

*Negotiated Hopes: Reconfiguring Narratives of Self-worth* is a multi-component practice research output that identifies fears experienced by young people (between 15 and 21 years of age) in Singapore, where narratives of self-worth are too narrowly defined by academic performance. Through the development of two new practice research interventions that took place in two education contexts in Singapore, and theorisation developed in two peer-reviewed articles, this practice research establishes new urban art-inspired applied performance practices that are highly relevant to young people in Singapore. In my practice research, I use *Art du Déplacement (ADD)* and breakin' moves to resist the pervasive discourses of failure and disavowal that frame the lives of many Singaporean young people deemed "un-academic" in formal education. Using an adapted narrative inquiry as my methodology, findings emerging from this socially engaged research indicate that students can resist the temptation to seek external validation by developing a narrative of self-worth based on their own experiences of conceptual learning and understanding outside of the formal education system. Creating these counternarratives of self-worth is a vital tool in countering the stigmatisation and social invalidation experienced by many Singaporean students, which have been identified as triggers for self-harm, depression and suicide. The principal contribution of this research lies in using *ADD* and breakin' to create a new applied theatre practice that reconfigures Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed techniques for the formation of more hopeful narratives of self-worth amongst young Singaporeans. This practice research has been disseminated through one peer-reviewed article, one book chapter in an edited collection, 14 workshops in universities and community theatre organisations within the UK and five conference presentations.

Negotiated Hopes



Adelina Ong

Materials which comprise or support this submission can be found inside the box or on the USB drive  embedded in the box's interior lid. Within this publication, references for components of the submission are found in the right margin using a lettering system A–L. Items marked with an \* are components of the output, all other items are contextual.

- A Workshop plan: *ADD*-inspired applied theatre workshop
- B Workshop plan: Breakin'-inspired applied theatre workshop
- C E-flyer created for Singapore Polytechnic workshop 
- D Reflections gathered during the *ADD*-inspired applied theatre workshop 
- E Reflections gathered after the *ADD*-inspired applied theatre workshop 
- F Reflections gathered during the Breakin'-inspired applied theatre workshop 
- G\* Article: Ong, Adelina. 2016. 'The Path Is Place: Skateboarding, Graffiti and Performances of Place', *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 21(2): 229–41
- H\* Article: Ong, Adelina. 2015. 'Creating Places of Radical Openness in Singapore', *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 20(3): 271–7
- I\* Article: Ong, Adelina. 2018. The Limits of Access: The Messy Temporalities of Hope and the Negotiation of Place', *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 23(3): 467–78
- J\* Edited collection: Conroy, Colette, Dirk J. Rodricks, and Adelina Ong, eds. 2019. *Special Issues as Books: On Access in Applied Theatre and Drama Education* (Abingdon: Routledge)
- K\* Article: Ong, Adelina. 2020. 'Is This the Change That Matters?', in *Witnessing Change*, ed. by N. Abraham and S. Baker (London: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming)
- L Online article: Jenkem. 2019. 'Looking Inside the World of Skate Academia', *Jenkem magazine*, 14 October 2019 

Further information on these materials can be found on the reverse of the box's interior lid.

Adelina Ong

## NEGOTIATED HOPES

Reconfiguring Narratives of Self-worth

The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama,  
University of London

NEGOTIATED HOPES: Reconfiguring Narratives of Self-worth

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SGD\$25,000 from the National Arts Council (Singapore).

This multi-component practice research project consists of:

- workshop plans of the two urban art-inspired applied performance workshops in Singapore; A,B
- an e-flyer created for the ADD workshop; C
- reflections gathered during, and after, the two workshops; D-F
- three peer-reviewed scholarly articles in *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*; G-I
- one edited collection that was published as part of Routledge's Special Issues as Books programme; J
- one book chapter that contributes to *Witnessing Change*, a collection edited by Nicola Abraham and Sylvan Baker; K
- one magazine article written by a staff writer at *Jenkem Magazine* summarising (and recommending) my article 'The Path is Place' to skateboarders. L G

## I Overview

This multi-component practice research submission consists of writings from a practice research project, *Negotiated Hopes: Reconfiguring Narratives of Self-worth*. The novel applied performance practices that I have developed are based on breakin' and *Art du Déplacement (ADD)*. My practice research reinvents Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1985 [1979]) techniques, regarded as foundational practice within applied theatre, with *Art du Déplacement (ADD)* and breakin' (also known as breakdancing).

