulating the room since we had come together as a group. Sasha and Sadie both made immediate connections between Kate’s music and their own life experiences:

Sasha: I see myself in families [that] are different. A lot. I used to think that I should fit in, but um, when I was trying to do that, I felt wrong and I felt like I had no one. When I started being myself and not trying, people came to me… In grade 5, I just moved to Mississauga and I… so I was in, I didn’t have any friends and I got bullied a lot when I started talking about my two moms. And um, until I moved [to] a different school in grade 6 when I just, like, started like being myself, and um, and um, I found I made, like, way more friends and people more accepted me for who I loved.
Sadie: It is my story but it is not my story. There are parts I can relate to and parts that I couldn’t. As a fellow queerspawn, there are so few stories, that every time we hear a story we are like – “that is my story” even though it actually could not be our story. But we are just so desperate for stories about us that it always feels like a piece of our story… it is just recently that there was queer content. So, we are still waiting for queerspawn content. There are songs written about us but not by us. I love songs about us. Like, I have never heard a song like that, where I was, like, “This is my whole family you are describing.” (Video Transcript, March 14, 2018)

The music was full of energy and reinforced a sense of connectedness and community among the group. In the quote above, Sasha reflects on her experience of being bullied in Grade 5, but this time, she takes the story further than she had in previous tellings of the same story by exploring her sense of self-acceptance and love as a way of building lasting friendships. The power of Kate’s songs in sharing stories of struggle and triumph provided an opportunity for Sasha to think past the tightness that ended her embodied rendering of this story and move it towards a celebration of living and loving freely. The feeling of aloneness expressed so often by Sasha seemed to melt away during Kate’s performance as the music filled the bodily openings we had been creating throughout the workshop with warmth, and love, and energy. Similarly, Sadie expressed a deep connection with the content of Kate’s songs, but also worked to define the thresholds of our current cultural context by noting that there was still work to be done. These songs reflected her experiences, yet they weren’t authored by “queerspawn,” this was not art that was being created by the community, but rather it was created for the community, and that is an important distinction.

Prentki and Preston (2009) talk about the transactions of applied theatre, noting that participation in applied theatre projects is a spectrum of practice, and depending on the goals of the project, theatre can be created with, by, or for community members. Communities should
always hold ownership over when their stories are told, how their stories are told, and who tells their stories (Preston, 2009a). Yet, navigating the many different stakeholders in an applied theatre project means that this is not always the case (Preston, 2009c). It is my belief that in order to facilitate ethical applied theatre, facilitators should strive for performance work that is with, by, and for a community. Most applied theatre scholars agree that participation is an ethical priority, yet, enacting a form of participation that is co-intentional and useful in the lives of participants in the way that it is taken up can be challenging in practice (Breed, 2009; Etherton, 2009; Salverson, 1999). In building stories from the bodies of participants—*with* and *by* participants—facilitators can create a dialogic and affective performance that works towards new materializations, in both emergent *forms* of theatre, and in our understanding of the world (Collins, 2015; Sloan, 2018). In the case of the songs Kate performed, Sadie’s critique was important, the songs were validating, exciting, original, and beautiful. But, could we shift to a narrative that emerges *with* and *by* community members, positioning authorship and creative autonomy in the hands of participants by creating an original song together?

As a starting point, participants were asked to jot down notes, words, and thoughts that emerged while Kate performed. In response the participants had this to say:

Bianca: I was thinking there is not really anything like that. There is no music like this. It is different and it is cool. It is like kinda groundbreaking because it’s, like, lots of people don’t agree with LGBTQ [people and identities] so it is like taking a risk and putting music out there and people are going to say, “I don’t like this, this is wrong.” And, there is nothing like it. And, it is that risk that you are putting it out there. It makes me feel happy. Because now I know that there is something like that that exists.

Sasha: ‘Cause most songs talk, most country especially and pop songs that are playing on the radio and are the pop hits are talking about straight people and nothing else. Just
straight, and that is it, and nothing else. And like that’s not just what is out there. That exists. To hear this music its different, it says way more what kinda people are out there and it’s not just one boring thing….not everyone is exactly the same, and everyone is different, and all the songs you hear on the radio are just about one thing and people are not just one thing. (Video Transcript, March 14, 2018)

These reactions suggest that participants had never heard their experiences, families, and identities reflected back to them through popular culture. Their engagement with the music Kate performed was a moment of recognition. Music seemed to bring us together, to feel a connection with the art, and then with one another as energy reverberated around the room, and words validated and replayed personal experiences loudly and with passion. This engagement with Kate’s music was an affective encounter that created openings for the group to move into the process of creating an original song together.

Writing an original song in collaboration with young people in an afternoon was an ambitious task. Kate felt compelled to try despite the fact she admitted that she had not previously written music with people as young as our participants. Yet, Kate’s relaxed and unassuming approach to the work created a space for the youth to jump in. One of the things we had been grappling with together as a group thus far was that we wanted to move beyond the sentiment that “love makes a family.” This is a line that is used ad nauseam in the LGBTQ2S+ community as we attempt to validate our unique family structures (Beer, 2018). It is used to help dispel the reliance on the idea that genetic material is the foundation of a family. But, it is a statement that also diminishes the nuances, challenges, struggles, and uniqueness of our familial structures (Epstein-Fine & Zook, 2018). Love does make a family. But, love is also complex, and families can be complicated and messy, and not always a giant rainbow of hugs and smiles (Goldstein, 2019b). The videos from the LGBTQ Families Speak Out Project, (recall Chapter 4) had allowed us to begin to dive deeper into the realities of what it means to live and grow up in
LGBTQ2S+ families. But, working with Kate provided an opportunity to direct that energy into an important piece of artistic work that explores both the celebration and challenges that these young people face due to their family formations.

Kate used her expertise in the form of songwriting to excavate the participants’ experiences; to find words, metaphors, and stories that reflected their everyday lives. This affective rendering of everyday experience provided opportunities for participants to reflect though their bodies, and with one another, about what their stories meant collectively. This was a shift from creating individual narratives to producing collective understandings (Prendergast & Saxton, 2016). Participants were able to braid together their experiences and move towards a collective emergence of possibilities (Sloan, 2018). Kate asked the participants, “What about your stories do you want to share with the world? What do you want people to know?” Kate repeated chords on her guitar over and over as participants shared ideas and thoughts through lyrics. The music permeated the room creating movement and energy while providing an emotional blanket in which the participants could relax into sharing their stories. Through this relational approach, Kate as artist/expert did not work to craft the art on behalf of participants, rather she stepped back and followed their lead. Facilitating participant driven work created an opportunity for these young people to learn the skills of songwriting while working towards a collaborative performance of their stories.

The chorus that materialized speaks to a shift in anti-oppressive narrative with lines about our families being different. Sadie revealed that when she was growing up, the narrative was, “We are the same. Our family is just like yours.” She was a generation of queerspawn that sought acceptance through assimilation into cis- and hetero- normative culture: her family worked to prove that they were no different from other families (Epstein-Fine & Zook, 2018). Ten years later, many of the experiences young people with two mothers are facing are similar, but there is also a need to declare difference. Sasha and Bianca wanted to say, “My family is
different, get over it.” They needed their family’s difference to be a celebration (Kandil & Te Bokkel, 2019): their families are not something that should be hidden and assimilated, but instead, are something to be recognized. Here is what they said:

Kate: What do you want people to know? Or, what do you want to say to them?

Sasha: Stop judging.

Kate: Tell me more?

Sasha: Stop judging. Stop judging how our families connect. Stop judging um… how it works? Stop judging…

Bianca: Oh, I have some good lyrics from that… “stop judging how our families connect. Stop judging, have a little respect.”

…

Bianca: Yes we are different. But, so are you. So, like, don’t treat us like there is something wrong with us. Different isn’t a bad thing.

Sasha: Different is a good thing.

Sadie: I like that idea that what makes my family different is a really great thing versus you know trying to hide that difference. I love that. (Video Transcript, March 14, 2018)

In anti-oppression education, this is an important distinction. Collapsing experiences to that of the dominant cultural understanding minimizes what is possible because it reinforces a dominant structure of feeling (Kumashiro, 2002; Williams, 1977). The song that emerged from this conversation highlights queer difference and calls out all people on their differences, which positions the failure of LGBTQ2S+ families and family dynamics to uphold a heternormative structure not as something to be ashamed of, but rather something to be celebrated (Halberstam, 2011). Claiming unique family connections in the song as a good thing, and then drawing attention to the fact that the status quo also encompasses difference engaged the participants in a subversive reordering of their world. Through pointed questions, Kate sought clarification as the
stories of participants solidified into lyrics. Here is the chorus in its final incarnation:

Chorus:

Don’t judge how our families love
Cause you can’t choose who you love
Don’t judge how our families connect
We all deserve a little respect
‘Cause difference is a good thing
Yes, my family’s different
I said, difference is a great thing

And, we’re all different in our own way (Video Transcript, March 14, 2018)

The music emerged and (re)emerged as youth shared stories, ideas, and words. They moved around the room, created rhythms, and opened up through quick vignettes, relationality, and exchange. This movement can be seen in Figure 16.

Figure 16. Participants move around the room as they write lyrics.

These openings were filled through one another, and validated through their inclusion in an original song. Here are some examples of the process from which the song emerged:

Kate: Let’s write a queerspawn song.
Bianca: The song should be called, “Unique.”

…

Kate: What was the weirdest question you were ever asked about your family?

Sasha: How was your baby brother born?

Bianca: I have to think about that because I have been asked a lot of weird questions and they are too weird to put into a song.

