

# A Reconsideration of Social Innovation: Drama Pedagogies and Youth Perspectives on Creative and Social Relations in Canadian Schooling

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## **Abstract**

Drawing from a multi-sited, global ethnography on youth civic engagement and artistic practices, the author uses students' perceptions from one Canadian high school, as they reflect on their experiences in a drama classroom, to ask what we might learn about the macro discourses and processes of social innovation from the local, artistic, and collaborative activities of young people. Learning from young people that they do not imagine themselves as the coherent social grouping our institutions have imagined them to be raises questions about the role educational institutions might be playing in developing and activating plural and progressive forms of sociality and social innovation more broadly.

*Keywords:* social innovation, theatre pedagogies, youth civic engagement, institutions of schooling, ethnography, social cohesion, social anxiety, educational and social evaluation

## Résumé

En se basant sur des recherches à multi-sites une ethnographie globale, l'auteur se sert des observations des étudiants d'un seul lycée canadien et leurs opinions sur leur participation dans des cours de théâtre pour se demander ce que nous apprenons des macro-discours et des processus d'innovations sociales provenant des activités locales, artistiques et collaboratives des jeunes. En apprenant de ces jeunes participants qu'ils ne voient pas comme faisant partie des groupements sociaux cohérents que nos institutions veulent nous faire imaginer posent des questions sur le rôle que joue nos institutions d'éducation dans le développement et l'activation de formes plurales et progressives de socialité et, plus généralement, d'innovations sociales.

*Mots-clés* : l'innovation sociale, les pédagogies de théâtre, l'ethnographie, engagement civil des jeunes

## Preamble

In the call for papers for this issue, the *Canadian Journal of Education* editors wrote the following:

The driver of economic innovation is creativity and according to innovation rankings, Canada has demonstrated weak innovation capacity for decades (The Conference Board of Canada, 2015). Given the trajectory of the CE [Creative Economy] in the next decade, we believe it is timely to address the complex constraints within education that separate pedagogical innovation from social innovation. Society needs creative thinkers who have been educated to address socio-cultural-political issues and who are capable of engaging in complex interpersonal relationships within diverse groups of people (see Hayes, Sameshima, & Watson, 2014).<sup>1</sup>

First, my gratitude goes to those who conceived of this special issue and decided that a lack of attention to educational, pedagogical, and artistic innovation was impoverishing our understandings of “social innovation,” rendering it bereft of some of the critical practices that are seminal if we wish to move beyond the economic, the neoliberal, and the instrumental in discussions about social innovation. What are these “measures” that have shown Canada as failing? What are we measuring and what are we failing to measure? What kinds of innovations are legitimized and which are not? And, let us take some responsibility, those of us in the fields of education and the arts/cultural production, for allowing our work to remain rarified in the academy, specialized, precious even, and divorced from the social world.

Research on social innovation has gained momentum over the last decade, spurred by the growing interest in a range of academic and policy discourses from management and entrepreneurship to health, the arts, education, and political, economic, and social policy. But, the boundaries of social innovation processes have not yet been completely defined, leaving considerable space for contributions to both theory and practice. In

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1 The *Canadian Journal of Education* invites submissions to its upcoming Special Capsule Issue entitled “Teaching Creativity, Creatively Teaching.” Please see the “Announcements” page for more details at <http://journals.sfu.ca/cje/index.php/cje-rce/announcement>. The deadline for submissions is December 1, 2016. [The Announcement page has been de-activated.]

addition, as de Bruin argues in her 2012 work, there is a “lopsided focus on technical innovation” despite the historical evidence of the crucial role of social innovation and its contemporary urgency (p. 368). As with any movement that rapidly gains currency, though, it can be stretched beyond recognition or even emptied of meaning as definitions and uses proliferate or its trendiness outpaces its substance. In surveying the broad literature on social innovation, the notion of human creativity is often central, across a range of diverse investigations. At the heart of this notion of creativity is the idea that societies need to maximize the creative potential of their citizens (Mulgan, 2015). I have considered the emerging field of social innovation, and creative activity in particular, as an opportunity to legitimize the idea of social innovation as a driver of social change, to examine some of contemporary society’s real-world challenges and to consider the role that might be played by institutions, like education, and practices and pedagogies of theatre-making in particular, that might contribute to understandings of social innovation as a driver of progressive social change<sup>2</sup> writ large. In short, what social value inheres to the artistic work we do in schools regarding growing social inequality and dislocation?

