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PEDAGOGY OF PERFORMANCE:
IMAGINING MEANINGFUL EDUCATION FOR STREET-INVOLVED YOUTH

by

Abby Hershler

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I explore the work and ideas of people who are engaged in theatre with street-involved youth. My research is three tiered. It focuses on 1) theatre theory as it pertains to street-involved youth, 2) the views of educators who are involved in theatre projects with street-involved youth and 3) the study of an experimental alternative educational program for street-involved youth. I examine the potential and limitations of theatre as pedagogy. I argue that theatre-based pedagogy is influenced by the wide range of approaches of theatre workers (exemplified in a discussion about the use of storytelling), the diversity of youth (encompassed by the label "street-involved"), the multiple and changing needs and desires of every person involved in theatre, and the constraints and possibilities engendered by funders that require particular "outcomes" such as "employable" youth.
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INTRODUCTIONS

How can we begin to imagine education that "work[s] for the reconstruction of social imagination in the service of human freedom" (Giroux & Simon, 1989, p. 223)? What does this education look like for street-involved youth1 who are unable or unwilling, for a variety of reasons (emotional, intellectual and circumstantial) to engage in mainstream (public or private) schooling? What are the ideals of educators involved in the creation of this type of education and what barriers and conflicts complicate their work? These are the basic questions underlying my thesis.

To answer these questions, I have been drawn to theatre and people who use theatre2 with street involved youth in Toronto. My aim is to explore:
A) theatre theory as it pertains to street involved youth (Chapter I)
B) the views of educators who are involved in theatre projects with street involved youth (Chapter II)

1 I will be using the term "street-involved youth" throughout this paper. I have chosen this term instead of "street youth" or "street kids" because I believe it offers a wider spectrum of meanings. "Street youth" is a label that conjures images of youth sleeping on park benches or panhandling on street corners. The population to whom I am referring live diverse lifestyles and are engaged in street life in multiple ways, some extensively and other sporadically. Some youth maintain relatively stable housing but still spend their days with friends on the streets. Some youth live in self-constructed squats or crash at different friends or hostels each night. Some youth have day jobs (such as squeegeeing). Some youth spend their days at drop-in centres. The list of their life experiences and lifestyles is lengthy. I have chosen the term "street-involved youth" to suggest diversity in street involvement and recognize youths' self-engagement or agency to choose their involvement in street life and community. Like any category, "street-involved youth" must be constantly challenged and redefined. It will never embrace everyone and it will always be limiting. This will be discussed more extensively in my first chapter.

2 Studying youth directly requires ethical considerations including permission from the youth to conduct research interviews and to use their words and opinions in academic work. Conflicts arise in a researcher's ability to access youth consistently enough to gather and confirm data, as well as determine the legitimacy of conclusions drawn from this data. Such a project requires a long-term commitment. Due to time restraints that restricted thorough examination of ethical concerns, my research is focused on theatre practitioners who work with street involvd youth and not youth themselves. This reserach can only be viewed as a partial analysis.
C) the study of an experimental, alternative educational program for street youth
(Chapter III)
I hope that this process will allow me to paint a picture of the potential that
teatre offers as meaningful pedagogical practice for people working with street
involved youth.
CHAPTER 1

THEATRE THEORY AND STREET INVOLVED YOUTH

1.1 Youth Education

I understand mainstream school programs to offer youth education through the provision of information that is packaged and delivered by teachers. These schools aim to supply knowledge and skill development to initiate and enable youths' integration into the workforce. Many youth struggle within these highly directive school frameworks. Most youth, through various means (adaptation, luck, a supportive teacher or parent, friends), eventually navigate their individual ways through the school system. For some, however, mainstream schooling is not navigable. It does not create an environment that is conducive to their learning and, without support or affirmation, they disengage from school. For these youth, if schooling is to become a possibility, alternative education is imperative. This leads me to ask: if mainstream methods for knowing the world through school are unsuccessful for some youth, how can alternative education offer new ways of being in and knowing the world? How can this alternative education re-engage youth?

1.2 Theatre and Education

Denzin triggers my interest in theatre as a possibility for alternative education. He explains that the stage holds the potential of an "evocative epistemology that performs rather than represents the world" (Denzin, 1997, p. 115). This can be extended to imagine participants in theatre having the potential of moving beyond passive observation to active engagement with their world. For youth who reject the mainstream schools' presentation of their world, I am interested to examine if theatre could enable a different kind of educational
engagement where youth become involved in learning through their roles as
performers. According to Denzin (1997),

If culture is an ongoing performance (Burner 1996),
then performers critically brings the spaces, meanings,
ambiguities, and contradictions of culture alive in
their performances. (p. 95)

From this foundation I am led to ask, can the role of actor enable students to
think differently about themselves and the contradictions and conflicts of their
cultural and social lives? What is the pedagogical potential in a stage as the
school environment?

These questions that seek to conceptualize a pedagogy of performance
motivate my research and draw me to the theory and practice of Augusta Boal.
Boal's political work through popular theatre has influenced many theatre
workers in Canada and informs my understanding of theatre discussed in this
thesis.

1.3 Augusta Boal and Theatre of the Oppressed (TO)

I would like to begin by providing an explanation of the work and ideas of
Augusta Boal. Originally based in Latin America, Boal has developed
imaginative theatre techniques that challenge both traditional theatre and
political-social oppression. His work strives to disrupt structures of power that
control both the production of theatre and most people's lives. Boal explains that
theatre holds the potential for both domination and liberation. He states in his
foundational text "Theatre of the Oppressed":

[T]heatre is a weapon. A very efficient weapon. For
this reason one must fight for it. For this reason the
ruling classes strive to take permanent hold of the
theatre and utilize it as a tool of domination. In so
doing, they change the very concept of what
"theatre" is. But the theater can also be a weapon of
liberation. For that it is necessary to create appropriate
Boal traces the history of theatre up until the inclusion of his own theories. He explains the transition from open air theatre for and by the people existing in ancient times to aristocratic presentational theatre with actors and an audience, protagonist and chorus, to Brechtian drama with actors who are objects of social forces, given input by the "masses" to, finally, his own work, where spectatorship disappears and every person is an actor, a protagonist working for change. Here, theatre is paralleled to society. He argues that where all participants are given the opportunity to act, the structures of power and domination are broken down. He explains that when audience members become actors, "people reassume protagonist functions in the theatre and in society" (Boal, 1995, p. 119).

For Boal, theatre is politics, a politics that works for change and liberation for people who live with oppression. He experiments using the theatre as language, capable of being utilized by any person. With or without artistic talent. [He] tried to show in practice how the theatre can be placed at the service of the oppressed, so that they can express themselves. And so that by using this new language, they can also discover new concepts. (Boal, 1995, p. 121)

Boal encourages the development of new theatrical languages through a variety of exercises. Language expands to include more than the spoken word. Boal focuses on the human body as a tool, along with "images" created with and by self-motivated human bodies. Developed from his theories, Theatre of the Oppressed exercises offer approaches to engaging with theatre. As developed by Boal, there are three central exercises in TO: Simultaneous Dramaturgy, Image Theatre and Forum Theatre.
Simultaneous Dramaturgy consists of a group of spectators "writing" or "speaking" a script, usually offering solutions to a dilemma on stage, that the actors almost simultaneously act out. Image Theatre is sculpture-based theatre, where human bodies are sculpted into images to express opinions and experiences without words. Boal explains this as making "thought visible" (Boal, 1995, p. 132) and allowing participants to analyze the possibilities of change. The sculpture becomes an image that can be discussed and reworked to provide alternative images, ideas, and potential experiences. Finally, Forum Theatre, a theatre practice most actively adapted by North Americans, is a performance exercise where scenes are acted out and audience members become actors ("spect-actors") who enter the stage to rehearse different solutions to presented conflicts. A forum theatre "participant has to intervene decisively in the dramatic action and change it" (Boal, 1995, p. 139). Theatre thus becomes a place for all participants to practice acting in the world.

Boal emphasizes key aspects of Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) practice. He explains that TO does not offer definite solutions to problems or oppression; it does not "show the correct path, but only...offer[s] the means by which all possible paths may be examined" (Boal, 1995, p. 141). Also, he continues, the staged practice of theatre is still removed from reality and "seeks fulfillment through real action" (p. 142). Most importantly for Boal, however, TO disrupts theatre controlled by people in power who create images that reflect themselves. Instead, TO provides a forum for people who are not in positions of power to experiment with creating a world that looks like them.

Boal's conceptualization of theatre is idealistic and shared experiences reveal many complications when different groups of people engage with Theatre of the Oppressed exercises. Boal's theatre has been used as a model by many theatre workers around the world, but, simultaneously, it has changed and been
challenged according to practitioners' needs and own conceptualizations of theatre. The next section presents two Canadian theatre projects that have molded and adapted Theatre of the Oppressed to meet the needs of their diverse participants and environments.

1.4 Theatre of the Oppressed in North America

According to Shutzman & Cohen-Cruz (1993), Theatre of the Oppressed was introduced to North America by "development" workers in Latin America, who were exposed to Boal's theories and exercises as educational tools for working with groups abroad and at home. TO was adopted by political collectives in the 1970's and was used in work with and within diverse communities, including women's groups, unions, Native communities, gay and lesbian youth, prison inmates, peace activists, refugees and new immigrants. There are many examples of TO work occurring throughout Canada, the USA and Europe. The two projects mentioned below are examples of TO practice outside of Brazil and can be used as fodder for thinking about theatre practice with street involved youth.

"Age Exchange is a theatre company that creates plays based on the reminiscences and current concerns of older people in the London [England] area" (Schweitzer, 1993, p.64). The organizers of Age Exchange work with elderly participants around issues of identity, retirement, memory, and status. They adapt Boal's forum theatre to create workshops that bring together people from the fields of welfare, retirement, financial counselling and volunteer organizations representing older people. Schweitzer (1993) emphasizes the need, in her work with Age Exchange, for Boal's exercises to mold and adapt to her particular audience. She explains:
'Theatre of the Oppressed' seems too heavy a term for the kind of domestic encounters we depict between older people who exist in a relatively stable and comfortable social and political environment. Where the oppression lies is often difficult to pinpoint in these situations; the power games we are showing are often so subtle that they perpetrators are not even aware of the conflict. Also the roles of protagonist and antagonist are a shifting affair, and a fluid use of the Boal technique is required to maximize the impact of the audiences insights. (p. 80)

Schweitzer's observation about her work with the elderly can be applied to theatre engaging street involved youth. Power relations on the street are not simple and individual youth, like the elderly, move through shifting experiences of antagonism and protagonism. Street involved youth struggle against diverse social barriers and engage in multiple acts of resistance. Using the term "oppressed" to define these youth as a group does not acknowledge the complexities and wide spectrum of lifestyles, roles and activities engaged in by youth who are involved in street life. Theatre with youth is rather an ever-changing "theatre of the oppressed", "the oppressors", "the resistors", "the courageous", "the meek", "the creative", "the angry", "the exuberant"...and the list keeps expanding, pointing to a shortcoming in theatre that frames participants in particular roles and identities when, fundamentally, identities can not be framed because they never remain the same.

In Vancouver, Headlines Theatre, lead for many years by David Diamond, has run week-long workshops for various communities called "Power Plays". Participants develop theatre pieces on issues that concern them and these pieces are then used in community forums, some of which are later televised with Rogers Community Television. Diamond writes in "Out of The Silence: Headlines Theatre and Power Plays" that one Power Play, workshopped around family violence in urban Aboriginal communities and eventually televised for a
larger community, became "a concrete tool for creating alternative role models" (p. 36). Headlines televised work is different from the participant based work of Augusta Boal and was met with some resistance and skepticism. Responding to a comment that his work was "so North American", a potential insult where "North American" is collapsed into values of commercialism and consumerism that, theoretically, work in opposition to TO work, David Diamond (1993) explains:

It seems to me that it is not possible or healthy for any of us to do "the work of Augusta Boal". We all live in very different circumstances and different cultures in communities with very different needs. Boal himself, once he left Brazil, could no longer do "the work of Augusta Boal" as it had been done in Brazil. He had to discover "the work of Augusta Boal" as it could be done in Paris. And I had to discover, and am continually discovering "the work of David Diamond" in Vancouver. (p. 52)

I understand David Diamond's comment as both insight and warning. Diamond is inviting us to acknowledge that theatre work can not be static. The nuances and complexities of every individual and each community that engages with theatre requires that theatre workers adapt their practices to meet the changing needs of their participants and environments. Without adequate adaptation, the theatrical philosophies, theories and exercises used with one individual or groups of individuals, may no longer be useful with other individuals or communities. This points to the potential for theatre practice and theory to be inadequate and even damaging, and for approaches to theatre work to vary greatly with each practitioner, resulting in the possibility for conflicts about and within theatre practice. Theatre as pedagogy is complex and volatile and only increases in complexity when examined for its ability to engage street-involved youth.
1.5 Street-Involved Youth

Street-involved youth is a category that refers to highly diverse individuals. As I mobilize this category to write my thesis, I hope to problematize its usage, beginning by naming conflicts I have encountered while doing my research.

