Running head: STORIES OF EXPERIENCE FROM STUDENTS WITH PHYSICAL
DISABILITIES IN HIGH SCHOOL DRAMA EDUCATION

Students with Physical Disabilities in High School Drama Education: Stories of Experience

By

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Abstract

The dramatic arts have been shown to positively benefit students with disabilities; however, there has been little research examining how students with physical disabilities have experienced drama. Inspired by my own experiences from high school as someone with a physical disability, this narrative inquiry sought to understand the experiences of people with physical disabilities in high school drama education. I began by writing and analyzing my own stories to reflect on my experiences and understand my personal transformations. Data were then collected through semi-structured interviews with three participants who had taken part in drama education during their high school years. I asked participants to reflect on their experiences, as well as how drama had transformed them. Their stories were then written as narratives to present themes that emerged. Finally, participants were given the option to write monologues in response to the prompt, “What does drama mean to you as someone with a physical disability?” I then performed and recorded the monologues to better understand the intentions of the participants and make connections to their stories. Findings identified that participants had a positive experience as they built social connections with their peers and were able to explore their identities through playing different character. However, participants also described feelings of isolation and frustration at being overlooked for roles due to their disabilities.

This study aims to give voices to students with physical disabilities so that they may express their experiences and thoughts on disabilities and drama. It also seeks to help drama educators increase understanding how they can support the experiences of students with disabilities and how they can make their classrooms and programs more inclusive.

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Chapter 1—Introduction

Drama has been an important part of my life from a young age. My parents signed me up for drama camp in the summers, which awakened my passion for the arts. Once I entered high school, I participated in every show until I graduated. Drama has been a way for me to express myself and build my confidence. My love for the subject has even led me to become a drama teacher. I know many people that I have worked with who feel the same way about drama. For me, though, drama meant even more. It allowed me to overcome challenges that came with having a physical disability.

At the age of 18 months, I was diagnosed with Systemic Juvenile Rheumatoid Arthritis. This disease not only affects joints, which is most commonly associated with arthritis, but it also affects organs. When I was 5, my arthritis heavily damaged my right hip, which left me with mobility limitations. I was fortunate to go into remission a few years later, and for two years I participated in dance class. By age 10, though, my left hip became damaged from the arthritis, which left me physically weak and unable to walk for long distances. I could not participate in sports or any other physical extra curriculars. However, I was able to participate in drama. My teachers in high school were accommodating of my disability and believed that despite my differences, I could still act and sing. This was a new feeling for me since most of my teachers in elementary school sheltered me and only saw me for my disability. When I was 16, my doctors told me that I was in remission and did not have active arthritis in my body. At 17, I had both of my hips replaced.

Since Drama helped shape me into the person I am today, I decided that I wanted to make a difference and help others build confidence, leading me to become a high school drama teacher. During my placements, I worked hard to encourage my students to work to their highest

potential and show that they were capable of being creative. Throughout my placements, I only came across one student with a physical disability in my drama class. It was clear that this student loved theatre and was very passionate about doing shows and participating in activities. This student reminded me of myself, and I began to reflect on why drama seemed to have an impact on students, especially in the case of someone with a physical disability. As I looked back on my experiences, I became interested in hearing the stories from students like me and how drama influenced them.

Purpose and Rationale

Currently, there is little research that examines how students with physical disabilities experience drama education. In 2017, it was reported that 200,000 Canadian students are diagnosed with some form of disability, though the statistics do not clarify how many have a physical disability (Disability in Canada, n.d., p. 1). Egilson and Traustadottir (2009) conducted a study which examined participation of students with physical disabilities in school activities. Results concluded that most activities required motor skills, which deterred students with physical disabilities from participating. As well, if the school was only partly accessible, such as having a long distance between classrooms and activity areas, students were less inclined to join (Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009, pp. 267-68). Law, Petrenchik, King, and Hurley (2007) highlight in their study that participation in recreational activities is crucial in a student's development, though there are many barriers for students with physical disabilities that prevent them from participating.

The arts, including drama, have been shown to benefit students with disabilities (e.g. Mason, Steedly, & Thormann, 2008; Müller, Naples, Cannon, Haffner, & Mullins, 2018). However, most studies have focused on music or visual arts education and have not focused on

drama education. In addition, the emphasis in these studies (e.g., Müller et al., 2018) has often been on students with learning and/or cognitive disabilities, rather than physical disabilities.

There is very little research that has examined if and how drama education can support positive experiences for students with physical disabilities.

Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to examine the high school drama education experiences of students with physical disabilities, with a focus on participants' stories, emphasizing student voice. The guiding research questions for this study were as follows:

- a) How have students with physical disabilities experienced high school drama?
- b) What specific experiences were most impactful and why?
- c) What role did teachers play in shaping students' experiences?

By sharing participants' personal experiences collected through interviews, this research may be able to help educators understand how drama can be important for students with physical disabilities and how they might work towards making their programming inclusive for these learners.

Theoretical Frameworks

In order to theoretically frame this research, I drew from understandings and perspectives associated with transformative learning theory and critical disability studies.

Transformative Learning Theory

This study looks to examine the impact of drama on students with physical disabilities. When an experience is deeply impactful, it can be a transformative experience. Accordingly, I drew from Jack Mezirow's (1975) transformative learning theory to ground the research. Mezirow (2000) states:

Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. (pp. 7-8)

In this sense, we transform our prior knowledge and way of thinking and expand our understanding based on experiences, helping us to grow. One of the main aspects of transformative learning theory is frame of reference, or “meaning perspective,” which is defined as the ways of interpreting experience. A frame of reference contains two dimensions: habit of mind and resulting points of view. Habit of mind refers to a set of assumptions, or conventional ways of thinking; some examples of assumptions that Mezirow identifies are psychological (self-concept, personality traits), sociolinguistic (social norms, ideologies), and epistemic (learning styles). These areas are commonly influential when forming opinions. For the purpose of this research, psychological assumptions were of particular interest as this study focused on student voices and their own experiences and self-perceptions of being involved in drama.

Kitchenham (2008), explains there are two important aspects of transformative learning: critical reflection (or self-reflection) and critical discourse, which involves the learner validating what they believe is the right choice. By critically thinking, we are able to examine our original thoughts and ideas and transform them based on new knowledge or experiences. How transformation occurs can be different for everybody. It can either be drawn out and happen over time because of repetition or because we want it to happen, or it can be sudden and dramatic, depending on the circumstance. Mezirow outlines ten phases of transformation: 1) a disorienting dilemma; 2) self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame; 3) a critical

assessment of assumptions; 4) recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared; 5) exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions; 6) planning a course of action; 7) acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans; 8) provisional trying of new roles; 9) Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships; and 10) A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective (2000, p. 22). As these phases seem to suggest, transformation is a very personal phenomenon and requires a lot of thought and emotion.

In this study, I examined personal transformations of people with physical disabilities. I used transformative learning theory to inform the design of the interview questions, asking participants, for example, how drama changed them or the way they see themselves. I also asked participants to reflect on the process of completing this study and their interviews with me to see if their assumptions or thoughts about drama and their time in high school had changed. Examining my own stories, I reflected on my personal transformations in regard to my experiences of drama education, as well as looking back on my interviews and how I have changed my way of thinking in response to learning more about the experiences of my participants.

Critical Disability Studies

As this study focuses on people with physical disabilities, it is important to discuss how society defines disability. Disability studies emerged in the 1970s as a way to break free from simply examining the medical model of disability. Barnes (2020) states that, historically, "disability" was viewed as a medical problem or a "tragedy" (p. 15). However, in 1974, a group of disabled activists created the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) and stated that "disability" was actually a form of social oppression (Barnes, 2020, p. 16).

UPIAS released a definition in 1976, describing the difference between disability and impairment:

‘Impairment’ denotes ‘lacking part or all of a limb, or having a defective limb or mechanism of the body, but ‘disability’ is ‘the disadvantage of restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes no or little account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities.’ (as cited in Barned, 2020, p. 17)

This created a new social model for disability, leading people to think about the way disabled individuals are treated. As Goodley states, disability studies encourage us to think about how we normally perceive our bodies and minds (2013). Similar to Mezirow’s (2000) transformative learning theory, disability studies seek to change our way of thinking and challenge our prior ideas. In this case, the challenge is in how we see and perceive the human body.

Linton (1998), however, describes a few faults with disability studies, primarily with the lack of voice from people with disabilities. He states that the voice of people with disabilities should be present throughout disability studies (Linton, 1998, p. 531). While people were focused on how to differentiate between disability and impairment, as well as thinking about how we think about disability, there was a lack of voice from people who were *actually* disabled.

It became important to gain better understanding of the thoughts, experiences, and perspectives of people with disabilities. Critical Disability Studies (CDS) became the popular term as these new perspectives were coming into place. Reume (2014) explained:

“Critical disability studies view disability as both a lived reality in which the experiences of people with disabilities are central to interpreting their place in the world, and as a social and political definition based on societal power relations. (p. 1248)

As the voices of people with disabilities took more precedence in shaping the discourse, there was an emphasis on reconceptualising disability. From Reume's perspective, CDS strives to change normal ideals of disability, such as pitying those individuals and labelling them as the "victim" (2014, p. 1248). Further, Shildrick (2020) mentions that CDS has also

Added new force to the theoretical impetus already at the heart of the social model, taking it in innovative directions that challenge not only existing *doxa* about the nature of disability, but questions of embodiment, identity and agency as they affect all living beings. (p. 31)

As a result of this broad approach, CDS is often linked to other disciplines, such as feminism and critical race theory. A main emphasis of CDS is to compel people to critically think about the world around them and to change their understanding. By intertwining CDS and related disciplines, they help each other fight normative ways of thinking and push boundaries.

In this study, I was interested in giving participants with disabilities a voice to speak about their experiences. During interviews, I asked participants to reflect on their initial feelings about their disabilities, especially when they were younger. Questions focused on the challenges they faced while growing up, as well as how they felt about their disability. I also asked them how their feelings have changed now that they have had more life experience. In addition, I gave participants a chance to write their thoughts through a monologue answering the prompt, "what does drama mean to you as someone with a physical disability?" As I received their answers and analyzed what they told me, I listened closely for the participants' own unique understandings and experiences of disability, and their relationship with issues of embodiment, identity and agency. I also listened closely to try and understand how their perceptions interacted with the understandings of disability held by the people around them.

Chapter 2—Review of the Literature

This review examines the current literature related to this study. It has been divided into two sections. The first section will examine each of the theoretical frameworks used to guide the study: transformative learning theory and critical disability studies (CDS). The articles reviewed provide information about, discuss, and critique these theoretical perspectives. The second section is a review of previous studies that have looked at experiences of students with physical disabilities in high school. The reviewed studies focus on aspects of high school such as social inclusion and participation within the classroom and extracurricular activities.

Theoretical Frameworks

Transformative Learning Theory

The articles reviewed in this section describe and discuss transformative learning theory and key aspects which scholars have debated. The first two include thoughts from two scholars that are closely associated with transformative learning theory, Jack Mezirow (1997) and John Dirkx (1998). They describe their interpretations of the theory and how it occurs. Kitchenham (2008) adds to this discussion by explaining how transformative learning theory has evolved over time and states that it will constantly be changing. Lawrence's (2008) article examines transformative learning through the lens of arts-based learning and discusses how art making and viewing can start an internal transformation. Finally, Wang, Torrisi-Steele and Hansman (2019) discuss transformative learning theory in relation to critical theory and how there are many similarities that tie them together.

Interpretations by Scholars. Jack Mezirow introduced the idea of transformative learning theory in 1975. About twenty years later, Mezirow (1997) expanded on his thoughts by discussing how to bring the theory to practice in education. He begins by defining transformative

learning theory, stating it is “the process of effecting change in a frame of reference” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). “Frames of reference,” as Mezirow defines, are built based on the society we live in and how we were taught and raised. The goal of transformation should be to have a more inclusive and self-reflective frame of reference. To change our frames of reference, critical reflection must occur. This reflection should challenge our ways of thinking. Such reflection can happen when reading a book or simply hearing another person’s point of view. Mezirow states that autonomous thinking is very important in the critical reflection process, where we think for ourselves and create our own opinions. He explains that we begin to learn to be autonomous thinkers when we are children. At this stage in development, children should learn about actions and consequences, using their imaginations to tell stories, and to think abstractly. Going into adolescence, we begin to think more critically and reflectively. As adults, it is important to strengthen these skills. Mezirow uses the term “awareness” often, which suggests how crucial it is to acknowledge the world around us and different perspectives. Once we become autonomous thinkers, we can become critically reflective, which Mezirow states is crucial to transforming our frames of reference (1997, p. 9). Mezirow emphasizes that transformative learning is rooted in how people communicate and are taught. He concludes by saying, “The position here is that there is an inherent logic, ideal, and purpose in the process of transformative learning” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 11). With this understanding, Mezirow explains that being aware of the transformation and its meaning is important and crucial to the process.

John Dirkx (1998) is often also cited when discussing transformative learning. In his writing, he gives an overview of the idea of transformative learning, citing that its core is based on Freire’s (1970) theory of consciousness-raising, which refers to the process where learners ask questions and analyze aspects of their lives that shape them. It is a sense of being aware of

the world around us and gaining a deeper understanding of the ways we think as a society. Dirkx also describes Mezirow's definition of transformation and his take on critical reflection. He confirms what Mezirow (1997) had previously stated, that through critical reflection, "we come to identify, assess, and possibly reformulate key assumptions on which our perspectives are constructed" (Dirkx, 1998, p. 4). He also addresses how Mezirow believes that a positive outcome of transformative learning is when people become more inclusive in their thinking and their perceptions. In his own description of transformative learning theory, Dirkx states that learning and transformation are deeply personal matters and can help us understand our previous experiences better. While it is important to understand the world and different points of view, transformation should first happen with an understanding of the self. He explains, "It is a reflective, dialogical, expressive, and deeply emotional and spiritual self that constructs and re-constructs itself through experiences of learning" (Dirkx, 1998, p. 10). He does, however, acknowledge that there is a connection between the self and the contexts in which we live in, and that there needs to be an understanding of both before a meaningful transformation can occur. Dirkx concludes that while many think that transformative learning is a common occurrence, this is not necessarily the case, especially in adult education. It requires constant attention to the inner self, which can be an emotional experience. Dirkx sees transformative learning as a way of being and understanding, rather than a process of becoming. In relation to Mezirow (1997), Dirkx (1998) believes that there should not be a big emphasis on "awareness" as Mezirow describes. While Mezirow presents transformative learning as a purposeful and logical process, Dirkx believes that it should be more of a personal and emotional experience and should happen organically rather than forcefully. However, both theorists acknowledge that there is a connection between the outer world and self, which can influence transformation.

Evolution of Transformative Learning Theory. Kitchenham (2008) reflects on the evolution of transformative learning theory. Since his first introduction of it in the 1970s, Mezirow expanded his 10-phase model of transformation by adding another phase: “renegotiating relationships and negotiating new relationships” (Mezirow, 1994, as cited in Kitchenham, 2008, p. 113). This step in the process signifies that it is crucial to talk to peers and teachers to form new ideas and perspectives, leading to a transformation in beliefs. Participating in this kind of discourse can foster learning and encourage the asking of critical questions. Kitchenham spends a large portion of the article discussing the different types of reflection that have been presented by Mezirow, such as content reflection, which involves thinking back to past events and experiences. Process reflection refers to looking at actions and wondering if there were any challenges or benefits that can be used in the future. Finally, premise reflection requires the individual to look at the bigger picture of a situation and ask why that experience is valuable to them. Kitchenham also seems to echo Dirkx (1998) by stating that learning and transformation is individualistic, and states that is found in the inner self rather than listening to external sources such as books and speeches. He concludes by stating that the revisions that Mezirow has made to the theory over the years has given a more thorough explanation of transformative learning theory and describes the process in more detail. He also states that transformative learning theory is still being modified as time goes on and is constantly debated, citing a conversation between Mezirow and Dirkx (Dirkx, Mezirow, & Cranton, 2006), where the two scholars talked about what they believe to be the most important aspects of transformative learning.

Transformative Learning Theory and the Arts. Lawrence (2008) relates transformative learning theory to the arts and arts-based learning. She expresses that she favours the approach by Dirkx (1998) as he highlights the importance of emotional and personal

connection to transformation. In her article, Lawrence states how art making is often seen as a spiritual and emotional process, and that it is important to sometimes step away from the rational mind. Simply looking at art can elicit an emotional response and start a change in the way we think. At times, it is hard to put into words what we are thinking or feeling. She describes a project where people turned to art after a crisis or dilemma and created paintings, theatre pieces, and poetry to portray their emotions and help them heal. In that instance, art allowed participants to move through their transformation (2008, p. 68). However, in another project, women were asked to depict a transformational journey they had experienced by painting on lantern boxes. After this project, the women described that the experience of painting their memories was transformative in itself. Lawrence argues that the arts are a powerful way to promote discussion and debate, leading to a deeply personal transformation. She goes on to explain how witnessing art can also lead to a transformation, and how our responses are subjective depending on our backgrounds and previous experiences. This aligns with Dirkx (2006) and how he believes that our inner worlds interact with the outer world to create a personal transformation.