ADD is an urban practice of playful movement developed by the Yamakasi in France (Angel 2011). ADD is a way of moving over, on, through or around obstacles (walls, fences, railings, buildings) and surfaces in the city, based on movements developed from an obstacle training course (Chow 2010: 148). ADD explores how playful exploration of a familiar place can transform an overlooked urban feature, like a park bench, into a place of beauty (Piemontesi and Najjar 2012). In FIG 8, Laurent Piemontesi, one of the Yamakasi, demonstrates how to do a vault at Singapore Polytechnic.

Breakin' is a form of street dance that originated in New York, USA. I have chosen the term 'breakin'' instead of 'breakdancing' as the latter term is perceived as a name imposed on the dance by the media (Huntington 2007: 54). The 'break' is the part of a song where the melody stops so that one can pay attention to the instruments that establish the essential rhythm beats of the song (Schloss 2009: 18). In FIG 1, I demonstrate some "floorwork". "Floorwork" is a generic term for deft footwork performed with one's hands on the floor (or ground), supporting one's body.

This multi-component practice research submission includes findings collated from two workshops conducted in Singapore. These workshops were co-facilitated with three ADD practitioners and two dancers in a polytechnic and a secondary school in Singapore. This practice research was realised in partnership with four organisations: Move Academy Singapore, Singapore Polytechnic, Recognize Studios and a secondary school that has chosen to remain anonymous. In total, 40 Singaporean students from low-income families in Singapore participated in this practice research. Between 2014 and 2017, I organised 25 urban art-inspired applied theatre workshops in Singapore and London with the support of a research grant of

## II Questions, aims and objectives

My practice research is primarily concerned with creating alternative narratives of self-worth with young people from low-income families in Singapore. Young people's narrative of self-worth should not be solely defined by their academic performance. At 12 years of age, students in Singapore sit for the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE), which is a nationwide examination that leads to two broad "streams" for secondary school education: "Express" and "Normal".<sup>1</sup> Between 2015 to 2019, the number of students allocated to the Normal stream rose slightly from 34.96% to 37.4% but a

<sup>1</sup> Students in the Express stream undertake a four-year programme that works towards Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level ('O' Level) examinations. Those in Normal stream are then further categorised into Normal Academic (NA) and Normal Technical (NT). NA students undertake a four-year programme towards the Normal Level ('N' Level) examinations with the possibility of taking the 'O' Level examinations (in their fifth year) if they do well. NT students are prepared

for vocational training in facility maintenance services, mechanical servicing, hospitality services or retail services at an Institute of Technical Education (ITE). Work undertaken by ITE graduates is commonly associated with 'manual labour' (Yeoh 2019), 'high physical risks, strenuous work [and a] lack of career prospects' (Lee 1976: 3). The general lack of respect for work done by ITE graduates is reinforced when this work is poorly paid and structured in a manner that favours the exploitation of precarious labour.

## I Overview

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FIG 1 Breakin'-inspired Applied Theatre Workshop (Singapore), 10 July 2015



FIGS 2-3 Breakin'-inspired Applied Theatre Workshop (Singapore), 10 July 2015

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majority of students (around 62.5% to 65%) were allocated to the Express stream (MOE 2015; MOE 2019). In Singapore, therefore, being “Normal” is associated with being ‘stupid, slow or lazy’ (Ng 2015), while overachievement (“Express”) is, ironically, the accepted, and expected, norm. These labels of “Normal” and “Express” have significant impact on the social validation that young people receive more generally (Kwang and Tang 2011: 23). Overall, this social validation informs a narrative of self-worth that is tacitly based on each young person’s ability to demonstrate deservedness (see III. Context). My practice research is necessary, timely and important because recent research has found that academic performance is closely related to stigmatisation and social invalidation from parents, siblings, teachers and peers that triggers self-harm, depression and suicide (Tan *et al.* 2014: 68–9; Ang and Huan 2006; Siau 2016; Wang 2016; Chelvan 2016).