Sadie: “Which mom would you trade for a dad?” I’ve also been asked things about my parents’ intimate relationship that I am like, “Well, do you know things about your parents’ intimate relationship?”

Bianca: Oh, same.

Sadie: Right?! It’s weird, hey? And, you are 10. That’s so weird. Like, what 10-year old knows things about their parents’ intimate relationship?

…

Kate: How would you phrase the question?

Sadie: It’s, “How do your parents do it?”

Bianca: Yeah.

…

Kate: I need a metaphor description of what it feels like in your body when you get angry.

Bianca: A volcano erupting. (Video Transcript, March 14, 2018)

The idea that a 10-year old was being asked about her parents’ intimate relationship was shocking to me as an outsider-within, but for the people in the room with LGBTQ2S+ parents this was an everyday encounter (Stewart, 2007). This is a reminder that a disclosure of gender and sexual difference (coming out), positions private lives within the public sphere to be consumed and (mis)understood by a world that views that difference as a failure (Baer & Baer,
The thresholds of these young peoples’ lives are being defined by a circulation of heteronormative and cissexist affects and my shock facilitated an unsticking of my own (mis)understandings of the world in which I live (Ahmed, 2015; Zembylas, 2015). Kathleen Stewart (2007) examines how affect manifests in everyday life. She explains, “ordinary affects are public feelings that begin and end in broad circulation but they’re also the stuff that seemingly intimate lives are made of. They give circuits and flows the forms of a life” (p.5). To affect and be affected shapes our way of being in the world through moments of encounter. It is these everyday encounters that determine how bodies move through space. If we connect this to the idea then it is perhaps not shocking that a 10-year old is questioned regularly about her parents’ intimate life or about her own sexuality (“Your parents are gay, so you must be too.”), then the affective currency of heteronormativity needs to become unstuck, and interrupted (Ahmed, 2015). Focusing on the movement of ordinary affect helps demonstrate how affective intensities impact individuals, communities, and societies (Stewart, 2007).

Shifting attention to affective encounters attempts to collaboratively re-invent the potential for different kinds of encounters through an inbetween-ness that does not contribute to marginalizing technologies of affect, but instead, subverts and disrupts those technologies in an active queering of embodied relationality (Airton, 2013; Sloan, 2018; Zembylas, 2015). This is what the song does, or, at least, attempts to do. Here are the lyrics\textsuperscript{14} in their entirety:

Verse

Who’s That?

Why do they look like that?

Why do they look like a boy?

And I’m thinking in my head

\textsuperscript{14} Lyrics were written as a collaboration between youth participants and artist-educators. Songwriter and guest artist Kate Reid provided a melody and helped structure the lyrics.
Well I have to do this again
I have to tell my story again.
So listen up.

Chorus
Don’t judge how our families love
Cause you can’t choose who you love
Don’t judge how our families connect
We all deserve a little respect
Cuz’ difference is a good thing
Yes my family’s different
I said, difference is a great thing
And we’re all different in our own way

Verse
When someone says,
I don’t like LGBTQ people
My first response is to ask a question back.
Why? Tell me why?
What are you afraid of?

Chorus

Verse
How was your baby brother born?
Is your mom a boy or what?
Which mom would trade for a dad?
Don’t you want to meet your sperm donor?
Are you gay too?
So she’s not your real mom?
What do you do on Father’s Day and Mother’s Day?
How do your parents “do it?”

Chorus

Verse
We refuse to conform to your ridiculous standards!
We don’t have to love certain people,
Love certain things,
And follow gender stereotypes
Queer isn’t a choice!
Queer is my family!

Chorus (Video Transcript, March 14, 2018)

As a strategy for songwriting, asking questions in the form of lyrics invited the audience in and asked them to do some thinking and emotional labour around some of the issues in the song that they might not otherwise encounter in their own lives (Baer et al., 2019). Asking questions in lyrical form opens up possibilities for an affective and dialogic exchange of energy and ideas to take place, creating movement through artistic and affective engagement. During the songwriting process, performance became a cycle of inquiry—perform, question, reflect, move,
and perform again. The repetition of performance was more than a fine-tuning of lyrics, rather it was an opportunity for the youth to feel their words move through them. Bianca asked to listen to the song again and again, facilitating this feedback loop herself. She was proud of the work. Participants became both the performer and the audience to their song: this was art created by them, about them, and for them (Prentki & Preston, 2009). The affective engagement of songwriting and collaborative performance had participants recognize that their stories and experiences were worth sharing.

As a form of queer pedagogy, writing an original song together allowed the youth to experience community in marginalization. The aloneness participants expressed feeling when sharing the stories of their families may not carry forward from here. Next time they are questioned about their family, Sasha and Bianca might have the laughter and the love from our song ringing in their ears. The songwriting process created a shared energy that took negative experiences and made them about love, power, and community. As an affective queer practice, it was not made powerful through aesthetic choices, rather, it was powerful because these young people were writing about and performing their own stories (Baer, 2017; Prentki, 2009a; Preston, 2009c). Performance as a participatory and affective practice provided an opportunity to imagine living differently by disrupting the marginalizing affective encounters participants experience everyday (Stewart, 2007; Zembylas, 2015). Drawing on Foucault’s notion of technologies as a “disciplinary power mechanism…used to achieve particular outcomes…[and] produce…humans as certain kinds of beings (p. 151), Zembylas (2015) believes “technologies of affect” circulate to (re)produce oppressions and these technologies create limits of what is deemed legitimate. In other words, technologies of affect infiltrate and govern our bodies on a daily basis. What I find compelling here is how technologies of gender and/or sexuality are produced in the affective realm of everyday life for queerspawn (Stewart, 2007). By perceiving affective and material encounters between bodies, we can “attend to the production of
pedagogical spaces and practices that create ways of living differently [as a form of queer pedagogy]” (Zembylas, 2015, p.146). Affective intensities impact our bodies’ abilities to move, touch, and feel, and in doing so these affective intensities police our everyday lives. In order to “live differently” a collective reordering of these intensities is necessary. As seen in the creation of an original song, reordering affective intensities queers the status quo by putting the body, along with desire, touch, emotion, and feeling at the centre of pedagogy and inquiry (Goldstein et al., 2007).

The writing of an original song was a collective labouring to engage differently and to produce narratives of celebration rather than hardship (Kandil & Te Bokkel, 2019). Youth participants wanted to disrupt taken-for-grated assumptions about their lives. The final verse states:

We refuse to conform to your ridiculous standards!

We don’t have to love certain people,

Love certain things,

And follow gender stereotypes

Queer isn’t a choice!

Queer is my family! (Video Transcript, March 14, 2018)

These lyrics once again push and pull at the threshold of a heteronormative structure of feeling (Williams, 1977). The lyrics reclaim queer failure as a site of possibility and re-center the structure of feeling by creating a new threshold of what is known and felt within the structure (Halberstam, 2011). During the process of songwriting youth participants and artist-educators moved between safe, positive, and queer moments (Goldstein et al., 2007). They felt safe enough to express some of the “weirdest” and likely hurtful questions they have been asked and then were able to transform those stories into a positive form of advocacy through song lyrics. Queer moments emerged as youth and artist-educators worked to dismantle their
heteronormative encounters and stand in their power through a bold proclamation of self-love. According to participants, queer is to be celebrated, embraced, and owned, not understood as a marginal identity that needs to be questioned and explained, but as an embodied site of emergence and becoming (Ellsworth, 2005; Prentki, 2009b). As I stated earlier in this thesis, queer is a way to live differently, to teach differently, and to engage differently with one another (Airton, 2013). I build on these ideas in the next section where I explore dance through voguing as a way of moving towards living differently.

**Vogue Femme with Twysted Miyake-Mugler**

Voguing is a dance of survival for many queer and trans folx\(^\text{15}\) of colour (Jones, 2018). It is a way to tell one’s story, to strip away words, and observe the embodiment of the moment. For many, voguing is an outlet, a way to express oneself when societies expectations of who one should be feel too narrow (Livingston, 1990). Butler (1993) has argued that voguing can reinforce the gender binary through its categories of gender “realness”, and hooks (1992) has argued that voguing often glamorizes the white ruling-class through its embedded affinity for stardom and spectacle. My argument here challenges these ideas by suggesting that voguing subverts gender, class, and race through its opening of embodied possibilities by asking the question: How can we move and live differently? Turning towards difference is a queer shift away from the status quo towards a reimagining of what is possible within a body’s ability to be and do. Therefore, I argue voguing does both/and: it reinforces and subverts within the same moment of performance. Performance understood in this way is distinct from performativity, because the former lies within the confines of artistic expression, which may or may not align to the way performativity works to discursively define bodies (Butler, 1990).