The scholarly discourse of social innovation for me, then, creates the possibility to see social challenges as opportunities to create more equitable and sustainable societies. It would not be an overstatement to say that social innovation has a key role to play in addressing climate change, the crisis of the welfare state, health pandemics and failures, social dislocation and inequality, and educational failure (see Caulier-Grice, Kahn, Mulgan, Pulford, & Vasconcelos, 2010; de Bruin, 2012). Much more empirical work is needed in order to develop social innovation as an effective policy tool to help redress these overlapping crises at the macro-level. While much attention has indeed been placed in recent years on technological innovation and research, social innovation seems to be, by comparison, in its infancy. In this article, I wish to argue for a more intimate and productive relationship between the broad, macro discourses of social innovation, and the micro creative and art-making practices of young people in schools and communities. To do this, I will privilege the voices of young people who are competent analysts of their own experiences, and who have much to teach us about how “creative pedagogies” are being enacted in classrooms and to what extent these kinds of pedagogies prepare them

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2 By “progressive,” I am referring to social action that centres social justice and equality in societies as its fundamental goal.

for the complexities of social life in globalized, increasingly unequal, and hyper-diverse contexts.

## **Defining Terms**

Pol and Ville (2009) argue in their article, “Social Innovation: Buzz Word or Enduring Term?” in the *Journal of Socio-Economics*, that some analysts have considered the term a passing fad and too vague to be usefully applied to academic scholarship. In the field of social entrepreneurship, scholars have been talking about “responsible reciprocity” (de Bruin & Kickul, 2011); those of us who have been involved in socially engaged or community-based research have long understood the value of such mutuality. It is not simply about disseminating our findings but allowing our very conceptions of research, as well as our findings, to be deliberated through engaged processes. What is further interesting about the field of social innovation, from my reading, is that the cognitive scientists, the political economists, the business and public management people, as well as the sociologists all seem equally persuaded by its potential. It has so far been an academic and policy space where things like technology, education, housing, prison reform, health care, and finance have all pledged allegiances. This is a very unusual phenomenon, but a very stimulating one for education and research that prizes interdisciplinarity and centres goals for social justice and change.

Phills and colleagues (2008) argue that social innovation is a novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than existing solutions, and for which the value created accrues primarily to society as a whole, rather than private individuals (p. 36), while Mulgan and colleagues (2007) have suggested that social innovation is the development and implementation of new ideas (products, services, and models) to meet social needs (p. 9). Some argue that the lack of universally accepted definitions of social innovation, the ambiguity around the term itself, is cause for concern. I think, however, it may be a sign of productive tension as a result of unsettling typically bounded ways of thinking. And fixing definitions may ultimately be more about the end of the story rather than the beginning of it. Social innovation is most simply understood, I would offer, as innovation in social relations within both micro and macro spheres, in order to satisfy unmet or new human needs identified by different sectors in society. For me,

this operational definition comes at the intersection of public pedagogy, socially-engaged research and collective and creative action.

In the following section, I will turn to my current multi-sited, global, ethnographic study of theatre practices and pedagogies in Canada, Taiwan, India, Greece, and England (SSHRC 2014–2019). In this research, as in previous studies, I lean on theatre as a powerful methodological and analytic tool to better understand the social and educational welfare of young people. For this article, however, I will focus on the Toronto site only, as a way to respond to the particular call concerning social innovation in Canada, and will explore the data that both illustrate and undermine the growth, as I see it, of social innovation in Canada today.

### **Youth, Theatre, Radical Hope, and the Ethical Imaginary: An Intercultural Investigation of Drama Pedagogy, Performance, and Civic Engagement (2014–2019)**

I conceived of this study in order to think about disengagement in schools as a precursor to, and driver of, youth social unrest around the world. This, of course, is the shadow side of social innovation and creativity as a lever for positive social change and justice. Using a socially-engaged and collaborative model of research, I am asking: What makes the classroom or a theatre workshop a forum of civic engagement in the present as well as an experience that may cultivate civic engagement later in life? Collaborating across schools in Canada, India, Taiwan, England, and Greece, the study is examining how theatre-making with young people can cultivate practices, relationships, dispositions, and values that orient them towards, and support them in, engaged citizenship. It was borne of the unexpected findings from my previous study (Gallagher, 2014), which illustrated a strong relationship between the care-giving activities that some students engaged in outside the classroom and their in-school engagement. It also comes from a deep curiosity I now have about the place of “hope” as a practice in young people’s lives.