The research questions that have guided my practice research are:

*How might applied performance practitioners use urban art-inspired place practices to enable the formation of alternative narratives of self-worth?*

*How might these alternative narratives of self-worth create hope?*

*How might applied theatre practitioners challenge evaluations of young people’s worth that are overly focused on academic performance?*

From the beginning of my process, these research questions guided the conceptualisation of my urban art-inspired performance practices in direct relation to the aim of enabling young Singaporeans to create alternative narratives of self-worth. The key objectives of this practice research are firstly, to work with young people and urban arts practitioners to challenge negative evaluations of academic aptitude and intelligence that are imposed on young people from low-income families in Singapore; secondly, to develop urban art-inspired place practices that support young people’s exploration of alternative narratives of self-worth; and finally, to support young people in the negotiation of their parents’ and educators’ academic expectations, thus validating these alternative narratives of self-worth that young people have created for themselves. The reflections and responses of the young people I worked with have shaped the design of subsequent iterations of my urban art-inspired place practice. Each iteration of the practice has informed the development of a theory of *negotiated hopes*, articulated in the peer-reviewed article, ‘The Limits of Access’.

### III Context

In this practice research, Boal's image theatre, first articulated in *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1985 [1979]), is brought into dialogue with *ADD* and *breakin'* in order to initiate an interrogation of academic expectations and support the development of new narratives of self-worth. Academic research on *ADD* is limited, generally ethnographic and framed as a contribution to the fields of sport (Atkinson 2009; Gilchrist and Wheaton 2011), urban geography (Mould 2009; Saville 2008) and pedagogy (O'Grady 2012). While applied theatre has often interacted with forms of *breakin'* and street dance and analysed it in the context of a performance (Holdsworth 2013), *breakin'* has not been analysed as a practice that can be used to develop more hopeful narratives of self-worth. By using *ADD* and *breakin'* to break with Boal's approach to applied theatre (where image theatre might be developed into a forum theatre performance, for example), my urban art-inspired applied performance practice also encourages the interrogation of a well-established applied theatre practice.

I first articulated the use of urban arts as a means of negotiating official narratives in the peer-reviewed article, 'The Path is Place: Skateboarding, Graffiti and Performances of Place' for *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, which focused on skateboarding and graffiti. Building on ideas explored in this article, this practice research focuses on *ADD* and *breakin'*, using these urban arts with applied performance practices to create counternarratives of self-worth that resist the negative narratives imposed on young Singaporeans in Normal stream.

Sociologist Teo Yeo Yenn has persuasively argued that 'as a mode of governance, differentiated deservedness articulates both deservedness and undeservedness [...] it operates not merely by punishing the deviant but also through *producing* the normal' (Teo 2015: 86; emphasis in original). Teo's analysis of public discourse in Singapore reveals how access to various government-controlled incentives have been used to encourage certain behaviours deemed desirable by the government. Incentives are differentially distributed, and this establishes social norms that discourage behaviour that does not comply with the desired norm. The PSLE acts as a sorting mechanism that regards intelligence as an innate, genetically determined attribute that remains

fixed over the course of one's life. In turn, the differential distribution of education resources and opportunities creates educational experiences that reinforce this belief. My *ADD*- and *breakin'*-inspired applied performance practice supports young people in the creation of counter-narratives that resist negative expectations of them based on their PSLE results.

In Singapore, a 2017 study of teachers' attitudes towards students in Normal stream provides further indication of how educational resources are differentially allocated. Apart from believing that Normal Technical (NT) students 'don't have the basic knowledge for thinking', the study found that teachers believe NT students have 'low intellectual ability in that they cannot think on their own and need help with thinking and analysis' (Heng and Atencio 2017: 219). Consequently, these teachers adopted a 'basic teaching' approach 'involving simpler, watered-down worksheets used by Express and NA [Normal Academic] students' (221). Teachers avoided teaching in a way that encouraged an understanding of 'deeper concepts' and focused on 'concepts taught at the textbook level' as 'many of the teachers believed that low-level tasks were adequate for NT students as most of them would not be in jobs that would require higher order thinking' (219). Many of the participants in the practice were NT and NA students who believe that they are not academically inclined, identifying themselves as 'dumb kid[s]'. In an argument with a peer in the Express stream, one participant was told 'don't act smart ah, you're in NA'. Many of my participants say they have a fear of studying.