\(^{15}\) Folx is an alternative spelling of the word folks that recognizes people that live beyond the gender binary.
One of the sites of inquiry for this research was how young people from queer and trans families might reimagine traditional notions of family. Dancer and workshop facilitator, Twysted Miyake-Mugler, was able to expand the definition of family by introducing participants to ballroom houses. Ballroom houses are an example of how some members of LGBTQ2S+ communities have come together to form familial bonds. Ballroom houses have and continue to be a refuge for racialized queer and trans youth who may face rejection from their families of origin (Jones, 2018; Livingston, 1990; Murphy, 2018). In (re)imagining family as the people who surround us, love us, and support us, ballroom houses sit at the heart of queer family by providing spaces for young people to be supported in expressing themselves on their own terms by people who become their chosen family. As a member of ballroom houses for many years, as noted in Chapter 3, Twysted’s bio states:

At the age of 16, he was introduced to an entirely new form of dance that embraced the femininity of black gay men, something he had never been exposed to before: the art of Vogue. Twysted began teaching himself how to vogue and connected with the international ballroom scene. He joined the Canadian House of Monroe as a founding member, and competed at his first ball in July 2008, where he won the “Virgin Vogue” category at Detroit Pride. Since then he has won balls locally & in Western New York, and is now a Canadian ballroom pioneer organizing balls in Toronto & Montreal. In January 2013, he was inducted into the NYC Iconic House of Miyake-Mugler as the First International member. (Nov. 2017)

I first met Twysted as a youth participant in a filmmaking workshop I was facilitating for LGBTQ2S+ youth and seniors in Toronto. At the time, Twysted was interested in producing a

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16 Chosen family is a term used by LGBTQ+ communities to describe the people that surround, support, and love us. These are the people in our lives who choose to fulfill familial roles because they want to rather than because they are biologically obliged.
Canadian version of the film, *Paris is Burning* (Livingston, 1990), which is a documentary film that chronicles ballroom culture in New York City in the 1980s. Twysted had the desire and passion to share the story of his ballroom community and to engage a wider audience in understanding the importance of chosen family, self-expression, and self-love for young queer and trans youth. Since then, his passion for the ballroom community and for voguing has grown. Earlier this year, he was quoted in NOW Magazine saying, “What Toronto can take from ballroom is that we need to celebrate everyone’s differences and make everyone feel that they are celebrated. That’s what makes us special” (Price et al., 2019). Given this embedded position within the community and his passion for this expressive practice, I turn to Twysted’s description of voguing, which he explained at the beginning of the workshop he facilitated for the group:

So, the style of dance that I usually teach, it is called voguing…vogue is a really, really fun, expressive dance…ballroom started in 1967 and voguing started in the 1970s. It started as almost like a “pop and locking,” if you guys know break dancing. We do a lot of pop, pop, poppy movements. But…instead of popping, like whatever, we pop from pose, to pose, to pose, and we set it up as trying to be like you are posing on a cover of a magazine…which is why they call it voguing…so that is the thing about voguing is that you are actually (*pose*) so check it (*pose*) you are more of (*pose*) even though you are (*pose*)…The thing about voguing is there is no correct way of voguing. You have your people that are more shy and you have your people that are more dramatic … And after you see it performed, it actually looks quite rad…. It all just goes by the way that you feel about yourself in the moment…so, you can never really predict how it is going to turn out, right? Voguing started then, as a more popping locking…and then throughout the 80s, you started seeing more of the trans women take on voguing and made it more feminine…and they introduced vogue femme as we know it now with the pirouettes and
Through Twysted’s introduction, it is clear that voguing is a queering of dance and art. It is a subversive performance form that emerged from within queer and trans communities of colour as a way of expressing and subverting identity/gender through playful movement. Twysted states that there is no right way to vogue and that one can never predict how it is going to turn out. Unlike traditional forms of dance where the outcomes and moves are predicted and expected, Voguing is about being in a constant state of becoming; to vogue is to become (Ellsworth, 2005; Prentki, 2009b). The movements, sequences, and poses are relational to the other performers, and to the audience. Voguing is interactive and the movements shift and respond to other performers and audience members in the moment. To strike a pose, even within a structured choreography, is unpredictable because it is a personal expression of how one feels in that moment. The affective and collaborative performance of vogue is one that opens up possibilities by allowing folx to move through and beyond their performativities to an imagined queer futurity that is not defined by normative technologies of affect (Moñez, 2009; Zembylas, 2015). These technologies—as a disciplinary power—create limits of what is deemed legitimate, much like performativity, technologies of race, gender, and/or sexuality are produced in the affective realm of everyday life infiltrating and governing our bodies on a daily basis (Zembylas, 2015). Being encouraged to play with notions of race, class, and gender through a facilitated dance workshop was a queering of traditional approaches to dance education because
it asked participants to bring their whole selves to the work and to strip away inhibitions while allowing the music to facilitate movement as an affective release of inner possibilities (Sloan, 2018). Voguing is an embodied and queer form of pedagogy that emerged through movement towards the unexpected (Airton, 2013; Keenan, 2017).

![Figure 17. Sasha stretching.](image)

**Striking a pose as affective pause.** Stretching our muscles at the start of the day (*Figure 17.*) allowed the group to arrive in our bodies. This was important physically so that we did not hurt ourselves, and it was also important psychologically so that the group was emotionally prepared for the embodied work of the day. As a professional dancer, Twysted led us through a strenuous morning. As the group began to rehearse the choreography, Twysted played music with a strong beat. When he felt the music was not loud enough, he retrieved a bigger speaker, because he wanted to ensure we could *feel* the music. Loud music circulated affectively around the room and beckoned participants to become aware of their own bodily sensations and horizons, which they might not always pay attention to (Ahmed, 2006; Ahmed, 2015). This was an important part of the “undoing” of our bodily *un*awareness because as Boal (2000) notes, “bodies are constantly touching the air, our clothes, other parts of our own bodies and the bodies of others, but we feel very little of what we are touching” (p. 50). The beat of the music moved
through our bodies, and brought a new awareness to our senses and prepared our bodies for movement.

![Hand performance](image)

*Figure 18. Hand performance.*

Twysted worked to strip away our fears and vulnerabilities while our bodies moved in and out of position. In *Figure 18*, the group is learning about hand performance, one of the five elements of voguing. Movement here was not about bodies on a trajectory from point A to point B. Instead, it was about bodies that exist in relational movement with other people and things (Manning, 2015). This form of embodiment is a way of knowing through the body as it moves in relation with the wider world. To engage the senses in a political becoming is an act of interference and disruption of the status quo: it is a queering of everyday affects by tuning into the ephemeral and sensational (Airton, 2013; Stewart, 2007). When research-creation explores bodies in movement and creates opportunities for spontaneity, there is potential for new thought to emerge (Manning, 2015).
‘Striking a pose’ (as seen in Figure 19. and Figure 20.) became an embedded and relational emergence of power and knowledge creating unpredictable compositions of embodied knowing through which an unsticking of affective signs materialized (Ahmed, 2015). The choreography we learned had a section with four consecutive poses. These were not predetermined, but rather, manifested in new compositions each and every time we rehearsed our movements. They were an embodied reaction to the moment, and to the poses that came
before and after. The movement between the poses was fast paced, and that energy moved through our bodies towards a moment of stillness in connection to the beat, to one another, and to the choreography. The poses were an instant capture of a particular movement, a pause in the dance. It was a moment to understand movement between and beyond bodies, and a chance to hold affective energy as it coursed through our bodies before being released back into the room with a new pose. The pace meant that the poses were not predetermined or planned, but rather they were a body’s response to the moment of movement and engagement. Although they were different each time, poses could be big, bold positions: in one instance Bianca dropped to floor like a cat, one leg bent, one leg straight, a hand on her hip and a hand on the floor, and then popped up again to a hip jutting pose in the next beat. Other times, a pose was shy with a peek of an eye over a hand. Then again, poses returned to bigger-than-life movements with a head tossed back, a hand on a hip, a hand in hair, knees bent, arms thrust in the air, ready to pounce, hands on knees. Faces were teasing and playful. The poses were simultaneously shy and fierce, and proud and bold. They reflected momentary feelings and embodied pre-cognitive expressions of emotion. There was no time to think about what it meant or how it felt, or how race, class, and gender, for that matter, were intersecting in our enactment of a glamourous pose. Rather, striking a pose was an instance where the affective signs that uphold race, class, and gender could be released (Ahmed, 2015).

Voguing has traditionally been a dance of survival for many queer youth of colour, an opportunity to shed the fear that is inscribed on their bodies by homophobia, transphobia, and racism. To engage in the art of voguing is an opportunity to move and feel and be in a way that feels glamorous without fear of persecution because of the way your body is read. Bailey (2011) states that: “the Black body is read through and within a visual epistemology, where gender and sexual hierarchies are corporeal, ballroom members refashion themselves by manipulating their embodiments and performances in ways that render them visible and
remarkable within the ballroom scene” (p. 380). Ballroom and in turn voguing is an opportunity to perform race, class, and gender not as a marginalizing affective encounter, but as an embodied release of power and opportunity. The more poses were rehearsed, the more playful participants became in their ability to strike a pose. It was when participants let their bodies take the lead that the unsticking of technologies of affect was the most profound (Ahmed, 2015; Zembylas, 2015). The heteronormativity and racism that seemed to inhibit participants’ ability to move through their everyday life was being pushed out through openings in their bodily horizons (Ahmed, 2006; Stewart, 2007), and reclaimed as queer possibility through bold proclamations of embodied self-love, self-acceptance, and playful movement (hicks, 2017; Keenan, 2017). Striking a pose provided the embodied pause in which this affective release could take place.

Figure 21. Bianca striking a pose.

Striking a pose is a power stance and holding that power while playing with gender and emotion facilitated openings across bodies. This can be seen in Figure 21. where Bianca is serving up classic voguing power in her side hip and hair flipping pose. These openings were
the affective exchange of the politics of sensation. Twysted spoke of vogue femme as a way of deconstructing gender, revealing that he likes to pretend that he has long flowing hair and is wearing high heels when he vogues: these things represent the persona that he takes on in his movement. We were each encouraged to find a persona for ourselves. Elements of my own personality emerged that I would likely not express in any other environment. My body moved as high femme\textsuperscript{17}, slightly shy, and very expressive/playful, and other than “shy,” I would not normally use any of these words to describe myself. It was an unexpected emergence of difference, an insight into the possibilities of my own embodiment and performativity.