1) I am writing about youth although the foundation of popular theatre is its application with youth. I must therefore acknowledge my distance from the youth whom I study, which influences my understandings of their lives. I can only, based on readings and discussions, observe and empathize with, but not experience, their lives.

2) Literature that studies street-involved youth or "street youth" is often found in the sociological sub-genre of deviance and criminology which frames youth as problems (criminals, addicts and school "drop-outs") with shared "characteristics" and "traits" such as drug and alcohol addiction, poverty and depression (See Hagan & McCarthy, 1997, Smart et al, 1990, Webber, 1991). These studies result in research that aims to help youth overcome "their" problems without examining how many of "youth"' problems could be socially constituted, embedded within damaging social structures, and not the result of individual character flaws.

Scratching the surface of street-involved youths' lives reveals complicated histories, like all people, of accomplishment and failure, contentment and dissatisfaction. Their experiences are shaped by social structures such as the "normal family" (which hides realities of abuse) and violent, racist, homophobic, and sexist attitudes within neighbourhood and school communities, which negate youth, deny them support and affirmation and push them onto the street as a means for survival. Webs of alienation lead youth to seek refuge in street
communities, evident in the large population of lesbian, gay and bisexual youth who are involved in street life. Youth can perhaps find refuge with new networks of friends, develop survival skills, escape the harassment of previous communities (such as family or school) and also experience "hunger, lack of shelter, criminal victimization, sexual harassment, trouble with the police" (Hagan & McCarthy, p. 8), as well as stigmatization and possible involvement in cultures of violence, drugs and alcohol. Most of these youth have not completed high school and, with little access to work, are living in extreme poverty. They are ineligible for health care, which requires that youth have a permanent address, and are struggling to meet their basic health needs. The list of circumstances possibly experienced by street-involved youth is lengthy. Most importantly, I wish to note, these experiences are circumstantial and socially constituted. They are not genetic or characteristic of any individual.

From this foundation, I wish to use the category of street-involved youth to indicate youths' social and cultural environment. Each youths' history, character, skills, dreams and desires is different and complex. Each youth is involved in street life in diverse ways for different reasons. I will support youth in their decisions to involve themselves in street life. I also wish to support youth who seek to leave street life. This thesis focuses on theatre practice and programs that provide opportunities beyond street life, if youth choose to access them. Of course, providing opportunities and choices for street-involved youth can be complicated. Who decides what these opportunities and choices will look like? Who or what determines which youth are eligible for accessing these opportunities? These questions will be discussed in greater detail in a later section of this chapter.

3) A third conflict emerges while writing about street-involved youth. I am faced with, what I view as, a paradox in the utilization of academia to write
about marginalization. I write from a position of relative legitimacy (questionably stable as a Masters student in a "marginal" program within the enclosed world of sociological theory itself) to which street-involved youth have little access to produce their own written work or utilize or affect the outcome of my work. This potentially reinforces street-involved youths' marginalization by not bringing their voices in the forum into which I speak. However, along with this realization, I see possibilities for the usefulness of my writing. My theoretical discussions hold the potential to provide perspective, to bring together multiple voices and experiences in dialogue and to potentially provide support, affirmation and legitimization for marginalized youth, within a mainstream system. This is my "forum". In some ways, this work parallels the ideals of Boal's theatre exercises. It is a rehearsal space; a chance to talk, critique, compare notes, challenge the status quo, form coalitions through dialogue and exchange ideas. It is preparation for action but it is not "direct" action. It can provide perspective on street-involved youths' lives but it is not written from the perspective of street-involved youth themselves.

From this position, I attempt to write about street-involved youth. I wish to understand the work of educators who strive to provide possibilities and choices beyond the street experience, for street-involved youth who wish to access these choices. It is with this goal in mind that I study theatre practitioners' work and ideas with street-involved youth in Canada.

---

3 I wish to acknowledge that academia is not the only place where there is resistance to marginalization. Youth resist regulations within society and their own marginalization in diverse ways beyond the academe. There is also the possibility that youth embrace certain experiences of marginalization and resist the so-called legitimation of academic work.
1.6 Pedagogy of Possibilities: Theatre with Street-involved Youth

Can theatre provide a place for engagement that meets the learning and life needs of Toronto street-involved youth? Can theatre offer a pedagogy that tries to work beyond the mainstream school system to challenge marginalization and disengagement? Giroux & Simon (1989) express that "pedagogy is simultaneously about the practice students and teachers might engage in together and the cultural politics such practices support. In this sense, to propose a pedagogy is to construct a political vision" (1989, p. 222). The pedagogy of theatre explored in this thesis supports a political vision that respects and offers options for street-involved youth. This includes a struggle to envision what education will look like if it includes support, engagement and freedom for street-involved youth.

Theatre practice established by Augusta Boal can be viewed as a model for student-centred education. It draws on Friere's concept of "conscientization" where knowledge and learning is supposed to start "with people's own experiences" (Salverson, 1996, pp. 23-24). "Patty", a youth participant in an AIDS theatre workshop in Toronto, provides an example of this kind of learning: "On one level we were doing this play about AIDS, but on another level we were really examining ourselves" (Epstein, 1990, p. 25). Patty became her own starting place for understanding society; her experiences and opinions were part of her learning. This indicates a potential for theatre to provide a forum where street-involved youth can be recognized as experts about their own lives. This potential, however, is counter-balanced by the dangers of self-examination and the uncertainty of expertise. Self-examination may be confusing and youth may have a complicated, changing sense of themselves and their experiences. Youth may not necessarily feel like experts after sharing stories about their own lives; they may feel exposed, self-conscious and unable to leave the "starting place" of
themselves to discuss other things. Theatre practitioners may not have the skills to mediate self-exploration. Theatre practice that centres on personal experience and self-exploration has triggered highly contentious debates about story-telling and the conflicts that emerge for and between both listeners and tellers involved in theatre together.

Julie Salverson (1996) explores troubling aspects of storytelling in popular theatre in her thesis "The Unimaginable Occurrence: Storytelling, Popular Theatre and an Ethic of Risk". She warns us effectively about the dangers of seeking traumatic stories from popular theatre participants, which creates a stage that parallels a "confessional" and "solicits stories concentrated more on pain than on agency" (p. 66). She explains that "[s]earching for trauma can elicit the role of the confessor and the imperative to confess, with the artist sending signals of reward to the participant for the degree of courage displayed by the confession" (p. 66). This can result, as mentioned above, in storytelling that leaves youth feeling exposed, and possibly open to painful memories, without the support necessary for their experience to be constructive or positive. Expectations of trauma on the part of listeners can also be very limiting for a street-involved youth whose stories and emotions may not fit the stereotyped personality of a "traumatized" street-involved youth. Salverson's provides the example of homesickness as affecting street-involved youths' lives but assumed by some as too "normal" to talk about.

Conversely, Salverson also warns of an over-protective and cautious approach to storytelling that assumes a participant's shared stories are too painful to speak about. Theatre must rather, she argues, become a space that recognizes "the knowledge and power within each participant that allows not only the free decision to tell her story but the strength and resources through which she has survived the incidents of that story and arrived at this point in her
life" (Savlerson, 1996, p. 67). Following from this, ideally theatre must not value stories of trauma above others and must negotiate the needs, histories and desires of each individual theatre participant/storyteller. These ideals are not simply met.

Theatre, unquestionably, brings people together to work on a shared project. This provides the possibility for youth to exchange ideas, listen, make decisions, and rely on or be relied upon, as a small project-driven community. For some practitioners, creating a theatre community is a political act. Salverson states: "To me what theatre does is find the common ground...To me that's a radical political act because I think we're so divided" (in Epstein, 1990, p. 26). According to this view, if youth begin discussions about their dreams, experiences, needs and the barriers they face as individuals, there is a chance that they will find others with whom they can relate. However, alternatively, there is also a chance that discussions will result in miscommunications and conflicts. The experiences of human interaction that occur within a community can span from support and connection to alienation, anger, irritation, disinterest and dislike. Jan Cohen-Cruz (1993) speaks to potentially detrimental group experiences when she states that

if the audience [in a forum theatre] is not relatively homogenous the intervening spectator may not actually share the oppression and thus inadvertently antagonize rather than support the protagonist. This has sometimes alienated those spectators who do identify in actuality (not just in spirit); solutions appear too easy and the environment does not feel sufficiently safe. In such a situation TO is no longer about self-representation and can appear reductive of differences". (p 114)

In this example, Cohen-Cruz reminds us that sharing experiences does not always result in community. Theatre is not simply a place where connections are forged, but also where individual youth can feel misunderstood, hurt, and
marginalized. Negotiating the interaction between diverse individuals can be risky and not always positive experiences for all people involved.

Julie Salverson (1996) proposes that the precariousness of group interaction is a challenge. She encourages theatre practitioners and their workshop participants to strive to

\[
\text{negotiat[e] a delicate balance between genuine points of contact and genuine differences; or, as artist Lib Spry puts it, between putting yourself in the picture but not taking centre stage. (p. 64-65)}
\]

From these discussions I begin to view theatre as a place where forging connections is a goal tempered by experiences that can never be shared. As expressed by Salverson, theatre is a space to tell stories "that can be entered by both teller and listener but will never be inhabited by both parties in the same way" (Salverson, 1996, p. 90), a community that is not always cohesive and is experienced differently by every individual within it.

Despite the uncertainty of community formation, popular theatre still works towards a group's solidarity that, according to many theatre workers, can result in social action. Theatre exercises, such as forum theatre, are designed "to provide a "forum" for people with a similar experience or oppression to explore alternative solutions or approaches" (Epstein, 1990, p. 23). Ideally, the theatre stage becomes a rehearsal space for youth to challenge barriers in their lives. "In the original Forum design [used in Theatre of the Oppressed workshops] everyone participates in both spectator and actor roles and all have the opportunity to literally rehearse (instead of talking about) changes in their lives" (Mittman, 1997, p. 1). Theatre workers suggest that the first step towards making changes in society or youths' lives is speaking about or acting out these changes. As Salverson (1996) explains, "]in order to be able to hear resistance,
possibility and examples of hope in action, [you] have to be able, at the very least to imagine them [your]self" (p. 187). For me, the possibility for imagining change also creates the possibility for conflicts about the conceptualization of this change and its actualization. These conflicts do not always demand resolution, but rather recognition. Whose imaginations dominate the stage and whose imaginations are left out? What do the visions for change look like? Is there a possibility that action (discussed or acted) could alienate certain people in a theatre group or could lead to destructive social change?

While I ask questions, I am still drawn to the vision for popular theatre presented within literature. For example, the stage is understood to provide new opportunities for those who enter it. The stage is presented by theatre workers as a space that is separate from everyday life, a space to move into and step out of. According to this definition, the stage provides the possibility for youth performers to view their work in a "petri-dish" where experiences and stories can be acted out, stepped away from, examined and analyzed. Objective examination, however, is not always possible. I imagine theatre exercises that encounter personal disclosure, do not always permit emotional distance. Analysis may be possible but only by creating a psychological space (where emotions are partially objectified) that works in tandem with the physical space of the stage.

Another example of theatre's possibilities presented by theatre workers, and one which I find particularly interesting, is theatre's potential offering of creativity and fantasy as tools for thinking about life. According to Pickard's (1990) studies, "[t]hrough fantasy, individuals can give free reign to their ideas, wishes and needs" (p. 5). Julie Salverson speaks about creativity within theatre through her discussions of Brecht. She expresses how Brecht called attention to
the possibilities opened up when working with theatre and art when he insisted that he considered himself and artist before he was an activist or educator. It seems to me that by doing so he called attention to the political potential held within the ability of art to hold contradictory material without insisting on its resolution, thus opening the possibilities for a community to notice something new.

(Salverson, 1997, p. 37)

This is also supported, and understood as pedagogical, by Mittman who states that theatre joins the call "for alternative kinds of learning that embrace ambiguity and multiple truth perspectives" (Mittman, 1997, p. 2). Ideally this pedagogical possibility for theatre encourages mind expansion but not resolution. Practitioners can urge street-involved youth who participate in theatre, to engage with fantastical thinking and acting, with the stated realization that this will include dissatisfaction, confusion or uncertainty.

In summation, I would like to lay out a number of possibilities, as presented in literature about popular theatre. I understand these as the ideals towards which theatre workers strive.

Possibility #1: Youth can witness each others stories and can be recognized as experts about their own lives, affirmed as individuals with experiences that are worth hearing.

Possibility #2: The theatrical stage can be used as a "petri-dish" enabling youth to act out experiences and step back to analyze their lives from a distance.