This belief in the PSLE as a definitive assessment of intelligence significantly shapes a young person's sense of self-worth. As students come to develop an understanding of themselves as Normal, they develop an aversion to theoretical knowledge that unnecessarily closes them off to other forms of learning that develop their ability to critically analyse a situation. Students in Normal stream begin to fulfill their teachers' expectations, demonstrating a resistance to advanced theory and complex work that involves conceptual understanding. The PSLE becomes deterministic when it should not be.<sup>2</sup> This practice of labelling students as Normal is a form of differentiated deservedness that has a detrimental impact on the narratives of self-worth formed by young people from low-income families in Singapore and has contributed to an increase in youth suicides, self-harm and depression (Tan *et al.* 2014: 68–9; Ang and Huan 2006; Siau 2016;

<sup>2</sup> Reportedly, students in NT 'have a less than 1% chance of moving to the Express stream' (Ng in Mokhtar 2019).

Wang 2016; Chelvan 2016). My practice research uses *ADD*- and *breakin'*-inspired applied performance practices to encourage the development of more hopeful narratives of self-worth that are not defined by academic performance.

## IV Methodology

For my methodology, I used narrative inquiry for the analysis of students' responses and reflections during the *ADD* and *breakin'*-inspired performance workshops as counter-narratives that can challenge and resist the negative narratives of worth that have been imposed on them based on their academic performance. My methodology has developed from a peer-reviewed article I previously wrote, 'Creating Places of Radical Openness in Singapore', where I used moves from a *dance battle* to interrogate the discourse of national identity in Singapore. This article formulates my innovative methodological approach to narrative inquiry using *breakin'* as a means of articulating counternarratives of national identity. This approach led me to consider how *breakin'* might support young Singaporeans in the development of alternative narratives of self-worth that resist negative narratives of worth reinforced by the formal education system in Singapore.

The *breakin'*-inspired applied theatre workshops were co-facilitated with Felix Huang, a second-generation b-boy in Singapore, leader of *Radikal Forze* and founder of *Recognize Studios*.<sup>3</sup> We usually begin by teaching the students some basic dance moves. After learning these basic moves together, we invite the students to create a character and to adapt the moves learned to a way of moving that would express this character. Next, I invite the participants to create abstract shapes that represent a fear, or an obstacle, in their life (FIG 4). In creating an abstract image of their fears or obstacles, participants often identify and articulate their struggles with academic expectations (FIG 5). Then, participants are invited to use the dance moves they have learned to "battle" this fear or obstacle.

In *breakin'*, the *dance battle* is where dancers learn from each other by mimicking their opponent's moves and



D-F  
A,B



H

FIGS 4-5 Breakin'-inspired Applied Performance Workshop (Singapore), 5 January 2016

<sup>3</sup> 'B-girl' and 'b-boy' stands for 'break girl' and 'break boy' respectively, referring to dancers who dance in the 'break' of a song (Schloss 2009: 18).



photo by Bernie Ng (MsBern Photography)

FIG 6 Art du Déplacement-inspired Applied Theatre Workshop (Singapore), 16 December 2014

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putting their own distinctive style into the performance of the same move. In this “battle” with fear, participants often used the dance moves to formulate narratives that gave them a greater sense of control over their fears. One participant made her partner stand with both arms outstretched in front of her body. When invited to suggest a more hopeful mode of interacting with her fear, this participant gently but firmly pushed both hands downwards until they were comfortably placed by the side of her partner’s body. This slow and deliberate “disarming” of the fear suggested that this participant had made a choice to render the fear harmless.

The *ADD*-inspired applied theatre workshops were co-facilitated with Move Academy Singapore. These workshops begin with the teaching of basic *ADD* moves (FIG 8). The participants are then invited to declare their dreams and fears as they vault over tables in the study area, using the tables as physical manifestations of fears they had to work through in the course of realising their hopes for the future. Then participants are invited to work in pairs to create a movement scene, using the *ADD* moves they have learned.

Both the *ADD* and breakin’ workshops end with an invitation for participants to reflect on new understandings of fear that have emerged from their breakin’- and *ADD*-inspired interactions with the site and with each other. In the breakin’-inspired workshop, one participant wrote, ‘Be the best you can be! Do your own style!’

During the *ADD*-inspired workshop, one participant wrote,

This empty place...  
It’s not a race  
They say  
Complicated maze  
It’s not darkness or light  
Pure black or pure white  
A blank space if you might

JK, 2014

As a preface to her reflection (‘This empty place’), JK explained, ‘I’ve been looking for something inside me ... recently I’ve just been feeling like empty space. I have nothing concrete to hold on to. And I know it’s there, but to me I can’t believe it’s there’. When I interviewed her one year after the workshop, JK noted that her physical hesitation resonated with ‘how much I hesitate to believe in happiness, even though happiness is right there in front of me ... Yet even as I hesitate, VN was there for me. Always at a safe distance and coming close when I need him’ (FIG 6).