In the project, in each of three consecutive years, we<sup>3</sup> have drawn upon a different model of drama or a kind of theatre pedagogy to investigate how these specific theatre-making practices with young people might give rise to their thinking about, expression of, or taking action upon their own and others' lives. Our careful study of these three forms of pedagogy—Verbatim Theatre, Oral History Performance, and Collective Devising—allow us to think about the specificities of these theatre practices/performance styles. For each year, a series of lessons/workshops were shared among sites through our online communications platform. In each of the years, a different site acted as “lead” of the pedagogical/theatre work. In year one, the Toronto team, along with our artist collaborator, verbatim theatre artist Andrew Kushnir,<sup>4</sup> led the pedagogical framework for all sites. In year two, our collaborator Dr. Wan-Jung Wang led the pedagogical work on oral history performance. And in year three, our collaborators, Dr. Myrto Pigkou-Ripousi and practitioner Nikos Govas of Athens, and our collaborator Dr. Rachel King of Warwick University, along with her artist collaborators from the Belgrade theatre in Coventry, led the ensemble-building and devising work. Our collaborator in India, Dr. Urvashi Sahni, led the feminist critical dialogue pedagogy, which is infused throughout all of the years. At the end of each of the units of work, qualitative interviews were carried out in each site. Members of the Toronto team have travelled to all sites over the 2016–2017 year and engaged in ethnographic observations as well as theatre work with the young people, working closely with the local researchers, artists, teachers, and students. In the third year of the study, all sites also completed a comprehensive quantitative survey on the broad notions of hope, care, and citizenship, for which analysis is ongoing. Though distinct, the three kinds of pedagogies we have engaged in also share important features. Significantly, they are all (1) pedagogies/ways of creating that privilege a collective and collaborative creative process, and (2) pedagogies/ways of creating that make use of original (not

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3 When I refer to “we,” I am referencing the large team of graduate student research assistants and artists that I work with in Toronto. The “we” of this study, however, also includes a larger group of international collaborators: researchers, artists, youth workers, teachers, and young people. For further detail on the global, multi-sited team, please see [http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/dr/Research\\_Projects/Youth\\_Theatre\\_Radical\\_Hope\\_and\\_the\\_Ethical\\_Imaginary/index.html](http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/dr/Research_Projects/Youth_Theatre_Radical_Hope_and_the_Ethical_Imaginary/index.html). As the focus of this article is on our work in a Toronto school, the “we” referenced here is pointing to our local research team in Toronto, consisting of doctoral students Dirk Rodricks, Rebecca Starkman, Rachel Rhoades, Kelsey Jacobson, Scott Mealey, Nancy Cardwell, Sherry Bie, artist Andrew Kushnir, and myself.

4 See <http://www.projecthumanity.ca> for further information on Project: Humanity's creative director Andrew Kushnir.

received) stories and, specifically, the unique experiences and stories of those involved in the creative process. It is these two features that I would like to examine for this article, in order to say something about the potential role of theatre pedagogy in an effort to think through the complexities of social relations in a diverse classroom and enact socially innovative policies and practices to more fully reap their benefits in the broader social world.

### **Regal Heights Collegiate in Toronto, Canada**

Regal Heights Collegiate is a secondary school in Toronto that was founded in 1964. The school identifies itself as a Global School, committed to a focus on social justice, international development, environmentalism, and multiculturalism. The staff and students represent over 100 countries. Of the 843 students at Regal Heights, 48% hold a primary language other than English. Six percent of students have lived in Canada for two years or less, and another 7% have lived in Canada for three to five years. The school population is 51% female and 49% male students. The school provides programs for the developmentally delayed and physically disabled, and provides support for students with learning disabilities. Regal Heights has also offered the two-year International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme since 2007, which is characterized by its rigorous academic curriculum and focus on critical thinking skills and community involvement. Our research engagement is with students in the regular stream of the school, within the context of “open” (students from all academic streams) drama classes.

Regarding the arts, the school’s extracurricular clubs include Concert Band, Drama Club, GLEE, Stage Crew, and Vocal Ensemble. In recent years, enrollment in drama has decreased and some classes have had to combine multiple grades. The International Baccalaureate program changed its offerings in 2016, which further resulted in drama courses being replaced with film studies. The Ontario Secondary School Arts Curriculum guides the content and aims of drama classes. The Core Values stated in the curriculum document include developing creativity, communicating, understanding culture, and making connections. The province-wide formal curriculum emphasizes preparing students for success in creative careers and for a depth of understanding in, and appreciation for, aesthetics and the sociopolitical aspects of dramatic works. Arts teachers follow two formalized pedagogical structures: the Creative Process and the Critical Analysis Process.