The repetition of choreography provided the space to fail, and an opportunity to learn through the thresholds of performance. Continuous movement uncovered new openings and new possibilities while continuing to push emergent becomings further and further. Manning (2016) suggests, “in its movement, the minor gesture creates sites of dissonance, staging disturbances that open experience to new modes of expression” (p. 2). By engaging in minor gestures that had us moving in new ways, affect was pushed and pulled between our bodies in unexpected ways. This provided opportunities for affective signs to puncture our bodies (Ahmed, 2015). In this case, the puncturing of participants’ bodies through their engagement with movement created a bodily disruption—an opening—through which new possibilities were imagined (Ahmed, 2006).

As affective signs circulated differently, they attached to bodies, and took on new meaning through new sensation (Ahmed, 2015). For example, participants spoke repeatedly in the workshop about their encounters with homophobia and cisgenderism at school. They had both been expected to explain their families, identities, and their parents’ gender presentations over and over again. There was a lot of pain that circulated through these stories. When given

\textsuperscript{17} High femme is a term used to describe a queer person who expresses extreme femininity as defined by cultural norms.
the opportunity to move differently, to challenge cisgenderism in the way that bodies move through dance, these stories took on new meaning. Their affective currency unstuck from participants’ bodies as we collectively worked through movement to redefine the horizons of what is possible for our bodies, our genders, and our performativities (Ahmed, 2006). While as a researcher I witnessed these embodied shifts take place as youth participants tried on different gender performances during the voguing workshop, there was very little reflection time dedicated to the relationship between movement and cisgenderism within our conversations. Youth participants weren’t given the chance to think deeply about their embodied encounters with voguing in a way that provided me access to their insights. So, while I can review footage and re-live the workshop, to dive deeply into a meaning making process feels as if I am inscribing an experience-in-the making onto participants. Therefore, in order to provide deeper evidence for how voguing challenged cisgenderism I am going to position my own body as participant. As a collaborative process of research-creation, wherein I participated fully in all activities throughout the applied theatre workshop, this positionality feels appropriate.

I mention above that the compositions that emerged from my own embodiment during voguing felt high femme. Based on the video footage of the workshop, this interpretation could be debated because my ability to translate a feeling into a movement is limited. So, in the footage I look clumsy and often took on the role of the clown in order to bravely engage with the unknown (Gray, 2019; Salverson, 2008), but inside I was motivated by my own understandings and interpretations of glamour. What surprised me is that in my everyday life my own embodiment of glamour often challenges the gender binary, I find joy and comfort in masculine and androgynous formal wear, movement, and positionalities. Yet, when positioned as being on the cover of vogue magazine through movements I associate with drag and ballroom culture; I was suddenly pouting my lips, blowing kisses, and embracing my curvy hips as they moved from side to side. I felt sexy through a femme embodiment. My prompt embrace of
cisgender performativity within the context of vogue might suggest that this dance form does not subvert cisgenderism, that, as Butler (1993) has previously suggested, voguing in fact reinforces cisgenderism. Yet, by creating an opening where I could move beyond my everyday performance of gender and play with the possibilities of gender expression through movement, regardless of their alignment with my own identities; possibilities for subverting and challenging my body’s attachments to the gender binary were facilitated. Manning (2016) states,

> In our everyday movements, especially in relation to movements that have become habitual, a movement might nonetheless feel completely volitional. When this is the case, what has happened is that we’ve experienced a sense of déjà-felt, in the event. This déjà-felt occurs in the interstices of the conscious and the nonconscious, directing the event to its familiarity-in-feeling. (p. 19)

My gender expression had become habitual. Through the process of learning to vogue, striking a pose, and finding a subconscious persona, I was able to embody my own internalized cisgenderism, to display my deeply held assumptions about gender through playful movement, and in doing so I was able to affectively engage in a release of these learned beliefs about gender. Keenan (2017) argued for an open-ended and creative pedagogy where students could bring their own questions about the world into play, potentially leading to an un-scripting of cultural attachments to gender. Voguing with its embedded affinity for movement that is read as highly feminine was able to provide this open-ended outlet to me and the other participants. It created a space where we could queer our understandings of gender by playfully engaging in the (un)expected.

The way that bodies move is defined by marginalizing technologies of affect, such as cisgenderism (Zembylas, 2015). Bodies come into and out of contact with signs that have high affective currency (Ahmed, 2015). Signs associated with cisgenderism or racism, for example, have affective energy that works to police how bodies move. Voguing asks participants to shed
those affective infiltrations through embodied movement and to create bodily compositions that do not adhere to gendered or racial categories. Unlike many traditional dance forms, voguing does not have gendered roles. Instead, it is a queer artform that has each person moving, breathing, and feeling beyond the binary. Participants eagerly engaged as their masculinity and femininity emerged and intertwined through sassy moments of release. Thus, through the art of voguing participants redefined their affective relationships with gender and each other by moving their bodies differently and challenging the marginalizing encounters of affective cisgenderism. This queering of dance and the deconstruction of binary movement through “striking a pose” was an example of safe, positive, and queering moments (Goldstein et al., 2007). Participants felt safe to try out new ways of being, were encouraged through positive reinforcement to play, and deconstructed heteronormativity and cisgenderism through their movement. Voguing, as an expressive, embodied art form, was an example of a queer pedagogy that led to living differently (Airton, 2013; Keenan, 2017; Zembylas, 2015).

\[\text{Figure 22. Learning the catwalk.}\]
**Movement + sensation = living differently.** Perhaps the best example of movement and sensation as a form of living differently came as we tried to learn the “catwalk” and the “duckwalk.” The catwalk is the travel element of voguing, meaning it is how you move from one location to another within the choreography and while staying in character. Twysted said doing the catwalk is “not walking but it is so much like walking.” A voguer begins on their toes in a seated position with their torso up. Then, they take small steps that almost cross one another, while staying on their toes with bent legs (*Figure 22*). This was not an easy move to master and the group stumbled into one another as we attempted to catwalk, failing again and again. Once we added the arms (which we extend and lift in opposite directions from the legs) our catwalks became sloppy and our focus narrower as we tried to master this new way of moving. Walking in a new way realigns a bodies’ ability to move. When a body’s ability to move is limited, an acute awareness of “its capacities for recuperation, restructuring, reharmonisation” (Boal, 2002, p. 49) materializes. The catwalk movement demanded that we recuperate from our failure. It required us to restructure our approach to walking, insisting that our bodies reharmonize within themselves and with one another in order to master the choreography. This reordering of our bodily horizons facilitated new understandings about how our bodies move and engage with the world around us (Ahmed, 2006).

The duckwalk facilitated a similar embodied becoming. In Twysted’s words, the duckwalk is “the enemy.” The voguer must sit low over their heels and kick their legs straight out in front of their body while bouncing on their toes (*Figure 23*). Attempting the duckwalk resulted in laughter as bodies crashed to the floor over and over again. As a form of “muscular alienation” (Boal, 2002) and movement as sensation, the duckwalk offered opportunities for participants “to feel more of what [the body] touches,” understand the “mechanised ways of walking and moving,” and “experience how our bodies, externalis[e] emotions” while, “feeling and discovering new ways of structuring [our] muscles” (Boal, 2002, p. 50).
engaging in the failure of trying to re-learn the thresholds of our bodily possibilities is that maintaining focus and pushing through the failure required an immense amount of discipline. In the case of the youth participants, both the catwalk and the duckwalk facilitated movement away from the task at hand. Distracted engagement led to the need to stop, start, and re-focus again and again. This collective movement saw us coming together as a community. As we each worked to overcome the challenge of mastering this move, we engaged and disengaged in our own ways and in our own times.

![Twysted demonstrating the duckwalk.](image)

_Figure 23._ Twysted demonstrating the duckwalk.

My inability to master these movements (as seen in Figures 24, 25, 26.) led to the young participants trying to teach me, but my older, less flexible, less than a year post-partum body, was not as willing to engage in moving in the way it needed to if I was to master the art of voguing. Prentki (2009b) states, “the social worker and the fool who meet together in the person of the applied theatre practitioner … show that another world is possible and that, as citizen artists and human becomings, we are always walking on the edge of possibility” (p. 367). While I believe that I brought a foolish energy to the entire workshop in my role of facilitator, it became more pronounced as I stumbled and fell and stumbled again. I never could quite get my
arms to sync up with my legs, but in the spirit of the clown I jumped in wholeheartedly, ready to embrace failure with my whole body (Salverson, 2008). Instead of getting frustrated, I played with the movement, making it big and bold even though I knew it was wrong and that I looked increasingly silly, I laughed out loud, I fell over, I flipped my hair, I collapsed to the floor dramatically, and, I tried again. The possibilities provided by this foolishness continued to re-focus a group that was distracted by their own frustrations or challenges with the routine. My brave enactment of the fool invited the others to join me at the threshold of possibility, to push their own embodiments beyond where they felt comfortable, and to join me in a foolish dance of silly encounters.

![Figure 24](image)

*Figure 24. Moving bodies in/towards new compositions.*

Pushing through the collective challenges and finding our own paces and resiliencies as individuals and as a collective meant that with each repetition, the confidence in the room grew. Each rehearsal of the choreography became its own performance as the group played with and learned the elements and form of voguing, and opened up new bodily horizons in relationship to one another (Ahmed, 2006). Reworking of bodily horizons through movement can be seen in *Figure 24, 25, 26.* It is a subtle re-ordering or our bodies through minor gestures, which can sometimes be hard to capture, interpret, and understand due to their subtle nature. Manning (2016) states that “the grand [gesture] is given the status it has not because it is where the
transformative power lies, but because it is easier to identify major shifts than to catalogue the nuanced rhythms of the minor [gesture]. As a result, these rhythms are narrated as secondary or even negligible” (p. 1). Throughout the voguing workshop minor gestures, the small repositioning of bodies in an attempt to replicate a movement or a sensation, were not negligible, but rather the very foundation of how our bodies moved and connected through dance.