JK's partner, VN, wrote the following reflection during the workshop:

We are still the ones with the valley.  
There are cemeteries that are lonely.  
Graves full of bones that do not make a sound.  
There are cemeteries that are lonely.  
Graves full of bones that do not make a sound.  
What I hear is a tearful trick  
That lays silence in this tearful world  
What I see are leaves in  
a tearful world.

VN, 2014

VN said he felt the study area was filled, on most days, with 'lifeless beings'. Hence the image of 'cemeteries that are lonely' to suggest the studying with a hyper-competitiveness that stigmatises, isolates and silences those who do not demonstrate deservedness. The repeated image of 'graves full of bones that do not make a sound' evokes a sense of expendability for those who underachieve and have been labelled as undeserving of the vast opportunities available in 'the valley'. VN seemed to suggest that meritocracy is 'a tearful trick' that nurtures self-doubt and silences the articulation of experiences that might encourage deeper understanding of inequality in Singapore. When I interviewed VN one year later, he said:

What I remember very clearly was when the table was too small to fit in, you find another alternative to go through it. And that's just really about life. When you cannot go through it, you find another way.

VN, 2015

This urban art-inspired approach to place practices enables the participants to physically explore ways to negotiate their fear of social invalidation that is linked to parents' and teachers' academic expectations. The novel physical exploration of a site in school that is usually associated with the fear of academic expectations (a study area, for example) encourages further challenging of fears. This new applied performance approach to the negotiation of fear is necessary because the physical interactions enable articulations of alternative narratives of self-worth that are not defined by academic performance. This physical navigation of fear encourages a more hopeful disposition towards the future. A theory of *negotiated hopes* (see peer-reviewed journal article, *The Limits of Access*) emerged from the physical practice of negotiating fear. *Negotiated hopes* considers the ways in which applied theatre practitioners might support young

people in expanding socially validated narratives of worth. This can lead to the creation of professional opportunities where alternative narratives of self-worth, articulated by young people, can be realised, thus addressing the aims, objectives and key questions of this practice research.

## V

## Timeline

2014	June– December	Planning and execution of <i>ADD</i> -inspired applied theatre workshop with Move Academy Singapore and Singapore Polytechnic.	
2014 2015	July– August	Writing and publication of 'Creating Places of Radical Openness in Singapore' (2015), <i>Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance</i> , 20(3): 271–7.	H
2015 2016	May– April	Writing and publication of 'The Path Is Place: Skateboarding, Graffiti and Performances of Place' (2016), <i>Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance</i> , 21(2): 229–41.	G
2015 2016	June– January	Planning and execution of breakin'-inspired applied theatre workshop with a secondary school in Singapore and Recognize Studios.	
2015	September	Presenting <i>ADD</i> -inspired performance practice, 'Moving On: Making Amends and Taking Responsibility for Disruptive Change', <i>Theatre and Performing Research Association (TaPRA) 2015</i> , University of Worcester, Applied and Social Theatre Working Group.	
	October	Presenting breakin'-inspired performance practice, 'Battling fears: A sea monster and a friend', <i>London Theatre Seminar</i> , Senate House.	
	November	Sharing <i>ADD</i> -inspired practice with BA Applied Theatre students at The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (Central), London.	
2016	June	Presenting breakin'-inspired performance practice, 'Performing Precarity in an Accelerated, Achievement-Oriented Singapore', <i>Theatre Applied: Hard Times: The performance of poverty and social injustice</i> , Research@Central Practices and Processes seminar series.	