There is a dual focus on creative production and on connections between artistic works and society at large.<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that provincial academic success measures continue to assess students on individual performance, not collaborative performance. Theatre is, above all else, about collaboration. Suffice to say, theatre classes are working, pedagogically speaking, against the grain, and in ways that do not garner broader evaluation measures nor figure into how schools are “performing” as institutions.

At Regal Heights, students tended to describe the work that took place in the drama classroom as having a small and intimate impact in terms of social innovation and change, which they viewed generally as a larger scale or wider-reaching concept. Occasionally, however, they broadened that circle to include potential change for their audiences. Anything beyond that was framed in a more hypothetical manner, almost always in response to the prompting of the interviewer (“if the principles and processes that are present in the drama class were to be leveraged in the larger world then I could imagine that...” or “theatre of this kind could potentially promote social learning in its audiences”). We might, again, speculate on the reasons for this finding, which are in contrast with our findings in places like India and Taiwan in our study. There is great diversity of race, class, and gender in the Toronto school, so the “starting place” was not always a shared one. North America, culturally and politically, is more individualistic and Western forms of neoliberalism, inside and outside education, have only heightened that foregrounding of individuality rather than collective or collaborative social forms. Finally, there is simply a much shorter history of social movements of collective resistance in North America than in other parts of the world. Despite all of this, there were certainly some students we encountered who imagined the practices and operations of the microcosms of their drama classroom, and the creativity provoked there, as relevant to broader visions for social innovation and change and broader cultural and political practices.

When the students did make connections between the micro-practices of their classroom and the governance of broader society, it was, therefore, notable. The youth responses collected below offer particular insight into the article’s focus on the potential role for drama’s pedagogies in the broader discourses of social innovation. As I present and draw further implications from these responses, my aim is to lift them beyond their

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5 For an in-depth examination of the arts curricula across elementary and secondary education, please see Gallagher (2016).

individual or psychological considerations and put them to work in a larger discussion of social processes, social innovation, and social change.

## **Emergent Themes Relevant to Understanding Drama's Potential Role in Articulating Observations of Social Innovation Processes in Canadian Classrooms**

The many and diverse voices cited below are drawn from four broad themes that can be usefully understood to offer insight into how, in the views of young people doing drama, we might consider the value of drama's pedagogies and practices for broader social innovation and change. These themes are (1) positive experiences of the local may offer the promise of future probabilities, (2) "deeper" issues can be addressed and consequently influence participants and audiences to adopt positive individual/collective social attitudes and behaviours, (3) the (emerging) activist voice can be developed to become even more powerful, and (4) processes inherent in drama provide a democratic space for "bringing people together" for social good. These discoveries were made through individual and focus group interviews as well as through our field observations of a unit on Oral History Performance undertaken by the teacher and his students, based on the unit shared by Dr. Wang-Jung Wang in Taiwan.<sup>6</sup> In the following section, I will further elucidate the themes derived from the interview data.

### **Theme 1. How Drama Might Make Micro and Macro Social Change<sup>7</sup>**

The first three responses cluster around a subtheme of "good communication." The first subtheme is that *good communication (i.e., open, well-intentioned, trusting) can break down existing social barriers and solve social problems*. Simple ideas about being able to speak to others, to take the chance and risk conversation, with people you do not know

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6 For further understanding of Wan-Jung Wang's oral history performance pedagogy, please see Wang (2010).

7 My deep appreciation to research team member Scott Mealey for early conversations about these emergent themes in the data.

well, is a sign of hope for these young people. Notably, the starting place is that “we” are not a group if we don’t know each other already; there is a perceived gulf to cross.

Kathryn (female, Native American, Longhouse, low/middle class, straight):<sup>8</sup> I feel like...when people work together they kind of get that, like, uncomfortableness; it’s like, when you are working together in acting type form, you get to know people, like when you are practising, you get conversations in there sometimes when you take a break. So then you start to get comfortable with them, that awkwardness goes away and you are able to communicate and get along with other people. I feel like that would help with the world because a lot of people our age have anxiety with talking with people. And if people come up to them and just talk to them, sort of just like make them feel comfortable, then that part would go away almost.

Josh Rotengo (male, Serbian, white, straight, middle class, casual Catholic): The fact that you can come together with complete strangers, like I did, not complete, I knew some of them but most of them I didn’t know- but the fact that you can come together and so quickly be able to make yourself into a team and put together this work of art that wouldn’t have ever been made in the world and that is totally unique to that group of people. And then how that brings everyone together. That makes it pretty hopeful for being able to solve conflicts around the world or being able to come together with other people and work towards solving things.