![Figure 25: Pam falling.](image)

The performance without a formal audience became a moment of collaborative meaning-making where every body took on the role of performer and audience as the group worked towards a relational emergence of affective performance. Together our bodies moved, intraacted, reimagined, and shared an unspoken, but very expressive and embodied story. It was in the inbetweeness of the movement that the performance came to fruition. Voguing is hard work. It was hard on participants’ bodies and this meant that they sometimes disengaged, got distracted, and sought out other brief activities to do. But that movement away from what is hard and then back again created a deeper affective reflection on how bodies came into and out of contact through movement. By engaging with this expressive art form, participants came to understand the thresholds of how their bodies moved, and in turn, pushed them to move differently (Williams, 1977). Our bodies—my body included—left feeling empowered. I felt stronger, as though my body could do new things and this physical strength and awareness felt
connected to my emotional strength and awareness. I felt ready to engage consciously with the world, and ready to experience a sense of wonder beyond what is thinkable through language by tapping into what is felt when attention is focused on our bodies (Ahmed, 2015; Boal, 2002). Here is Twysted and Sadie reflecting on the voguing workshop:

Twysted: Everybody vogues different. Like, literally. And, that is the beautiful thing about voguing. It is personal expression, which is why everybody vogues totally different.

Sadie: There is something so creative when you all move together in a room.

Twysted: It feels good, right?

Sadie: Yeah.

Twysted: It’s, like, empowering, almost.

Sadie: Yep. (Video Transcript, March 15, 2018)

When bodies are punctured as they come into contact during collaborative and relational performance, openings are created that facilitate movement both towards and away from one another. This invites recognition of similarities and differences across bodies and becomes a building block for participants to understand themselves as individuals and as agents of change within the wider world. As a form of queer pedagogy, affective collaborative performance, such as this vogue femme workshop, worked to redefine ways of being and doing through movement as a relational encounter (Airton, 2013; Manning, 2016).

**Bodily encounters with/in voguing.** Participants moved in new ways, and as each body stumbled, and fell, and stumbled again, the group collectively entered a site of productive failure. Heron and Johnson (2017) suggest that, “The hopeful practice of… exploration de-
hierarchies a scholarly endeavour and recasts the student as co-creator of knowledge, rather than consumer of cultural capital. The values and practices of such a laboratory may open one avenue of participatory pedagogy that scaffolds risk and re-values failure” (p. 282). By moving toward failure, expecting and welcoming failure, both within the voguing movements and within the research in general, participants, and artist-educators, engaged in a hopeful exploration of the unknown. As Gallagher et al. (2018) state, “Far better, in our estimation, are those drama spaces where students are encouraged to knowingly embrace an unfettered praxis of failure” (p. 73). This affinity for failure through our work facilitated openings across bodies as they moved through and past attached vulnerabilities. These intensities punctured participants’ bodies and led to openings through which affect could stick and unstick from their bodily horizons (Ahmed, 2015). According to Ahmed (2006) bodily horizons are the boundary of what a body can reach, the limit of what a body can do, and what it can feel. When participants work to realign and disrupt their bodily horizons, they shift towards realizing their bodies can reach new limits, and that they can live in new ways. The bodily horizon sits at the threshold of what is currently possible. When this threshold is punctured and new horizons are created, new possibilities for living differently can emerge.

Movement through voguing in Twysted’s workshop pushed at these horizons. It was a site of community building, where the group’s failure to successfully replicate the dance moves built a relational space of relative safety in which bodies could work to imagine new ways of being and doing. Voguing as an emerging encounter for participants took them to the edge of their bodily horizons and required them to move in unpredictable ways by unsticking familiar affects and facilitating movement towards the unknown (Ahmed, 2006, 2015). As a queering of education, participants’ bodies stepped towards the thresholds of what was known to them and then engaged with movement from this new positionality. They were able to subvert their
preconceived ideas about how they moved through space, how their bodies intra-acted with the world around them, and how they engaged in a performativity of race, class, and gender on a daily basis. Participants took risks with how they moved and could feel the difference in their bodies when they performed. They recreated what they had seen in popular culture through dramatic dips and pursed lips, but they also subverted these representations with their own embodied ideas of what it means to experiment with identity in an open forum.

Figure 26. Bodies in movement.

Nervous laughter filled the room as we learned the elements and attempted to replicate them in our own bodies. Boal (2000, 2002) has written about the need to “undo” taken for granted muscular structures. He argues that by awakening our bodily senses we can engage in a “physical reflection on oneself” (2002, p. 49),

which helps the doer to a better knowledge or recognition of his or her body, its muscles, its nerves, its relationship to other bodies, to gravity, to objects, to space, its dimensions, volumes, weights, speed, the interrelationship of these different forces, and so on. The goal … is a better awareness of the body and its mechanisms, its atrophies and hypertrophies, its capacities for recuperation, restructuring, reharmonization. (p. 49)

By introducing new ways of moving and engaging, the voguing workshop provided this type of
physical reflection and muscular undoing for participants. New sensations through new movement facilitated awareness about bodies as they came into contact with the people and things around the room. The physicality of the dancing changed participants’ bodies in a number of ways; from building strength, engaging forgotten muscle, and pushing bodies to move in new directions. To change one’s body—its movements and its sensations—is to change the way one lives, it is a form of living differently. In engaging a new way of moving participants were experimenting with movement as a not-yet knowable way of living differently (Kumashiro, 2002). This embodied reflection was not one that took place through words, but rather was a bodily (un)learning through relational movement, a queering of educational practice and the ways that we come to know.

**Summary**

In this chapter I answered the following researching questions:

1. How do affective moments infiltrate, intensify, and emerge through participants’ daily lives, and what impact does this have on their bodies during the applied theatre workshop?

2. What are the possibilities and limitations of performance as a political and educational tool for young people from LGBTQ2S+ families to learn about and advocate for themselves?

By exploring the thresholds of possibility for young people from LGBTQ2S+ families, we can see the potential that art holds in pushing at those boundaries. Movement, songwriting, and performance, as political and educational tools, brought forward opportunities to advocate for ways of living differently. These art forms positioned the bodies of the performers in dialogue with each other and audience members, calling beyond the framing of a stage and into an affective exchange of uniquely queer possibilities. Through improv games, songwriting, and dance, I explored how connection and embodiment facilitated movement within an applied theatre project. I demonstrated that bodily openings as discussed in the previous chapter call us
to move both towards and away from one another as we come to recognize our similarities and differences. In a discussion about her encounters at school, Bianca had this to say:

Bianca: Everything a kid knows comes from home. ‘Cause even if they get information from another kid at home they will come home and dodododo do do do. And, the parents will be like, “That is wrong.” And, the kid will be like, “Well, my parents say it is wrong and I trust my parents, so it means it is wrong.” All those ideas, they come from somewhere and usually, it is from home…they come from school and they go home and tell their parents about school and they will be like, “This isn’t correct information.”

(Video Transcript, March 14, 2018)

The warm ups, improvisations, movement, song writing, and dancing that I discuss in this chapter are a direct response to the idea that participants’ encounters at school are being negotiated through what their peers are learning in their homes about sexuality and gender identity. Bianca’s quote above is describing the power that this familial learning has on her experiences at school. She believes that even when cis- and hetero- normative ideas are challenged at school, parents’ worldviews hold more power on how their children decipher their worlds. This leads to the bullying and marginalizing encounters that both Sasha and Bianca described over and over again during our workshop. Drawing on artistic engagement, we worked not only to come to understand ourselves and our worlds through embodied encounters, but we also worked to shift that movement outwards while challenging the affective signs of heteronormativity and cisgenderism (Ahmed, 2015). Although we cannot undo the learning that is being done in the home of their peers that reinforces these marginalizing affects, we can work to decrease their affective value at school, and the influence they hold over our bodies. By providing opportunities for the emergence of love, empowerment, community, and connection to circulate among us, our work created a resistance to the idea that “everything a kid knows comes from home.”
Through working with expressive movement, I demonstrated how the everyday intensities that participants face impact their bodies ability to move, creating both tensions and releases dependent on the context in which they are moving/navigating/living. Through connection to one another, to the art forms, and to the wider world, participants were able to embody ways of living differently. This movement created opportunities to explore how their bodies come into contact with the thresholds of performance, and brought forward openings through which others could be invited to move in unison with them. This collective movement towards the unknown was an invitation to affectively (re)engage in how we queer spaces through bodily movement and imagine a future where bodies are not defined by heteronormativity and cissexism but are free to move, and play, and respond in unique and unpredictable ways (Keenan, 2017).
Chapter 6: Queering Spaces & Collaborative Performance

This research had two points of focus. The first was working alongside youth participants to understand how marginalizing affects circulated in and through their experiences. The second was working to understand how applied theatre practice could be used as a collaborative and affective queer pedagogy with young people from LGBTQ2S+ families. I addressed these points of inquiry by asking and answering the following research questions:

(1) How does applied theatre work as a form of collaborative affective queer pedagogy for young people from LGBTQ2S+ families?

(2) How does affect circulate in and through the experiences of young people with LGBTQ2S+ parents?

(3) How do affective moments infiltrate, intensify, and emerge through participants’ daily lives, and what impact does this have on their bodies during the applied theatre workshop?

(4) What are the possibilities and limitations of performance as a political and educational tool for young people from LGBTQ2S+ families to learn about and advocate for themselves?