Transformative Learning Theory vs. Critical Theory. Wang, Torrisi-Steele, and Hansman (2019) examine the relationship between transformative learning theory and critical theory, which is the other theoretical framework I employ in this thesis. The authors define transformation as something that occurs at our deepest core and that changes our behaviours and world view. They state that while critical learning is important to the transformational process, it is crucial to identify the experiences that lead to transformation. The authors noted that people who had positive outcomes and experienced transformational learning were those that were able to see the perspectives of others rather than just focusing on their own. Reflection also plays an important role in the process of transformation as it allows the individual to deconstruct their

prior beliefs and put themselves in the position of others. In regard to teaching and learning, Wang et al. express that interactions within the classroom will determine if people engage in transformational learning. It is up to the teacher to support and challenge ideas in the classroom that could ignite this change.

It is also important to make the classroom inviting when discussing critical theory. Wang et al. (2019) state that critical theory “acknowledges power imbalances and represents a dialectic methodology, which requires back-and-forth interaction between individuals who demonstrate mutual respect for the diverse insights each person contributes” (p. 235). Critical theory is usually used when talking about minorities, such as disabled people. The authors describe that like transformative learning theory, critical theory is prevalent to adult education as mature students have built assumptions and ideas during development and are asked to challenge these views. Also similar to transformative learning theory is the importance of critical reflection and questioning norms and beliefs. Further on in the article, the authors state that both transformative learning theory and critical theory can only occur in the classroom when there is a feeling of openness and where students feel comfortable enough to talk about their opinions. According to Wang et al., both theories require a moment of reflection and insight, and the end-goal is to have a change occur. In this case, the authors suggest that they can work alongside each other to help change our world views. In the following section, critical theory will be discussed in regard to disability studies, expanding on how critical theorists aim to change society’s perceptions on disabilities.

Critical Disability Studies

In the following discussion about critical disability theory (CDS), I review how scholars continue to explain the importance of critical theory and how it has helped CDS to emerge over

the past decade (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). An important aspect of CDS is the intersectionality between other disciplines, such as queer theory, feminism, and critical race theory, which Goodley (2013) attempts to disentangle. However, there is much criticism about CDS and questions on how it fits into our world and society (Goodley, Lawthorn, Liddiard, & Runswick-Cole, 2019; Vehmas & Watson, 2014).

Critical Theory and CDS. Meekosha and Shuttleworth (2009) examine how critical theory fits in with disability studies. The authors state that over the past decade, there has been a shift in the way scholars think about disability studies and looking at it through the lens of critical theory. Meekosha and Shuttleworth mention that there have been a few factors as to why disability studies have been re-evaluated. They explain one such influence, stating, “First, the social model of disability argued for a conceptual distinction between ‘impairment’ as a functional limitation and ‘disability’ as a socially generated system of discrimination” (p. 50). Rather than trying to decide if the social model or the medical model of disability is correct, CDS strives to move away from this constant battle and merge the two together. Before the authors try to explain CDS, they discuss what critical social theory is and how it has influenced the change in disability studies. Critical theory looks to examine the injustices made towards minority groups and that special attention should be paid to issues such as representation and lack thereof. Meekosha and Shuttleworth go on to explain that critical theory strives for an autonomous and participatory society, much like what Mezirow (1997) refers to in his article about transformative learning theory. This autonomous society is important to critical theory so that people can step away from dominant ideologies and question why these ideas are in place. In their discussion of critical theory and disability studies, Meekosha and Shuttleworth stated, “In CDS the question has become how to conceptualise a diversity within a radical agenda to restructure cultural

meanings, social processes and a carnally relevant politics” (2009, p. 56). Citing disability studies scholar Mairian Corker as an example, the authors reiterate that it is crucial to have a dialogic relation between the terms “impairment” and “disability” rather than pitting them against each other. This is so that one does not have more power over the other. They conclude their article by describing CDS as “eclectic” but that generally disability theorists can agree that “disabled people are undervalued and discriminated against and this cannot be changed simply through liberal or neo-liberal legislation and policy” (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2017, p. 65).

Intersectionality. To expand on these ideas by Meekosha and Shuttleworth (2009), Goodley (2013) explained that CDS lives in a trans-disciplinary space, meaning that different disciplines work together to create new ideas and frameworks, and that there are many other factors that go into CDS. He stated, “Critical disability studies start with disability but never end with it: disability is *the* space from which to think through a host of political, theoretical and practical issues that are relevant to all” (Goodley, 2013, p. 632). Goodley mentioned that intersectionality is not surprising when it comes to CDS as disability is often associated with other categories of difference, such as those associated with queer theory, race, and feminism. However, Goodley stats that intersectionality is not about bringing all of these groups together, but to see how each group can support each other and help unsettle dominant ways of thinking. As an example, Goodley examines the relationship between feminism and disability. He states, “Historically. . . disability and femininity have been coupled, as mad, bad and ill women’s bodies are categorized through conditions such as premenstrual tension, hysteria, post-natal depression and Munchausen’s syndrome by proxy” (Goodley, 2013, p. 637). He continues by saying that disability is built on gender norms and sexist practices. By examining and cross-referencing the similarities and ideas of feminist and critical disability studies, new insights can be made for

activists. However, Goodley mentions that there are dangers with intersecting disability and other areas. By combining disability with another field, such as feminism, “disability” might get lost in the conversation and become forgettable. He also writes, “If disability studies perspectives are no longer exclusively related to the discourses of the disabled people’s movement. . . then one wonders whether disability studies has lost its anchoring” (Goodley, 2013, p. 641). In contrast, though, intersectionality can help each discipline bring attention to discrimination, and there is hope that change can occur, and new insights emerge.

Critiques of CDS. While the previous articles discussed the emergence of CDS and the basic ideas behind it, Vehmas and Watson (2014) critique some of these ideas and explain that improvements must be made. The authors note that CDS was a way for theorists to move away from policymakers who scholars believed were using the social model of disability for their own means. Vehmas and Watson challenge this notion by stating, “Whilst CDS often makes normative judgements about policies or about the current understanding of disability or how contemporary social organization is morally wrong, it offers no evaluative arguments on impairments or on the implications of living with an impairment” (2014, pp. 640-41). They expand on this notion by saying that while there is not an “acceptable mode of embodiment” (p. 641), there are many people who believe that some embodiments are wanted more than others. Another criticism that Vehmas and Watson make is that while CDS aims to challenge normative ideas and approaches towards disability, there is no account about the experiences from people living with a disability. They state that there are many different perspectives and experiences that people have in terms of impairment and disability, but there is no account of these narratives. Attached to disability are important ethical choices. An example given by the authors is if a pregnant woman discovered her baby had a life-threatening disease that might not let them live

beyond the age of four. They explain that CDS, in its current state of ideas, would have the mother confront ableist views and challenge her beliefs, but it is also important to take into consideration the well-being of the child *and* the mother. Vehmas and Watson write, “The moral wrongs related to disablism or ableism are matters of great concern to disabled people, and CDS should in its own part take the responsibility of remedying current wrongs disabled people suffer from” (2014, p. 643). They conclude that while CDS strives to dismantle judgements and assumptions about disability, it is not realistic, and that people will always sometimes see others as different. They also refer to intersectionality within CDS and state that disability is not always the same compared to other groups. They state, “We need to explore both morally and socially disability and difference rather than simply use difference as a concept through which to critique the disability identity” (Vehmas & Watson, 2014, p.648). In this sense, the authors seem to note that CDS needs to evolve and take into account the personal experiences of people living with a disability.

Goodley, Lawthom, Liddiard, and Runswick-Cole (2019) look at some of the questions made by scholars about CDS, such as Vehmas and Watson (2014) and offer some responses for debate. In an appropriate description of CDS, the authors state, “What Critical Disability Studies has done is to welcome in a smorgasbord of perspectives drawn from inside and outside of the disability experience” (Goodley et al., 2019, p. 974). As stated previously by Goodley (2013), intersectionality and the ideologies from other disciplines formed the basis of what we know of CDS. The first provocation mentioned by the authors is what is the purpose of theory? In response, they write that theory is used to understand the social world. The change from disability studies to CDS is suggested that while the original notions behind disability studies were fine and accepted, it was time for new ideas, and that a change like this would be

inevitable. As society and the world change and activism becomes more prominent, it is of no doubt that in time people will begin to think more critically. The authors also examine the criticisms made by Vehmas and Watson (2014) about excluding the experiences and the thoughts from people with disabilities. They state:

A fear we share is that just as more and more theories of disability are generated, we wonder to what extent disability has become an object of curiosity for theoreticians and disciplines in ways that detract from disabled people and their allies being the driving subjects and articulators of theory. (Goodley et al., 2019, p. 980)

The authors confirm that people with disabilities are left out of the conversations of discrimination. However, they do not give a clear answer on how to fix this. Instead, they ask more questions, such as “Is the potential of disability theory and activism reduced when disability only appears as yet another object of study in a curriculum?” (Goodley et al., 2019, p. 982). It seems, in this case, there is no clear answer on how to bring in multiple experiences of people with disabilities into the conversation. They conclude the article by seemingly saying that we need to become more critical about critical disability studies and that it is important to keep asking questions and challenging notions of CDS.

How the Frameworks Will Inform the Study

Both frameworks rely on people examining the world around them and thinking critically about their prior knowledge. They also imply that these changes in the way we think should make our thoughts and ideas more open-minded. In the case of transformative learning theory, both Mezirow (1997) and Dirkx (1998) acknowledge that transformation can occur from discussions, books, and life experiences. Specifically, CDS seeks to challenge and transform ideas and biases about disability. As Meekosha & Shuttleworth (2009) describe, people with

disabilities are often undervalued and discriminated. Ideally, by applying CDS, people will re-evaluate such preconceived notions. A difference between the theories is that while transformative learning theory focuses on personal changes and transformations, CDS emphasizes a societal change in thinking. Transformative learning theory is an individualistic experience and does not put a clear focus on what the transformation needs to be. CDS, on the other hand, solely seeks to change the ways people think about disability, though theorists have agreed that personal experiences do need to factor into changes in the way of thinking (Goodley, Lawthom, Liddiard, & Runswick-Cole, 2019; Vehmas & Watson, 2014).

In this study, I used these frameworks to ground my research. From a transformative learning perspective, I formed questions that relate to drama education as a vehicle for transformation to ask my participants during interviews. I also analyzed my data and discuss my findings using a transformative lens to identify if participants believed their time in high school drama was transformative and what specific expectations inspired their transformation. I also used this lens on my own autobiographical narratives to examine my personal transformations. In terms of CDS, I looked at how participants viewed and experienced their disabilities as well as their related interactions with their peers and teachers. I also used transformative learning theory to explore CDS by comparing how my perceptions changed, as well as how participants perceived their disabilities, examining specifically if their initial ideas had transformed over time.

Review of Related Studies

It is important to discuss drama and assess the benefits of drama in schools. It is my personal belief that drama focuses on connections with each other, whether that be actors on stage, or the audience connecting with what is happening on stage. Through drama, we can see

how students can learn to make connections and work with others. Drama education is important because it should promote creativity and offer a space where students can be themselves. In a survey by Debra Hundert (2010), teachers from the Niagara region in Ontario were asked to answer a questionnaire regarding drama education and its importance. Almost all of the 126 teachers who completed the questionnaire had positive feelings towards drama in schools. Benefits they reported included creativity, social skills, personal growth, empathy and values, and problem-solving. Another study by de la Cruz, Lian, and Morreau (1998) examined the effects of drama on social and oral language skills of children with learning disabilities in the United States. Thirty-five children were involved in the study and participated in the drama lesson. The lesson focused on saying an apology when their actions hurt another peer. Activities included improvisation and pantomime. The results showed that participating in these drama activities improved students' social and listening skills. These studies show that drama in education can be an important tool.

The following studies examined the experiences of students with physical disabilities in high school drama. While I did not find literature reporting research that examined the experiences of students with physical disabilities in drama, the selected studies have looked at other contexts of high school life. Many studies examined how students integrated into their school and found various factors that help them feel like they fit in to the school communities (Doubt & McColl, 2003; Kelly & Viola, 2019). Another study examined participation of students with physical disabilities, specifically in physical education classes, by listening to the voices of students. (Blinde & McCallister, 1998). Inclusion was another factor, which seemed to have been an overarching theme throughout most of the studies. Studies found that students felt that they were included to an extent and felt excluded from other aspects of their high school communities

(Alves, Grenier, Haegele, & Duarte, 2018; Asbjørnslett, Engelsrud, & Helseth, 2014; Curtain & Clarke, 2005; Place & Hodge, 2001). Finally, studies were included that examined social connections, such as friendships and bullying amongst students with physical disabilities (Asbjørnslett, Engelsrud, & Helseth, 2011; Haegele, Zhu, & Holland, 2020; Stang, Frainey, Tann, Ehrlich-Jones, Deike, and Gaebler-Spira, 2020).

Integration Within School

In a recent study, Kelly and Viola (2019) examined what aspects of high school experience predict a sense of school community among students with disabilities. The authors noted that this sense of community can help or hinder a students' high school experience. Kelly and Viola identified some school assets and school challenges that would affect a feeling of school community. They hypothesized that school assets would convey a positive sense of community and a sense of belonging, while school challenges would convey a negative sense of community and feelings of isolation from students with disabilities. Data were collected from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2, which took place over ten years. Over this time, surveys were distributed to 1,180 high school students in grades eleven and twelve across the United States. While this study included students with all types of disabilities, a majority of participants identified having a type of physical disability, such as an orthopedic impairment, or a visual impairment. Kelly and Viola identified predictive assets and challenges prior to collecting data, such as school support, connections with school staff, bullying, and being teased by peers. The researchers analyzed the data by running regressions by using asset-related variables within the survey answers. The same method was used when identifying variables for school challenges. Kelly and Viola found that their predictions for both assets and challenges were correct, with participants identifying that they felt a better sense of school community when

they enjoyed school. Participants stated that being part of extracurricular activities and having good relationships with teachers increased their school community.

Similar to Kelly and Viola (2019), Doubt and McColl (2003) looked at the experiences of students with physical disabilities in high schools located in urban areas across Ontario.

Primarily, the authors wanted to identify factors that would promote and limit social integration with their peers. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, Doubt and McColl interviewed seven participants who had a physical disability and were still in high school. Each participant completed two or three semi-structured interviews which were audio-recorded. Once interviews were completed, transcripts were coded into two categories: limiting factors and promoting factors. Researchers also coded within these two categories to find intrinsic and extrinsic factors.

Doubt and McColl's (2003) study aligned with what Kelly and Viola (2019) had hypothesized to be assets and challenges to students feeling connected to their school community, but also found other variables to be important. Doubt and McColl found that participants did not feel comfortable integrating with their peers because of exclusionary behaviours, inaccessible extracurricular activities, physical limitations, and self-exclusion. On the other end of the scale, participants identified that factors such as finding a place to fit in, masking their disability, educating peers, and support from peers and staff helped to promote social integration. The authors also noted that a big factor in social integration was the physical school environment, which influenced getting around and what extracurricular activities were accessible. While some participants found they could do some extracurriculars, a lot of activities revolved around sports, which limited their participation. It was also important to note that while many of the participants identified positive experiences of social integration, they also accepted that there was a limited level to this integration. They articulated that their perception of peer

acceptance was simply acknowledgment from their classmates, which happened more often than creating friendships.

Participation in School

Blinde and McCallister (1998) wanted to listen to the experiences of students who participated in physical education in school. Rather than speaking with teachers, the researchers wanted to give an opportunity to students to share their stories. The researchers recruited twenty participants between the ages of 10 and 17 who attended schools in fairly rural communities in the United States. The participants consisted of 17 boys and 3 girls, with disabilities such as cerebral palsy, spina bifida, and paraplegia. Data were collected through interviews, which asked students to discuss their past and current experiences in physical education. The researchers found that responses fit into two themes: limited participation in activities, and negative emotional responses. Participants explained that while they attended classes, their actual participation was minimal, and that teachers and peers often did not adapt activities to include them. One participant commented, “My freshman year I had to take one year of P. E. in order to graduate. . . the instructor told me to leave because I was a liability. So, I sat in the library for an hour every day” (Blinde & McCallister, 1998, p. 66). Students described that they felt like outsiders and were often excluded by their peers. Blinde and McCallister offered some suggestions to teachers to improve inclusion of students with physical disabilities, such as listening to the students’ needs, adapting their lessons to make activities more inclusive, and watching the social dynamics within the class.