Possibility #3: Theatre can lead to coalition building when common experiences are shared.

Possibility #4: Theatre can become a place to rehearse challenging common experiences (enmeshed within societal structures) that create barriers in individuals' lives.
Possibility #5: Theatre can offer a space for creativity and fantasy.

Possibility #6: Through the accumulative experience of all these possibilities, Epstein (1990) asserts that theatre can be used as "a means for self-expression, [and] for building confidence" (p. 23).

Sometimes presented by theatre workers themselves and certainly fundamental to my own analysis of theatre practice, these possibilities or ideals must be understood as buffeted by reality that is unpredictable, risky, fragile and confusing. Theatre workers are maneuvering along the unstable bridges between their desires and goals and the desires and goals of the youth with whom they work. Theatre's possibilities must be tempered with the knowledge that theatrical experience exists along a continuum that includes life without theatre experience. The transition from working within a theatre framework to life without this can leave participants without a sense of support or continuity, once a theatre program comes to an end. Theatre practice is tenuous and risk-filled and ideals are only the fragile goals towards which those involved strive.

I understand my readings, an accumulation of practitioners' ideals and the conflicts that emerge through the attempted actualization of these ideals, as a means to think about and understand theatre practice. In the next chapter I aim to supplement this understanding through dialogues and discussions with theatre practitioners working with street-involved youth in Toronto.
CHAPTER II

THEATRE'S PEDAGOGY: A DIALOGUE IN MANY PARTS

2.1 Introduction

Boal says that oppression occurs when dialogue becomes monologue, when we stop listening to each other. (Neville)

Ora Avni supports this statement with an example in her discussion of Moshe the Beadle from Elie Wiesel's Holocaust commemorative novel, Night. Moshe returns from his first encounter with Nazi murders to warn his community but is met with, not only disbelief, but an unwillingness to hear him by the people from his town. He is silenced by, and therefore excluded from, the community that was once his own. Moshe strives for dialogue but is left with a monologue.

In an effort to contribute to the dialogue about learning with street-involved youth, I began conversing with diverse theatre workers. What follows is a conversation developed and staged from a series of interviews with people involved in theatre with street-involved youth. My explorations into the educational potential of theatre began with questions and created more. Speaking with practitioners, the multiple possibilities for answers or meanings behind theatre began to parallel the possibilities examined and explored on a popular theatre stage. Discussion allowed for imaginings. My theoretical research became a form of performance, a series of interwoven dialogues.

We are all actors, reacting and responding to each other. The following conversation is staged, bringing together various voices as documented, understood and critically integrated by me, and now presented to you. This is an on-going performance that helps me understand the possibilities within
theoretical work. Theory is not fixed or static. My words may be printed on paper, compiled, edited, framed and delivered, but they are the results and hopefully the instigators of conversations. This is not a traditional conceptualization of theatre or of a thesis. This is only one approach to theatre and theory within a spectrum of possibilities.

To begin, I would like to acknowledge the disjointedness of my own research. My initiation into qualitative research has resulted in tensions and inadequacies. My accumulated data has not always met my post-interview, writing needs. If given the opportunity to speak with my interview subjects again, I would ask very different questions. Consequently, the following pages are a narration constructed out of the threads of different interviews. As the narrator, I have the opportunity to reflect upon theatre workers’ comments and my own approach to gathering information, as well as ask questions that were not voiced during the interviews. I do not expect my questions to be answered or even resolved but rather to reveal areas of analysis that require further consideration.

List of Players
Neville - theatre worker and playwright
Igor - theatre worker
Joyce - theatre worker, playwright and academic
Max - theatre worker
Narrator - grad student researcher (me)

2.2 Scene I: STREET-INVOLVED YOUTH
Narrator: To whom does the category street-involved youth refer? How and when does it get used? To what ends? In this thesis, I use the category to include youth who have disengaged from mainstream schooling and have chosen to
associate, in any capacity, with street life. I assume commonalties of circumstantial instability and poverty, as well as potential histories of alienation or abuse from people within social structures, including school and home. I choose to mobilize this term in order to imagine how educational and life options for this particular population of youth can be expanded. Perhaps my use of the term "street-involved youth" reinforces a false idea that these youth have similar characteristics, and not only certain shared social and physical environments. Who shares the category of "street-involved youth"?

**Neville:** 'Street Youth' is an undefinable quantity. We're talking about a group of highly diverse individuals. It's very difficult to make any simple typologies.

**Narrator:** Neville is quick to refute any notions of commonality. Yet I do not understand how theatre can be utilized for a specific group of individuals without an underlying assumption that these individuals share certain similarities that would enable a "group" to form.

### 2.3 Scene II: THEATRE WORKERS

**Narrator:** How do theatre practitioners working with street-involved youth, understand themselves and their practices? Boal, in "Theatre of the Oppressed", disrupts and melds the defined roles of actor and spectator into creators of their own theatrical stories, and explodes the traditional role of 'director'. According to Boal, a director is an instigator of action, challenging participants to actively engage with questions and scenarios related to their own lives. In my discussions with popular theatre workers, I have encountered many diverse approaches to practice. How do you describe your role in theatre work?
Max: [I have always describe my role as that of] facilitator because I was really facilitating their experiences into a piece of art.

Neville: [Boal] said "when I do this work people call me a "facilitator" - I do not like this word. I am a 'difficultator'." And I think that's very true. What I try to do is to orchestrate challenge...on the frontier of people's ability to succeed and to let them own that frontier. [The do this] by experiencing survivable failure and expanding degrees of success.

Joyce: I actually teach, direct, write or animate theatre.

Narrator: From these answers, I understand theatre workers to conceptualize their roles very differently. This results in, I assume, greatly divergent examples of "theatre". I am curious to know how theatre workers' divergent understandings of themselves translates into practice and consequently influences the experiences of youth with whom they work. What are theatre workers' methodologies? In my discussions with Neville and Joyce, the diversity in approaches to theatre practice was particularly evident. Joyce provided highly involved formal direction as well as casual prompting towards informal group activities, and Neville presented his approach as periphery guidance that faded to non-involvement. I understand, from our discussions, that "theatre work" has multiple, fragile definitions. As theatre workers, Joyce and Neville provide contrasting but, potentially, equally effective approaches to creating a theatre program or activity. Joyce shares two of her approaches to theatre practice. She is an instigator of discussions and song creation in informal settings without an established theatre group or workshop, and a provider of controlled direction in a defined theatre workshop. Neville, alternatively, in one example of his methodology, works from the sidelines as a retreating participant and supporter.
Joyce: [In an informal drop-in centre] I wouldn't go and say "hey, we're going to have a group". I would just sit there with the guitar and someone would pick it up ... And I'd just ask them some little question. I'd get them writing songs without it being formal.

Joyce: [In a formal program] it's the details of how the puppet works that gets them excited. It's not just looking at the puppet...If you show them what happens in the still moment, which is just the skill...they're just blown away - and they go away thinking, I could learn how to manipulate a puppet.

Neville: I would agree with the [theater performance workshop] group that we had a common task [and goal] and that I was in possession of some tools which they were welcome to use if they wanted. [I offered to show them] how they worked... and then they would do the work.

Narrator: From these examples, I understand theatre practice to range from non-directive attempts to create experiences of camaraderie and shared accomplishment, to formal teaching where specific directions are used to acquire skill and knowledge. In all instances, theatre is approached pedagogically, providing, from very different positions, possible educational experiences for youth participants. I imagine that theatre practitioners must modify their approaches to their work to meet divergent participant needs and that theatre experience can never be replicated. This requires a high learning curve for every new theatrical endeavour, experimentation and the ability to work with uncertainty. I am certain that there are many experiences of failed methodology, along with moments where work seems particularly successful. I thus understand theatre methodology to be a shifting and always-unique combination
of every participants' needs and desires, integrated with the practitioners own needs, goals and methods.

From my studies, I have found that the wide spectrum of approaches to theatre practice seem to share many common goals. In the next scene I explore the theories, goals and ideals that motivate theatre workers' methodologies and practices when working with street-involved youth.

2.4 Scene III: THEATRE GOALS

Narrator: I have been told repeatedly about the possibility of community formation when individuals are involved in a shared theatre project. Practitioners hope to encourage connections between individuals through discussions and shared theatre experiences. I see this as a complicated aspiration, complicated by the diversity of personalities, needs and histories that will not necessarily meld into "community" simply by sharing the same goal. Still, the opinions of theatre workers are strong and attest to the potential of shared experiences.

Joyce: A big part of what the arts...is about is this sort of...sense of soul...being in contact with other human beings who listen to each other and care about something together. [It is] really quite an experience....You have human contact and you share your ideas and your passions, and your losses with other people. And that happens all the time with theatre.

Igor: The constant repetition of bringing the same group of people together to work, or try to work, on a particular goal, is ...community building.
Joyce: [Theatre's] social. In it's simplest level, it's social. You've got to figure out your problems with other people. You've got to figure out what you're going to wear if you're going to perform with other people.

Joyce: And I think it's different than when it's on TV 'cause I think you really do participate physically and viscerally... with an audience, with people around you. And that sense of being in the world that comes from doing it in the same room with people...

Narrator: Theatre workers confirm the ability of theatre to provide experiences of commitment, trust, cooperation, and support. They report that working in a group requires that individuals learn to deal non-violently with people who are not like themselves.

Igor: You have to be there, you have to commit yourself, on these days, on these hours, because our goal is to create this piece that we're going to take out to the community for each other.

Max: It's simply learning to manage with difficult people because in a street environment, the way you manage a difficult person is usually through violence or exclusion.

Max: It's cooperation skills, it's people working together, supporting each other. And with cooperation and support, it's learning to trust... When you're doing a scene together...you trust that your other actor's going to show up. You trust your other actors are going to have the lines ready. You trust that if you don't know your lines, your actors are going to help you out.
Narrator: I find that these statements by theatre workers are inspiring but idealistic. I speculate that failure is a distinct probability, at least at certain moments during any theatre experience. I am interested to know the possibilities for theatre experiences when participants do not cooperate or fail to show up on time or speak/act violently towards fellow actors or screw up their lines repeatedly. What happens when trust is broken? Can it be repaired? I am certain that the ability to respond to distrust and lack of support becomes equally as important as the moments when a group of youth experience cooperation.

Another ideal presented by practitioners of popular theatre is that theatre provides an opportunity for coalition building amongst youth, a chance to discuss issues of concern and brainstorm possible solutions.

Neville: Popular theatre is generally tremendously powerful. There aren't very many opportunities for people without resources, without power, without systems, to use the energy and the truth-making power of language, and what we, in the largest possible sense, call theatre, to share and to realize that other people have similar issues and that other people feel the same way and that they're not alone....

Joyce: Realizing that there's more than one of you in this situation and that there are different models for response.

Neville: The thing about popular theatre is that it's not just for a certain definable group here, it's of - it's theatre for, by, and about a community where the audience and the performers share a community.

Narrator: According to these theatre workers, theatre can be a means to recognize shared social barriers and demonstrate dissent. I think that this
possibility must be weighed against the reality that youth problems and barriers are not necessarily experienced the same way. There may be dissent amongst a group of dissenters. How does this factor into political activism through theatre?

Along with providing a potential forum for social activism, some theatre workers understand theatre as a place to learn basic employment skills that will enable youth to enter into the workforce. This presents an interesting paradox. Theatre is no longer offered as a space to fight the barriers and limits of social structures but rather as a place to learn skills that enable (and encourage) entrance into social structures (such as the workforce).

**Max:** When we do theatre, we're really looking at basic level employment skills, hygiene, respect, punctuality, trust, support. [These are] major foundational employment skills.

**Narrator:** From this comment, I am drawn to ask, is it possible to be involved in theatre as a means to both resist social regulation and structure as well as to find one's place within mainstream society? How is this, seemingly paradoxical, position negotiated?

Neville does not answer these questions. (Although, to be fair, I did not pose them during our interview.) He does, however, offer an interesting insight into theatre's potential to build on the experience of accomplishment and risk-taking where failure is non-destructive.

**Neville:** The true goal is that the [youth], both as individuals and as a group, experience the relationship between commitment, effort and success and begin a reinforcement loop. Success...or failure is a habit.
Neville: People who live in extremes have little opportunity to develop lateral thinking skills. A survival situation is necessarily linear. And I think there's a reason why traditionally theatre has been dominated by people from secure backgrounds - from middle and upper-middle class backgrounds or, at least, from secure family environments because they've learned to take chances, make mistakes and survive.

Neville: [Youth theatre participants learn] not only the experience of taking chances and of the relationship between risk-taking and success but also [the experience of] surviving failure.

Narrator: From the previous comments made by Neville, I think it is important to note the potential for theatre workers to influence conceptualizations of accomplishment and failure.