In chapter one, I noted that recent literature in the fields of gender and sexuality education and applied theatre suggested a need for practice-based research that examines the possibilities of queer and affective pedagogies as a critical intervention into our social world. In working to answer the above research questions I have demonstrated that engaging a creative, playful, and collaborative process generated a space where participants and artist-educators could question their affective attachments, reimagine their relationships, and collectively move towards an imagined future.

This research project demonstrates that children and adults who are in pain from daily encounters with heteronormativity and cissexism, can engage in performance as a form of queer
pedagogy that destabilizes the internalized, marginalizing affects held within their bodies. In this project, the community building work that occurred through the process of performance creation was strong enough that it allowed for vulnerability to emerge. This vulnerability provided the space for participants to find connections with one another, themselves, and with a wider community of queer and trans activists who are working to make a difference in the world through their artistic practices. With applied theatre work, participants were able to move differently, feel differently, and rehearse what it means to live differently. This is an important form of anti-oppression education, where living differently in a way that is not-yet knowable is a tangible outcome of queering educational spaces (Kumashiro, 2000; Lather & St. Pierre, 2013; Zembylas, 2015). Participants were able to celebrate their family formations, as well as their own uniqueness and individuality, while gaining deeper understandings of their own positionalities as agents of change. Both Sadie and Sasha had important insights into what this workshop meant for them. Here are their final reflections:

Sadie: I have learned, well, new skills for one. I have taken away voguing, and bookmaking, and song writing. Like, I think that is... really cool to, like, as an artist, all of us, right, have like, these new modes of creating art, which is so cool. Also, I am taking away that telling our stories, well I kinda already know this, but it is kinda nice to work intergenerationally, because our stories can be told in multiple ways from, like, opera to storytelling to, um, clothes pin putting together. So, thanks for reminding me that art can be told in a variety of ways.

Sasha: Um. I am taking away, um (pause). All of the fun that we had and how just... the idea of the song and also ... That there is other people out there to share their stories and be a part of something... Being able to write something about our experiences and about
our lives and be a part of something that might be a part of something big. So, just like taking that chance … makes it [fun]. (Video Transcript, March 15, 2018)

Sadie reflected on expanding her repertoire as an artist, but also the collaboration that took place between young people and artists, the intergenerational storytelling was a sticking point for Sadie, one in which she could build new understandings and relationships. Sasha was drawn in by the fun, the laughter, and the playfulness of the workshop. This affective energy was important in facilitating an experience for Sasha that engaged in conversations that she sometimes found difficult (see her personal mask in Chapter 4). Sasha’s final words indicate that the riskiness of sharing her experiences, of presenting her vulnerable stories, and taking the “chance” was worthwhile because it meant that Sasha got to be part of something bigger than herself. She was able to find community and a place of belonging. While Sadie focused on the collaborative aspects of artmaking, for Sasha having fun was a really important component of the workshop. I build on both the collaboration, the sharing of experience, and the fun in my final reflection during the workshop:

Pam: I am taking away so much. But mostly the incredible people that I got to spend these three days with, getting to know all three of you, getting to know all of your stories, being able to laugh so much together while also diving deeply into some really serious and sometimes sad topics that we touched on – so I am taking that away. I am taking away your willingness to be vulnerable and that you could open up and share things that you maybe haven’t shared with other people and that is the biggest and best gift that anyone could ever give to another person… being vulnerable and sharing your story. So, I am leaving holding all [of] that and I am… so thankful that I have gotten to know you and that I have gotten to create art with you. That I have gotten to hear your stories, live your stories, and transform your stories into art and be part of this experience with you… And the sense of community that comes from creating together
and talking and sharing. I think that sometimes it is really easy to feel alone in the world and I am just thankful that I am not [alone] because I know that there are people out there in the next generations who are … doing amazing things both in the artistic sense and in the advocacy sense. You are, by being here, advocates for queer communities and for queer lives. You are amazing. You are all amazing. So, thank you. (Video Transcript, March 15, 2018)

In some ways this reflection from the final moments of the workshop has guided the writing of this final chapter. I continue to be thankful for the time that I was able to share with these incredible people, to learn from them, create art with them, to build community with them. In what follows I expand on these thoughts from Sadie, Sasha, and myself, building an argument that community building and artmaking have the potential to be tangible queer pedagogies if you attend to the affective and collaborative potentiality of the work (Sloan, 2018). I begin by examining how and why creating a queer space seemed to be beneficial in understanding and challenging the affective attachments of participants. Then, I explore how the notion of a collaborative performance emerged from the queer and affective space that was created. Finally, I share implications for future research and practice.

**Queering Spaces**

Young people from LGBTQ2S+ families navigate marginalization on a daily basis because, in general, Canadian public schools do not yet know how to support them (Goldstein, 2019b; Taylor et al., 2015). This meant that Sasha and Bianca—the two youth who participated in this research project—exhibited overwhelming excitement and relief about being in a queer space, a space where they were expected (hicks, 2017), welcomed, and encouraged to approach storytelling, artmaking, and research as their whole selves with LGBTQ2S+ artist-educators. In discussing the enduring violence of being unexpected at school as a non-binary teacher, hicks (2017) states, “I do not want to be accommodated. Like everyone else, what I do want is to love
and be loved and I do not see any reason why all of our school-based endeavors should not acknowledge and encourage the things that we each need to learn and practice so that we can support one another well in this need” (p. 13). hicks proposed that approaching schooling through a spirit of caregiving works to meet the needs of everyone in the classroom and that this is what it means to queer education. Goldstein (2019b) builds on the notion of being expected in educational environments suggesting that,

Safe moments work towards tolerance at school: ‘I’ll sit beside you.’ Positive moments work towards acceptance and support: “I’ll put my arm around you” and “I’ll lift you up when you can’t get up.” Queering moments, which work to challenge cisgender normativity and heteronormativity, however, show that teachers and principals have been expecting and have been preparing for the arrival of LGBTQ students and families at their school (p. 138).

Much like the literature cited in chapter one, hicks (2017) and Goldstein (2019b) are grappling with what a queer pedagogy looks and feels like in practice. In this workshop, the artist-educators and I put a great deal of care and labour into expecting youth participants, we used our intimate knowledge of LGBTQ2S+ experiences to design a workshop where participants could bring their stories, and then feel validated and heard (Jiménez, 2009). One of the most poignant examples of this was in the act of listening to youth participants as equal collaborators in the research, in the artmaking, and in the knowledge production. Listening, really listening, to youth shows them that they are welcome in the space, their ideas and experiences are invited, and that they have power and worth within the educational encounter. This research was an example of the ways in which queering educational spaces can benefit students from LGBTQ2S+ families, and how creating queer spaces that challenge heteronormativity and cissexism in the way the programming is designed and delivered has the potential to be beneficial for all students.

Expecting LGBTQ2S+ identities provided opportunities for participants to take the pain they
experience from daily encounters with marginalizing affects and transform that pain into something else. When individuals choose to move away from marginalizing affects, the result is a more loving space that acknowledges people and their intersectional identities as valid and important (Crenshaw, 2016).

In this research, collaborative performance as a deliberate queer pedagogical pursuit worked to dismantle hierarchies in the room, center the stories and knowledge of youth, and welcome and expect a diversity of experiences, while providing a safe-enough space for marginalizing affective energy to circulate—not as a reproduction of violent discourses, but as a way to examine and restructure that marginalization towards reimagining the thresholds of our worlds. I say safe-enough because I believe it is not possible to create a space that is completely safe at all times for all people. I also believe that in order to engage in risky work that facilitates new ideas we need to be willing to push at our collective and individual boundaries. Staying within our comfort zones, staying safe, means that we will likely not create change in our thoughts, actions, or the world around us - which is antithetical to the goals of applied theatre. To be safe-enough means that we are working collaboratively from a place of respect to build towards change while recognizing that we are all going to make mistakes as we learn together, even if that sometimes feels scary. Approaching this safe-enough space involves asking participants and artist-educators to forgive each other’s mistakes and learn from one another as we collectively push at our individual boundaries and ways of knowing. In doing this, young people feel supported to take risks, negotiate diverse perspectives, and navigate conflict, as can be seen in this research project.

The ongoing creative exchange facilitated openings within participants’ bodily horizons and new possibilities for living and expressing themselves emerged (Ahmed, 2006; Zembylas, 2015). Shifting the orientation of a workshop towards what else is possible and engaging a queer futurity is a queering of educational practices (Goldstein et al., 2007; Keenan, 2017). When we
arrive at the thresholds of possibility and then retreat again, we limit what can be articulated in that moment. To engage in a queering of educational and artistic spaces involved a constant questioning of those thresholds and an openness to engage with reimagining how they are drawn (Williams, 1977). This moved the work beyond creating safe, positive, and/or queer moments (Goldstein et al., 2007) to a tangible queering of how we engage, move, and hold one another in practice.

Creating queer educational and artistic spaces involved a reordering of our taken-for-granted assumptions. It was a purposeful shift away from how things have been done in the past and a step towards the unknown. In this research, the creation of queer moments facilitated an embodied shift in how bodies move through space. As a group we came to move differently. During this workshop, youth predominantly facilitated that movement, because as a facilitator, my approach to queering spaces involved centering young peoples’ experiences, ideas, and stories. This has left me wondering if we can create a paradigm where this work is not the responsibility of our marginalized students, but rather, is embedded in our educational pedagogy and curriculum. It is with this shift towards a queering of practice in both artistic and educational communities that I expand on with the idea of building collaborative performances as a strategy for engaging queer pedagogy.