Inclusion in School

While the previous studies examined how students with disabilities integrated themselves into their school community and their participation within school, the following studies take a

closer look at feelings of inclusion specifically, and how students felt included by their peers and in their classes. In England, Curtin and Clarke (2005) asked students between the ages of 10-13 who used wheelchairs to participate in biographical interviews to discuss their life stories. A big aspect of these stories were their educational experiences. The main goal of the study was to see how students with physical disabilities felt about inclusion, especially after the implementation of the Disabilities Discrimination Act (1995) and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001), where it is stated that people with disabilities in England have to have equal opportunities. Curtin and Clarke also found it important to get the stories directly from students with physical disabilities, citing Giangreco et al. (2001): “We need to spend more time listening to and trying to understand the perspectives of self-advocates” (as cited in Curtin and Clarke, 2005, pp. 197-198). Nine participants were involved in the study, with four of the students being from a segregated special school while the rest attended a mainstream school. Interviewers asked the students to talk about their lives starting from their earliest memories and let them talk with no interruption. Data were analyzed by transcribing the interviews, then turning them into biographies, which were approved by the participants. The interviewers worked collaboratively with the participants to make sure the information was accurate and true to their stories. Once the biographies were finished, the researchers identified themes. The findings showed that students who attended mainstream school had relatively positive experiences making friends, especially in primary school, but found it difficult once they transitioned to secondary school. One student stated that they mostly interacted with other peers that had disabilities. While their experiences with their peers were positive, they struggled with their teachers, as they noted that their teachers were often unsupportive and did not give them equal opportunities in classes. Interestingly, the four students that attended a segregated special school did not feel excluded or have any negative

interactions, even with peers outside of school. These students also stated that they would never change to go to a mainstream school, as they felt they would not fit in.

Like Curtin and Clarke (2005), Asbjørnslett, Engelsrud, and Helseth (2014) interviewed students with physical disabilities from Norway to examine their experiences in everyday school life in relation to inclusion and participation. Fifteen students with physical disabilities were interviewed. All participants were first interviewed in their final year of primary school, and final interviews were done at the end of their first year of secondary school. Researchers conducted between two to four interviews with each participant over the course of two years. Once the interviews were transcribed and analyzed, the researchers found three themes that related to the experience of inclusion and participation: community and independence; adequate help and influence in the classroom; and influence in planning and decision-making. Asbjørnslett et al. noted that most of the participants perceived “social togetherness was a significant aspect of participation in everyday school life and influenced the kinds of experiences they found meaningful and engaged in with enthusiasm” (2005, p. 204). To help with this idea of social togetherness, some students stated that physical education classes helped them feel closer to their peers as they had to work as a team. Students also mentioned that having learning aides to assist them helped them feel included in the class activities. Their findings aligned closely with the results from Kelly and Viola’s (2019) study, where participants stated that having positive experiences helped them feel part of the school community, and that by being included by peers and teachers helped them to be part of that broader community.

Using a case study approach, Place and Hodge (2001) sought to examine social inclusion of students with physical disabilities in physical education classes from schools in urban areas in the midwestern United States. The purpose of the study was to describe the behaviours of

students with and without physical disabilities and how they related to social inclusion. Place and Hodge were also interested in looking at how students spend their class times (i.e. activity, transitions, waiting, and off-task). Data were collected over a 6-week duration. Out of the 22 students, there were three girls with physical disabilities. Researchers attended classes twice a week to observe social interactions between students, making field notes during the class. Three of the classes were randomly chosen to be videotaped and additional interviews were done with the participants who had physical disabilities. After six weeks, the videotapes were coded to look for social interactions, such as praise for effort, using a peer's first name, asking for help, etc.

The study found two reoccurring themes: segregated inclusion and social isolation. Place and Hodge (2001) discovered that while the participants were allowed to be part of the class, they were kept separate from the rest of their classmates. Participants seemed to be fine with the arrangement but did note that they sometimes felt "left out." The study showed that there was almost no social interaction between students with and without disabilities. The only social interactions that occurred were between the three girls. For one of the girls, though, it was noticed that one of her non-disabled peers picked on her and "enjoyed intimidating" her (Place & Hodge, 2001, p. 399). In response to their question on how students spent their class time, the three girls spent 29% of their time waiting for their turns and participate in the activities, whereas their non-disabled peers only waited 13% of the time. The teacher also seemed to give more of her attention to the students without disabilities by directing knowledge content to them more often than to the three girls. Place and Hodge concluded by saying that physical education classes could help increase social interaction, but only when inclusion is encouraged by the teacher and practiced. This also supports the claims made by Blinde and McCallister (1998) where students stated they had limited participation in activities.

In Brazil, Alves, Grenier, Haegele, and Duarte (2018) were also interested in looking at the perspectives of students with physical disabilities toward physical education and inclusion. The authors cited previous studies that revealed that students often felt excluded in physical education because of their physical limitations, which usually led to feelings of isolation from their classmates and disregard from their teachers. Seven students were selected to participate in this study, each from different schools across Brazil. Participants were between the ages of 10-17 with all of them using either a wheelchair or a walking aide. Semi-structured interviews were used to ask participants to express their feelings towards physical education classes and elaborate on specific experiences. The researchers also wrote reflective field notes during and after each interview to note initial thoughts and findings. The interviews were transcribed and examined using a content analysis technique to help find and classify themes. Two themes emerged which reflected the experiences of the participants: separate is not equal, and disability as a barrier to PE class. When discussing their experiences in physical education classes, participants stated that if they did participate in the class, they were separated from their non-disabled peers. One participant had stated that while her peers were playing a game of basketball, she was instructed to walk around the court. Participants also stated that if they did participate in games with their non-disabled peers, it was usually unstructured class time and did not have specific learning goals attached. However, students did mention that they had a sense of fear when having to participate in activities with their classmates because they were insecure about their strength and abilities due to their physical disabilities. In terms of accessibility and adaptability, there were no changes made by teachers to make students feel included and want to participate in physical education classes. Alves et al. concluded their article by providing recommendations to make physical education classes more inclusive, such as educating teachers on how to provide

accommodations for students with physical disabilities and how they think about physical education classes.

Social Connections

In another study by Asbjørnslett, Engelsrud, and Helseth (2011), the authors sought to examine the experiences of friendship of students with physical disabilities in Norway, specifically during the transition between primary and secondary school. The researchers believed this to be important for students to be happy and have a better quality of life in general. Friendships can also lead to more participation within the school and community. Fifteen participants were interviewed, starting in their final year of primary school and ending after their first year in secondary school. Fourteen of the participants were diagnosed with a physical impairment, while one was diagnosed with a visual impairment. Each participant was interviewed three times over the course of the two years. Life mode interviews were completed, with participants asked to talk about their daily lives, such as what happened the previous day and what a typical day consists of for them. The data were analyzed by looking at statements directly made about their friends or interactions with their peers. Once this information was separated from the rest of the transcription, researchers coded for reoccurring themes. The researchers also asked questions such as who do the participants consider to be their friends and why? They also categorized different types of friendships, such as good friends and acquaintances.

Participants seemed to separate friends with disabilities and friends without disabilities. Asbjørnslett et al. (2011) found that many of the participants had close relationships with others that also had disabilities and often considered them family because they had something in common. Others had stated that they became friends with non-disabled peers but were

sometimes embarrassed by their disabilities. Many of the participants stated that by having these non-disabled friends, they didn't feel different and could sometimes forget about their limitations. The researchers also examined what the participants perceived to be important qualities in a friendship. Many of the participants mentioned that trust, mutuality, and understanding were extremely important to them, but mostly when their friends also had disabilities. One participant stated that while she has non-disabled friends at school, she does not necessarily share all her thoughts and secrets with them. When commenting on this, the authors stated, "This reticence is directly related to not daring to expose all the intimacy of her impairment" (Asbjørnslett et al., 2011, p. 489). It seemed apparent, though, that students became friends with non-disabled peers as a way of feeling normal, confirming what Doubt and McColl (2003) had stated about conforming with their peers and trying to mask their disabilities.

Haegele, Zhu, and Holland (2020) decided to look specifically at students with visual impairments and their experiences of being bullied in high school in the United States. The authors decided to do this study retrospectively as these types of studies "permit participants to have gained a degree of emotional distance from events that may be challenging to discuss (e.g., bullying) when being researched" (Haegele et al., 2020, p. 298). The researchers included eleven participants between the ages of 20-35 who had already graduated high school, had a self-reported visual impairment, and were educated in an integrated school. Semi-structured, audio-recorded phone interviews were used to collect data. Participants were asked to reflect on the high school experiences, describe how they were bullied, and how they felt during that time. Researchers also wrote reflective interview notes immediately after each interview to describe their initial thoughts, and how they felt about the conversation. Once interviews were transcribed, they were coded for themes that embodied the participants' experiences. These

themes were highlighted by using the participants' original words, such as "Going through the motions" which examined the feelings of participants and victimization (Haegele et al., 2020, p. 303). Haegele et al. found that most of the bullying took place in areas where teachers were less likely to intervene, such as physical education classes. The authors found that being bullied heavily influenced the experiences of being in school and how they interacted with others. Participants stated that they had low self-esteem and were excluded by their peers in various activities.

Exploring the experiences of bullying amongst students with cerebral palsy was the main goal of a study by Stang, Frainey, Tann, Ehrlich-Jones, Deike, and Gaebler-Spira (2020). Using a mixed-methods study, researchers reported on the participants' perspectives of being bullied and their perceptions of their bullies, as well as themes of bullying. Surveys were sent to 49 participants between the ages of 10-18 who attended therapy or clinics at a rehabilitation hospital in Chicago. Two questionnaires were sent to each participant. The first was a version of the California Bullying Victimization Scale (CBVS) 2011, which asked about their experiences and their perceptions on their bullies. Additionally, there was a blank area at the end of the survey if participants wanted to elaborate on their experiences. The second questionnaire, the Gross Motor Function Classification System (GMFCS) Family report Questionnaire, was given to the primary caregivers of each participant to report on their motor ability. The survey results were analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics. Written responses to elaborate on experiences were analyzed qualitatively by coding the responses and finding themes. Results found that participants did not perceive their bullies to be more popular than them in school and 85% of them believed that their bullies were of lower intelligence than them. Out of the participants, 14 elaborated in the blank section at the back of the first questionnaire. Responses were separated

into five categories: grade in school, type of bullying, psychological effects, intervention, and outcome. The researchers found that participants were often called names and teased by their bullies, and that this caused negative effects such as social isolation and emotional difficulty. While most participants that were bullied had told someone (e.g., a parent at home), only three participants stated that there was an improvement over time.

Summary of Related Findings

These studies I have reviewed focus on different aspects of life in high school for students with disabilities. Many of the studies focused on an underlying theme of inclusion, such as social inclusion, class inclusion, and having a sense of community within the school. A few studies identified that while students were allowed to participate in classes and extracurriculars, they were still segregated from their non-disabled peers and did not take part in the same activities (Alves, Grenier, Haegele, & Duarte, 2018; Asbjørnslett, Engelsrud, & Helseth, 2014; Blinde & McCallister, 1998; Place & Hodge, 2001). This led to students feeling isolated and led to self-exclusionary behaviours. These feelings of isolation were especially prevalent in physical education classes. In contrast, a number of studies found that participants were more likely to participate when they felt a sense of school community (Curtain & Clarke, 2005; Doubt & McColl, 2003; Kelly & Viola, 2019). Participants described they felt included in the school environment because of support from teachers and positive interactions from their classmates. Overall, participants felt a sense of inclusion when they had positive experiences in schools and felt isolated when they had mostly negative experiences.

Another key aspect from these studies was social interaction. In most of the studies, participants described interactions of being bullied because of their physical disabilities and described negative social experiences (Curtain & Clarke, 2005; Doubt & McColl, 2003; Haegele,

Zhu, & Holland, 2020; Kelly & Viola, 2019; Place & Hodge, 2001; Stang, Frainey, Tann, Ehrlich-Jones, Deike, & Gaebler-Spira, 2020). Bullying included being called names, teased, or, on occasion, physical violence. Participants noted that when they did make friends, they tried to mask their disability or chose to interact with peers who also had physical disabilities (Asbjørnslett, Engelsrud, & Helseth, 2011; Curtain & Clarke, 2005; Doubt & McColl, 2003). However, though participants stated that they tried to hide their disabilities from their non-disabled friends, they still described their high school experiences as positive.

Chapter 3—Methodology

Since this study focused on student voice, qualitative methods were the most appropriate in collecting data. By using this type of research, there is an emphasis on gathering personal experiences from participants (Stake, 2010). Plano Clark and Creswell (2015) also describe qualitative research by stating, “the researcher studies a phenomenon; relies on the views of participants; asks broad, general questions; collects data consisting largely of words (or text) from participants . . . and conducts the inquiry in a subjective and reflexive manner” (p. 54). With this description in mind, qualitative methods aligned with the goals of this research. This study examined the experiences of students with physical disabilities in drama education in high school. This chapter highlights how narrative inquiry as a methodology was used, as well as outlining the different methods that were used to collect data.

Research Design

Narrative inquiry was used as the research design for this study, as there was a focus on student perspectives, including experiences of their time in drama during high school. Spector-Mersel (2010) describes the aim of narrative inquiry by stating, “Many researchers wish to learn about the ways individuals and groups share their identities through stories. . . . Researchers often focus on the narrative identities of people who have experienced special circumstances” (p. 215). This description aligns with the aim of this study, which was to examine the impact of drama and how it transformed students with disabilities. Barrett and Stauffer (2009) also note that speaking and expressing thoughts and stories is a distinguishing human trait, and that through narratives, we gain a better understanding of our past and present selves (p. 7). To echo this sentiment, Connelly and Clandinin (2000) state, “Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which his or her experience of the world is

interpreted and made personally meaningful.... Narrative inquiry, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience” (p. 477).

The inclusion of stories has been around for many years, but it can be rare to hear from the perspectives of students. Blinde and McCallister (1998) used student voice for students with physical disabilities in physical education classrooms. They note that while there are many studies from teachers’ or administrators’ points of view, the perspectives and experiences from students were often omitted. The authors state, “listening to the voices of students with physical disabilities concerning their experience . . . can maximize student development and assist teachers in creating, modifying, or eliminating curricular activities” (Blinde & McCallister, 1998, p. 64).

Fraser (2004) states that narrative research should “not only reflect ‘reality’ but also challenge taken-for-granted beliefs, assertions and assumptions” (p. 182). This aligns with transformative learning theory as conceptualized by Mezirow (2000), who states that its purpose is to transform our initial assumptions and have a more inclusive way of thinking. Fraser continues, “Narrative researchers retain an awareness of social conditions as they consider how culture, and social structures, surface in the stories participants and researchers tell” (2004, p. 182). With this in mind, narrative inquiry fit my study because it seeks to provide a voice for those with physical disabilities, share their stories, and help expand the minds of others.

Participant Selection

Participant selection was done through purposeful sampling and snowball sampling. Purposeful sampling allows for the researcher to intentionally choose who will participate in the study. Plano Clark and Creswell state, “This type of sampling is best suited for qualitative research because the researcher is able to select the individuals who are most appropriate for a

study of the central phenomenon” (2015, p. 332). In the case of this study, I contacted teachers and colleagues to help find participants. As I did not find enough participants through my personal contacts, I used snowball sampling, which is where, “the researcher samples individuals. . . based on the recommendations of others” (Plano Clark & Cresswell, 2015, p. 334). My first participant was suggested by a teacher who was contacted by a family friend. I decided to create a website that described my research and my own backstory to provide people more information about my study. A colleague of mine from work shared my website to a group dedicated to actors who have disabilities. Through this website, I was contacted by my second participant. Finally, I contacted a theatre group in the United States who works with people with disabilities, that was suggested by my colleague. Here I found my third and final participant.

To participate in the study, participants had to have a physical disability, have already graduated from high school, and have participated in drama during that time, whether it was in a curricular or extra-curricular context. Participants had to have finished secondary school at the time of this study so they were in a position to better reflect on their experiences and consider how drama had transformed them, if at all. I also decided not to include a geographical limit for finding my participants, as it allowed me to broaden my search. Three participants were found to participate in this study. Though it is normally suggested that one to two participants should be included within a narrative study (Plano Clark & Cresswell, 2015). Michelle Butina (2015) argues, “Sample size is ambiguous, as it depends on the answers being sought, theoretical framework, type of data collected, resources and time, etc.” (p. 192). Patton (2002) suggests that it is important to decide on a minimum sample size and increase if necessary.

Each participant was contacted using a recruitment email, which explained the research and their roles in the study. This email included a Letter of Information, as well as a consent

form. Through my website, I also received three responses from people who were interested, however two never responded to the recruitment email. Once I received the signed consent form back from each of the three participants, I began my data collection.

Data Collection

Autobiographical Narrative

I engaged in autobiographical narrative for this study as the first step. Clandinin and Caine (2012) state, “Because narrative inquiry is an ongoing reflexive and reflective methodology, narrative inquirers need to continually inquire into their experiences before, during, and after each inquiry” (as cited in Saleh, Menon, & Clandinin, 2014, p. 272). Autobiographical narrative requires the researcher to examine their own experiences and stories, in relation to their current study. Since I participated in high school drama and had a physical disability, I have my own experiences and stories on how drama has impacted me. In the past, I have written stories of my time in high school as a way to reflect on what they meant to me and how I felt in the moment. I wanted to use my stories as a way to examine if there are any similar themes between my experience and experiences of my participants. For this portion of the study, I wrote two stories from my time in high school drama, explaining what was happening in the moment and what I was feeling at the time. When analyzing my stories, I looked for reoccurring themes. I also examined my stories through a transformative lens and saw how those moments shaped me into who I am today. I described how these particular moments meant to me now that I have graduated and the significance of what occurred during that time.

Hamilton (2005) used this technique when she wanted to find ways of improving her students’ writing (as cited in Hamilton, Smith, & Worthington, 2008). Hamilton wrote her own ideas and narratives, discussing her teaching practices and reflecting on them, and then analyzed

her data. Once this was completed, she did the same practice with her students, asking them how they thought they could improve their own writing (Hamilton et al., 2008).