Theatre workers, running a program or workshop, are in positions of authority and, despite every intention of creating equality or youth empowerment, their voices and ideas carry the potential to be both damaging and constructive. I wish to begin questioning the underlying assumptions within theatre workers' goals and ideals, in order to examine their potential influence on the theatre experiences of youth. For example, many practitioners present theatre as, ideally, a creative and imaginative space where youth are encouraged to imagine possibilities and choices for their futures. However, this ideal does not explicitly indicate how theatre workers understand "possibilities" and "choices"? Will certain kinds of imaginings be considered inadequate or illegitimate? Below, theatre workers comment on the creative potential of theatre followed by my continuing queries.
Joyce: [Theatre] is images to step into, symbols and metaphors. [The work by altering] how we experience and see our lives.

Neville: In some ways it's very hard to live a reality without first imagining it... Theatre's very much about imagining alternative realities.

Max: We want people to have the option of surviving in mainstream education and in a mainstream "9 to 5". We want people to have the option of becoming suits if they want to.

Joyce: There's also places for people to just have a different sense of agency in themselves and that's what it's really about for me.... A sense there's another way to act in the world, right?

Narrator: According to these comments, theatre is a language that provides new ways of talking about and living in the world. Starting from this foundation, I would like to know how theatre workers' own dreams, language, ways of living and visions for being in the world, influence the ways youth speak about change and options that youth envision for themselves? Max mentions that youth who are involved in the streets should have the opportunity to work a mainstream business job (requiring a suit), if they desire it. Would Max also encourage a youth to stay involved in the street, without a fixed address, economically unstable, surviving outside of the "9 to 5" work world, if that is their desire? Are all alternative realities better than how youth already live? Do "new options" and "alternative realities" look different for theatre workers than they do for street-involved youth? These questions lead to an examination of the investments of theatre workers and the youth with whom they work, and how their investments may differ and conflict.
In my discussions, many theatre workers have claimed that theatre provides youth with the opportunity to speak for themselves, to talk about their own lives and receive recognition and affirmation for the stories they tell. This possibility also requires examination.

_Neville:_ We're bombarded with images of what, how corporations want us to see ourselves and we rarely get to show each other what we look like.

_Neville:_ [Youth involved in popular theatre performance] don't feel like they're selling out to some corporate overlord or whatever - by putting on a play. And they can say something. They make a statement. They can ask questions.

_Joyce:_ I think it's about not being just a statistic or someone who needs a place to go for the evening but someone with a story, someone with a life...[You] have this sense that you are participating in your life - your story is hearable - is worth something.

_Narrator:_ Although self-representation may be achievable in theatre, I do not believe that meaningful storytelling occurs simply by providing a platform for youth to speak. Telling stories and listening to stories in groups is complicated. Groups inevitably produce moments and relationships that are unequal. Whose stories get heard? What questions are asked? By whom? To whom? How is a story experienced or taken up by a listener and how does this affect a youth's storytelling experience?

The solicitation of personal stories and the dangers associated with storytelling has been greatly debated. According to Joyce and Neville, theatre, ideally, will acknowledge youth for their individual choices to tell or withhold their own stories, and enable youth to feel supported and comfortable with
deciding to share any stories about their lives. However, this ideal is not easily met. Tensions emerge between creating a space that allows youth to feel "safe" speaking about their emotions and the possibilities that theatre workers will not have the ability to respond adequately to youths' emotional needs:

Neville: [If theatre workers] use the resources of theatre to persuade people to disclose, open up issues, access suppressed memories and feelings [then] I think it's irresponsible. [Particularly,] with a group of volatile individuals.

Narrator: Or, youth might begin to feel pressured to tell stories of emotional trauma to fit the stereotyped "role" of a street-involved youth:

Joyce: "Yeah, we're hired to have problems"... I saw it all over the place...you go around a story and you tell about a moment of oppression. Well, it better be good. It better not be that you miss your mom. And I've been watching kind of ever since for how to not just tell stories that are a sort of victimization.... With street kids, well, they better be rough and full of pain. Better not want to be dentists. That doesn't fit...

Narrator: Another conflict, revealed in comments made by Neville and Joyce, surfaces about personal storytelling. Neville understands theatre to provide a place for youth to speak about their own lives where they can be recognized as experts. Joyce presents the importance of creating enough distance from a story to enable analysis, pointing to the possibility that self-exposure may result in an emotional investment from which it is too difficult to separate.
Neville: Theatre...where you are creating character from your own life ... is a situation where you can't not be qualified. You can't be excluded from portraying yourself. And in fact, you're uniquely qualified to portray yourself.

Joyce: I think there's this thing about stepping into another character...We're then stepping into something. We can look at it. It's outside of us. It's not autobiography. And if it's something else created that enables us to see our life, think about it, maybe change...that's really huge.

Narrator: These are two oppositional approaches to storytelling. They are both potentially effective tools for engaging youth in theatre and certainly revealing of diversity in popular theatre philosophy. This points to the likelihood for conflicting opinions when discussing theatre and the wide spectrum of experiences conceivable for youth engaged with theatre.

In this past scene, I have endeavoured to point to moments of risk in theatre through my questions about the goals and ideals of theatre workers. During my interviews, however, I approached the risks and dangers in theatre as a separate segment of inquiry. I have realized that goals, and conflicts experienced while striving towards them, are in a constant symbiotic relationship. My interview procedures requires re-assessment for future projects in order to begin hearing theatre workers' responses to the concerns and conflicts raised both by their own work and my examination of their work.

2.5 Scene IV: EPILOGUE

Neville: What you're doing [as a theatre worker] is planting some seeds.

Narrator: Using Neville's analogy, I would like to synthesize my understanding of theatre workers and their involvement with street-involved youth in theatre.
They are "gardeners" who strive to encourage and support the growth, and the emotional and intellectual nourishment of street-involved youth. Their work attempts to provide opportunities for self-development, community and coalition building, skill development, experiences of success and failure and self-expression through the creative language of theatre.

However, like all gardeners, theatre workers are experimenting and their goals are buffeted by many outside forces. Theatre workers choose what "seeds" to plant (thereby, influencing the conceivable outcomes of theatre projects), but youths' own needs, circumstances, histories and desires affect their theatre experiences and may even conflict with those of the theatre workers. The theatre climate is always risky and unpredictable but carries complicated possibilities for engaging youth in meaningful learning experiences. From the dialogue in this chapter, I understand some these possibilities to be:

a) Negotiating shared and conflicting goals which lead towards a theatre performance.

b) Working with others in the spirit of cooperation and support, but at the risk of miscommunication and alienation.

c) Developing specific pre-employment skills such as punctuality, respect, commitment, and hygiene. These skills may only apply to a narrow field of work.

d) Talking with others about day-to-day experiences. This could lead to coalitions or confrontations.

e) Involvement in activities that result in both accomplishment and failure.

f) Creating images and stories about oneself which involves risks for both tellers and listeners.

g) Creative and imaginative playing and acting that enable participants to experience new ways to act and live in the world. One of the problems is that
creativity can be limited or curtailed by the theatre worker or the theatre participant.

This list of possibilities, because of their inherent risks and conflicts, leads me to define a specific form of pedagogical experience: theatre-based pedagogy. By this I mean pedagogy not only affected by the usual benefits (e.g., learning opportunities, devoted teachers, motivated students) and risks (e.g., lack of funding, lack of resources, over-burdened teachers, disinterested students) but pedagogy affected by all the above risks and benefits associated with the use of theatre as an educational medium. It is at the core of theatre work with street-involved youth.

In the next chapter of this thesis, I move beyond theory based literature and discussion to look at theatre as it plays itself out on the stage of alternative educational programming with street-involved youth. My writing is based on research and volunteer work at an experimental program in downtown Toronto which, in the interests of confidentiality, I will name "Sky". I endeavour to present my understandings of Sky, bringing together my discussions with theatre workers and theoretical readings in an examination of a program in action.
CHAPTER THREE
THEATRE IN PRACTICE: "SKY" - AN EXAMPLE

3.1 Introduction

Sky has been operating for fifteen years with theatre as a central aspect of its programming. I began volunteering at Sky in September 1997 (and have stayed involved, in various capacities, ever since) with the desire to contribute to a community based organization and, hopefully, to create an opportunity to do research about theatre and pedagogy. I became very excited by the philosophies and practices that enable Sky to provide alternative engagement with learning for street-involved youth but I found myself struggling in the role of researcher. Below, I share my rationale for supporting alternative programs that attempt to meet the needs of youth who leave mainstream schools, the experience I had attempting to research one of these programs and the information I finally gathered and understanding I formed about Sky.

Most "regular" schools assume that all students can make sense of a complex and mainly fragmented range of academic courses and can make some kind of link between what happens in school and outside school. Most schools also assume that students have fairly similar capacities and motivations for learning, that learning is not affected by the sense of isolation that some students feel in large impersonal institutions. Finally, there is a tacit assumption that some students can keep their academic performance separate from the pressures of outside influences or life circumstances.

(Gagne, 1990, p. 308)

What happens when life circumstances and large, impersonal schools, result in youths' inability to complete high school? How can these youth become excited again by learning and hopeful about their futures? What type of education combines learning with life experience?
A range of attempts have been made to create alternative schools that not only teach academics but "attend to the more difficult task of helping students to take charge of their own learning and personal lives" (Gagne, 1996, p. 315). School then orchestrates the development of self-esteem and perhaps even "strategies to help redress the social inequities that in many cases led [youth] to be marginalized in the first place" (Gagne, 1996, p. 323).

There is a wide spectrum of alternative schools in Toronto, many of which serve middle-class youth. I am interested in the few alternative schools established for poor and working class youth. These schools, like the youth who attend them, are usually marginalized and disadvantaged, struggling economically for suitable space and resources. These alternative schools are, much like Salverson’s discussion of popular theatre companies, "over-extended and under-funded; over-extended because of the huge interest in what we do, under-funded through a combination of factors including the recent recession and no sector being prepared to take responsibility for this type of endeavor" (Salverson, 1996, p. 31). However, dedicated staff, guided by philosophies of education that strive to engage youth whose needs are not met by mainstream schooling, enable the creation and sustenance, often in economic jeopardy, of alternative educational programs. Gagne describes one Toronto alternative urban high school called Contact, explaining that "[t]he small school community has evolved an antidote to the lives students have lived, and continue to live, in that it provides a place of security, stability, and hope in the inner city" (p. 313).

I am drawn to the potential of unique learning environments to provide support for youth who are marginalized. What do these programs look like? How do staff contribute, philosophically and practically, to the maintenance and possible growth of such programs? I have chosen to take a closer look at one
alternative program that centres around theatre and permits an exploration of performance as a potential pedagogy for street-involved youth.

The following section is focused primarily on the work and ideas of the people who are involved with the running of Sky, an experimental theatre-centred educational program for street-involved youth in urban Toronto. My research examines Sky as a model for education and the staff who run Sky as people with knowledge to explain how an alternative educational program for street youth can work. I would like to see my writing as a critical inquiry about Sky and an information source for people wishing to contribute (as educators, administrators, counselors, etc.) towards the creation of educational programs for street youth. I wish to build a picture of Sky that enables an understanding of how programs like this can be imagined, implemented and possibly expanded.

My exploration of Sky attempts to answer two questions. Primarily, what are the organizational needs, individual responsibilities, and philosophical goals that motivate and support the running of Sky? Peripherally, how does Sky fit into a social history of alternative education in urban Toronto and what accumulative aspirations and goals allowed for this pedagogical space (not bound by the conventions of standard schooling) to form?

To answer these questions I have conducted one to two hour interviews with members of the present administration and staff at Sky, one interview with a long standing member of the Board of Directors (who is also an alternative school teacher), one interview with the former Theatre Director. I also spent many hours volunteering at Sky. I hope to paint a comprehensive picture of how Sky functions within the social and political context of urban Ontario today.
3.2 Approaching Sky

From the first moment I revealed myself to staff at Sky as a volunteer with external interests in research, I became suspect. My volunteer experience 'butted heads' with my research needs. My volunteer work allowed me to engage with and contribute towards Sky while my research was suspect and resulted in my marginalization⁴. I began to realize that my greatest source of information (working at Sky) was inaccessible to me as a researcher with the intent to make my work public. My desire to observe and formally write about Sky was met with resistance. Sky staff's resistance to my work came in small pieces: a comment about time restraints, a question about whether I was taking notes when I pulled out a day planner to write down a future volunteer date, enthusiastic responses to my desire to volunteer but disinterest in my requests for a review of my project proposal. Eventually, the accumulated comments resulted in my inability to maintain my planned research methodology, which would have involved youth as well as staff.

For a program that has run precariously for the last decade, constantly threatened by funding cuts and unquestionably marginalized from a mainstream conception of education, there are various reasons why I believe my research was not welcomed. Primarily, the pressures of funding consumed the staff and my requests for collective permission to proceed with my research, was extraneous and beyond the limits of their time and energy. Secondly, issues of confidentiality in regard to the youth are viewed as central to the program.