I

	November	Sharing <i>ADD</i> -inspired performance practice with BA Applied Theatre students at Central, London.	
2017	February	Sharing <i>ADD</i> -inspired performance practice with BA and MA Applied Theatre students at Central, London.	
2017–2018	February–April	Drafting call for papers, co-editing 'On Access' and writing 'The Limits of Access: The Messy Temporalities of Hope and the Negotiation of Place' (2018), <i>Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance</i> , 23(3): 467–78.	J I
2018	February	Sharing <i>ADD</i> -inspired performance practice with Brunel University, London first-year BA Applied Theatre students.	
	March	Presenting <i>ADD</i> -inspired applied theatre performance practice, 'Performing <i>Limpeh</i> ' as an invited speaker for the 'Performing Citizenship in Singapore' panel, 2018 <i>Association for Asian Studies conference</i> , Washington DC.	
	July	Presenting <i>ADD</i> -inspired performance practice, 'Writing Postcards in Lieu of Being Home', <i>International Drama-in-Education Research Institute (IDIERI) 9: The Tyranny of Distance</i> , University of Auckland, New Zealand.	
	October	Sharing <i>ADD</i> -inspired performance practice with MA Applied Theatre students at Central, London.	
	October–present	Writing 'Is This The Change That Matters?', in <i>Witnessing Change</i> (forthcoming 2021), ed. by N. Abraham and S. Baker (London: Palgrave Macmillan).	K
2019	February	Sharing <i>ADD</i> -inspired practice with BA students at Brunel University, London and BA and PG Certificate Applied Theatre students at Central.	
	November	Presenting breakin'-inspired performance practice, ' <i>Being Imperfect: Breakin' Away from Relating Competitively</i> ', MFA Coordinated Provision, Central.  Publication of Special Issues as Books: <i>On Access in Applied Theatre and Drama Education</i> (2019), ed. by Colette Conroy, Dirk J. Rodricks, and Adelina Ong (Abingdon: Routledge).	J
2020	February	Sharing <i>ADD</i> -inspired performance practice with BA students at Central and the University of Surrey.	

## VI

## Findings

My practice research led to the publication of one peer-reviewed journal article and one book chapter. My first key finding, articulated in the peer-reviewed article 'The Limits of Access: The Messy Temporalities of Hope and the Negotiation of Place' in *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, argues that increasing upward income mobility through access interventions will not mitigate the academic stress of performing to meet academic expectations. Access interventions will not expand narratives of worth beyond the scope of academic performance and access will not slow down or stop parents' hypercompetitive approach to education in Singapore, even when this has had demonstrably negative effects on young people's mental health. I suggest, in the article, that this is a limit to access interventions. In this article, I use my *ADD*-inspired performance practice to support the participants in the development of alternative narratives of self-worth based on the idea of "flow". "Flow" frames challenges within a narrative of hope that explores alternatives in the present in order to create future possibilities. To "flow" in *ADD* might be described as adopting an adaptive approach to obstacles in one's path. The *ADD* practitioner does not destroy the obstacle. She adapts to the obstacle. In other words, flow extends one's margins of manoeuvrability within a limited space, and this enabled one participant, who struggles with suicidal tendencies, to build an alternative narrative of worth based on her ability to care for people who were struggling with challenging life circumstances (FIG 7).

The other participants did not create an alternative narrative of self-worth per se, but they expressed defiance towards letting the academic standards and expectations limit their academic potential and define their intellectual ability. We cannot oppose access or strategies for access without reinforcing marginalisation and exclusion. We cannot not want access for ourselves or for others. However, it was useful to identify the limits of access strategies for Normal students from low-income families in the context of formal education in Singapore.

'The Limits of Access: The Messy Temporalities of Hope and the Negotiation of Place' has been viewed 426

times and cited in *City* by Jason Luger, an urban geographer at UC Berkeley.

My second key finding is articulated in my peer-reviewed chapter 'Is This the Change That Matters?' in Nicola Abraham and Sylvan Baker's forthcoming edited collection, *Witnessing Change*. Here, I advocate for a reconsideration of Singapore's instrumentalist approach to NT education and propose a direction for change that re-conceptualises what a foundational secondary education might be. In this chapter, I reflect on a breakin'-inspired applied theatre workshop at a secondary school for NT students in Singapore. This school for students between the ages of 13 and 16 specialises in imparting vocational skills in mechanical engineering, hospitality and retail, with the option of pursuing tertiary vocational education. Being deprived of educational opportunities to build a narrative of self-worth based on their academic abilities, some students in this school chose to develop an alternative narrative of self-worth based on the leadership status obtained through validation by the school.

The teacher present witnessed how this alternative narrative of self-worth hindered the students' development as creative individuals, capable of expressing ideas that do not conform to any model answer. This teacher witnessed how obedience and compliance had subverted the idea of leadership and recognised this as a potential area for institutional change. Through this practice research, I found that the potential for change occurred when receiving validation from teachers mattered less than it used to. In other words, when students in Normal stream choose to perform change for themselves, and not for us (the facilitators, the teachers or their peers), they begin to build a narrative of self-worth that is no longer dependent on external validation. They begin to build a narrative of self-worth that is no longer concerned with performing deservedness for social validation.