Interviews

Data were collected primarily by conducting interviews with participants. Spector-Mersel states that “in interviews . . . the stories are created *for* the researcher; they are told to him or her and are influenced by the way the teller has understood the purpose of the study, by his or her aims in telling the story to the researcher and by their interpersonal interaction” (2010, p.213). Interviews can be a personal experience, and the participant must feel that they can trust the researcher when telling their stories. The interview process needs to be carefully managed to allow for participants to be open and share their experiences in rich and accurate detail in a way that is true to their own perceptions of their experiences.

Individual interviews were conducted to ensure confidentiality. Two of the participants were interviewed three times, and the other four times. (An additional interview was completed with one of my participants to discuss her monologue.) Interviews were about 45 minutes in length and were completed using Skype due to distance. Interviews were semi-structured, with a set of questions for the participants to answer. Questions were open-ended, allowing participants to answer in as much detail as they desired and provide specific experiences that may relate.

Interviews were recorded using an audio recorder.

The first interview helped build trust between myself and my participants. Guillemin and Heggen (2009) state,

Qualitative research, in particular methods such as individual interviews and participant observation, is largely dependent on building good interpersonal relations between researcher and participant. . . . The purpose of establishing rapport between researcher

and participant is to both generate rich data while at the same time ensuring respect is maintained between researcher and participant. (p. 292)

To help build trust, the first interview with each participant included a conversation between myself and my participant about our own experiences and backgrounds. Since I have also been a student with a physical disability in drama, I wanted to be open about my disability and limitations and what that meant to me. It was my intention to make my participants feel comfortable to share their background and stories. Participants responded well to this sense of openness, and mentioned, “You might understand. . .” or, “I’m sure you felt the same. . .” when telling me about their experiences. Once this was completed, guided questions were asked, including how drama transformed them and what specific experiences were transformative within their drama education.

After the first set of interviews, the recordings were transcribed and analyzed for important themes. Each participant had different themes that emerged, which guided questions for the following set of interviews. In the second interview, participants were asked about the themes found and what they thought they meant. They were also asked to share additional stories to help provide context. Once the second interviews were transcribed, and in preparation for the final interview, I took previously collected data and wrote a re-telling of their stories that highlighted the themes found. This method is supported by Creswell (2008), who discusses the importance of collaborating with the participant to ensure that details are accurate, and that they feel confident with the work being produced. Creswell also notes that the researchers should “use restorying because the listener and the reader will better understand the story told by the participant if you sequence it into a logical order (2008, p. 517).

Before the final interview, I sent the narratives to each participant to review and edit. The third interview centred on talking about the narrative and if there were any changes that needed to be made. Additional questions were asked to clarify or expand on stories and themes. After the third interview was transcribed, edits were made, and the narratives were sent back to the participants for final review.

Monologues

In addition to the interviews, participants were given the option to write a monologue based on the prompt, “What does drama mean to you as someone with a disability?” In their study, Schonmann and Kempe (2010) used monologues from pre-service drama teachers to assist in their research. The authors discuss analyzing the monologues:

When working with interviews one needs to transfer the interview verbatim transcription and try to render the spoken language by including pauses, inflections, false starts, unfinished sentences and overlapping speech and more. By using monologues we could omit this process and immediately access the authentic texts without intervening in their form. (p. 316)

Having participants write monologues offered them a different way to express their feelings and ideas. I decided to make the monologues optional for participants to complete so as to not pressure them into writing if they were not interested. The Letter of Information sent in the recruitment email provided information about the monologues to make them aware. At the end of the first interview with each participant, I provided further information about the monologues and asked if they were interested. All three participants were interested in writing a monologue, however, only two participants submitted their piece. One participant, while stating she was

interested, said that she was unable to complete the monologue due to time and other commitments.

There were no limitations in the length of the monologues, and participants could format it however they wished. Once the monologues were submitted, I read them and wrote my initial thoughts and interpretations of the piece. These notes were kept separate in a journal which allowed me to express my opinions freely. After writing these entries, I recorded and filmed myself performing the monologues. I believed it was important for me to perform the monologues, rather than my participants, as it allowed me to experience an active, embodied process of interpretation as I read, pondered, memorized, performed, and video recorded the monologues. The process helped me understand the intentions of the writers and tap into their emotions. This strategy was also used by Mindy Roberta Carter (2010), who performed monologues written by teachers as a way to examine their experiences of teaching. After receiving the monologues, Carter gained permission from the teachers to perform and record their monologues. After performing the monologue, she sent them back to her participants and interviewed them to ask about their process of writing. She also noted that she had received permission from her participants to reinterpret their work by performing their written pieces herself. Carter stated, “As an actor, I too felt enlivened, excited, and “free” when performing this monologue” (2010, p. 62).

Once the monologues were recorded, I followed the advice of Carter (2010) and sent the videos to my participants for feedback. I was also interested in setting up additional interviews with them to talk about their original intentions for the monologue and get their thoughts on my performance to be sure I understood their thoughts clearly. One participant expressed interest in

doing another interview, while the other did not, though they did include some feedback in their email response.

Talking with my participants about how they felt about me performing their monologues, they stated that they liked the idea and were excited to see the final product. One participant stated, “To see someone doing [my monologue] was really cool and really great to see. There’s part of me that wants to see how other people would take it, just to see where it goes.” Both participants expressed that interpretation was important, and that there is no “wrong” way to interpret a dramatic piece. Another participant related the experience to another performance he did where another actor was portraying him. “It’s an honour,” he stated. Keeping this in mind, I felt that by performing the monologues myself allowed me to connect with the monologues better and honour their work and their art.

Data Analysis

Once interviews were completed, the recordings were transcribed and analyzed for themes. To analyze these interviews, I used the constant comparison method (CCM). Hewitt-Taylor (2001) describes CCM as “a method of analysing qualitative data where the information gathered is coded into emergent themes or codes. The data is constantly revisited after initial coding, until it is clear that no new themes are emerging” (p. 39). Transcripts from the first interviews were coded by highlighting specific words and phrases, and different themes emerged for each participant. For example, within Claire’s transcript, the word “isolation” appeared numerous times. This was used in context about self-isolation and isolation from peers, as Claire mentioned being bullied. Any reference to bullying was also highlighted and put separately in categories such as isolation and connection with peers. Key phrases also stuck out to me, such as Claire mentioning that she used drama as an “escape.” Again, this word appeared a couple of

times during our first interview. Once I had these key words, I categorized them into themes.

During the second interview, I would discuss these themes with participants to see how accurately they reflected their experiences. Afterwards, I would code the second transcript looking for participants to elaborate on these themes or to see if there were any additional themes that I may have missed the first time.

On a few occasions, themes were not solidified until after the second interview. In the case of Leah, I had found three initial themes: acceptance, support, and passion. After talking with Leah, there was a phrase that stood out when discussing acceptance: “There was a line with the acceptance if you know what I mean.” After reviewing my codes for acceptance, which included words/phrases such as “friends”, “adaptive”, and “it taught me that it’s ok to be different”, I realized that many of these related to support, which led me to combining the two themes. During our second interview, I brought up another possible theme of exclusion as I had also noticed codes such as “overlooked” and “passed over” from the first transcript. Leah expressed that it was a very appropriate word to describe how she felt in high school at times. This helped solidify the theme of exclusion in her final narrative.

Quite often, the titles of themes would change. For Samuel, after our first interview, I had coded words, such as “leadership”, “purpose”, and “happy place.” I struggled to find a name for this theme until Samuel sent me his monologue and used the word “empowerment.” In our second interview, we discussed this theme of empowerment, and Samuel talked about the most empowering moments in drama, which seemed to include challenging perceptions on disability. This led me to return to the transcript of our first interview, and noticing stories Samuel had shared, such as having discussions with children who would stare at him, or his sister’s emotional reaction to seeing him and his peers on stage for the first time. Rather than

empowerment, I realized that Samuel had used drama to move beyond disability and simply become an actor, challenging peoples' thoughts and ideas about disability on the stage. In the end, I settled on the title, "moving beyond disability."

After the second interviews and discussing initial themes, I returned to the transcripts of the first interviews to confirm themes or find additional codes. Once there were no more codes or additional themes, I organized emerging themes into individual narratives for participants. While each participant has different themes, I included a cross-case analysis of these themes to find any that overlapped or connected with one another. For instance, all three participant narratives included social connections of some kind. Claire's discussed connection with peers; Leah mentioned support; Samuel explained how his peers were like family and his connection to his teacher. These themes merged together as social connections. Other themes, such as isolation for Claire and exclusion for Leah were similar, and thus were discussed as an overarching theme.

The monologues were examined to find any additional themes for participants. When analyzing monologues for their research, Schonmann and Kempe (2010) referred to *The Listening Guide* (2003) by Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, and Bertsch. The authors "suggest reading texts gathered in the course of research several times but prefer to call this process "listening" to the text, because this infers a more active relationship between the teller and the listener" (as cited in Schonmann & Kempe, 2010, p 316). In this way it is important for the researcher to "read between the lines" of the monologue and look for additional stories or emotions that may be conveyed through the participant's writing. When writing my initial thoughts for the monologues, I highlighted key words that I thought were of importance. After I performed the monologues, I added a few additional notes to show any changes I had in my original interpretations. Finally, after sending the recorded videos of my performances to the

participants, I wrote my final thoughts. During the additional interview I had with one of my participants, I transcribed the recording and highlighted key phrases and words that appeared, which helped my understanding of their intentions.

After themes were found from the transcripts and the monologues, I organized and retold the participants' stories. Creswell (2008) expresses that it is important to organize the stories into a chronological order, so that it will make sense to the readers. Creswell (2008) notes that there are many ways of structuring the retelling of a story, including setting, characters, actions, problems, and resolutions. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) also list the three-dimensional-space narrative structure, which includes interaction, continuity, and situation (as cited in Creswell, 2008). For this study, I used the structure created by Clandinin and Connelly, as I not only wanted the narratives to express what happened to the participant at the time, but also how they were feeling in the moment, and how those experiences affected them today. I believe that by using this structure, the narratives became more "alive" and effective. It is also important to collaborate with the participant who shared the story and make sure they feel that their voices are being heard in an accurate manner (Creswell, 2008). It was crucial for me to make sure that my participants felt that my retellings accurately reflected their time in high school and their thoughts.

To separate my own thoughts from those of my participants, I had a journal to write down my thoughts and feelings. These notes would include times where I connected with participants, such as feelings of being overlooked and having connections with my peers. Other notes included identifying when I did not connect with the participant data, such as being bullied. I also used this journal to write thoughts that included things that I had never considered before. For example, I asked Samuel how he had overcome disability, and he explained that he had

never overcome his disability, rather he overcame challenges due to his disability. These were notes that I consulted when writing my discussion, especially in my section when discussing my personal reflections. This journal was also helpful during the monologues, as I wrote down my initial ideas and thoughts before performing the monologues. Once I finished recording the monologues, I went back and wrote how my initial thoughts had changed and been transformed in the process of rehearsing and performing the monologues. The journal helped me organize my thoughts and my thinking process, as I tried to keep my own experiences separate from those of my participants.

Validity and Trustworthiness

Acknowledging Bias

Since this study is of personal importance to me, it was vital to recognize and minimize potential researcher bias. Creswell (2008) states that it is impossible to completely remove bias, but certain thoughts should be recorded and tracked throughout the research process. Though I had my own experience in high school as someone with a physical disability, I did not want my experiences to be generalized to include everyone with a physical disability. I also did not want to project my own thoughts to my participants, such as the importance of teachers in my drama education. I was fortunate to have teachers that supported me and helped me create positive experiences; however, this may not be the case for somebody else. Connelly and Clandinin (2000) note, "Narrative inquirers need to be self-conscious of their potentially intimate connection with the living, with the field texts collected, and with their research texts. In designing a narrative inquiry, researchers need to deliberately imagine themselves as part of the inquiry" (p. 482).

To separate my own thoughts and connections, I wrote these down in a separate journal, as stated earlier. Here, I wrote my personal beliefs and ideas, as well as my initial thoughts on monologues that were submitted. I also made sure to acknowledge when I connected with a story from participants and when I did not. This allowed me to separate my own experiences and to make sure I highlighted stories that were different from my own. As I analyzed the participant data, I kept in mind the need to meticulously ensure that all the themes I perceived within the data were supported by evidence directly collected from the participants.

Validity

To ensure that my interpretations of the data were accurate, I used member checking to validate information and the accuracy of the narratives. Creswell and Miller (2000) state that member checking includes

taking data and interpretations back to the participants in the study so that they can confirm the credibility of the information and narrative account. With the lens focused on participants, the researchers systematically check the data and the narrative account. (p. 127)

With this in mind, interview questions for the second and third interviews were tailored specifically to each participant. I crafted questions to clarify specific memories and stories and to make sure I understood. I also used these interviews to ask participants about their specific themes I had identified within their stories and how they believed my description of them accurately reflected their high school experiences. This approach was also used to determine the accuracy of the narratives, and I collaborated with participants to ensure the themes made sense and stories included the proper information.

I also used triangulation to strengthen validity. As Creswell and Miller state, “Triangulation is a step taken by researches employing only the researcher’s lens, and it is a systematic process of sorting through the data to find common themes or categories by eliminating overlapping areas” (2000, p. 127). By using multiple modes of data collection (i.e., multiple interviews and monologues), I was able identify and confirm themes across data sources.

Chapter 4—Research Findings

To examine the experiences of students with physical disabilities in high school drama education, I followed three different approaches. This chapter first reports the findings of an autobiographical narrative based on my own experiences. Next, I report the findings from interviews completed with three participants who had also participated in drama during their high school education, in the form of narratives constructed to retell the participants' stories. Each narrative highlights themes that emerged from analysis of the interview data. For two of the participants, Leah and Samuel, I present additional narratives that describe the process of soliciting, receiving, analyzing, rehearsing, and performing monologues they wrote about their experiences.

Autobiographical Narrative

This section presents two stories I wrote based on my experiences of my time with drama during my high school years. After each story, I discuss themes that emerged from analyzing them, as well as reflections I had while writing.

When the Shoe Fits

The room was small, only able to fit three people at most, though more would always try to squeeze in. On the far wall, all our costumes were hung up, labelled with our names. We used this room as our dressing room for all our shows. Only leads were allowed to use the dressing room. Apparently Little Cosette in *Les Misérables* was considered a lead, which made it all the more exciting.

I grabbed my costume off the rack, curious as to how my outfit would look. I used the bench to support me as I put the outfit on, a long purple shirt and a matching skirt, made of scratchy material. The outfit was marked up, making it look like I had been in the dirt. A

matching bonnet was in the bag that was included on the hanger. I looked in the full-length mirror that was attached to the back of the wooden door and placed the bonnet on my head, making sure that it was straight. I examined myself in the mirror, turning and looking at myself from all angles. The costume swallowed me. I looked dishevelled and frumpy, which was appropriate for my character! One thing I noticed, though, was that you couldn't see the curve in my back and my deformities. For once in my life I actually looked normal. I had one last task that I was dreading. Shoes.

Of course, to match the costume, I had to wear appropriate footwear that went along with the era. Shoes have always been my enemy—my feet are two different sizes, I walk on the sides of my feet, and my smallest foot has a high arch. Shoe shopping has never been easy. I eyed the shoes that I had picked out with the costume designer. When I first tried them on, the fit was fine, but they were uncomfortable. It didn't help that somehow my limp became more prominent than it already was. The designer had said she might know a way to fix it, so I put my trust in her.

I picked up one shoe and slipped it on my foot. So far so good. I put the other one on and stood up to look at myself in the mirror again. Nothing seemed to be extremely different about them, except that my right shoe had an added heel on it, like a lift. I didn't think anything of it.

There was a knock on the door, and I told them to come in. It was the costume designer. She was tall and skinny, with huge blonde hair. I knew her because she was the mom of a girl I went to middle school with. She was always very eccentric, but her skills as a costume designer could not be compared. She was famous in our small town for making the best costumes. She looked me up and down and gave me a smile, fidgeting with the garments. She grabbed the plastic bag hanging from the hanger, and retrieved a rope, which she tied around my waist.

“Alright, let’s go show Mr. Lewis and see what he thinks,” she told me.

She led me out of the dressing room. I walked down the few stairs and took a couple of steps. That’s when I noticed that I wasn’t limping. I couldn’t believe it! The heel that had been attached to my right shoe made me level, minimizing my limp. It didn’t seem to be that noticeable and I actually felt comfortable. I emerged from behind the curtain and onto the stage, stopping downstage centre. I could see my classmates looking at me from out in the audience, taking themselves away from their conversations. I heard a lot of “ahhh” and “you look adorable!” I was beaming, my braces fully showing. My director sat in the front row with his clipboard full of notes and stage directions. His whole face lit up when he saw me walk across the stage and show off my costume. The designer was explaining my costume, saying how everything fit and what changes might need to be done.

“I took the shoes to a place downtown and asked him to put a heel on it so that the shoes would be more comfortable for Nissa. He didn’t charge anything, said that he was happy to do it,” she said.