⁴ I never felt fully comfortable volunteering at Sky while conducting my research. I felt that staff questioned my intentions for being there. Perhaps staff suspected that I was more concerned with successfully completing my thesis than contributing to their program. Or perhaps, they felt threatened by my research, uncertain if my work could have negative impacts on their already precarious (due to lack of funding and the volatility of working with street involved youth) program. I discuss this further in an upcoming paragraph.
Moreover, the time required to create philosophically sound guidelines for my work was not available or was not seen as a priority. Thirdly, as all thesis work becomes public documents, my research could be viewed as having the potential of exposing aspects of the Sky program that could be used in detrimental ways. For example, Sky might be expert at meeting the needs of possible funders while my writing might provide information that funders deem unacceptable, resulting in a threat to financial support. Many scenarios can be imagined.

I did not wish to jeopardize my relationship with the staff by pushing my research agenda nor had I any desire to jeopardize the program. Instead, while continuing to volunteer, I chose to reframe my research about Sky by creating a report about an unidentified program in urban Toronto. In this way, I was able to write about Sky without disrupting the staff for collective permission. In keeping with ethical research standards, the chapter you are reading about Sky maintains generic and anonymous personal observations and does not include real names or identifying characteristics.

In order to supplement the formal information I have gathered to create a concise picture of the Sky program, I have written about moments that were branded on my brain while I visited Sky. I have called these experiences "snapshots". My research methods and positioning as a volunteer and university student affect the snapshots I produce. Like a photo album from travels abroad, my written observations frame only certain aspects of Sky, capturing moments that strike me as note-worthy. They provide a partial perspective, viewed from a marginal and voyeuristic position. While I proceed to explain the structure and philosophies of the Sky program I will intersperse my writing with these "snapshots". They will be immediately followed by a "caption" providing a brief analysis of the captured moment.
Snapshot #1

I am placing myself in the position of observer. I am positioned outside of the Sky student community and not included within the collective decision-making body of the program. I peripheral to a project that has brought together theatre and education for 15 years in a fusion that is enabling street youth to become self-sufficient, a project in which I would like greater involvement. I am involved in academic pursuit. This undertaking both provides me with perspective and time for a potentially constructive analysis about Sky and distracts me from a full commitment to participate in Sky. It is also a method of knowledge production and educational pursuit that Sky students are usually excluded from. I am faced with possible assumptions and ethical questions as I negotiate this position. There is the possibility that I may attempt to speak for or about youth and, in the process, usurp their voices and exploit their experiences for my own academic ends while their paths to legitimacy and success are still blocked. In order to prevent this possibility, I will establish my location as a researcher who stands outside the experiences of street-involved youth. I will focus on the educators and community workers who run Sky and not the students who access Sky.

My research centres around the methods and philosophies engaged by people who are striving to provide educational environments for street-involved youth, not, at this point, the response to these environments as voiced by street-involved youth themselves. I do, however, assume that this research, which does not directly engage the experiences, ideas and opinions of street youth, can directly (and constructively) affect street youth. I would like to see my writing as practice (or movement towards practice) collaborating with the Sky agenda to create a means for self-sufficiency for disadvantaged youth. I am participating in a discussion that I hope will contribute to an understanding of meaningful pedagogy for street-involved youth as engaged by both youth and educators.

CAPTION #1
This snapshot touches upon the experience of qualitative research as a process of negotiation, with my own ethics and experiences, with the boundaries of the people with whom I am conducting my research. Gathering information from
people is rarely simple. My initial field notes indicate my fears and uncertainties about doing research that may not contribute constructively to the lives and goals of the people involved at Sky. This points to my strong desire to make a difference in the lives of the people whom I research and my underlying hope that the people whom I study will be accepting of my contributions. I am attempting to balance my research investments with my personal ones. I am coming into contact with staff who also have conflicting investments in their work, that do not always meld with mine.

3.3 A Brief History of Sky

Sky offers a 17 week long program for street-involved youth who have not completed high school. It is a "stepping stone" program that enables youth, who have the desire to reduce their involvement in street life, to gain access to jobs, housing, counseling and the public school system. Using theatre as a central aspect of its programming, Sky strives to help people, as stated in its brochure "acquire the skills and confidence to take...control of their lives and to speak out loudly and emphatically about things which affect them". Although not explicitly stated in its literature, discussions with staff confirm that Sky's theatre program and goals are rooted in the popular theatre philosophy's of Augusta Boal and Theatre of the Oppressed.

Sky began in 1982-83 as an informal street youth performance group based out of a community centre in a rented space in a downtown Toronto neighbourhood. As with many small organizations, Sky changed in response to its leadership. To begin, two adult organizers, a drama teacher and administrator, ran Sky. In 1985-86, Sky recognized that some participants, interested in re-entering the post secondary school system, could gain from the acquisition of high school credits. An arrangement was set up between an
Alternative Toronto School Board High School whereby a couple of teachers offered to teach students and mark their work for credits, a non-obtrusive opportunity for youth to attain high school qualifications. In approximately 1989, **Sky** split from the community centre and established itself independently.

From about 1987 to 1993, **Sky** had a strong community profile and received full funding for their programming through the federal government. To receive this funding, however, Sky' youth were required to graduate from the program trained and ready for the job market. During the Mulroney years, the criteria for "trained", employable youth, as established by government funders, became more stringent and **Sky** no longer fitted the funding category. In 1993, 85% of the budget was cut. It was precarious times. Many assumed that **Sky** would not survive. With huge lobbying efforts, a move from a higher rent to a lower rent location and a unwritten decision to avoid receiving core funding from only one source (whereby a single cut can devastate the program), **Sky** pulled itself out of the "fire". After a very short period of closure, **Sky** "reopened for business" in a basement space within walking distance of its old location.

Shifts in **Sky** did not only happen geographically. Philosophically **Sky** changed along with the people involved with it. **Sky** went through periods of ideological tension and instability. For example, conflict occurred around **Sky**'s movement from a hierarchical structure to a collective, when incoming and outgoing staff had differing opinions about having an "executive director" versus a "collective decision making body". Eventually this conflict dissipated along with the role of executive director and, today, **Sky**'s decisions are made by consensus within a non-hierarchical collective.

There are six staff members at **Sky**: four people in the collective, a highly involved teacher (provided by the board of education and based out of a Toronto alternative school) and a Nutrition Coordinator. Many volunteers and short-
term contract community workers are involved at Sky for diverse periods of
time. A Board of Directors helped to establish Sky as a charity and meets
throughout the year, sporadically contributing to long-term planning, and fund-
raising.

Sky is publicized by word of mouth and referrals: community workers,
graduates and current participants sharing information about the program with
other street youth. According to a member of Sky's staff, there have been
periods in Sky's history in which the program's street reputation was poor and
applicant numbers were low. There have been other times when youth from
throughout Ontario have come to Toronto seeking involvement in Sky, along
with a life in the big city. The present administrator heard about Sky in her
previous job as Executive Director, in an organization for street-involved youth
in a smaller Ontario town, when youth who had moved to Toronto came back to
their home town with positive reports. Oral advertising brings possible
participants knocking on the Sky' door.

3.4 The Participants

As described in a Sky brochure, youth who are "homeless and
disenfranchised, 16 to 24, have had extensive experience on the street, have had
little or no success in mainstream education or training programs, live in Metro
Toronto [and] are ready to make positive changes in their life and set goals for
the future are eligible for the program" are eligible for the Sky program. These
criteria very clearly set out Sky's agenda as one that will not be suitable or
accessible to all street-involved youth. This is a program that only offers choices
beyond street life5.

5 Although Sky is only useful (and accessible) to a limited segment of street involved youth
population (i.e. those ready to leave street life and access certain regulated social structures), it
includes in its mandate a political commitment to advocate for all street involved youth, even
those who do not participate in the Sky programming.
An application process consists of an interview by at least two members of the Sky staff. Accepted applicants commit to five days of classes per week for the duration of the seventeen week long program. Upon entrance into Sky, the youth and staff create reciprocal contracts whereby needs are assessed and expectations and guidelines are established. These contracts are a framework for on-going assessment and priority-setting. They contribute to a youth's understanding of their involvement at Sky, which is framed in terms of individual goals, group dynamics and behavioural guidelines.

Every youth has different histories and goals upon their entry into Sky. According to the present staff (all of whose names have been changed to conform to standards of confidentiality),

they get very excited about learning new things. And very proud of their accomplishments. (Alison)

They are people who have a long history...They haven't finished school. They've been on their own for a while. There is a strong feeling of failure. (Nancie)

According to Alison, the school teacher, Sky youth have gained a vital education on the street.

They have some critique of society. And....I would say that most of the youth that I've worked with here are highly motivated and are really interested in a variety of things. And they are maybe because of their experience with being independent a lot of the time and being on the streets and even because they're the sort of youth who had the confidence to go on the streets or go out on their own. (Alison)

Alison's description suggests a very different image than that presented in a Sky brochure:
Typically, youth in the program have been out of work and school, without stable housing, without means of support and isolated from the mainstream for prolonged periods of time. Sky helps youth explore and address these and other issues including extremely difficult family situations, a reliance on drugs and alcohol, depression and emotional challenges, difficulty acquiring housing and welfare, isolation arising from lack of support and connections and various health conditions caused by stress and a lack of nutrition...[Sky youth usually have histories of] abuse, alcoholic or drug addicted parents, neglect, abandonment or family breakdown. On a practical level, they lack education, work experience, self respect, self knowledge, and community.

It is interesting to note that Sky's public document stresses the barriers that youth face rather than, as the school teacher suggests, the strengths and unique qualities some youth gain while living on the street. I believe these public portrayals in brochures may be necessitated by funding applications where funds are only accessible if youth are presented as having problems that donated monies will help to rectify.

**Snapshot # 2**

I arrived early today. Four youth were waiting on the steps for Marta to arrive and open the Sky kitchen. One youth mentioned the new educational budget released today and that the cuts might force programs to shut down. He said that he hoped this wouldn't happen to Sky because he wanted to graduate from something and Sky seemed his only hope. While I put away dishes, two youth worked on maths at the kitchen table, making sporadic comments about the difficult numbers. Nancie arrived by bike with the large front basket filled with groceries, which I helped unload. We set to work with meal prep.

Marta came in to request a pie. I though it was a craving but she explained that it was for the evening fund meetings. She wished to demonstrate visually how the funding "pie" was being "eaten" by throwing pieces of cut pie at a poster of Mike Harris tacked to the wall. We all wanted to join in.
The school teacher came in to let Nancie know that two students had been given permission to work in the kitchen as long as she approved. A youth took a break at 10:15 a.m., breezing through the kitchen, asking Nancie about lunch, grabbing food and heading out front for a smoke. A future workshop leader came by at 11 a.m. and spoke with Tracey, the Theatre Director, for about an hour.

Lunch was on time at 12:15 p.m. There was active discussion about landlord-tenant conflict and shitty apartment upkeep and compliments about the food. An old troupe member stopped by, filled with energy, talking about new projects, helping himself to fruit (with vocal thanks). He spoke with Tracey about his newest theatrical project. She was very supportive.

CAPTION #2

This snapshot provides a sense of the multiple layers of activity occurring at Sky all day long. Staff and youth (present and past) converge in Sky's social areas, especially the kitchen. They bring diverse histories, and talk about issues of funding and varying life demands. My volunteer experiences exposed me to the youth participants' reactions to the program and to the daily emotional states of the staff - stresses and pleasures - as played out in Sky's space.

3.5 The Bones and Flesh of Sky: Structure and Programming

The Sky program is broken into segments. There are five central aspects to the Sky program (please see Table A following this section). The morning (8:45 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.) is run by a Board of Education teacher (linked to an alternative program) who focuses her lessons around academic upgrading and political/social activism. Students who complete Sky receive three high school credits in Guidance, Theatre Arts and Fine Arts (at the grade 10 level if they need it). Every student creates separate educational goals for themselves (in a verbal contract with the teacher), sometimes striving to complete 1 to 1.5 more credits (in Math or English) during the program. Alison (the teacher) strives to create a framework with realistic goals so that achievement becomes a possibility and
motivational. Classes are divided between in-class lessons, individual and group work, and expeditions to events throughout the city, focused usually on political issues relevant to the youth.

One morning each week a group of three students works with Nancie, the nutritional coordinator, on a project around budget shopping and cooking, as well as basic nutrition. Students will sporadically meet with Freda, the Future Options coordinator, who sets them up with career mentors and talks about future job possibilities, and Chris, the counselor, who aids students with issues around money, housing, personal welfare and involvement/attendance at Sky.