**Collaborative Performance**

In this project, collaborative performance facilitated queer educational practice because it was relational, dialogic, and was guided by a principle of love (hicks, 2017; hooks, 2000). To allow love to lead us into new ways of knowing was a practice of queer possibility because it opened up vulnerability and created encounters that were not subject to fear. To fear the unknown is to defend social borders that re-inscribe heteronormativity and cissexism on our bodies. To resist this through the fabric of our encounters allows queer moments (Goldstein et al., 2007) to multiply into queer practices and queer spaces. This was important for Sasha and
Bianca because so few spaces that they enter do this; most spaces require them to explain
themselves or their family, as Bianca said, “I do the whole thing again.” They are immediately
Othered with each new encounter and each new coming out. To queer a space celebrates their
difference. Therefore, this research shows that when we approach the threshold of what is
known, and the discourses available to us with an open heart, we can lovingly and collectively
work to break down the boundaries, in relation to one another, and in dialogue.

To reflect on and transform the world in which we live is a driving component of applied
theatre. Yet, I would argue that when I worked to queer applied theatre my praxis required a
continued questioning of the hierarchies of performance-based explorations and included a
reimagining of who gets to be an artist, and what constitutes art. This research project shows
that art is not a completed artifact, or a craft that can only be practiced by trained individuals. In
this research art became defined by the affective exchange of energy within the creative process.
The artistic artifacts that emerged from the work of youth participants and artist-educators were
ephemeral, fleeting relational moments that facilitated new ways of knowing and being and
doing. Artistry then was not a pre-determined outcome or lesson, but rather it was an experience
in the making. As artists, we are not separate from the power dynamics of our world. To invite
those dynamics into applied theatre practice, that is, to examine, reimagine, and attempt to
subvert them through a collaborative exchange of affective energy, takes up a queer approach to
education through theatre. In this research, a queering of applied theatre practice through
collaborative performance became a pedagogical tool that attended to affective movements by
engaging the body as a site of (un)knowing.

When I first introduced the idea of a participatory aesthetic (see Chapter 2 & Chapter 4),
it was with an “accidental audience” in mind (Schechner, 2003). I argued that the raw and gritty
aesthetics that emerge from having participants as lead authors and creators in their own stories
created powerful artwork and pedagogy within performance spaces even when the audience was
unknown to the participants (Baer, 2017; Prentki, 2009a). As I continue to build this concept through my research and writing, it is becoming clear that a participatory aesthetic is multi-layered, collaborative, and most importantly, a way to summon affective exchange between participants, performers, and audiences, while being aware that the roles of participant, performer, and audience are often overlapping. Understood in this way, participatory aesthetics are a queering of performance work. Much like the traditions of participatory action research, and participatory learning activities, theories from which applied theatre’s literature on participation has been built, a participatory aesthetic prioritizes people and communities in identifying and solving problems in their own lives (Ackroyd & O’Toole, 2010; Breed, 2009; Fine et al. 2004; Kumashiro, 2002; Lunch & Lunch, 2006; Preston, 2009a; Rahnema, 2009; Stoudt, 2007). In a participatory aesthetic, this problem solving occurs through a collaborative, affective, and aesthetic dialogue.

This research chose to prioritize an integral and embedded audience (Schechner, 2003), as well as the pedagogies and stories of participants over many other competing interests in applied theatre work, such as a public performance, audience, and advocacy. In doing so, I found that the person who benefitted the most from a performance was often the performer; the one telling, enacting, and embodying the story. It has been argued that this approach to applied theatre is too insular, and that it does not have the reach of a large-scale performance, or the globalized contextualization of work striving for systemic change (Prendergast & Saxton, 2016; Thompson, 2009b). And, while I would agree that these limitations of localized and collaborative performance work are valid, I am hesitant to dismiss the potential for change that is created when we focus on the here and now. When we immerse ourselves in the stories of who is in the room and work to help folx articulate who they are in the face of marginalization, we engage in a powerful form of advocacy, and one that is largely missing from the educational and theatrical institutions of our world. Unlike process drama, collaborative performance is
dependent on startling empathy (Baer et al., 2019), the dialogic exchange of affective understanding between performer and audience. This creates a space for vulnerability and movement to occur before, within, and after a performance event. Participatory aesthetics and collaborative performance are a way to build community, re-imagine community, and use artistic intra-actions to transform our affective encounters.

**Implications for Research**

**Implications for research in education.** This research points to a need to further examine the experiences of children from LGBTQ2S+ families as they navigate school and schooling. Specifically, further research should work to understand more diverse and intersectional experiences of young people from LGBTQ2S+ families and how educators and administrators can work to create school systems that address gender and sexuality as a part of the formal curriculum beginning in the early elementary years. Both participants spoke extensively about bullying in elementary school in response to their family formation. Therefore, further research needs to be done on how educators respond to homophobic and transphobic bullying and if any preventative measures are finding their ways into the classroom and/or curriculum in elementary school (Goldstein, 2019b). I believe that research that works to understand how teachers can weave the experiences, identities, and stories of LGBTQ2S+ people and families into the fabric of our classrooms as a proactive measure to challenge heteronormativity and cissexism while also preventing homophobic and transphobic bullying would be highly beneficial for all students, not only students from LGBTQ2S+ families.

**Implications for research in applied theatre.** As an applied theatre project, this research points to the benefits of further study into the role of affect as it manifests in the process of applied theatre work and, more broadly, in social change, particularly as it relates to the co-creation of understanding between participant and audience in the moment of performance. While my current research dives deeply into the process of creating-in-community
as a form of collaborative performance, further research can build on how to use this understanding of performance to facilitate other kinds of individual, social, and political change through embodied encounters.

**Implications for Practice**

**Implications for educators.** This research demonstrates the importance of holding space for individuals, even when working to address issues of systemic oppression. Creating space for people to feel welcomed and expected in education and in research involves slowing down, listening to people, and validating their emotions, their experiences, and their ways of being in the world. In education and research there is rarely an opportunity to focus in on the specific needs and experiences of one or two individuals. This research shows that when we prioritize each and every person and invite them into a collaborative process of meaning making the possibilities around community-building, advocacy, and artistic-creation are infinite.

This research also shows that engaging emotions and affect as a relational way of knowing is of vital importance within critical pedagogies. Our emotions, our interactions, our intra-actions are not separate from marginalizing intensities such as heteronormativity and cissexism, as is evidenced in the experiences of youth participants. To build pedagogical practice that welcomes the complicated and messy relationships of everyone in the room and works collaboratively to explore new potentialities is a powerful approach to building educational practices and spaces that are proactively working towards inclusive, positive, and queer schools (Goldstein et al., 2007).

This project suggests that researchers and educators have an opportunity to continue to challenge current ways of knowing by engaging open-ended, creative, and affective pedagogical conversations that work towards the unknown (Airton, 2013; Keenan, 2017). In doing so there is the potential to centre the experiences of participants, to reimagine the world from the margins, and to facilitate living differently as a not-yet-known future (Kumashiro, 2002). This research
demonstrates that laughter, playfulness, and genuine listening were strategies that resonated with participants, facilitating the potentiality for a queer affective pedagogy, through which participants and artist-educators were able to question their affective attachments, reimagine their relationships, and collectively move towards living differently.

**Implications for community members and activists.** There is a continued need to challenge the systems that aren’t expecting LGBTQ2S+ families and identities (Hicks, 2017). This project shows that heteronormativity and cissexism are governing many of the encounters young people have at school and these marginalizing technologies of affect are not always blatant acts of homophobia and transphobia that can be combated with a reactive policy (anti-bullying for example), instead they are an ongoing re-production and circulation of affective intensities that define the relational encounters of young people’s worlds (Zembylas, 2015). Therefore, this research shows that community members and activists need to continue to push for the availability of queer spaces and practices. In particular this research suggests that when schools are still attempting to create safe encounters at school for young people from LGBTQ2S+ communities, there needs to be queer spaces in alternative settings that can be easily accessed. As parents and as activists initiating and seeking out these programs in order for our children to feel welcomed, expected, and validated in their experiences is necessary. In particular this research shows that for young people with LGBTQ2S+ parents who may or may not feel included in the larger LGBTQ2S+ community (Epstein-Fine & Zook, 2018), and may or may not feel comfortable in school-based programing such as a gay-straight alliance, there is a need to have programs available where their unique experiences can be explored and where these young people can work through their experiences in a collaborative and potentially intergenerational way.

This research suggests that there is an ongoing need to find ways to support one another as activists. This project demonstrates that activism requires a significant amount of emotional
labour and young people from LGBTQ2S+ families are required to engage in inter-personal activism in their daily lives. Each time they are asked to explain their family they are challenging heteronormativity and cissexism by simply existing. In this case both youth participants were in elementary school, yet they were educating peers, teachers, and other adults regularly. The affective intensity of this labour became undone through this research work, participants were given a space where their stories and their experiences could be held by caring adults and the burden of their ongoing emotional labour was momentarily lifted. Much like Jiménez (2009), this shows “that the notion of care is a potentially powerful tool for queering elementary education” (p. 178). As noted throughout chapter 4 and 5, a queer pedagogy of care facilitated a release of affect from deep within participant’s bodies leading to new bodily horizons (Ahmed, 2006). This research shows that holding one another, supporting one another, and loving one another in the face of ongoing marginalization is a powerful and needed form of advocacy.

**Implications for artist-educators.** This research indicates that when artists have social and educational goals and are working directly with community members, the process of creation requires an ongoing cycle of care (Hughes, 2013). This means that the aesthetic goals, the social goals, and the affective goals of the creative work are in constant movement requiring attention from artist-educators and participants in order to effectively navigate the creative process so that it is beneficial for everyone involved (Goldstein, Gray, Salisbury, & Snell, 2014; Prentki, 2009a; Preston, 2009c). This research demonstrates that, affect, understood as pre-cognitive intensities of emotion, is more accessible through the aesthetic form and that artistic creation provides an entrance into the affective realm through a creative, playful, and collaborative process. As tangible strategies for queering applied theatre spaces, creativity, playfulness, and collaboration are important implications for practice. This research suggests that when these strategies are used alongside a cycle of care, they were able to explore the
thresholds of possibility in challenging, subverting, and reimagining the status quo by engaging with the potential that art holds in pushing at our collective boundaries. In particular this research demonstrates that the open-ended qualities of creativity, playfulness, and collaboration are a queer approach to applied theatre and pedagogy (Keenan, 2017).