I would forever be grateful to this man who helped me to walk with a bit more confidence. I looked back at my director waiting for his response.

“It’s perfect!”

When the Shoe Fits Analysis. Looking back on this moment, I think of the excitement I felt as I put on my costume for the first time. This was my first musical and I was given a solo! Putting on the costume made it feel real to me. I had wanted to be part of this music theatre program since I had seen *Grease* the year before when I was in grade 8. My high school was famous in my small town for putting on spectacular shows, and I was about to be in one. What made it even more exciting was to be in that small dressing room. It was reserved for the leads,

and I had been cast as one of them. That small room held a lot of significance for a little grade 9 girl. Thinking back on this moment, I can feel the excitement of trying on that costume and looking at myself in the mirror. I *was* Little Cosette.

However, I was still aware of my limitations and my deformities. I recall being the shy girl who didn't say much because I was kept to the side. I knew that even though I was cast in this big production, this was still something that was holding me back. The self-conscious child within me was nervous about walking out on stage and being in the spotlight, showing off her differences. There wasn't much I could do, though, except put on the shoes to complete my look.

When I slipped on the shoes, I noticed a change. I stood a bit taller and straighter. Our costume designer had gone out of her way to do this for me. I was not only grateful to her, but to the shoe-man downtown. He helped me fix my shoes for years until I finally moved away. I will forever remember him and his kindness. These two people gave me a gift that put a new spring in my step. A small gesture like this can go a long way.

I did not know what to expect from my teacher when I stood on that stage showing my costume. But when his face lit up in acceptance, it sparked a newfound confidence in me. It wasn't just his approval of my costume, it was his approval of me as a person, as an actor. It reassured me that he still felt confident that I was the right person for the role, and the costume was the icing on the cake. Nobody pointed out my walk or the curve in my back. I was given an opportunity to be me, someone who loved theatre and just wanted a place to belong. Not only did I hear the teacher's approval, but admiration from my peers as well. Their comments made me feel welcomed into the program. In this story, I see the beginning of my transition into the person I am today. This allowed me to have more confidence walking onto the stage in later years and

helped with my confidence after I graduated. It may not seem like a big moment to many, but for me, it was everything.

The Witch

I stood in the empty auditorium, at the edge of the stage, leaning against the piano. The auditorium at my high school could fit about 400 people, sitting in the uncomfortable wooden chairs that were bolted to the ground. They hadn't renovated the auditorium since the 70s or 80s, but it felt comforting after being there for four years. The stage was a standard, proscenium stage, with red curtains. I had just finished a run through of the song "Still Hurting" from the musical, *The Last Five Years*. That was going to be my song for competition in the upcoming weeks. I felt confident in my abilities, and my voice had gotten stronger each time I practiced. My music director sat on the piano bench. He was an intimidating but admirable man. He had his favourite students, and I had only recently become one of them. When I rehearsed with him the previous year, he discovered that I could belt when I sang "In His Eyes" from *Jekyll and Hyde*.

He smiled at me and told me that I had come far since my first performance as Little Cosette in *Les Misérables*. That was the recognition I had been longing for. This was a particularly poignant time in my high school career since I had just finished my last musical theatre show a couple of months before in December. This competition was my last hoorah before graduating. Even though I was leaving at the end of the year, I felt validated in my abilities because at least I was being recognized after four years of hard work.

We began talking about future songs that I could rehearse, our voices echoing in the large space. He had even made me a list! Then he started listing off roles that I would be great for—the Witch from *Into the Woods* being the one that stood out to me. For a brief moment I felt

excited. I had never had a lead role in one of our shows before, but this comment made me hopeful for the future.

“You’d be great for one of these roles, since, you know...” He trailed off and pointed at my legs.

My legs bowed together, my back arched and twisted because of the damage in my hips from the arthritis. When I walked, I clearly had a limp, and would get tired from standing too long. I couldn’t walk long distances, not because I was in pain, but because my body would tell me, “no, I’m getting too tired.” I always tried to not see myself as ‘different’ from anybody else. I knew I had my limitations, but my perseverance kept me going.

This comment crushed me. I could only act in roles if the character had a limp or a deformity because that’s how I looked. It was heartbreaking because I thought by being accepted into the music theatre program, I had gotten past this. I started thinking about my previous auditions for our school musicals and how I always got a call-back. I would be asked to read for one of the lead roles, and I would always get my hopes up. Then when the cast list came out, I would have a smaller part, just missing out on my dream role. I never complained, though, thinking that maybe someone was just better than me. After hearing my teachers comment, I started doubting this. Did I not get these roles because of the way I walked? Were looks really that important to making the show more believable?

I nodded at my musical director, without saying anything. What could I say? I didn’t think it would make much of a difference.

“Let’s do one more run-through and we’ll call it a day,” he said, not even batting an eye. I sang my song like nothing had happened.

The Witch Analysis. When I look back on this experience, the first thing I notice is my confidence. This was due to the fact that I had been built up by teachers, peers, and my parents over the years. Confidence was not something that came to me naturally since I was always stared at for the way I walked. Theatre gave me the opportunity to grow and showcase my talents. At this point in time I had been in four musicals, two senior drama shows, sang in competitions for three years in a row, and was involved in the school choir. Drama was my chance to shine, even if I didn't get the starring role. As I reflect back on this story, I notice how my teacher was still boosting me up, having witnessed my growth. Validation is one of the most important things a person can receive from anybody. Hearing the recognition that I felt I deserved from my teacher was a thrill. It made it that much harder when I heard his next comments.

Even though my confidence had been growing, I was still the girl with arthritis who looked different. I still had insecurities that I needed to work through. Being seen for your disability is a tough thing. In this moment, I realized that many people, though they might not state it outright, judge based on looks and abilities. I realized that this judgement takes away opportunities for students to show their true selves. To have a comment such as this directed at me was devastating. However, I did not say anything at the time; I moved on. I try not to dwell on comments such as these. Looking back, it is still discouraging, but it is almost a reminder to keep pushing forward and to try to get past these barriers.

When I look back on this moment, I wonder how things could have been different. I know for a fact that my teacher did not mean anything negative by saying what he did. In fact, I believe that from his perspective he was trying to still look at the positives and compliment me. However, I think what I really needed him to say was, "You have come so far, and I am proud of

your progress.” He did not need to bring my disability into it. It had nothing to do with my singing or acting abilities.

Shortly after this experience, when I sang in my competition, the same teacher cheered for me when I won second place and hugged me in congratulations. I know he did not mean to discourage me in that moment. However, words hold a lot of power, especially coming from a teacher. They can either build up your confidence or shake you. I was shaken after this for a while, but I was able to rebuild myself and carry on.

Concluding Thoughts

As the stories indicate, there were good and bad experiences, but overall, drama education helped me build confidence and realize my potential. In the first story, I can recall the person who I was before that moment: a shy, quiet girl who was afraid to speak out. After that first show when I was in grade nine, I was never the same person again. I let myself believe that I could be on the stage and that I had talent. The second story almost seems to have an opposite effect. I started the story with that same confidence I found at the end of the first story. I felt comfortable with my voice and knew that I had come a long way. However, to hear those words from my teacher, I felt like I was that shy girl again. I was not good enough to have a main role on the stage because of the way I looked and walked. It was not until I performed that song for my competition and won second place that I felt confident again. It was because of these experiences that I decided I wanted to be an educator. I wanted to encourage my students and make them believe that they were good enough for the stage. My teachers pushed me to be the person I am today, and I am grateful for them, no matter what comments they made to me in the past.

Participant Narratives

This section presents the narratives written for each participant based on their stories they told during their interviews. The narratives were constructed to highlight the themes that emerged in analysis of the participant data. All names included have been changed to pseudonyms for privacy.

Claire

The following narrative introduces Claire, a young woman who graduated from high school about five years ago. Through our conversations, she explained that she enjoyed drama during high school, and it helped her become more creative. However, because of being bullied while she was growing up, she found that she had separated herself from her peers and preferred to be alone. She also claimed that she felt isolated from her peers because her teacher let her do assignments alone. However, as she became comfortable in her drama classes and with her peers, she started seeing drama as an escape from her disability that allowed her to be someone else. Finally, Claire expressed that though she was bullied in her youth, drama allowed her to build her social skills and she was able to communicate with her peers. She reflected on her personal growth and explained that even though she can still be shy, she no longer isolates herself from her peers.

Portrait. Claire was not born with her physical disability. When she was two years old, she suffered a traumatic brain injury, resulting in an impairment on the right side of her body. Claire walks with a limp and has limited function in her right hand. In addition, Claire mentioned that she has a language impairment, which causes her to stutter when she is tired or nervous. “I’ve grown up with my disability from an infant,” she stated, “so I know no different.” Claire explained that she had to adapt to her surroundings and make things work for her:

Being someone with the use of only one hand isn't easy. It makes it more challenging because I have to figure out how to do things in a different way than other people would think of how the task would be completed.

Because of her physical disability, Claire was exempt from partaking in gym classes and was told to stay inside during recess in the winter as a safety precaution. She noted that she was not able to establish connections with her classmates during this time and so was often left out of playground activities.

I asked her about her introduction to drama. While she was exposed to drama classes in elementary school, they were not regular classes, but seemed to happen about once a week. When Claire entered high school, she mentioned that her mom had put her into visual arts for her first semester. "I hated visual arts!" she exclaimed, laughing. In the following semester, she enrolled in drama, which worked out a lot better. She proudly told me, "I did phenomenal in drama." She explained that she received a good mark in the class and, in addition, told of a story about an assignment she completed:

When I moved schools in grade twelve, I had to do a monologue – I think the first or second week into it. I didn't know anyone in my class. I did it about myself and about me in 20-30 years. The drama teacher—he never taught me previously—he said it was one of the best monologues he had ever heard.

As Claire shared this story, she smiled brightly, a sense of pride coming through. She continued on to explain that she and her family moved when she was in her senior year of high school, causing her to change schools and have different experiences.

Claire participated in drama classes all four years of high school. At her first school, from grade nine to grade eleven, her classes were active and busy. Examples of lessons included

writing monologues, creating skits, and working in groups. When Claire changed schools in grade twelve, she claimed, “it was more laid-back, and I found it boring.” In comparison, her first three years in drama were much more “hands-on.” While Claire participated in drama classes, she also had a role in the school musical.

Isolation. When talking with Claire in our first interview, the word “isolation” came up a lot. I followed up the next time I talked with her and asked why she believed this was a prominent theme. “The isolation. . . I know why, because in grade seven and grade eight I was bullied so much,” she explained, “I isolated myself . . . to protect myself from being bullied. In grade nine and grade ten, I was closed off around my peers.” I asked her if that feeling of isolation carried with her into the drama classroom. Claire confirmed that it did, and that it made it hard for her to join groups for activities and assignments:

It was difficult for me to go into groups sometimes, especially if some of the kids who bullied me in elementary school were in those classes because it was a small high school. . . . When I asked people if I could be part of their group, they would always say no or that it was too full; there’s no more room.

She explained that for most of these group assignments her teachers would allow her to work alone and do her own projects. However, that, to an even greater extent, “would isolate [me] more from my peers.” These feelings of isolation made Claire feel sad, though she noted that she got accustomed to working alone and found a sense of security in it:

It was different because looking back now, I enjoyed working on my own, even though I was upset to work on my own. But it was like a sanctuary because I was isolated from my peers from the bullying, so it was a comfortable place to be in, if that makes any

sense. . . . Yes, it's sad that you're doing these assignments alone, but you also feel more protected.

Thinking about how her drama teacher helped in this way, Claire described sensing that they were aware of her troubles fitting in and believed that having her work on her own would be beneficial. "Especially for the culminating projects at the end of the semester, they allowed me a couple of times to work on it [by] myself . . . and if I needed extra help, they would give it to me," she noted. With regard to her peers, she continued, "They made it harder to be able to come out of the shell of isolation." I asked if she experienced any challenges being in drama with a physical disability in high school, to which she replied, "Just trying to fit in and feeling alone."

Escape. One of my questions for Claire asked, "What does drama mean to you as someone with a physical disability?" In response, Claire simply answered, "An escape." She defined this statement by saying that she was "able to express myself with no judgement." Claire explained that because she was bullied while growing up, drama allowed her to have an escape. It seemed to go hand-in-hand with her description of feeling isolated from her peers. As she had stated before, working alone was like a "sanctuary." During our second interview, I asked Claire if she could elaborate on this idea of drama as an escape. "Drama and being able to act allowed me to put aside my differences with my disability. It allowed me to escape, to be someone else for a little while," she explained. When I asked her what she was escaping from, she said, "Reality." Through her time in drama, though she stated that she often felt isolated, Claire felt that becoming someone else removed her from those negative situations and allowed her to feel freer.

I also asked Claire if she still felt like she was escaping something now that she is out of high school. "To escape, being out of high school, I'm a writer. I don't do it so much during

school. But I do write to have that escape,” she answered. When reflecting on her time in drama during high school, she exclaimed, “Being able to experience drama has allowed me to express my creativity as well. To allow me to hopefully do more after school.” Claire expressed that her main takeaways from her time in drama class were the development of her communication skills and being able to express herself creatively, which she now takes into her writing. Claire also stated the possibility of writing plays in the future. I curiously asked her if she thought about writing about her physical disability. She thoughtfully replied, “I have, I just can’t get the right words yet. They’ll come when I least expect it.”

Social Connections. As Claire discussed her feelings of isolation and using drama as an escape from reality, there was a sense of hope in her stories, as she recalled how she realized that she wanted to make a change in her situation during high school. “Halfway through grade ten, I just had enough. I tried to slowly open up. It took me years to open up after that,” she stated. Claire went on to describe how she used drama to help her make those changes:

I used the drama room for one lunch hour a week in the school to just bring together some people that had few friends, and we made a club out of it. We got to run, and play games, and eat lunch, and laugh I ran it, but because it was on school property, we needed a staff member to watch it as supervision. I asked a teacher who knew me (since I was really little) to help.

The drama classroom had given Claire a sense of comfort and so she used it as a way to bring people together. Claire had expressed that in elementary school she was not able to make successful connections with her peers due to her teachers’ efforts to protect her from any safety risks. In high school, however, drama allowed her to “learn social cues” by acting out scenes and

watching others. Claire saw drama class as a way to “just to engage with peers again.” She explained:

With my brain injury, I was lower in maturity, so the way I acted and things like that was lower than my peers, and it was noticeable. So, just learning those aspects so that I could slowly catch up to them. It’s allowed me to learn how to communicate properly with people. It’s taught me all these skills that I need for the future that I probably wouldn’t have been able to get without drama.

Before drama class, Claire had described herself as “shy.” While she still feels that she is shy, there are more moments when she is “outgoing and talkative.”

After Claire decided to make a change to not feel isolated, there was a change in relationships with peers. The shift became noticeable in Grade eleven. “They supported me, and they accepted me more rather than in Grade ten. In Grade twelve, I was in a whole different school because we moved.” Claire explained that it was her perseverance to “fight for everything” that helped her form connections with her classmates. She stated that by Grade twelve she would talk with her teachers or her peers to help understand a concept in class if she didn’t understand.

I asked Claire how she felt drama helped shape her into the person she is today. Claire expressed that, along with expressing creativity, another of her main takeaways was the development of her communication skills. “As I said before,” she answered, “I completely opened up. I’m not isolated anymore. I am shy, but not isolated.” I asked her if she felt like she is still fighting for what she wants, to which she replied:

Not so much now. . . . I know what I want, I know how I can do things. In my role as an EA, I have the background of a Child and Youth Worker. Being able to bring what my

experience was and bring that out in my current and future practice with the children that I work with.

Leah

It was clear from our first interview that Leah was passionate about drama. Though she was born with cerebral palsy, she participated in drama starting at a young age and did not let her disability stop her from being on the stage. She found a lot of support from her family and friends who helped to make her feel included during class and in shows. Though she made close friends during her time in drama, she reflected how she was often overlooked by her teacher to play lead roles, which she thought was presumable because of the way she looked. However, that did not stop her love of drama, and she continued to persevere, even after graduating high school.

Portrait. Leah was born with cerebral palsy, but was not officially diagnosed until she was twelve months old. She was four and a half months premature, and her doctors had told her mother that she would never crawl or walk. However, Leah defied the odds and began walking, using a walker until she was four years old and now using canes full-time. She described:

My disability is very visual to the outside world. You can see that I have a physical disability. My hands are affected slightly, and just other things people wouldn't know. I have a tendency to choke more when I'm eating and that kind of thing. . . . Everything I do, I sort of modify it to how I can do it.

During her early school years, Leah's mother fought for her to be included in the classroom. "I was never really in special education, and my mom took me everywhere," she stated. "If I think about other disabled people in my town, you saw them go in the morning to special ed. and that's all you ever saw of them." Leah described her life in her hometown as "normal." She noted that

it got harder as she grew up and became independent. “It wasn’t until I got older and moved out on my own that you start to realize things, and you’re sort of faced with it more, I think, when you aren’t in the bubble of your town,” she explained. Leah has always tried to maintain a positive attitude toward her disability. “My theory is that you always have to be able to laugh at yourself. . . . You kind of just have to make fun of yourself and have humour with it, and I think that’s how I survived.”