Brittney (female, Caucasian): ...we’re just really open-minded people and we’re able to trust each other a lot. I think it creates in me that eventually years from now, the world will be a better place. Just through the people that are in the world and the things that they believe and the things that they’ll teach their children to believe.

A second subtheme emerged related to this idea that “micro” discoveries might offer “macro” ways forward. This second subtheme is that *using your voice can be personally and socially meaningful*. It is noteworthy here that learning in drama, and perhaps

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8 In the case of youth in our study, they have chosen their own pseudonyms and social identity markers.

learning generally, is conceived as a very individual experience. And that “making a group,” even in a context where that is the expected outcome, is a hurdle for many young people and can feel like a real victory when it is achieved. One must ask, what are our social arrangements in the everyday that this comes to be seen as such an achievement by young people in a Canadian high school?

Kathryn (female, Native American, Longhouse, low/middle class, straight): Oh yeah, like I gained confidence talking with people. 'Cause like when you started in drama class, Mr. L got us doing name games and games with each other, and he would pair us with people and you would have to talk to them, stuff like that. Basically making us comfortable around each other. So then once the comfort level came around, like I noticed that I felt confident in talking to people, like 'cause they kind of just like me. Like when I am outside the class it gives me confidence to actually go out and talk to people. Like how I will start stuff to talk to them. So like I get sort of like un-nervous in other places. And like I had to talk in this class, and you have to talk to new people in the outside world. If I had to apply for a job or something like that.

Greg Tran (male, East Asian, heterosexual, middle class, atheist): I really enjoy drama and I think the people who do take drama benefit a lot in general. I mean, they're more expressive, they're much more open about their opinions, and I think it's just a really positive thing to take. I mean, especially people in our generation, not to really brag on people who aren't taking drama, but I feel like they're really missing out. And people who do take drama are better off in this generation, in this society.

Marcell (male, African Canadian, lower-middle class, straight, raised Seventh-day Adventist but I am not religious): So I feel like, because like if something's wrong I won't usually mention it; I'll just kind of try to work through it on my own and that can't, like that's not always the thing to do. So I noticed after like being in this drama class like I'm, like the other day I was feeling down and I was talking to like Estelle and Evangeline about like why I was feeling down and I noticed

that actually helped a lot. I felt a lot better. So I've, I'm learning to be a lot more like I guess trusting. I don't trust people very well. Now I do, so.

A final subtheme of the micro and macro of social change theme could be expressed in the following way: *positive results can come out of stressful processes and drama can be a way of dealing with social stress.*

Josh Rotengo (male, Serbian, white, straight, middle class, casual Catholic): It's good to have that experience [a conflict in the midst of group work] to be able to say that you've been through that and go through with it. Also, confidence I think. 'Cause you trust everyone and they trust you and you're willing to put yourself out there and that makes you more confident. For other classes, if you have a presentation or something, it's pretty similar to drama so you can be more confident in that sense. And it gives you a relationship and it makes you relate to other people a bit easier.

Jessika (female, straight, Roman Catholic): I mean it's just a way to get away sometimes. When you don't want to be you, there's a way to be somebody else... I've been going through some things. I have really bad social anxiety. And I was...I'm just getting over depression. So I overthink almost everything I do. Literally everything! I can't stand in a line at Tim Horton's without overthinking things. And I feel like drama is such a welcoming place where you can be yourself and you don't get judged. Because we're all different and it's a good different, and we all understand each other.

Paul (male, bisexual, middle class, Caucasian, Anglican): There is no class like drama. I think the big way that drama helped me is more, uh, is more an emotional standpoint than, ah, um, academic standpoint. Emotionally I feel more reassured because you hear, because I am not alone, when I get stressed about my life I know that others, I know this is something...I am not alone, I know that we all kind of suffer from stress and all these varying factors when we are teenagers and it is reassuring to know that everyone else is in the same boat.

Stress and anxiety are taken as a shared experience by these young people. And drama is positioned as a kind of antidote to that stress and as a way to get oneself out of one's own head, as it were. Here, difference is welcome, most especially when "being a group," despite individual issues, is achieved. What role does adversity play in our conceptions of ourselves as "a group," both in classrooms and in larger social contexts? Politicians often mobilize such national narratives in times of elections or social turbulence. Young people clearly learn the lesson of strength as a group, despite individual differences, in the struggle to create in a drama classroom.