The afternoons are focused on theatre, led by Tracey. Visiting volunteers or paid specialists are invited to involve youth in various theatrical activities, from musical instrument construction and mask and stilt making to set design and video production. Tracey leads the youth through theatre exercises often drawn from the lessons of Augusto Boal's "Theatre of the Oppressed". Each group of youth who enter Sky are a 'troupe' and the culmination of their involvement in the program is a theatre production performed for the public. The theatre program provides a cohesive long-term project for the troupe while aiming to establish group trust, co-operation and a sense of community. Sky began as an ad hoc theatre group and theatre has remained central to its structure. Sky stands out as a unique, comprehensive program for street youth primarily because of its use of theatre as a tool for youth affirmation and education.
**TABLE A**: The Five Central Aspect of Sky Program  
(as discussed in a Sky brochure)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASPECT OF Sky PROGRAM</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Upgrading</td>
<td>On site high school teacher helps youth in group and independent studies for high school credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifeskills</td>
<td>Group research, workshops, guest speakers, counseling focused on personal and social issues such as poverty, drug addiction, budgeting, anger management, safer sex, relationships, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Options</td>
<td>Long and short term future planning, workshops in pre-employment skills (resumes, interview skills, job search) along with a mentoring program, where youth are matched with a person working in their chosen career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition</td>
<td>Breakfast and a hot lunch are provided along with lessons in basic nutrition and hands on meal planning, shopping and cooking on a low budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theatre</td>
<td>Building on theatrical exercises, individual and collective issues are explored while simultaneously developing and ultimately performing their own production</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.6 Program Goals

The central goal for Sky is the provision of a program that affirms and supports street-involved youth in making changes in their lives. As mentioned before, it is important to note here that Sky does not meet the need of all street involved youth, nor does it claim to do so. For example, Alison explains that

The younger youth, fifteen or sixteen years old, just left home, haven’t been on the streets very long, are maybe more focused on getting on to the streets and meeting the community there, as opposed to getting off.
Instead, **Sky** aims its programming at youth who are striving to reduce their involvement in street life. **Sky** works "to take youth who [have] always failed in school and convince them that they are capable of achieving" (Alison).

> [Sky] is a re-engagement. Re-engaging [street youth's] minds. Re-engaging their belief in themselves. Re-engaging them back into more of the mainstream, mainstream schooling and the idea of getting out of the sub-culture and its lifestyle and back into something that's more positive for them. (Marta)

**Sky** aims to sustain a comprehensive program where

> there is a sense of success....Certainly with the theatre piece - just putting on the play - they're high as kites after that....

(Nancie)

I am particularly interested in the **Sky** focus on theatre and wish to explore the possibilities that are opened to **Sky** youth when theatre becomes a core aspect of their education. Unfortunately for my research, gathering 'data' on the **Sky** theatre program proved more challenging than I first anticipated. The theatre director, Tracey, was very protective of her theatrical territory and would not allow me to observe her work. She firmly expressed that her theatre work with **Sky** participants was personal, volatile and participatory, for them and for her.

All people who entered the **Sky** stage were actors, theatre workers or specialists with specific skills to teach. According to Tracey, research was only permissible once a wide range of ethical questions had been answered in conversation with the entire **Sky** staff collective and all youth participants. With the demands of her programming and a disruptive funding crisis, Tracey was not inclined to engage in ethical debate and policy making around my research project and, consequently, she was unwilling to invite me into 'her' space as a researcher. Instead, my information has been culled disjointedly through discussions with
peripheral members of the theatre program and one of Sky's previous theatre directors.

3.7 A Spotlight on Theatre

Sky's theatre program, lead by the theatre director, occupies the weekday afternoons. Individual and collective issues confronting street involved youth are explored through exercises, based on popular theatre techniques. Every seventeen week program ends with a performance, developed and directed by the youth (with the participation of the theatre director). The process of creating a final production is saturated with potential lessons, tensions and challenges.

Sky's theatre involves youth as individuals and as members of a group. For individuals, Sky's theatre works to enable the development of specific skills necessary for participating in a performance, builds self-esteem and provides the possibility of achievement. As a group, theatre attempts to build cohesion and negotiate the multiple, ever-changing investments of every individual within the short-term performance community.

3.8 Youth as Actors

Theatre workers repeatedly mention that a low sense of self-worth limits the potential and experience of street involved youth. Theatre practice aims to help youth build self-esteem through accomplishment: performing and feeling good about this performance.

Nothing's good for your self esteem like achievement. (Neville)

Neville, a previous theatre director at Sky, suggests that youth as actors are not limited by roles that they live everyday. He expresses that acting allows youth to push the boundaries of how they see themselves, to experiment with other ways
of being in the world. This, however, is countered with the potential for acting to reinforce limitations and stereotypes, narrow rather than open ways of seeing oneself. Theatre, explained by Neville, can become a method to reinforce stigmatized identities, rather than disrupt them.

It's tempting, and I've seen it happen with theatre for and by disadvantaged youth, to get the juicy stories, to get the self-pitying disclosure and the pathetic disclosure and I think that only reinforces their identity as a victim or as an addict, or whatever. (Neville)

This points to the precarious nature of theatre work at Sky and the uncertainty that desired theatre goals (on the parts of both director and participants) will be met.

Neville continues by explaining how certain theatrical exercises help him to challenge himself and youth participants to break stereotypes and routine ways of being and experiment with theatre and new ways of acting in the world. One example he uses is his encouragement of play:

We would do a lot of exercises near the beginning of the program both about relaxing, about de-mechanizing. A lot of youth are paralyzed by "cool" and have a hard time just being silly. And it's wonderful when that breaks loose. To see a bunch of wildly decorated street punks, just playing like six year olds. Just giggling and playing and rolling on the floor and laughing and laughing and laughing and laughing... And I've often thought that sometimes I'm seeing somebody that is playing for the first time in their life. (Neville)

3.9 Youth on Stage

Neville explains that the theatrical stage offers a space that is separate from "reality", an opportunity to experiment, to take chances, make mistakes and survive the consequences.
If your parent slams you up against the refrigerator door and knocks your teeth and calls you a 'fucking idiot', you learn not to try and not to take any chances and you move forward in very small steps.... [Theatre exercises at Sky] would pose problem-solving challenges to the group they wouldn't meet and then point out that was o.k. and the roof hadn't caved in and no one was going to ridicule them and how might it have gone otherwise. (Neville)

One of Sky's assistant theatre directors, Max, reports that Sky's staged theatre is a rehearsal space where youth can develop their political thoughts and practice by challenging social structures and family relations that have created barriers for them. Theatre, he expresses, can enable youth to confront political systems in an organized way.

[The government] feels safe having the youth come to City Hall. And the youth feel safe because they've created a piece that they're proud of. And they've created a piece that says, 'this is the message I want to say, let's go say it'. And so they don't feel that they're going to be taken advantage of. (Max)

Neville continues by expressing the potential benefits of a group of youth speaking with combined voices.

What we create is a fictional story that speaks for all of us rather than something that prises into your privacy or your private life and we start to see what we share in all of this. (Neville)

The benefits are derived as a bi-product of the group project. (Neville)

Neville further describes that these bi-products include the potential for youth who are creating a performance together, to learn to trust and respect each other, experiment, fail, and succeed in the process. He hopes to provide opportunities for learning through theatre exercises that are used for discussion and analysis.
Problem solving exercises, lateral thinking...and then always feeding back, observing what happened in the dynamic, pointing out that somebody wasn't listened to, or somebody was uncomfortable. And then always creating, every day creating, even if it's a thirty second scene or tableau or something [based on their own lives]. (Neville)

Fundamentally, Neville presents Sky's theatre as a place to engage with learning.

4.0 Youth as Learners

In our discussions about Sky's theatre practice, it became clear, however, that educational moments do not always instigate immediate learning. Neville presents experiences at Sky as seeds that are planted for later use.

I've met people....who seemed to have had a totally unsuccessful experience with the program, dropped out half way through in conflict... or were dropped out of the program because of poor attendance, or because of aggression or whatever, who show up five, six, seven years later and say, 'it's the best thing that ever happened to me. Thanks a lot. It changed my life. It just took a while. (Neville)

Snapshot # 3

The theatrical space at Sky is a rectangular room painted completely black. The stage, made from wood and also painted black, rests slightly above floor level. Sky students use this room in the afternoon, during theatre rehearsals. I have not been involved in the theatre program but I am aware of two important aspects of the theatre rehearsals. Sky students are involved in theatre workshops and exercises that will result in a final theatre performance by and for peers. And the stage at Sky requires that actors remove their shoes before stepping onto it.

I am particularly interested in the rule of shoe removal as a metaphor for theatre and education. The stage is transformed into a different space, a "magic zone", where an actor no longer lives within his/her "own shoes". This provides an opportunity to imagine what it would be like to live "in someone else's shoes" or, fundamentally, to experiment with new ways of thinking and being. This may not always be helpful or constructive. It may result in angry exchanges and
feelings of hurt and frustrations. However, most importantly, it opens up the possibility for imagining. I believe that change is only possible if we are able to imagine what that change looks like. The shoeless stage at Sky becomes a "neutral" space where change can be imagined, where students do not have to be themselves and the limits of their present and future are the boundaries of their imagination.

CAPTION #3

As pointed to in this snapshot, theatre at Sky becomes a framework for talking about daily experiences. The school stage becomes a space where disparate individuals come together to exchange ideas and share experiences. "A crucial focus that various political movements and theaters shared was a belief in the importance of everyday, material, lived experience" (Canning, 1996, p. 39). Once everyday life is established as important and legitimate knowledge, individual experiences that are lived by many people can be exposed as systematic. This is demonstrated in Canning's (1996) feminist theatre, where the practice of sharing personal everyday experiences "was intended to counteract the divisive effect of patriarchy and to bond women by demonstrating that their experiences were not individual and unrelated occurrences, but part of a larger pattern in the material oppression of women" (p. 44). For marginalized youth, social and political structures that affect their daily lives, such as welfare, education, landlord-tenant acts, healthcare, and the job market, become shared realities that can be studied, and possibly, challenged. "As such, drama is not a reflection of life by a demystification of it, by the full exploration of these realities" (Smith, 1995, p. 333).

I wish to end my section on Sky's theatre practice by drawing on the previous chapters in this thesis. Although Sky strives to create a staged environment that can offer new learning experiences for youth, the theatre
program at Sky, like all popular theatre, is precarious. As discussed before, group cohesion is never definite. Individual experiences are bound to be emotional and potentially hurtful. I understand the Sky theatre program to be buffeted by funding requirements (that are often experienced as harassment by most social service organizations) and the multiple investments of every person with whom Sky comes into contact: staff, volunteers and participants.

I see, however, theatre as a unique aspect of Sky’s programming. Unlike academic upgrading, which (in part) helps to enable re-entrance into the public (if alternative) school system; future options, which aims to provide opportunities for accessing the workforce; and counseling, which strives to help youth gain stable housing and economic stability, the theatre program does not present any goals that work towards re-involvement in, or adjustment to, social structures. Instead, it provides an alternative form of education that is non-conventional and never stable. Perhaps due to its volatility and marginality, Sky’s theatre is not stagnant and will, even if it includes some difficult experiences for its participants, always remain vibrant. It may be that only through confronting difficult experiences youth are able to work through obstacles they face. Sky’s theatre director may not always reach her goals for a theatre program but the Sky stage will provide an opportunity for education outside of the mainstream and enable the possibilities of community formation, self-exploration and political activism.

4.1 The Staff: Individuals

The people on staff are....assertive and risk takers. (Nancie)

Devoted, experienced staff are essential for the maintenance of a program like Sky. Every staff member contributes to the daily and long-term running of
the program. There are six permanent staff involved at Sky (please see Table B following this section for a clear summary of staff titles and roles). Their principles, aspirations, teaching styles, and decisions become the framework in which the Sky youth work and learn. I have begun speaking with the staff members of Sky in order to assemble an understanding of the personalities and philosophies that contribute to Sky.

Although individuals experience diverse involvement in Sky, there are aspects of the staff's personalities and philosophies that tend to overlap. Every member of the staff have a strong critique of society. They are dedicated to Sky as a means to resist and challenge elements of society that are oppressive to youth and themselves.

I think there are qualities that it would be good... to have here.... An analysis of our society that appreciates that when we're dealing with issues of poverty, we have to look at the responsibility that society has for that and the responsibility that our system - I would say the capitalist system - has for creating that.... We have to have that anger politically. But at the same time we have to encourage youth to take personal responsibility for their own lives and not just use that as an excuse. But also not to let that get them down and feel that there's nothing they can do. (Alison)

The staff express an underlying respect for the youth who are involved in Sky and a general openness, relaxed, natural, humour-filled demeanour in interactions with each other and with the youth.