Leah has been involved with drama since she was an infant. She told me, “I played baby Jesus in the first Nativity when I was born!” Once Leah reached middle school, she realized that theatre was her passion. She took drama classes and became heavily involved in her theatre program in high school. In Grade nine, her involvement in drama was primarily through drama classes, but quickly expanded to working on extra-curricular shows, both onstage and backstage. “I was involved in every production. . . . Anything I could possibly do in the theatre I was there doing it. It was basically my life. I would go to school at seven in the morning and I would get back at nine or ten. That was my high school,” she explained. Shows she worked on included *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Anything Goes*, and *A Christmas Carol*. The school would rotate between doing a musical or a Shakespeare play every year. Leah also mentioned that the school would get the community involved:

As we got older and there were less kids doing theatre, we would branch out and do community productions where everyone could come audition, even though it was a school production. We did that with *A Christmas Carol* and *Anything Goes*. . . . But I think that was the theatre in that town. It was a very sports-oriented town. Not a lot of arts going on.

Leah described her drama teacher as a “lovely person” but not a great educator. “She did the best that she could with a school that didn’t really support theatre. . . . I don’t know if she’s given me anything that I would use to this day if I was in another production,” she said. Her drama teacher was there all four years of Leah’s high school career. She also mentioned that her choir instructor was involved in the school productions, as well, and she was very close to him. She told a story of how her choir teacher helped her when it came to choir performances:

He really modified things for me. . . . I was in an all-girls choir that you have to audition for, and he had all of us stand on risers, which was the first time I ever did that in my whole choir career. He would come over and stand there, and I would use his hand to step up, and that just became part of the thing.

Support. Over the course of our conversations, Leah mentioned that she had met her best friends during her high school drama experience. After transitioning from middle school to high school, Leah became closer to those who were also in the theatre program. “They embraced me, and I could really feel more myself with them than I would with any other friends,” she explained. She continued to tell me a story of how her peers helped accommodate her disability during a performance:

I did [a production] where we performed at elementary schools. It was *Little Red Riding Hood* and I played the Grandma. They built this stand-alone door, and it had this big thing that I had to step over, and I was supposed to run away from the wolf. We were trying to figure out how I could still run and not trip over that. We created this whole line where I ran and then froze, saying, ‘Stupid door, I hate you so much!’”

Leah said that her peers were very supportive and adaptive, even helping her when she tap-danced in *Anything Goes*. “They really helped the process. Really helped modify things and [made me] feel supported,” she mentioned.

Leah told me about her friend, Mark, whom she met in the theatre program. They became close during a trip to New York during her freshman year, and he and some friends helped her by giving her piggybacks around the city. “He was very supportive,” she said. She explained that he was one of the only ones that she talked to about her disability during that time. Leah recalled that she missed her cue during a commedia dell’arte performance, which really upset her. Fortunately, Mark was there to comfort her, saying, “Everybody misses a cue. I’ve missed cues. It’s fine.” Even now, Leah still talks to Mark about theatre and asks for advice once in a while.

Not only did Leah have support from peers at school, she had support at home from her mother. Leah had previously mentioned that her mom fought for her to be included. “My mom would tell you that I always was a performer as a kid,” she said, laughing. As a child, her family thought she should be an actress as she was “so dramatic.” They enjoyed how she told stories. When Leah was older, she told her mom that she actually did want to pursue a career in acting:

I very distinctly remember what we were wearing. She said, “Everything you do as a disabled person is going to be ten times harder than the average person. Anyone who wants to be an actor is already doing the ten times harder thing, but it’s going to be harder for you, so maybe that’s not the best route.”

While her mom does not like to get her hopes up when Leah goes for an audition, she still supports her and encourages her to attend conferences and meet other people. Overall, Leah felt: “Support for me to do theatre, it was definitely there.”

Exclusion. During our second interview, I asked Leah about her thoughts on the theme of support. “The support was there. . . but there was a line,” she replied. It was apparent through our conversations that while there were times that she was supported and accepted by her peers, she was also excluded in various ways, especially by teachers. Leah told me of various instances where she was passed over for roles. “I always knew I wasn’t getting parts because my theatre teacher didn’t see them as being played by a disabled person,” she stated. Leah told me one such story from her senior year:

We were always told, “Once you’re seniors, you’ll get main parts.” The play that I thought was going to be my time was *Arsenic and Old Lace*, and I thought, “I can play an old lady, I got this.” But then these popular kids from the school decided to audition and she ended up casting them, because she was hoping more tickets would sell. I was so mad, I even refused to go see it.

I asked Leah about her relationship with her drama teacher. “She’s a very nice woman,” she said, “but she would always cast a play in her mind before we actually had auditions. . . . Going through auditions was just a ritual essentially. . . . In that way, it’s kind of sad. I think that if she were really a good theatre teacher, she would have tried to do more things to include us all.”

Leah told another story of when their school did a production of *A Christmas Carol*:

I thought, “Yes, here’s my chance, I can play Tiny Tim.” I was very tiny in high school, I weighed like 80 pounds. I had just played a boy in *Much Ado About Nothing*. But then she opened it up to the community and some little kid got it, and I was the woman who sold Scrooge his bedsheets or something like that. There were definitely moments [like] that, [when] even [though] the character is disabled, you still get passed over.

While Leah is grateful that her drama teacher let her be involved as much as she did, she also added, “If you just tried to teach me and not push me into a corner, and tried to give me a chance to be a lead, who knows where I’d be now?”

In addition to her drama teacher that she had for four years, Leah’s school had guests who came in to assist with shows:

Sometimes they would have guest directors come in. My school director would ask us, “What part do you really want to be considered for?” So, this guest director came in when we did *commedia dell’arte*, and I wanted to play this character named Maria, but she didn’t ask us that, and I just told her that kind of off to the side: “I really want this character.” And then I just ended up being a little girl.

Leah acknowledged these rejections in high school, and even wondered occasionally, “Is it because I’m disabled?” However, Leah was able to stay positive and look back on all the support she had from her peers:

Even with instances with not getting a part and getting passed up because of a disability, the friends that I had were really supportive in it and really helpful. I think maybe sometimes though they did it subconsciously, and it makes you more well-aware of what you have to fight for. But it was also very fun and shaped who I am.

During our last interview, Leah was reflective of her drama experience after reading the first draft of the narrative. She remembered that even though she directed shows for drama class, she never put herself in lead roles. “I did that a lot, looking back at it,” she explained. “We did *Charlie Brown* and I was the director, but I was throwing snow for the balcony. Why didn’t I put myself in the show?” I asked her why she believed she did this. “All of this, talking to you and doing the memory thing, [I] start to realize that people weren’t pushing me to do the roles, but

because of that I wasn't pushing myself as much as I could have been." It seemed that since her peers and teachers were not casting her in lead roles, she didn't see the point in placing herself in those roles either. She stated, "It kind of makes you stop. As a whole, I've always felt they supported me, but did they? . . . Maybe they were just as bad as my theatre teacher."

Moving forward with her acting career, Leah has decided to have a different mindset. She told me that she was going for an audition soon and was going for the lead character. "I'm going to go for it, because go big or go home!" she exclaimed. "I have to be amazing. I have to make them think I can do this role. If my body can't look the part, then I have to make my acting look that way."

Passion. It was obvious to see as we talked that Leah had a strong passion for theatre. When we spoke about theatre, she often became excited and discussed the possibilities for theatre in the future in regard to disabilities. There was a sparkle in her eye when she talked about certain shows and discussed artists such as Tony-award winning actress Ali Stroker. During our second conversation, I asked her what she loved the most about theatre. She paused to think before replying:

You know how they say you've been bitten by the acting bug? I was bitten. There's no describing it. There's just something great about performing and becoming someone else and telling these stories. I think I say bitten too because it's really hard to describe where it comes from. You're bitten by this thing, and you don't even know what's happened, and there you are.

I was curious to know if her passion had ever dimmed. She explained that while she was a freshman in high school, she became friends with the upperclassmen in the theatre program. By the time she was a senior, most of her friends had graduated. "I was over the drama and the

people. . . . I sort of became friends with the theatre outcasts of the group. You'd think that we'd all be outcasts, but it happens. I was just over it." She added, though, "Even when I go away from it, there's still this huge part of me that's still that theatre nerd."

When reflecting on how her time in high school drama affected her, Leah stated, "I think it kind of created everything about me." She mentioned that her experiences were able to shape her into the person she is today. She explained:

I think it shaped me as much as any high school theatre experience shapes everyone.

Mine was shaped by theatre. . . . I think being with that group and being the outcast of the school, it taught me that it's ok to be different, it's ok to be weird, and it's ok to be yourself. You don't have to fit this norm. I think that's stuff I really learned at that time being in theatre.

Now living in Los Angeles, Leah is planning on getting back into theatre and attending auditions. She now has said that she has more hope for theatre for those with disabilities, stating:

Now there's all these great companies coming up where they're trying to include people with disabilities into the theatre, and I've been going to auditions and trying to get my foot back in there. I feel like to play someone with a disability would be great, but to even just play any character where the disability isn't even a question would be amazing. I'd like to be in *Waitress*, the musical. . . . I really like Dawn.

When asked how drama shaped her, Leah responded, "I think it really did give me a foundation for who I was and that you can be outgoing. . . to be the different, weird kid in theatre. I think it really shaped me that way."

Leah's Monologue. Leah was excited when I had asked her about writing a monologue after our first interview. She liked the idea of doing something creative and was intrigued by the

prompt. When she sent me her monologue, it was after our third interview. When I first read her monologue, I smiled. She had related it to an upcoming audition that she had, which she had told me about in our previous interviews. I could immediately picture the setting of the monologue and seeing a table of directors and stage managers up front. This was something that I could connect to right away as I have been the person auditioning and the person at the table many times before.

I wrote my initial thoughts on Leah's monologue, stating how I pictured her to be feeling in the moment and what she was doing. I wrote that I believed the monologue took place just after the audition and someone at the table had asked her, "What would it mean to you to get this role?" Her monologue would be her response to that question. I also reflected on our past interviews, as I wanted to embody Leah and base it off of what I knew of her already. Based on our conversations, I knew that Leah had been passed over for lead roles. I interpreted her monologue as a way to finally speak out against being in the background. In my notes, I wrote, "As the monologue goes on, she becomes more defiant, with all the memories of past auditions flooding back." I also noticed that she did not seem to be accusing the people at the table, but rather inviting them to collaborate with her. She says in her monologue, "Let's think outside the box together! Let's break down walls and change theatre together! Let's collaborate together!" Even as I read these lines, I could feel enthusiasm welling up inside me. In my notes, I included words such as "frustrated" and "confident" to describe how Leah would be feeling as she speaks.

At the end of her monologue, she uses lyrics from musicals that she loves to make her point. I debated a lot about whether to sing these lines or simply speak them. In the end, I decided not to sing them as I thought it would have a bigger impact by just speaking the lines. In my notes, I had stated that I thought Leah would bow at the end of her monologue, in a cheeky

manner. When it was time for me to perform and record Leah's monologue, I had two canes that I borrowed since she uses canes to walk around. I noticed that as I was speaking, I couldn't connect to the monologue when I was being "cheeky." It felt arrogant to me. Instead, I took a different, empathetic approach to the monologue. It felt that she was putting her heart on her sleeve and finally revealing to people the thoughts that she has had for so long. I took out the bow at the end and simply ended with the line, "This is me."

I sat down to write my thoughts after performing and I realized that this monologue might not have been a monologue spoken to the people at the table. Rather, this could have been an internal monologue to help Leah feel prepared and confident for her audition. As I wrote in my notes, "These are her inner thoughts, things that she has felt for years but never has been able to express." I decided to keep my original interpretation though instead of recording it again as I felt I wanted Leah to say her thoughts out loud. I felt like these were words that people needed to finally hear. I felt happy about the ending of the monologue, and I wrote, "She simply ends off stating, "This is me." Take it or leave it. She is no more and no less."

You can see my performance of Leah's monologue by following this link:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1SB9RCg1_bxLUN2O6yN4cW20ETh4pSles/view?usp=s
[haring](#). Please see Appendix A to read Leah's monologue.

After I sent my video recorded performance of the monologue to Leah and asked if she was willing to complete an additional interview, she replied back enthusiastically: "That was amazing!" She agreed to an additional interview, which we set up for the next day. During our conversation, I asked Leah about her original intentions and thoughts when she was writing her monologue. She explained that before writing, she researched monologues from disabled actors or characters and did not find a lot online. She also watched interviews with disabled actors and

thought about how she feels when walking into an audition. We discussed my thoughts about the monologue being spoken out loud to someone rather than an internal monologue and I asked Leah if she had any thoughts on that aspect when writing. “I feel like that is what we all in the disabled community want to shout out. . . . It’s like a “stop and actually listen to me” kind of monologue.” I was also curious about the lyrics she included in her monologue and told her my thoughts of singing the lines. She replied

“You should have! I would have loved to have heard it sung because I definitely didn’t think about singing them. It could definitely be sung though; it would be interesting.

They have musical improv with my improv group. I should take in the monologue and have them play each line.”

Leah was interested in the idea of others performing her monologue to see their interpretations.

“You did it one way. I would do it one way. Ten other people would do it completely different.

And there’s something really beautiful about that, I think.” She also expressed how she was interested in how I said certain lines. For example, she stated that at times she would scream and yell during the monologue but enjoyed that I took a calmer approach. “It really made me see what’s beautiful about this artform.” When I asked her if she thought my performance reflected her original interpretation, she agreed and thought that I was able to connect to it the way that she did.

When talking about the monologue, Leah also reflected how she didn’t think anyone would perform it. I was interested to know what she thought about seeing her work performed by someone else. She replied, “Just the fact that I wrote this, and someone is performing it—how cool is that? It fed my ego a lot.” We ended our conversation by talking about the setting I chose to perform the monologue. Since my options were limited, I filmed it in my kitchen. Leah

thought that even that in itself could be a statement of accessibility in theatre and how some actors send video auditions because they are unable to get to the audition space. This was an interesting interpretation that I had not thought about. I thanked Leah for her insights and allowing me to perform her work, encouraging her to keep sharing it to see how other people would perform her piece.

Samuel

Samuel was excited to share his experiences as he loved drama and made a career out of it. He explained that the first time he performed on stage it changed his life. Samuel was the oldest of my participants, having graduated from high school over 40 years ago. However, he still remembered his time in high school and spoke fondly of his peers and teachers. He talked about how he found it hard to find his purpose in school before participating in the drama shows when he was in eighth grade. Drama also allowed him to explore his identity as he connected with his characters. It was apparent that his teacher made a great impact on him as she was the one to introduce drama in his school. Even many years after graduating, Samuel mentioned that he is still close with his former teacher and they often catch up. He also connected with his peers, becoming a leader of their group and making lasting memories. Samuel also discussed how he uses his disability to break boundaries in theatre, and started doing that with his classmates at a young age.

Portrait. At the age of two, Samuel contracted polio, a muscular disease. While sitting on the couch watching TV with his older brother, his mother walked in to say it was time for bed. “I went to stand up and I couldn’t,” he explained. “My dad immediately thought my legs had fallen asleep, so he was rubbing my legs and trying to get circulation back, and then they decided they’d better rush me to the hospital.” Samuel described his case as severe, stating that

he was initially paralyzed from the neck down. He endured several surgeries, including on his legs to release the muscles that were tightened and contorted. Another surgery on his left hand, which he described as an experimental surgery, took a turn for the worse when it became infected and was turning gangrene. "If we had waited another few days, I probably would have lost my arm, or so the doctors told us," he explained. Samuel also described that at thirteen years old, he had a spinal fusion to help his scoliosis. As a result, he was placed in a body cast from his chin to his knees. After three months his doctors cut him out of the cast. Samuel described the experience:

What happened over that three-month period is kind of like rigor mortis. My muscles had tightened up from being in that sitting position because I wasn't moving at all. So, when they started cutting the cast off, the pain was excruciating. Worst pain I can remember in my life, and I can still remember it. I remember screaming so loud, and I swear the floor below and the floor above could hear me.

While he was growing up, Samuel used a manual wheelchair. But he told me, "I never looked at myself as being disabled. I give all that credit to my family . . . because they never wanted me to look at myself that way, and they were always forcing me to be out in public." With the help of his family, Samuel found ways to overcome challenges, such as learning how to get in the car with a body brace on. With a look of defiance, he stated, "I'm a survivor, and I'm a fighter." Samuel also took the time to talk to younger children who would ask questions and explain his disability. "From that point on, it's like I had a story to tell, and that's what I wanted to do and what I've wanted to do since."

Samuel attended a school in Colorado for students with disabilities from kindergarten to grade 12. He stated, "Growing up in our neighbourhood, we would occasionally put on shows in

our backyard and basement, and I was the one always directing the shows.” A new teacher, Jenny Schuster (pseudonym), joined the faculty when he was in eighth grade and wanted to produce a play with the students. Samuel explained, “She had to go through the administration to get everybody’s approval. Apparently, the principal wasn’t on board at all, but she got all the teachers to back her.” The first show they put on was *Oliver!* Samuel explained that he had seen the movie a few years prior and decided to audition. He was cast as the Artful Dodger. By the closing curtain of the first performance, Samuel knew that he had found his calling.