## **Theme 2. "Deeper" Issues Can be Addressed and Consequently Influence Performers and Audiences to Adopt Positive Individual/Collective Social Attitudes and Behaviours**

Vanessa (female, Brown, straight, middle class, Hindu): And for the world—it gives others the opportunity to see art in theatre, rather than art in a poster or a canvas. It's showing an actual person re-enacting in a role. And it's pretty impressive how a person can really put themselves in one's shoes and it gives inspiration to others as well and they could pursue what they really want. 'Cause drama is not only about if you want to go to the theatre, but it can help you with your everyday things.

Reigna (female): We had a unit about what people thought about race and sex and everything. I mean, how other people's opinions are important, too, and that gets you thinking more, and galvanizes what you do to change the outside... I think in drama, you get to see these other perspectives and you get to thinking more. So when you learn different things, you go out into the world, and based on those new thoughts, you can change a little bit. So I think with you changing your perspective, you can change other people, too.

Zofia (female, Caucasian, heterosexual, upper middle class, Catholic): I think maybe more appreciation for what drama has to bring to the world because, like I said, some people may view drama as a wishy-washy course especially in, like,

middle school. Even me, like I took drama in middle school but as soon as I got into high school I was like, this is serious stuff. And I hope that our world can come to accept bigger ideas that can be presented through drama because it's such an abstract thing and I think a great example is with the stories we tell and the kinds of reactions that we got with that. I'm hoping that people...it's such a hard thing to think deeply and find that deeper message in literature, in drama, in movies, like usually they always say, "What's the big idea?" And it's so difficult and I hope that like people are able, when they finish watching an artistic piece, that they kind of go home and digest what was going on and that they're able to appreciate the actors and the message and all that.

In these responses, the youth feel drama is not valued for all that it brings to the world. I am particularly struck by Reigna who values drama for the ways it both offers a reprieve from the complexities of social identities and relations, and also a space for their meaningful exploration. Her explanation seems almost entirely contradictory—asking why there is so much focus on the ways in which we are divided and categorized, and yet how great it is that drama offers a practice for understanding diverse perspectives. In the end, rather than a "wishy-washy" experience, drama helps people get at "deeper issues."

### **Theme 3. The (Emerging) Activist Voice Can Be Developed to Become Even More Powerful**

Having a voice is linked, in different ways by different youth here, to making connections with larger issues and larger, possibly global, communities of people. Drama here is a way to activate the voice of engagement. Of course, these thoughts are highly relevant to my study, which is interested in the ways in which drama pedagogies might offer a space for the practice and development of the engaged youth citizen. Here, the students count the "small" gestures or practices as potential harbingers of more macro forms of civic engagement.

Estelle (female, Asian, black, white, lower middle class, raised Catholic practices Hinduism): And my, like, I'm very involved with equity and social justice issues and stuff like that so I've noticed a lot that through the dramatic arts and any art, I guess, it helps people become aware of what's going around in our world... I

definitely notice that with drama, I don't know, if you really have an eye for it and you're keen about it and you notice even just a smidge of a lesson in it, you're gonna take that with you and you're going to try to apply it somewhere.

Katie (female, Caucasian, heterosexual): I think that drama class, as I said, like helps you open up, so I think it would help people that maybe have a quiet voice inside them open up and maybe I don't know what that quiet voice is about but maybe for some people it would help them speak out against certain things or speak up for certain things, and I think it makes you more self-confident. So, maybe it'll help you know people who are already political activists or activists for certain things maybe it'll help them raise that voice and um activate it I guess.

Greg Tran (male, East Asian, heterosexual, middle class, atheist): I realize that maybe even all these little small seemingly petty things that happen in everyday life could mean something greater in the future... It does make me think more about the fact that even the small things that I do have some effect on everyone else, even if it varies from person to person and each person has a smaller and smaller effect, as I get farther and farther away from them or the less I know about them, it still has an effect on them to some degree.

#### **Theme 4. Processes Inherent in Drama Create a Democratic Space for “Bringing People Together” for Social Good**

Zoe Jenkins (female, Caucasian, straight, middle class, atheist): In drama, I think it's like very collaborative and everyone wants everyone else to do very well. And they want to help each other as much as they can 'cause like everything is group work... When we all work together I think we have a level of care for each other, even people that I've never met before and then they come into this class and I already, like, feel for them... Um, the, you wouldn't do that anywhere else. It's just kinda this open space where everyone can do something. I think it's really great and I think we should have more ways to do that in the world. I think that kind of gives us an idea of how stuff works and what we can do.