We... treat [the youth] with respect and as individuals and we hold ourselves accountable to the same behaviour that we expect from the youth. So there isn't, "this I can do... but you can't" kind of attitude.... So if [you] screw up with the youth or something and.... [you're] having a crappy day and you bitch at them, you damn well go repair that because they deserve an apology. You don't get away with it. No. That's just crap. (Marta)
I love working with this age group. I love working with these kids. It's not just the age group. It's also the situation that they're in... Most of them have had pretty rough lives but they're very lively people. Something's happening all the time. Yeah. I love working with the staff as well. I like working physically and I believe in the program. (Nancie)

Most importantly, the Sky staff are experienced community workers who have extensive knowledge of Toronto street life and resources.

We're not just here to give [the youth] an education. We're here to deal with stuff.....Family issues, abuse issues, drunk-abuse issues, drug abuse issues, sexuality issues, gender issues - [public high school teachers] aren't set up to deal with that....Whereas Sky is set up specifically to deal with that. We've got the education and the skills, the connections and the network to deal with those issues. (Marta)

**TABLE B: Sky Staff Roles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Running the morning program including individual and group academic upgrading and social/political activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theatre Director</td>
<td>Running the afternoon program including leading theatrical exercises, organizing guest workshops, facilitating the creation and performance of the final theatre production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Fundraiser</td>
<td>Office maintenance including computers, Xerox machine, supplies; Grant and report writing for funders; Budget creation and monthly maintenance; Liaison with the Board of Directors; Participates in collective meetings; Keeps all brochures up to date; Coordinates special events/fundraisers; Raises funds (form corporations, government, and private donations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor/Life Skills Coordinator</td>
<td>Creating and ensuring self-created contracts are maintained by youth participants, providing counseling, support and referrals in regard to personal welfare, issues of poverty, housing, anger management, communication, and basic needs maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Options/Skills Development Coordinator</td>
<td>Providing pre-employment skills including resume writing, interview techniques, realistic goal setting and future planning, and coordinating mentorship program that connects community member working in the field of employment in which each youth is interested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutritional Coordinator</td>
<td>Preparing a daily hot lunch and ensuring food is available for breakfast, educational programming about basic nutrition and shopping and cooking on a low budget</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 The Staff: Collective

The counselor, theatre director, future options coordinator and administrative fundraiser manage the program as a collective. As a group, at weekly meetings, they make decisions, solve problems, discuss individual participant issues, and develop philosophies.

We've made it a priority that we have to have meetings, that we have to maintain a collective body. And that we keep it strong. Because with not having an actual boss, it'd be very easy to say, "oh-whatever". But the four people that we have right now [we're] very committed to the idea of a collective - very committed to it. It's working very well. (Marta)

If you have core principles, then you always know how to act 'cause you've got them to refer back and you go, o.k., that's my principle, how do I respond. (Freda)

As a collective, we....set up policies and process to deal with...the situations that might occur. If any crap does happen, how do we address it with each other? How do I hold you
accountable? How do I talk to you about a conflict I have with you? Or if I see you do something with a youth, what do I do? So that's all been set up by the collective to ensure that the philosophies are all actually maintained. (Marta)

Despite their experience and qualifications, the staff as a collective and as individuals are often distracted by their heavy workloads and the program's lack of money. As I witnessed the funding situation deteriorate, money issues began to dominate the discussion and lives of Sky's staff. There was a high level of anxiety around the limitations created by low income and the possibility of no income (i.e. no program and, thus, no job). Funding anxieties were exposed as a job hazard that carves into the emotional state of most staff members.

4.3 The Bigger Picture: A Matter of Funding

Nobody has stable funding anymore. Nobody know if they're going to be in existence for the next couple of months....And you can't live like that. Nobody can live like that....[The government] get a four year fuck'n term....We don't. It's month to month....They're saying, you fix all of society's ills and problems but we're giving you no resources to do it. (Marta)

In order to understand Sky's place in society, it is important to contextualize it within a larger social and political picture. The provision of government monetary support is the realistic indicator of social and political priorities in a province. Presently, in Ontario lead by Mike Harris and the Conservative Party, funding to all social programs, education and health is being heavily cut. New policies and funding criteria are leading to the dismantling of hospitals and community-based organizations, and the reduction of school staff. Across the city, low-income, disabled, homeless and other marginalized members of our society are being greatly affected. Social services are becoming a
scarcity, and social workers are pressured to increase their moral surveillance and policing of clients.

Street youth, who require more emotional and economic support than, for instance, the majority of youth living in their homes who are economically supported by parents and attending public school, are finding that social services are no longer available to them. Sky, one of the few comprehensive program successfully supporting street youth, is threatened by funding cuts.

For example, with cuts to provincial adult education, the older youth who are more inclined to involve themselves with Sky are directly affected.

I think that the main criteria [for involvement in Sky] is that youth have decided that they want to make some changes in their lives, that they have an idea what sort of issues or changes they want to address and why they think that Sky can help them once they hear something about the program.... And I think the people who tend to fall in that group are...on the older end of our intake. That's why I'm really disturbed about the changes around adult education. (Alison)

Sky relies primarily upon (quickly diminishing) short-term government grants supplemented by private donations and event fundraisers for its funding. The program costs approximately $7,300 for each youth, based on having 18 participants in a four month program. A smaller troupe causes this figure to rise, but, in general, it costs $429 a day for a youth to be at Sky.

People might look at it and say that's rather expensive for each youth to go through the program...But in boot camps, one of Harris's new boot camps...[it costs] $1250 a day.....A jail is a thousand dollars a day, so we're quite cheap. (Marta)

It would appear that our social priorities as demonstrated by the current government's policy-making have warped. According to Wallis and Mee, "the education available within a society has generally been considered an important indicator of development and cultural sophistication" (p. 12). Based on my
present research I must conclude a decreasing lack of "cultural sophistication" in regard to support for alternative programming. Sky is an example of a compromised social programming, struggling to acquire government support that will ensure its survival. Sky is running month to month on a very limited and limiting budget. The effects of such insecurity and instability are evident. However, there are moments when resistance is also expressed.

**Snapshot # 4**

I was on my own in the kitchen today, surrounded by rally organizing activity. A protest was planned for noon outside the Mayor's office at King and John Street. Tracey photocopied and cut out flyers. Her complaints about the poor exacto knife pointed to lack of funding for high quality equipment. Sky's students talked (during break) about what to wear and if they felt comfortable being taped (by City TV).

Marta mentioned that the supportive responses to the Sky funding crisis have been non-stop. She has received letter upon letters of shared distress and a desire to help.

At 11:30 a.m. Tracy rounded everyone up with an instructional pep talk. I felt frustrated that I hadn't stopped moving all morning and still the soup wasn't quite ready. I had to stay behind until lunch was prepared. I felt left out.

By 12:15 p.m. I was at the rally. The drums were going. Youth and adults were handing out flyers to all passer-bys. BRAVO and CITY TV were taping the activity and short interviews. There was an abundance of energy, drum playing and shouting, even through whipping rain and hail that intruded for about 30 minutes. All the dark suited business people made an interesting contrast with the unmatched, colourfully clothed street youth and supporters prancing around an enormous bicycle with an attached drumming platform and huge metallic skeletal umbrella.

At 1 p.m. Tracey made a rousing closing speech of thanks and congratulations for raising awareness, followed by loud cheers. There was a sense of community and solidarity. In the space of one month, the Sky troupe had become a group of political activists, driven by a shared desire to keep Sky running.
CAPTION #3

This snapshot captures an interesting consequence of Sky's funding crisis. Although lack of money creates stress and anxiety, it is also a driving force behind the energy and activism of Sky's staff and participants. Sky's tenuous existence gives them a political edge. A program that is marginalized within a society parallels and collaborates with youth who are also marginalized.

4.4 Positioning the Researcher or Conducting Critical Qualitative Research on Alternative Education During a Funding Crisis

Changing one's approach to qualitative research when faced with barriers may be assumed as inevitable to a honed and experienced researcher (see Lareau & Schultz 1996, Hammersley & Atkinson 1995, Bogden & Biklen 1998), but it was a new lesson for me. My research around Sky as a model for alternative education was an introduction to trial and error methodology. I learned that ideas and methodology have a symbiotic relationship. They are inter-dependent and intrinsically related. My data has changed due to my evolving methodology and my methodology has changed in the process of acquiring and thinking about data. The following section explains the planned and improvised process that lead to the accumulation of data organized in this paper.

Sky, along with many other educational and social programs in Ontario, recently found itself in a major funding crisis. After 15 years of unstable but sufficient funds to run two 17 week programs each year, Sky was at an unprecedented breaking point. They were uncertain if they could remain open for another month.

Every staff member at Sky became involved in the crisis. Regular work was set aside to aid in letter campaigns, press releases, rallies, demonstrations and parades. Their weekly dinner, open to all street involved youth, was
canceled indefinitely, a sign of direct effects on street youth due to funding cuts. The youth became involved in the construction of stilts and puppets for demonstration to protest these cuts. All efforts were focused on raising awareness and money to enable Sky's survival.

I became more involved at Sky at this time too. I attended rallies and parades and helped out more often in the kitchen. With my decision to write about Sky as a model for alternative education, I had become intent upon recording my experiences while visiting Sky. I found time after every Sky visit to write "field notes" about my observations and feelings. However, as the funding crisis became more evident and pressing, I found this increasingly difficult. The Sky collective decided that no subjects peripheral to the day-to-day running of the program and funding would be tabled at meetings until the crisis was over.

Emotionally, I felt committed to the Sky program before my own research. I did not want to add any excess burden on the over-stressed staff. This meant that I only approached certain of the Sky staff, whom I judged to be less anxious, for interviews. It meant that I avoided speaking about my research and focused only on staff and program issues when visiting. Understandably, stress levels rose: without funding there would be no Sky. My own distress was two-fold: a) The deterioration of Toronto social programming was slowly eating away at the core of the city and making life harder and harder for those with the least money and privileges; Sky funding cuts is one destructive example of this. My emotional state was taking a beating as I witnessed increased homelessness,

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6 Ultimately, this has resulted in a slightly more disjointed thesis than I desired. My information and data have been gathered sporadically, on a rocky schedule, determined by the levels of anxiety within Sky around its funding crisis. I have been working with an awkward set of field notes, gathered with Sky's needs as my first priority, to the detriment of my work on this thesis. I think this has been an education in the difficulties of community programming and the consequential conflicts writing about these difficulties.
poverty and rising levels of anxiety and fatigue in a city that I am trying to make my home. b) My research was precarious. It was risky to work on a project without "official" consent. I worried that Sky' staff did not view my research as useful but, rather, as a distraction from something far more important. I did not wish to give up 'when the going got tough' or become a peripheral victim of funding cuts. However, my own anxiety was increasing.

All Sky' staff were setting limits for themselves. They were uncertain about the futures of their own jobs and consumed with money issues at Sky; my request for group acceptance of my research proceedings was outside of their limits. The stress experienced by Sky's staff around funding was compounded by personal issues that were consuming the Sky's staff lives including births, transitions in relationships and major operations.

I was concerned for Sky and aware that my research was in jeopardy. Should I continue doing my research if it required that I disrupt, even briefly, the work of a program in crisis? Could I even acquire enough information to draw an adequate and accurate picture of Sky for my paper? The funding crisis was having a direct effect on my research. I was required to rethink my methodology.

I believed that, with their existence in question, alternative programs like Sky need to be written about, legitimized and supported, more than ever before. However, I did not wish to write about Sky in any way that could affect them detrimentally or that met with their resistance. This project is not a collaborative effort as I had hoped, but rather a rough blueprint of an anonymous organization. I still believe this is an informative foundation for understanding alternative programming for street involved youth. I have begun to parallel the uncertainty of my research with the precarious nature of running a community
based educational program for street youth. They both require faith that with drive and dedication a project will sustain itself and remain/become a reality.

4.5 What Now?: A Brief Look at Future Investigations

I have drawn up a blueprint for Sky, an alternative educational program for street youth, including an historical overview, descriptions of programming structures, philosophies, staff and participants. I have pointed to the way Sky and the people who run Sky are buffeted by funding needs. Yet I feel that this is only a beginning. There are many more questions I wish to answer, to both satisfy and expand my initial intentions for this project.

I am conscious of my limited ability to comprehensively examine the possibilities of theatre without incorporating the opinions and experiences of street youth participants with theatre. How do youth experience and understand theatre? How do different youth respond to the other programs and philosophies at Sky? What happens after Sky? How do youth experience the support that staff claim is provided during the Sky program, and does this stay with the youth after graduation? What are participants' frustrations and pleasures while involved at Sky? Which of their needs are being met and which are not? I see this as a project that will require extensive research, necessary for a more complete understanding of the effects of Sky and theatre on street involved youth, that can only skimmed through studying the success and failures of the program itself and the people who run it.