Every spring, the school would put on a musical, such as *Guys and Dolls*, *South Pacific*, and *Oklahoma!*. Samuel participated in every show during his time in school from eighth grade on. When describing his teacher, he said, “Jenny was so good at her job because we were getting acting classes through the rehearsal process, and it never felt like a class. That’s what made it so much fun.” Samuel credits Jenny for so much that has happened in his life, and he has been friends with her since graduating.

Finding Purpose. Throughout our conversations, Samuel expressed that by eighth grade he had become bored with school and did not feel he had a purpose. “I wasn’t scholastically that strong, and I was lazy when it came to school. There were things that I didn’t like about that school because it was a school for people with disabilities. . . . I was dealing with so much and the disability was one minor part of it,” he explained. He described that at that point in his life, he didn’t like who he was and called his adolescence “hell.” He stated:

I was looking for some direction. . . . I was always challenging my teachers. The ones that I got away with a lot of stuff from were the teachers that were not inspiring me. . . . I had teachers that took a lot of my crap, and I resented them for that. A lot. I realized later on why I resented them was because I needed direction and I needed a purpose, and I

needed someone to push me to figure out what it was that I needed from school and why I was there.

It was at this point, when he was 14, that Samuel decided to audition for *Oliver!*, discovered his love of theatre, and never looked back. He mentioned that by the time he entered Grade ten, he had started turning around. “I was now focused on building my grades up and completing high school.” He added, “It wasn’t until the theatre program started that I actually found a purpose in school again.”

Because of his involvement in theatre and participating in the school musicals every year, Samuel was motivated to work on his grades and was able to find himself. He explained, “If I wanted to act, I had to be in school. If I had to be in school, I had to have the grades that were at least good enough to audition for the shows. . . . The theatre program was the one that was pushing me to succeed.” He also knew that he wanted to pursue theatre after high school. After a performance of *South Pacific*, one of his teacher’s professors who had attended the show asked Samuel to come study with him. While Samuel was excited about the opportunity, his family was not as enthused. Rather than go to college, Samuel decided to start working as it was the other thing he enjoyed aside from theatre.

Samuel eventually did attend college for drama. He told me, “had I gone [to college] for any other reason, I would have failed.” He has continued to act and direct. He feels fortunate to have found his niche at a young age and to have been able to pursue it as a career. He exclaimed, “I can’t imagine not being a part of theatre for the rest of my life. . . . It’s going to sound cliché, but if I were to die in a theatre, that would be the best way to go for me! . . . It’s my happy place. I like it there.”

Exploring Identity. In our first interview, Samuel had explained that when he was in school, he liked acting because he could be someone else. I asked him why it was appealing to him to play a different character. He answered:

Because I didn't like who I was. Honestly! . . . Sexuality was also a big thing for me. . . . That period of my life was very confusing, and I had no one to go to because I didn't know anybody else that was gay or even bisexual. I think I felt very alone during that time. Playing a different character, it didn't matter what their orientation was. It was just creating a backstory using whatever method you used. . . . I got to step away from Samuel and be somebody else.

Samuel acknowledged that most teenagers struggle with a sense of identity. "There's so much going on in your head. . . . That constant Jekyll and Hyde going through your body. One minute you love everything, the next you hate everything." Now, having graduated high school and having had some time for reflection, Samuel has realized that taking on the various roles wasn't only about playing someone else, but also exploring facets of his own identity. "I was being this character through my own body," he explained. We discussed his various roles and how he saw elements of himself in these characters. In the case of the Artful Dodger from *Oliver!*, Samuel described him in his monologue as "incorrigible." He laughed and explained that many of his classmates and teachers would have used that word to describe him. "I was an inquisitive child," he explained. "When adults find a child that ask a lot of questions, I think that they think they're troublemakers." He quoted the famous line: "'I fought the law and the law won.' That's basically how I felt because I was fighting everything." His favourite role in high school was as Emile de Becque in *South Pacific*. Samuel also found a lot of similarities between himself and that character, stating:

He was a very romantic man and I've always thought of myself that way. I think by the time that I got to play that role, I had grown a lot as a person, and this was a character that I wanted to play because I understand that romanticism that he has for life and for other people. He always looked at everything very positively and very passionately.

Though Samuel mentioned that he struggled with finding purpose and figuring out his identity, he made it clear that his disability was only a minor part of it. I asked him how his disability made him feel while he was growing up. He answered, "I had mixed feelings about it. There were times when it didn't bother me, and then other times when it really bothered me." After reflecting on his life and his experiences in high school, Samuel concluded that he wouldn't change anything about his life and felt that drama and his disability helped him become the person he is today:

I honestly believe if it hadn't been for the disability, I probably wouldn't be the person I am today. . . . I think at 13 I didn't want to be disabled, but that was again that whole adolescent thing going on. Now, I really am grateful for all the opportunities I've had throughout life because of the disability.

Connection with Teacher. When discussing the theatre program at his high school, Samuel gave credit to his teacher, Jenny Schuster, for helping him find his love of theatre. He told the story of his first performance of *Oliver!* and how Jenny helped him:

I remember opening night, which I'll never forget. There's a song when the Artful Dodger and Oliver first meet in the streets of London, and I'm supposed to start the song "Consider Yourself." Well I started singing—in my head I'm singing it—but nothing is coming out of my voice. . . . [Jenny] could see my lips were moving but she's not hearing

anything. She smiled and she mouths to me, “Louder.” I just started belting out the song, and it was like someone opened a door. That’s the only way I can explain it.

I asked him more about Jenny and how she influenced him in high school. “I would say probably the way she impacted me the most was that her passion had become my passion,” he answered.

But Samuel also valued Jenny for other ways she impacted his time at high school. “Because of her, so much has happened in my life,” he stated. At age 16 Samuel gained a new respect for Jenny, thanks to an incident in his choir class, which she also taught. After being accused of talking in class, he was thrown out and threatened with the possibility of failing the class. He explained:

I begged her to let me do something to let me make it up. She finally came up with the game plan and gave me a homework assignment to write about musical theatre. That was so incredible! I spent so many hours researching the history of musical theatre. . . . I was getting books from the library. . . and I was determined to write the best paper I could. I got an A on the paper and wound up getting a C overall. I was so relieved! I could live with a C. . . . Thank God for second chances! That was where I probably developed my respect for her. . . . I argued my case and was able to at least get her to see that I wanted to make it up somehow. Given that opportunity, I was so grateful.

After that incident, Samuel became closer with Jenny and felt comfortable with her. He described her as a best friend at times and would seek her comfort in challenging times. In his senior year, Samuel’s cousin whom he was close to passed away. When he went to school that day, Samuel asked his homeroom teacher if he could go see Jenny. He continued:

Jenny was in there getting papers ready for a show that we were getting ready to do. I just broke down. I cried for probably 30 minutes non-stop. . . . She excused me from class,

and I spent the next 45 minutes in the bathroom just trying to pull myself together. It was because of her that I was able to. I'm so grateful that she was there that morning when I needed someone. . . . That's why I say we developed a really strong friendship.

For Samuel, Jenny "was truly an inspiration. Her passion—I picked up on it immediately! It became my driving force because I found. . . a passion for being in school again." When discussing her passion, he said that Jenny enjoyed directing and teaching. "I think she just wanted to showcase the talents of people with disabilities. Maybe there was a purpose, I'm not even sure if that was her goal, but it turned out to be!" Samuel and Jenny created a bond during his time in high school. They are still friends today and talk on a regular basis.

Peers as Family. While he was close with his teacher during high school, Samuel also bonded with his friends that were in the theatre program. When talking about his peers, he stated:

I had my friends at school, who were all disabled. When you're a student, you never know what anybody else's disabilities are. We never questioned each other. . . . We were just teenagers, and just trying to live like teenagers. If you had asked us about music, then we could have gone on and on about songs and groups. But we never knew about each other's disabilities because it was never a topic.

Samuel mentioned that he was with the same peers throughout high school, and with some for much longer. "Most of us had met in the first grade on. . . . We all knew one another or rode the bus to or from school." Throughout our conversation Samuel often referred to his peers as his family. "They were everything to me!" he exclaimed. He added that it was the theatre program that brought them together:

I got to be close with a lot of them. Even students that were older than me. We have to remember this was grades 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 that were all involved in the theatre

program. Some of these students were much older than me. . . . Just a real kinship with all of them.

Samuel also reflected on antics that would happen backstage and how those experiences were sometimes more fun than the actual performances. “I was always the class clown, if you will, in the wings or in the dressing room of the theatre. . . . That’s probably the thing I enjoyed the most offstage,” he mentioned. He spoke fondly of his time in school and said that his friends were “everything” to him. He concluded, “It’s not just about the people you grow up with from childhood. A family is a group of people that love you unconditionally. That’s what it was for those of us that went to school together. We were a family.”

As Samuel talked about theatre, he reminisced how everyone worked together closely during the process of putting on a show. After being with his peers for so long and connecting with them, they became a big part of his life. “I still feel a strong connection with the people that I went to school with, even though we don’t see each other as often. I still remember everyone, and I think that speaks volumes.” Thirteen years after graduating, Samuel and a few friends from high school came together to start a theatre company for people with disabilities. He claimed that family, in every sense of the word, has been the driving force behind the theatre company.

Moving Beyond Disability. Samuel often mentioned the “magic of theatre” and called it empowering to act, especially as someone with a physical disability. He described acting with his friends in school and explained:

I think we all shared the same passion and drive to be the best we could be on stage, because we didn’t want people to feel sorry for us. . . . We weren’t doing it for pity’s sake, we were doing it for pride.

Samuel believed that this was what his teacher wanted to accomplish. “I think she just wanted to feel a part of something big. Theatre’s big!” he said.

To illustrate what he meant, Samuel told a story about when his family came to see him in his first show, *Oliver!*, and how it impacted his sister. He explained:

She sat through the first act crying the entire time because all she was seeing were kids with disabilities. In the second act, she was spellbound. My mom said she would not move because she was so caught up in the story that she didn’t move. She was on her feet before anybody when the show was over. That’s the power of theatre. She looked past the disabilities. She looked at them, and then because of the storytelling or because of the story, something flipped that switch where now she cared about the show and not about the disability.

He added that everyone supported each other in the theatre program. He stated, “You’re given an opportunity to do something and you have someone there supporting what you are doing, and when it’s all said and done, you can look back and say, ‘We did it. We did a damn good job.’”

Samuel’s Monologue. When I first reached out to Samuel to ask him about participating in this study, I had sent him the link to my website to allow him to get to know more about me. When he replied, he mentioned that he had already been looking at my website, which was forwarded to him by a mutual contact. In his email response, he wrote, “I’ve started writing a response to your question, “what does drama mean to you as someone with a physical disability?”” On my website, I included a blog section, and I decided to take the time to answer the question myself. I was happy to hear that he had already been thinking about it. We discussed the monologue in more detail at the end of our first interview, and he mentioned that he was

almost finished writing. Before our second interview, I received his monologue in an email. At first glance, I noticed that Samuel had included many details that he had told me during our first interview, such as his introduction to drama in school by his teacher, Jenny. During our second interview, we discussed his monologue in some detail, like how he described the character of the Artful Dodger as “incorrigible.” I asked Samuel how he felt about me performing his monologue, and he replied that he thought that would be great. “It would probably be good if you could get a wheelchair,” he suggested.

I began writing down my initial thoughts in a journal and some ideas I had for his monologue before I decided to perform it. In my notes, I wrote:

“I imagine Samuel is speaking in front of a class, or possibly speaking to the company of the theatre he founded. He’s telling a story, which is what drama is about. It’s not a lecture. Rather, he is giving words of encouragement.”

When I reached the end of reading his monologue, I found the final line the most powerful. At the end, Samuel talks about how he’s always been stared at and notices when children point at him. He concludes his monologue by stating, “However, on stage, I’m empowered with the decision to allow people to stare.” I had chills when I first read it, and I was able to connect with that line on a personal level. I also recalled during one of our interviews that Samuel had discussed this idea of inviting the audience to look at him during a performance of *Side Show* he did a few years ago with his theatre company. He explained that the show was all about people looking at people at the circus who are different. In the opening number, he said that each cast member, who all had a disability, would make direct eye contact with an audience member and hold it for about ten seconds. “That was the most empowering thing!” he exclaimed. I knew

when I performed his monologue, I wanted to tap into this emotion. In my notes, I wrote, “It’s being given the choice rather than being an object.”

Before I recorded the monologue, I had my third interview with Samuel. At the end, I mentioned that I would be performing his monologue soon and would be sending the recording to him. I asked if he would be interested in doing an additional interview to provide feedback on my performance and talk through his monologue to better understand his thoughts when writing. He chuckled and replied, “I don’t really give feedback.” He explained that it is up to the actor to create their own interpretation of the piece, which may be different to his interpretation. He recalled a time where he and his friends wrote a play based on themselves and their disabilities, which was performed by other actors. Samuel said that going to see someone else play him and create his own understandings was magical. “I had never met this actor and he knew nothing about me.”

I recorded Samuel’s monologue shortly after our third interview. Unfortunately, I was not able to attain a wheelchair, but I used a regular chair instead. As I was performing his monologue, I knew that I wanted to embody Samuel as a teacher. He had mentioned that he loved teaching, and he even helped me in preparation for this monologue. As he tells his story in his monologue, I felt like Samuel was reflecting back on his memories and how he started out. I wanted it to feel that he was being transported back into the past. In Samuel’s monologue, he does not allude to his wheelchair or disability until near the end. I was curious about this choice, but I included in my notes, “This is not because he is ashamed of his disability. I believe it is because he wanted to make those connections, saying theatre is for everybody and we all roughly go through the same experiences.”

You can see my performance of Samuel's monologue by following this link:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1wVcXkYANHU->

[Gli103phl5PWCudaQF_cz/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1wVcXkYANHU-Gli103phl5PWCudaQF_cz/view?usp=sharing). Please see Appendix A to read Samuel's monologue.

After performing the monologue, I wrote additional notes that described any thoughts that I had changed. For Samuel's monologue, many of my initial thoughts stayed the same. I connected his monologue to my own experiences though, especially the part about being stared at. I could recall being in my wheelchair when I was a teenager when I could not walk long distances and how children and parents would stare at me. When Samuel mentions that in his monologue, I could almost feel myself wanting to shrink down like I did before.

I sent my recording of the performance to Samuel, as well as my notes so he had a better understanding of what I was thinking before the performance. While Samuel did not express interest in completing an additional interview, he did reply back to my email and said, "Very nice."

Cross-Case Analysis

In this chapter I have identified and described different themes for each participant to highlight their specific experiences and thoughts on their drama education in high school. However, there were overarching themes that appeared across participants. Two of the participants identified feeling isolate and excluded. All appreciated that drama provided an opportunity to "escape" into another identity—to be someone else. Another common theme was connection with peers and how they influenced participants' experiences. Finally, each participant noted the significant impact their teachers had on their experience. This section expands on these themes.

Isolation/Exclusion

Though participants reported their time in drama education as enjoyable, there were moments where students felt isolated and excluded from their classes. Both Claire and Leah had similar feelings of being excluded, though in different ways. For Claire, who had been bullied during her time in elementary school, she already felt isolated from her peers and stated that she was shy at the beginning of high school. Group projects were often difficult because peers did not want to work with her and would make excuses as to why she could not join them. Her teacher would often allow Claire to work on assignments on her own until it became common for her to work independently. She also acknowledged that she self-isolated to protect herself from her peers. When I asked her to elaborate, she explained, “I was afraid to ask if I could be in my classmates’ groups and stuff like that because I didn’t want to get any reactions from them in asking, so it was more along the lines of fear.”

Leah, on the other hand, claimed she was never bullied by her peers. She described that some of her best friends were people she met during high school drama. However, she explained that she often felt excluded because her teacher did not give her opportunities to star in a lead role in school shows. Roles that she thought she would be perfect for, such as Tiny Tim in *A Christmas Carol*, went to other people or children from the community. While she was grateful that her teacher allowed her to be part of the shows and drama classes, Leah often felt that she was left in the background. When I asked Leah about this theme of exclusion, she replied, “I think that’s a good word. Obviously, I did theatre, I did all the things that everyone else did, except it was almost like, “This is how much we are going to do with you.””

Opportunity for Escape

Interestingly, each participant stated in their interviews that they enjoyed drama because it allowed them to be someone else. For Claire, she described it as an “escape” from her disability and she was able to express herself freely. Since she had been bullied at a young age, she used drama as a way to escape from those negative experiences. She also described her drama room as a safe space, using it as a meeting space at lunchtime for her club, and calling it a “sanctuary.” Leah similarly stated that she enjoyed drama because she could forget about her disability momentarily and had fun being somebody else. In our final interview, she stated, “I think I spent my high school life trying to be normal and trying to prove that I wasn’t as disabled as the world might see. I think I spent all those years trying to prove that my disability wasn’t going to stop me.” Drama provided her the opportunity to defy the odds and show that she could do most things her peers could do.

Similar to Claire and Leah, Samuel acknowledged that when he was in high school, he enjoyed pretending to be someone else. However, he explained that he never tried to hide his disability. Rather, he used drama as a way to explore his identity, especially his sexuality. By playing various roles, he was able to connect to some of their personality traits, such as the passionate Emile de Becque and the incorrigible Artful Dodger. Samuel also found structure and drive in drama, something that he did not have before. In a way, through his narratives, Samuel seemed to have been escaping his old self, and was able to come out as a new person after his experiences in high school.