I argue that applied theatre facilitators can subvert the institutional will to prepare students in NT for a prescribed vocational path by nurturing a disinterest in performing deservedness for the school's validation. This renders institutional governance by differentiated deservedness less effective. Following Sara Ahmed's 'willful subjects' (2014), as willful applied theatre practitioners I suggest that we might begin by interrogating the positioning of operational knowledge as foundational knowledge within NT education and facilitating the willful reimagining of what a foundational education might encompass. I argue that a foundational education should encourage curiosity, practice critical thinking and

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FIGS 7-8 Art du Déplacement-inspired Applied Theatre Workshop (Singapore), 16 December 2014

entice students in Normal stream towards a conceptual understanding of the world.

Singapore's instrumentalist approach to education tends to reinforce a one-dimensional narrative of worth based on academic performance. In answer to the research questions (identified in II. Questions, aims and objectives), my urban art-inspired practice research has encouraged young people to resist societal definitions of worth that are narrowly defined by their academic performance and enabled a more hopeful disposition towards these academic expectations through the exploration of multi-dimensional narratives of self-worth.

The findings of my practice research have been shared with applied theatre researchers and practitioners at two international conferences, the *International Drama-in-Education Research Institute (IDIERI)* at University of Auckland, New Zealand (7 July 2018) and the *Association for Asian Studies* conference in Washington DC, USA (25 March 2018). In the UK, I have presented my research findings at Central's 'Research@Central: Practices and Processes' research seminar (23 June 2016), *London Theatre Seminar* at Senate House in London (15 October 2015) and the *Theatre and Performing Research Association (TaPRA)* at the University of Worcester (10 September 2015) to performance researchers. These conference presentations reached an approximate total of 140 attendees.

This practice research has supported my teaching at Central on the BA Drama, Applied Theatre and Education programme, the MA in Applied Theatre programme and the MFA Coordinated Provision. I have also shared this urban arts-inspired place practice with BA Applied Theatre students at Brunel University, London, and the University of Surrey. This reached an approximate total of 394 students.

I have also facilitated an *ADD*-inspired workshop in London for ten vulnerable adults in mental health recovery based on this practice research at Society Unlimited, a community theatre project commissioned by Paddington Development Trust. 'On Access', the special issue of *Research in Drama Education* that I co-edited and contributed to, was published as a book under Routledge's Special Issues as Books programme.

Academic literature on *ADD* and breakin' is limited and has largely focused on ethnographic thick descriptions that contextualise the evolution of these practices in France and New York, respectively. The principal contribution of this applied performance practice research lies in using *ADD* and breakin' to create a new applied theatre practice that reconfigures Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed techniques for the formation of more hopeful

narratives of self-worth amongst young Singaporeans in Normal stream. My peer-reviewed article 'The Path is Place' has been cited in *Sustainability*, the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, the *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* and was featured in *Jenkem*, a popular skateboarding magazine. It has been viewed 1869 times. The peer-reviewed article 'Creating Places of Radical Openness in Singapore' has been viewed 371 times and was cited in *Territory, Politics and Governance*.

In terms of contributions to the creative field and the practice of applied theatre beyond practitioners in this field, my co-facilitators from Recognize Studios and Move Academy Singapore have also created programmes based on the urban art-inspired practice I developed for this practice research. Recognize Studios uses exercises from the breakin'-inspired place practice in their street dance programmes with young people from low-income families in welfare organisations, such as Beyond Social Services and Lakeside Family Service Centre. Move Academy Singapore has started a movement programme for seniors over the age of 65 that draws ideas from the *ADD*-inspired place practice that we co-facilitated. The importance of this research has been recognised by MIND Hong Kong, which invited me to speak at its inaugural youth mental health summit, curated by young people, in November 2020. The Institute of Mental Health in Singapore has also invited me to propose a parent-child programme for their outreach activities in 2021 based on the urban art-inspired place practices developed in this practice research.

The research has also had a significant impact on the participants' lives. One participant used the breakin'-inspired place practice in her work as a peer specialist at the Institute of Mental Health (Singapore). Another participant has used the *ADD*-inspired place practice in his placement at Community Health Assessment Team, a national youth outreach and mental health centre in Singapore.

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## VII

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