Muckles (male, white, straight, middle class, Christian): After this unit [on oral history performance], how do I feel about the world? I feel like it is a stronger place. There's a lot of problems, there's always going to be problems, but I feel like our world is getting stronger. The older generation is starting to help with the younger generation. We're starting to really connect as one.

Drama provides a space where “care” cannot only be practised, but is often also noticed by others. For each of these youth, drama is a microcosm of the world as they *wish* it to be. The power of metaphor, the power of symbolic action, the power of imagination, are key to “connection” and understanding “how stuff works.”

### **Considering the Regal Heights Youth Voices and Canada's Social Innovation Deficit: Drawing Some Conclusions**

Throughout the interviews and our observation of their creative practices with their teacher, three important understandings surfaced that may help explain why Canada has, according to global rankings, “demonstrated weak innovation capacity for decades”: (1) the Toronto youth appear to take as a given that they are not part of communities but are, rather, individuals; (2) the mere idea of thinking of themselves as part of a group can cause social anxiety; and (3) drama is offering them a rehearsal ground for important ways of being social or living more socially in the world. I have written elsewhere about the dialogic nature of drama classrooms (see Gallagher & Yaman Ntelioglou, 2011). What I have seen over many years of research is that the space afforded for peer-to-peer dialogue, typical in many drama classrooms, is a coveted space, a way for difficult conversations to happen, a way for diverse opinions to find their place in the room, often unmediated by adult voices. Important in drama class, however, is that these dialogues are relevant to the young people's own lives. Recall that the particular pedagogies used in this research project privilege collective and original story-building, that is, the stories used as fodder for creative development are from the actual lives of the young creators. The students tell us, over and over, that this space “for the personal” matters and cannot be taken for granted in other contexts. Recall Paul: “Emotionally I feel more reassured because you hear, because I am not alone, when I get stressed about my life I know that others, I know this is something...I am not alone.” His “discovery” is that he is not only

an individual with unique problems, but someone who shares experiences with others unlike him, and who gains from his relationships to them. Consider also Zoe Jenkins: “When we all work together I think we have a level of care for each other, even people that I’ve never met before and then they come into this class and I already, like, feel for them... Um, the, you wouldn’t do that anywhere else.” Drama is a space where caring for others and thinking of the world in more relational ways can be foregrounded as a condition of creating, learning, and being human. Further, initial reluctance and fears can be overcome and the important line between one person’s concerns and another’s can be realized.

In considering the role of arts pedagogies, then, in broader national discussions about social innovation, the political, cultural, and local context must be carefully considered. That means we must first inflect understandings of social innovation with local ideas about what sociality is, what the barriers are to achieving it, and how we create and sustain social forms of being. In one Toronto school, sociality was not a given, its features were not fully understood; it was, often, a tangible source of anxiety. It is important that we understand this if we are to consider how classrooms might be seen as microcosms of larger social forms. We must not dismiss the fears of social discomfort simply because we are speaking about “young people,” who we presume will simply develop social skills and greater self-confidence. Such fears of how to be together in diverse groups, how to acknowledge self-protective behaviours and recognize when they may be conditioning social relations, and how to begin to imagine ethical relations across difference are not the domain of young people alone, as the current political climate around the globe would tell us.

In both the scholarly discourse and in the popular imagination, social innovation is mostly invoked without much attention paid to cultural and political differences globally. Further, social innovation is understood and articulated in more monolithic ways, as the struggle to define it has shown us. Our research in various global sites has taught us a great deal, not only about how the ideas of social innovation and social change differ across global sites, but also how the starting premises for imagining social innovation are radically different. We learned in India, for instance, that social cohesion is the starting place—youth are coming together as a group and trying to determine how best to improve how they make progress as a group in light of enormous social inequality. In Toronto, by contrast, we took from the youth that their starting place was very different: we

are not a social group, we have great trouble and even anxiety thinking about ourselves as a social group, and one great achievement of drama pedagogy is when we manage to see ourselves as part of a larger social assemblage.