I am interested in the effects of economic policy on education, in particular education for street involved youth and education that centres around theatre and the creative arts. At what point is Sky and our creativity at the mercy of government grants? How does power play itself out in community based programs within Metro Toronto? How do Ontario political leaders involved in
education understand Sky and other alternative programs to fit into Toronto and Ontario? How do we enable grants (and priorities) in the political agenda to support programs like Sky?

Specifically important to me, how can I begin to feel that my research is a collaborative effort with the Sky staff, where my role as researcher is not seen as a distraction from the central funding concerns? Can my research become a resource for exchanging ideas and providing support and insight into alternative education marginalized youth and, perhaps, the possibilities of theatre as learning?

Finally, I am interested in continuing to examine how the conflicts that emerge in theatre and within an organization like Sky, affect education for street involved youth. How does precariousness and uncertainty, inevitable within this kind of work, play itself out?

'Performing' myself on paper has been an important step for me in my explorations of theatre as pedagogy. I hope it will lead to discussions, on paper or in person, with others interested in the same area of alternative and creative education. This is a "forum" that seeks to open up possibilities for future work and conversations.
CONCLUSIONS

I introduced my thesis with a question: What are the ideals of educators who create education that engages street involved youth who are unable or unwilling to involve themselves with mainstream schooling, and what barriers and conflicts complicate their work? Propelled by this question, rooted in my interest in the transformational and educational theatre work of Augusta Boal, I began researching popular theatre, and searching out theatre practitioners for discussions about theatre as educational practice with street-involved youth in Toronto. Although I gathered information and the beginnings of answers, I mainly emerged from my discussions with more questions. I discovered that my initial queries themselves were layered in my own investments, assumptions and multiple meanings and that finding answers could be approached in widely divergent ways. My thesis inquiry provided lessons in both critical thinking and research methodology.

At first I was stunned by the magnitude of information available. It was difficult for me to critique and challenge the complex work of theatre practitioners whose practices (on a theoretical level) impressed me, and, thus, my interviews lacked a critical edge. Only after completing my interviews and gathering my data did I recognize certain holes, questions and foci that I should have explored deeper. I found myself with interesting data that required more extensive analysis. I pushed myself to draw up lists of uncertainties, potential conflicts and controversies that pointed to both the difficult task of thorough research and the reality of my field of interest: popular theatre is volatile and ever-changing and establishing with certainty its possibilities is an impossible expectation. In order to discuss theatre's educational possibilities, I have had to be willing to accept unresolvable conflicts and recognize questions as instrumental to research analysis.
My initial question harbours fragile and multiple definitions. Theatre workers understand themselves and their work differently. "Street involved youth" is a category that can not be mobilized without assessing its problems. Education (and theatre) understood by theatre workers for street involved youth is a layered conceptualization, saturated with theatre workers', and my own, ideas about the learning needs of the youth with whom they work.

Theatre workers present themselves in roles that involve varying concepts of authority and approaches to educational practice. Their methodologies range from formal teaching to acting as casual peripheral information sources. This points to the uncertainty within practice, the need for experimentation (where practice changes according to who teaches and who participates) and the possibility for conflicting ideas about the goals of and approaches to theatrical work amongst practitioners. In this thesis one central example of a conflicting idea, emerges around the use of personal storytelling. For one theatre worker, theatre offers the unique space for youth to experience being the most qualified individuals to tell stories about their own lives. This same theatre worker, warns that theatre practitioners who solicit emotional stories and are unprepared or unable (along with other theatre participants) to support youth through this self-exposure, may cause greater damage than good. Another practitioner expresses that soliciting storytelling requires a balance, often hard to acquire, between alleviating pressure that would make a participant feel obligated to fulfill a stereotype of the "traumatized youth", and accepting that certain individual do have stories of trauma that they have the capacity to choose to speak about (and determine the extent to which they wish to share). Following this, the same theatre worker expresses the importance of theatre that is not autobiography but instead creates stories that are outside of youth's own lives and, therefore, more easily objectified and analyzed. In this one example of
storytelling, theatre practice is revealed as highly controversial. Theatre workers themselves have conflicting approaches to their own practice, and multiple desires that may include the wish to hear traumatic stories, be able to provide emotional support and help participants analyze their lives. Participants may also have various reasons to tell or withhold stories of their own life experiences. The practice of storytelling (and, in parallel, all theatre methodologies) thus evolves to include complex negotiations between the experiences and investments of both the tellers and listeners, practitioners and diverse theatre participants.

Paralleling debatable and divergent theatre methodology, the goals and ideals that theatre practitioners work towards are contentious. I have been keen to discover the pedagogical potential in theatre practitioners' work. However, I have not been thorough in questioning practitioners' understanding of pedagogy and their goals for their work. How do theatre workers understand learning? What do they count as knowledge? How does this compare to the learning needs and desires of youth participants? How are their theatre goals affected by funders' demands, whose donations enable their work? In the case of Sky, the alternative downtown educational program for street involved youth in Toronto which I explore in this thesis, education is limited to youth who are willing to make specific changes in their lives. Sky, based partly on funding that requires particular "outcomes" such as "employable" youth, and partly on the visions and goals of Sky staff, provides youth with options beyond street life that include welfare, stable housing, employment and school. Thus, "educational possibilities" in the context of Sky theatre and its other programming, focuses on inviting youth back into regulated society (perhaps marginalized, but still bound to social structures often managed by the government, such as the public school system or social assistance). Sky's theatre program may instigate political
activism or resistance to social structures, but within a broader context of working from within these structures, to which the overall Sky mandate strives to connect street involved youth. Here, I conclude, that the goals of any program carry investments that influence the education and learning possibilities available to its participants.

I am also struck by the need to question the layers of meaning in the term "street involved youth". With any name that points to a particular segment of the population, there is a danger in creating stereotypes and generalizations that limit and stigmatize diverse individuals. I mobilize this term in an effort to understand the educational possibilities for youth, who have self-identified as being involved in street life and dis-engaged from mainstream schooling, to re-engage in learning through theatre. However, I am writing about a population who are often referred to as having similar characteristics and traits, demonized in the media and framed in sociological studies as criminals and addicts. My own writing falls into a dangerous zone where I can potentially reinforce these stereotypes. Instead, I wish to emphasize that my use of the category of "street involved youth" refers to youth who, for circumstantial reasons, have involved themselves in street culture in a variety of different ways. Many of these youth have chosen street life above their involvement in social structures, such as family and school, which have been dysfunctional, non-supportive or even destructive to their growth as individuals. Street life, like all living and social environments involves the potential for community, individual barriers or conflicts, pleasure and discontent. Every youth is negotiating their individual path through life, sometimes including involvement in the street, as they navigate their way into adulthood.

From these fragile beginnings, where theatre workers, their goals and practices and the street involved youth who work with them, are understood to
be shifting, with divergent needs and desires, and conflicting investments, I wish to summarize the possibilities that theatre workers present for theatre practice. Popular theatre practice, most of which finds its roots in the ideas and exercises developed by Augusta Boal in Theatre of the Oppressed, molds and is challenged by every theatre worker and participant who becomes involved with it. What interests me is how theatre can create unique opportunities for learning, and the conflicts that emerge in striving to actualize these opportunities. Below I list pedagogical possibilities of theatre, along with questions and controversies that have arisen in my analysis of these possibilities.

a) Theatre, undeniably, brings people together to work on a shared project. This provides the possibility for community building. It also involves the risk of conflict between individuals working in theatre together. Community cohesion can be understood as a tenuous and hopeful ideal. What happens when a community, working on a shared project, is made up of individuals who do not get along? What pedagogical experiences are possible within this environment?

b) Theatre strives to enable skill development including commitment, dealing with difficult people, building trust, being on time, hygiene, and respect. This leads me to ask, for what purposes or end are skills being developed? Who decided what skills matter? Are these skills being developed/taught as a means to enter the 9 to 5 workforce? What happens if certain youth are not interested in learning these skills? What happens when participants are late, disrespectful, untrustworthy, uncommitted or are violent towards each other? What possibilities does this open up?

c) Theatre, ideally, creates a space for social analysis where personal experiences, shared on stage, can be studied for their connections to larger systems within
However, it is not always possible to create the distance required for objective analysis of personal stories. What happens when emotions dominate a forum for discussion? Is it possible to analyze all experiences for their commonalties with others? Or are certain experiences understood, by the people who live through them, as unique? What conflicts emerge about different analyses of a personal experience?

d) Theatre strives to provide a forum for coalition formation and political activism where the stage becomes a rehearsal space for challenging experiences of oppression. This is an ideal that must be understood against the possibility that individual experiences and barriers are greatly divergent and that the stage itself may exacerbate social barriers for certain participants. What happens when a theatre project includes experiences of oppression for participants, such as encountering racist or homophobic attitudes amongst co-actors? Is political activism and coalition building possible when individuals have differing concepts of what barriers must be challenged or what counts as political?

e) Theatre creates the possibility for participants, through the encouraged use of creativity and fantasy, to begin imagining alternative realities. I must ask: What kind of realities are encouraged and recognized? On whose terms? Does alternative reality for street involved youth mean life off the streets? Or can it mean a variety of new ways of living within street culture?

f) Theater strives to enable the experience of listening and being listened to. However, this can also lead to experiences of alienation and misunderstanding. Conversation is always wrought with the potential for miscommunication. How does this play a part in the pedagogy of performance?
g) Theatre offers the potential for self expression where youth have a chance to speak about their own lives and gain a better sense of self and self-worth. This is weighed by the risk of self-examination. Will youth necessarily feel comfortable sharing their stories? Will practitioners have the skills to mediate self-exploration? Youth may have a complicated, changing sense of themselves and personal storytelling may be confusing and even traumatic. Youth may also feel pressure to disclose information that they are not ready to share.

h) Theatre creates the chance for youth participants to experience accomplishment and survivable failure. From this final point, I am compelled to ask: what happens when a theatre project is not completed? Are there ever experiences where failure is experienced as painful and traumatic (barely survivable)?

As I come to the end of my compiled list of theatre's pedagogical possibilities, and my queries about them, I am made aware of one underlying principle within the practice of theatre. Theatre work is never certain. Theatre workers are educators who strive towards varying ideals and goals, constantly faced with the potential for inconsistency, conflict and failure. I imagine that this is balanced by glimpses and (brief but fulfilling) experiences of success and actualized ideals and, perhaps, the (motivating) challenge of working towards such volatile goals.

The volatility of theatre practice, as described above, plays itself out in both the theatre programming and broader educational mandate of Sky, for which I piece together a verbal blueprint in chapter three. Sky is a program offering particular options for street involved youth. It has a clear structure and established goals and, yet, it is restrained financially, buffeted by funders, and
constantly changing according to the staff and youth who are involved within it. Theatre, incorporated into Sky's programming, is enmeshed within larger agendas and the goals and investments of all who work within Sky (in particular the four person decision-making Collective). This becomes important for acquiring an understanding of the possibilities that Sky's alternative education provides for street involved youth.

Sky's comprehensive program endeavours to bridge youth's entrance into social structures such as schooling and employment. The theatre segment may augment this, or alternatively, it may provide a chance (in potential conflict with this goal) to actively resist social structures that create barriers for youth. Political rallies, parades, plays created for a government audience, and educational performances for peers may enable youth to speak about inadequate social models that may motivate their decisions to become involved in street life in the first place. Theatre may enable youth to envision life changes that are very different than re-entrance into school or involvement in the 9 to 5 workforce. Of course, these possibilities for resistance are contingent upon the changing desires of every new theatre director and group of youth who participate in a Sky program. They are affected by funds (or lack thereof) and they are part of an ever-evolving, risky and uncertain effort to create educational opportunities for street involved youth.

In summation, Sky's use of theatre, like all popular performance practice, creates distinct pedagogy. This pedagogy is unpredictable and complex, paralleling the youth who engage with it. A central goal in this thesis has been to begin discussions about the controversies, conflicts, pleasures and, resulting from these multiple experiences, educational possibilities for street involved youth who work with popular theatre.
From the foundations of this thesis, I hope to explore further theatre's potential pedagogy through:

- conversations and collaborations with street involved youth about their experiences, understandings, likes and dislikes when involved with popular theatre projects

- dialogue (and critical questioning) with a greater number of theatre workers, perhaps brought together in one space so that the process of comparing philosophies and practices can be based on immediate dialogue rather than, as developed in this paper, a reconstructed puzzle

- involvement with and explorations of diverse alternative educational programs that incorporate theatre into their structure, as a means to enhance through comparison and an exchange of ideas the work of Sky

I hope this thesis and future conversations will move towards an understanding and creation of educational models that re-engage youth for whom mainstream schooling is inadequate and will aid in supporting self-identified opportunities for street involved youth.
REFERENCES


Video

"What's Wrong with This Picture?", Produced by Second Look Community Arts/Video Events, 52 minutes (1989)