Movement, in particular, drew on these strategies and positioned the bodies of the performers in dialogue with one another, wherein these young people challenged the impact that marginalizing affects have on their bodies ability to move. Playfulness and collaboration facilitated a new relationship between audience and performer creating an ongoing dialogue throughout the workshop that built upon previous performances and tellings. Youth participants and artist-educators moved from audience member to performer and back again, upending any traditional delineation between the two, and using this cyclical artistic dialogue to move collectively towards the unknown through a playful invitation of laughter (Salverson, 2008). For artists this indicates that art is not always a completed object, rather art (and specifically the process of creating theatre) is a relational emergence between people, that might look and feel differently with each and every affective exchange (Halprin, 1970). This project indicates that artists, educators, researchers, and activists can lean into and embrace the unknown in order to invite other people into a space that genuinely engages with creative, social, and educational potentiality (Sloan, 2018).

**Final Thoughts: Love as Activism**

As a queering of applied theatre spaces, this research-creation process re-conceptualized the roles of participant, facilitator, artist, performer, and audience and invited each person involved to move together towards the unknown. The performance and artistic work was embedded within the workshop space as a form of dialogue. This research shows that affective and collaborative performance creation has the potential to engage in a queer sensibility by engaging a pedagogical practice that cyclically and systematically questions our taken-for-
granted ideas about the world around us. This was done by centering participants’ experiences and stories in performance work and required a reconceptualization of the role of audience. It required vulnerability, failure, deep connection, and a willingness to move towards the unknown. This was particularly powerful for young people from LGBTQ2S+ families because they are so rarely given the opportunity to do this identity work in a loving, queer space: they are rarely allowed the freedom to immerse themselves in articulating, on their own terms, the world they envision for themselves. When reviewing footage of the workshop our final words were this:

Sasha: I am taking … the excitement (pause) and sadness, ‘cause it was the final day.

Pam: We will throw some love in there for you, so you don’t have to feel sad that it is over.

Bianca: I am taking … excitement and love, but no sadness.

Sadie: I am taking all of your brilliance… I am bathing in that brilliance.

Pam: I am taking a powerful, beautiful, exhausting three days of love. It is like a lovefest in here… This is what love feels like. (Video Transcript, March 15, 2018)

This research shows that approaching education, art, and research from a loving stance is a queer sensibility that provides opportunities for new possibilities to emerge and sustained change to take place, allowing individuals and communities to enter into meaningful dialogue about issues that are sometimes difficult to discuss. We can transform our daily encounters with heteronormativity and cissexism as individual activists, but it is much easier to do so when we feel connected, empowered, and loved.

Sadie: Bouncy movement with arms, dancing, excited, energy.

Bianca: Swings arm, swings hips, escalates voice to a high opera note as arms extend to ceiling.
Sasha: Arms up above her head, voice finding a beat, arms moving down and back up to a V shape above her head as she dips into a lunge – big smile on her face.

Pam: Bubbly arms and noises into a superhero pose.

(Descriptive Video Transcript, March 15, 2018)
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Appendix A: List of Videos


Appendix B: Consent Form

An Invitation to Participate in a Research Project
About LGBTQ Families and Schooling:
LGBTQ Families Youth Theatre Creation Project

Consent Form

Date:

Dear Potential Research Participant:

My name is Pamela Baer and I am an artist, educator and researcher at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). I am writing to invite you to participate in a research project on LGBTQ families’ experiences of school.

Purpose of the research
As a PhD student at OISE/UT, and an artist who has a background in creating socially driven theatre and media work with youth, I am interested in how artist educators like myself can work effectively with young people from a variety of backgrounds so that they can create an equitable and creatively generative learning environment for all students. In an attempt to understand the potential of theatre as a form of anti-oppression education, I am interested in creating a new piece of theatre about the particular issues LGBTQ families experience in their everyday lives both inside and outside of school.

Stages of the research
Stage 1: One-week workshop series: The research project will consist of three stages. The first stage will be a one-week March Break workshop that operates similar to that of a drama-based day camp, where youth participants arrive in the morning Monday through Friday for a full day of activities and explorations. Drawing on my experience as an applied theatre facilitator the workshops will involve drama games, improvisation, storytelling, imaginative play, movement, and other drama activities. The first few days will involve group building exercises and storytelling through various theatrical techniques (puppetry, choral speaking, movement, tableau, narration, etc.). We will then focus on play-building and performance work collaboratively coming to understand what is unique about the experiences of these youth and what they feel would be important to share with an audience.
Stage 2: Optional Rehearsal Period: Once the one-week workshop is completed we will move into an optional rehearsal period. During this time youth who are interested in continuing with the project will be invited to come to rehearsals in order to prepare for a performance. During this time we will be working with the artistic material that was created during the two week workshop, refining it and making sure that we are ready for an audience. These rehearsals will only take place on a as needed basis as determined by myself and participants.

Stage 3: Local community performances: The research will involve performing for audiences in the local community. These performances will be arranged with the help of the youth and will be for family, friends, peers, and teachers of the participants.

I am keenly aware that talking about family life and potentially discussing experiences of homophobia and transphobia are intensely personal and may cause the participants feelings of anxiety, anger and sadness. This is a risk of participating in the research. As a way of navigating this risk, participants will have the right to pass or sit out during any activity and this will be clearly communicated on the first day – no one will be required to share more than they feel comfortable with. Participants will also have the option to decide whose stories are developed for an audience. As a research participant, you will be able to stop your participation at any time during the workshop. Parents who give their permission children to participate in the workshop can stop their participation at any time during the workshop. Youth themselves can stop their participation at any time during the workshop. With your permission the workshops will be video recorded.

Sharing the findings of the study

In the final phase of the project, I will share the findings through a PhD dissertation of the study and through conventional academic and professional journal articles, this may include excerpts from the artistic work such as video and photography.

Participation

Participation in the research is voluntary. If at any time people wish to withdraw from the project they may do so.

Storage of Interview Information

To protect confidentiality, the video and photo documentation will be stored in a password protected computer file. As well, any printed materials such as transcriptions or consent forms will be stored in a locked filing cabinet to protect confidentiality.
Confidentiality

Participants who agree to be part of the performance group will waive their right to confidentiality for the duration of the performance work. In both the group work and when on stage it will be impossible to maintain anonymity. In addition, the artistic work (and it’s documentation) will become important components of your artistic portfolios, which you might want to use for university or grant applications. Therefore, along with maintaining creative copyright and ownership over the performance work, you will be entitled to keep copies of the artistic work once the project is complete. In research dissemination activities you will have the choice to make your name and image (from the videos and photographs) publicly available or not. In research reports and articles, conference presentations and online publications, you will have a choice to be referred to by a pseudonym or by your real name or to have your face blurred in embedded images and videos. You will also have the choice to waive confidentiality in the online edited videos and other artistic projects if you choose.

Limits of Confidentiality: Duty to Report

Because you are under the age of 18 I have a duty to report instances where you are being harmed in anyway and instances where you express intent to hurt yourself or others. If any of these circumstances emerge I will contact the appropriate authorities and/or your parents.

Reporting the results

As indicated above, the results of the research will be written up as a PhD dissertation and in the form of academic and professional journal articles. Participants will be able to find a copy of the dissertation and these articles on T-Space, the University of Toronto’s Research Repository, which can be accessed on web with the following address: https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca

I would like to express my appreciation for your participation in this project. Should you have any questions about your rights as a participant you are welcome to contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3272. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me: Pamela Baer pamela.baer@mail.utoronto.ca or my supervisor Dr. Tara Goldstein tgoldstein@oise.utoronto.ca.

In closing, I am very excited about the research project and I hope that you will want to participate. Many thanks for your interest.
Sincerely yours,

Pamela Baer
PhD Student
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

Biography
Pamela Baer, MA, is a theatre artist, queer mom and PhD candidate in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Pamela has been creating socially driven theatre with youth for the past ten years, including writing curriculum for drama and film camps, training and supervising artist facilitators, and generally enjoying the process of collaborative creative discovery with people of all ages.

Consent Form

I understand the conditions of participating in the study and I consent to participate in the Theatre Creation Research Program for Youth with LGBTQ Parents. By initialling beside the statements below I agree to:

___ Have documentation of my own art making used as research materials
___ I choose to waive confidentiality during the creative and performance work
___ I would like a pseudonym to be used in any writing about the project
___ I consent the use of my image for research dissemination activities
___ I would like to remain anonymous through the following methods (Please list):

Name (Please print): ____________________________
Signature: ____________________________
Date: ____________________________

Parental Consent Form

I understand the conditions of my child participating in the study and I consent my child’s participation in the Theatre Creation Research Program for Youth with LGBTQ Parents.

___ Have documentation of my child’s art making used as research materials
___ I choose to waive my child’s confidentiality during the creative and performance work
___ I would like a pseudonym to be used for my child in any writing about the project
___ I consent the use of my child’s image (video and photo) for research dissemination activities
___ I would like my child to remain anonymous through the following methods (Please list):
Name of Child (Please print): ______________________________
Name of Parent (Please print): ____________________________
Signature of Parent: ________________________________
Date: ________________________________