Unger (2015) has persuasively argued the following:

Our conceptions of a market economy or of a political democracy are always wedded to flawed, relatively accidental institutional arrangements. We must occasionally resist and redesign these arrangements for the sake of interests and ideals that they fail to satisfy. (pp. 233–234)

If school, then, is a “relatively accidental institutional arrangement” and if we further believe that school is a microcosm that reflects broader cultural realities, then we have learned from young people that while our schools have grouped young people together by virtue of their age, they have not appreciated that these young people may not see *themselves* as the group we imagine them to be. They recognize in drama pedagogies and practices that they are being asked to pay attention to self–other relations, that their experiences are, in some ways, contingent upon, or at the very least relative to, the experiences of others, both local and global others. If Canada has failed in measures of social innovation, we have likely failed in this very fundamental way. We have taken as a given that young people see themselves as a group, because our flawed institutions have situated them in this way. But young people do not necessarily feel that social cohesion, and schools themselves may have somehow failed to satisfy this basic human need. Young people in schools are not the collectives we have imagined them to be by simply grouping them together by age. Rather, schools need to engage in practices, in drama classrooms and elsewhere, that privilege social forms as potential and realizable goals. Sociality, then, is not the starting place we have assumed it to be. Rather, sociality is possibly the most important goal to set for schools, a discovery made by so many young people we worked with in one Toronto high school, and one that is the best starting place for imagining greater forms of social innovation and evolution in our times. Of course, I am not suggesting that our discoveries in one east-end Toronto high school can be generalizable across different provinces, urban and rural spaces, and levels of social diversity. However, I am posing the question: Have we erroneously made the assumption that young people, by virtue of being housed together and educated through a shared curriculum, have thought themselves a thriving social community? The young people in our Toronto site

have invited us to doubt that very basic assumption. To do so—to question that implicit key assumption, I am arguing—may in fact help us begin to address a larger, perceived “social innovation deficit” in Canada.

Canadian experts on “innovation,” like the University of Toronto’s president, urban geographer Meric Gertler, often tout cities like Toronto as “leading-engines of innovation.” In a 2016 *Toronto Star* Opinion piece, however, Gertler and coauthor Ilse Treurnicht, CEO of MaRS Discovery District, note that the “geography of innovation” has changed, that Toronto, notably, has an “innovation ecosystem” comprised of multi-disciplinary teams, a “mash-up of scientists, entrepreneurs, students, investors, marketers and more.” They write further, “Toronto is also a leading financial centre, with great neighbourhoods, strong public schools, and unparalleled diversity and cultural vibrancy.” They conclude: “The geography of innovation is changing. This shift has serious consequences for policy-making. And as cities become the leading engines of innovation, Canada will fall behind unless it embraces downtown density as a driving force in the new economy” (Gertler & Treurnicht, 2016, n.p.).

Working with young people in schools has made me wonder what the implications of “human density” will be in a context where social groupings in traditional institutions (like schools) may not be the ideal arrangements to satisfy our collective needs as we move towards the middle decades of the 21st century. More and more of us live in institutions that are not enabling us to see ourselves as intentional communities. Further, growing social and income inequality (see Chen, Myles, & Picot 2011) in major urban centres has challenged our cherished national narratives about pluralism. Schools, currently, are very far from the ideal “hubs of innovation,” despite much creative work that goes on inside them.

The youth in Toronto have understood exactly what Richard Sennett (2012) has articulated as the single-most important challenge facing contemporary, diverse societies: the ability to live well together. At Regal Heights, drama practices were issuing an invitation to youth to create together, and to use the very material of their own lives to build that creative work. As the CJE editors quoted in their call for papers as cited above: “Society needs creative thinkers who have been educated to address socio-cultural-political issues and who are capable of engaging in complex interpersonal relationships within diverse groups of people” (see Hayes, Sameshima, & Watson, 2014). Can drama classrooms create intentional spaces for interpersonal and political struggle? Can we say

that grappling with a creative process as a collective enterprise offers young people many tools to work across difference and struggle towards a shared goal? As Reigna beautifully summarizes,

We had a unit about what people thought about race and sex and everything. I mean, how other people's opinions are important, too, and that gets you thinking more, and galvanizes what you do to change the outside... But I think in drama, you get to see these other perspectives and you get to thinking more. So when you learn different things, you go out into the world, and based on those new thoughts, you can change a little bit.

Ultimately, some may argue that our social institutions alone cannot articulate the full aspirations for social innovation, social justice, and change needed in Canada, but they are the closest we will come to understanding and reviewing, collectively, those complex visions. If social institutions, like schools, are operating with outdated or inaccurate conceptions of its "users," we will undoubtedly continue to "fail" in the global rankings. Finally, if we do not provoke a new conversation about what kinds of things we should be measuring as reasonable markers of social innovation and progress, if we do not address operating assumptions that we may have got wrong and listen to the words and thoughts of young people who are highly motivated to create a thriving sociality, we will miss a great opportunity to pay attention to our rich and varied local contexts, which are key to "scaling up" social innovation across such a vast country and a globalized world.

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