Connection with Peers

The participants’ social interactions with peers in their classes were very important to their experiences of high school drama. Leah, for example, was grateful to her friends for

modifying stage directions that would accommodate her disability. She often talked about her and her friends hanging out together backstage or in the drama classroom and laughing together. Samuel had a similar experience, calling his friends from high school his family. He spent many years with the same people and made close connections with them. Even many years after graduating high school, he still keeps in touch with his peers. On the other hand, Claire discussed being bullied and how this affected her time in drama as she did not complete many group projects with her peers. However, through drama, Claire realized that she wanted to make a change and started a club that brought people into the drama room to talk and play games. She had to go outside of her class to find connections, but still found the drama room to be a safe space.

Teacher Support

Teachers played an important role in helping make drama memorable for participants. Many participant stories featured their teachers as supportive and actively inclusive. However, two participants reported ways that teachers did not go above-and-beyond to make them feel included. Claire stated that while her teacher at her first school was nice, she often allowed her to complete assignments alone and did not encourage her to join with the rest of the class. Her second teacher after she moved, however, encouraged her and even praised her monologue early on in the course, calling it one of the best monologues he heard. Similarly, Leah described her drama teacher as “nice” and described getting along with her during high school. After graduating, though, Leah realized that her teacher had not given her the same opportunities as others and felt that her teacher could have done more to make her welcome on the stage. When she described modifications that were done to make a scene, it often involved her peers suggesting changes instead of her teacher. Samuel, on the other hand, included many positive

stories about his teacher, Jenny, who he often turned to during hard times. She was the one who brought drama into his school and often supported his personal growth and development, within and beyond the drama context. It was evident that Samuel accredited Jenny for his love of drama and highly valued the impact she made on his life.

Chapter 5— Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine experiences of students with physical disabilities in high school drama education. Three research questions were used to guide this study:

- a) How have students with physical disabilities experienced high school drama?
- b) What specific experiences were most impactful and why?
- c) What role did teachers play in shaping students' experiences?

In the following chapter I answer these questions by discussing the themes that emerged from the analysis of participant narratives, monologues, and my own autobiographical narratives in relation to existing literature. I also connect the findings to the theoretical frameworks that I used to ground this study, transformative learning theory and critical disability studies. I reflect on my personal reflections on the process of this research. Finally, implications for practice and future research are discussed, as well as the limitations of this research. I conclude by articulating the study's overall significance.

Experiencing Drama Education in High School

All participants described their time in high school drama overall as a generally positive experience. Drama education experiences varied for each participant. For example, Claire only participated in drama classes, while Leah participated in classes as well as extracurricular shows that were put on every spring. Samuel was the only participant who attended a school specifically for students with disabilities, and while there were not any formal drama classes at his school, he participated in his school plays starting in middle school. For Samuel, when asked about any negative experiences he had during drama in high school, he could not think of any, stating that he made lasting friendships and had many opportunities to perform. This aligns with

what Curtin and Clarke (2005) found in their study about inclusion, where participants who attended a special school (as Samuel did) stated that they did not feel excluded or have any negative interactions with peers. As Samuel stated, no one in his school discussed their disabilities and they were “just teenagers, just trying to live like teenagers.” Alternatively, students from Curtin and Clarke’s study who attended mainstream schools found it difficult to make connections with peers in high school and found the transition from elementary to secondary school tough. This finding relates to Claire’s experiences, as she described being shy at the beginning of high school.

For Claire, bullying prior to participating in drama classes contributed to feelings of isolation, and she admitted to occasionally self-isolating from group activities to get away from her peers. While this was not the case for all participants, this fact does line up with studies where participants with disabilities reported being bullied due to their impairments and often self-isolated (e.g., Haegele et al., 2020; Place & Hodge, 2001; Stang et al., 2020). Participants also described other feelings of exclusion, such as not being cast for lead roles. Participants believed that teachers did not choose them for these parts because of their disabilities, which, upon reflection, disheartened them. Multiple studies (e.g., Alves et al., 2018; Blinde & McCallister, 1998; Curtin & Clarke, 2005) support this notion, describing teachers segregating students with disabilities from the rest of their classmates or not offering them the same opportunities as their peers without disabilities

Participants also experienced drama as an escape. Leah, for example, enjoyed pretending to be someone else as a way to forget her disability and have a chance to be “normal.” In their study, Doubt and McColl (2003) similarly found participants trying to mask or draw attention away from their disability. One participant in the study explained, “You start to want people to

know who you really are and not focus on your disability and you're really dead set on people getting to know your personality. . . want people to forget you have a disability" (Doubt & McColl, 2003, p. 145). Participants in this study expressed this notion multiple times, especially when discussing how people would stare at them in public. For Samuel, though, drama was a way to escape his reality and explore identity. By playing different roles during classes and in shows, he was able to connect with the characters and their specific traits. In a study by Mason, Steedly, and Thormann (2008), teachers who used arts integration in their classroom found that students with disabilities were able to explore voice and making choices in their arts practices, allowing them to explore their identities and what makes them unique individuals. This was brought up by Claire, Leah, and Samuel in this study as they became more accepting of themselves after their time in drama.

Memorable Experiences

Many of the stories that were shared by participants centered around the school plays they did and their connections with their peers. Leah and Samuel stated that they participated in every show their schools put on, with Leah adding that she also signed up for every drama class her school offered each year. Participants discussed specific shows they were in, such as Samuel in *South Pacific* and *Oliver!*, and Leah in *Anything Goes* and *A Christmas Carol*. Similarly, in my autobiographical narratives, I reflected on my first music theatre show and how that was the beginning of my love for drama. Participating in big shows was enjoyable for participants and allowed them to play different characters. For Samuel, his first performance was a turning point for him that paved the way for his future in the dramatic arts. Leah also expressed this same sentiment, saying that she knew that she wanted to do drama in the future from a young age. A number of studies (e.g., Doubt & McColl, 2003; Kelly & Viola, 2019; Law et al., 2007) confirm

that actively participating in school activities, such as joining extracurricular clubs, can help students feel integrated into their school community. In the example of Kelly and Viola (2019), students who participated in extracurricular activities had more positive experiences in high school than those who did not.

Participants also revealed that their friends and interactions with peers helped make their time in drama memorable. Each participant stated that they made friends in their drama programs and told anecdotes that involved hanging out with their friends backstage. They found that when they felt supported by their peers, they had a positive experience. This was especially prominent when their peers helped accommodate their disability, such as modifying a prop or set on stage. Asbørnslett et al. (2011) also found this in their study, where participants said that they felt closer with their peers when they had an understanding of their disability and they felt that they could trust their friends. On the other hand, Claire discussed being bullied and how this affected her time in drama as she did not complete many group projects with her peers. A few studies (e.g. Haegele et al., 2020; Place & Hodge, 2001; Stang et al., 2020) confirm that bullying is an issue amongst students with physical disabilities, and often leads to self-isolation. In their study, Place and Hodge (2001) also found that students with physical disabilities completed assignments and activities on their own in a physical education context to avoid negative interactions with peers. However, after realizing she wanted a change, Claire started a club which was held in the drama room, allowing her to make connections in a safe space.

Teacher Influence

The prominent role of the teacher in participants' high school drama education experiences was often mentioned in the interviews with participants, as well as my own autobiographical narrative. Participants stated that they had a good relationship with their

teachers, although some had a closer relationship than others. All three participants were grateful that they had teachers that allowed them to participate in drama in the first place and be cast in shows. This also appeared in the autobiographical narratives as I had stated that my drama teacher allowed me to take part in the music theatre program in my high school. Leah, for example, stated that she was happy that her teacher involved her as much as she did. Samuel, especially, had a close relationship with his teacher, mentioning that he was still close with Jenny long after he graduated.

Encouragement from teachers was a key component for participants to have a positive experience in high school drama. In the autobiographical narratives, I note that my confidence had been built after showing my costume to my drama teacher and he claimed that it was “perfect.” Similarly, looking at Samuel’s story of his first on-stage performance in *Oliver!*, his teacher encouraged him with a smile and signalled for him to project while he was singing. As simple as these actions might have been, they made an impact that is still remembered after graduation. In the case of Leah, her choir teacher impacted her experience in high school as he accommodated her disability and encouraged her to sing solos. Claire also reflected on her teacher at her new high school, remembering that he complimented her monologue, stating that it was “one of the best monologues he had ever heard.” It was clear while she was telling me about this story that Claire remembered that moment with pride. A study by Dymond, Renzaglia, and Chun (2008) sought to find methods for including students with disabilities in high school service-learning programs. Through a focus group with adult stakeholders representing five schools in Illinois, participants agreed that it was important for teachers to encourage their students. Methods of encouraging included open communication with students to find out how

they see themselves being involved in the class, as well as getting to know students and making them feel comfortable with the teacher.

Alternatively, moments appeared in the narratives where participants stated that their teachers had overlooked them or did not give them opportunities to be included in activities. For instance, Leah described her drama teacher as “not a great educator” as she felt that she was often placed in the background during their school shows and felt excluded by her teacher. Leah felt that she was overlooked for lead roles because of her disability. These feelings are also expressed in her monologue as she explains to the people at her audition that she is used to being pushed aside and that people notice her canes before her talent. Claire also felt isolated in her class as her teacher would tell her to complete assignments on her own rather than in groups like the rest of the class. Her feelings of exclusion reflect the findings from Place and Hodge’s (2001) study, which saw students with physical disabilities isolated from the rest of their physical education class, as per the instructions of their teacher. While they seemed fine with the arrangement, participants stated that they did feel left out on occasion.

It is important to note that teachers can powerfully influence the experience of students, as can be seen from these results. Kelly and Viola (2019) similarly found that when students with disabilities had a good relationship with their teachers, they had a positive experience and felt integrated into their school community. Giving students opportunities to perform can help teachers build a better relationship with their students. In the case of Samuel and myself, words of encouragement helped build our confidence. On the other hand, it is not enough to just allow students with disabilities to be part of drama classes. The teacher should help integrate students with physical disabilities in the classroom by allowing them to work with others in the class.

Making modifications such as building accessible sets and allowing students to sit during scenes during shows or classroom activities are also important to help students feel included in classes.

Considering Participant Stories Through the Lens of Transformative Learning

Throughout my interviews with participants, I encouraged them to think about their time in drama and if it was transformative experience for them. The purpose of interviewing people who had already graduated high school was to give them the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and to see if their perspectives had changed, as suggested by Mezirow (2000).

Participants expressed that their time in drama had been transformative in different ways. Drama helped participants transform their ways of being and acting in the world, such as becoming more confident and making friends, or using it to explore their identities. For Samuel and Leah, once they stepped on the stage, they found their passion that helped shape them. Participating in drama seemed to help unravel personal transformations, which aligns with Dirkx's (1998) interpretation of transformative learning. As he describes, transformation should start by understanding self before understanding the world around us. Through drama, participants transformed their ideas about their disabilities, becoming more accepting of themselves. Leah, for example, learned to love herself and stated that she wanted to become an advocate for disabled actors.

Looking at specific stories, I could see that participants had already reflected on their past before our interviews. For example, Samuel acknowledged that when he was in high school, he enjoyed pretending to be somebody else. However, he realized much later that he wasn't pretending—the characters were an extension of himself. He could connect with his characters, such as the Artful Dodger, and how he was "incorrigible." This was something I had not considered in drama, that we can still be ourselves even when trying to portray someone else. It

is our interpretation of the character that is important. I could also identify a transformation in Claire as she discussed her high school experiences of being bullied. She explained that she wanted to change in grade 10 from being shy and isolated, to being more outgoing. This relates to what Mezirow (1997) and Dirkx (1998) say in their explanations, where a particular moment occurs that causes a transformation to happen. Though Claire could not pinpoint an exact moment when she knew she wanted to change, she mentioned that she “had enough” and decided to open up to more people.

An important aspect of transformative learning theory, as emphasized by Kitchenham (2008), is reflecting on past experiences. Through our conversations, I could see that participants were reflecting on their experiences and discovering new things. For instance, Leah had believed her high school drama teacher to be a nice person, but during our interviews, she stated, “I think that if she were really a good teacher, she would have tried to do more things to include us all.” She had begun wondering if she didn’t get larger roles because of her disability. Dirkx (1998) comments that transformation can occur while talking with another individual or reading a book and connecting with a particular passage. Indeed, participants reflected on their experiences and looked at things in a different way. During our final interview, I had asked participants if the process of discussing their stories was transformative. Leah and Samuel had said that it was transformative for them, saying that they were able to reflect on that time and make realizations on things that might not have been perfect during that time, or how much they realized how much drama actually means to them. Claire, while acknowledging that the interviews brought back a lot of memories, said that they were not transformative. A reason for this could be the different level of interest in drama between Claire and the other participants. While Leah and Samuel spoke passionately about drama and discussed their endeavors after high school, Claire

did not seem to have the same enthusiasm. Though she enjoyed drama in school, she did not wish to pursue it further. A possible explanation could be her experiences with bullying and working alone during class activities. Claire did admit, however, that she found drama to be a creative outlet, and she preferred it over other arts classes. In addition, during interviews, Claire would admit to not remembering specific details, which may have been another reason for not finding the interviews transformative.

The examples of transformation above link to Mezirow's (2000) phases of transformation. All of them began with a disorienting dilemma, such as Leah being overlooked for parts because of her disability, which she realized through our interviews. In Samuel's case, his dilemma was that he felt like he had no direction or purpose in his life during school. Participants also experienced moments of self-reflection and critical assessment, such as why Samuel felt like he did not have direction or why Leah was being overlooked for roles. Mezirow also details that action needs to be taken, such as planning a course of action and acquiring knowledge and skills. Through our conversations, I could see Leah had become interested in signing up for different groups, such as improv and dance, as a way to continue in drama and prove that she could be on stage with a disability. Samuel's course of action was to take part in drama and build his relationship with his teacher. The final phases of transformation include feelings of confidence and reintegrating with new perspectives gained through the transformation. Samuel used his time in drama to explore his identity which led him to feeling comfortable with who he was and accepting himself. Leah's new perspective and reintegration involved her realizing that she wanted to become an advocate for actors with disabilities and finding ways of spreading a positive message.

As I finished interviews with participants, I took a step back to think of my transformations through the duration of this research. Many of my frames of reference centered around my own experiences, and I had hoped that most people with disabilities would have had positive memories of drama education as well. I can say that I experienced transformation through this study as these stories made me aware of how people with disabilities might not have the same opportunities as everyone else. I could see potential for future transformations in the drama world through participant monologues. As Lawrence (2008) writes, the use of art can cause a transformation or emphasize it. Participants stated that while writing the monologues, they were basing it off of their own experiences in drama, during and after high school. The experiences were very personal to them. When I performed the monologues, I could connect with some of the words and base them on my own experiences. I also reflected on my own experiences, using autobiographical narrative, and realized how much influence a teacher can have on a student's experience and their confidence. These transformations are important to bring into my future teaching, as I can use them to understand my students, as well as change previous perceptions when I gain new or different understandings, which will allow me to continually grow.

Considering Participant Stories Through the Lens of CDS

Similar to transformative learning theory, I wanted to ask my participants about their disabilities and their perceptions of them. When I was younger, I would try to hide my disability and to not bring attention to myself, which made me shy and introverted. I felt like teachers only saw me for my disability and tried to protect me from getting injured. Through drama in high school, I finally felt seen beyond my arthritis and became more confident. During this study, I was able to find a voice to explain my feelings, and how I used to think the term "disability" was

a negative word. One of the critiques of CDS is that there are few accounts about the experiences of people who actually live with a disability (Goodley et al., 2019; Vehmas & Watson, 2014).

This study aimed to give a voice and listen to the stories about drama and disabilities.

Participants reported that, at some point in their life, they had wished they did not have a disability and did not want the attention from strangers. This seemed to be prevalent when the participants were children and growing into adolescence. They did not appreciate strangers staring at them or asking questions. There were also cases of bullying that affected participants' wellbeing. It made them question if their disability was the reason they were not getting the same opportunities as everyone else. As discussed earlier, every participant stated that they enjoyed drama because they could be somebody else and pretend they did not have a disability. This was something I could relate to in my own experiences, as expressed in my autobiographical narrative, "When the Shoe Fits," when I described that the modification to my shoe made my limp better and that I felt "normal."

The participants stated that as they grew older, and often once they were out of high school, participants stated that they started to accept their disability and that it helped them shape who they were. I could agree with Samuel when he said that without his disability, he might not have been interested in drama. An overarching theme of perseverance appeared throughout the narratives and monologues, showing that participants wanted to fight to be included and be treated like everyone else. Using these personal stories from participants can help critical disability studies by sharing with others and influence how society treats and perceives people with disabilities.

Along the same lines as transformative learning theory, my original opinions were changed during the process of this research. One such example occurred during my interview

with Samuel as I asked him, “What were some ways that you have overcome your disability?”

Samuel explained that “overcome” was not the right term and that no one can really overcome their disability; rather they adapt and make the world work for them. This was a revelation for me as it made me consider the term more thoughtfully. “Overcome” could imply that someone is trying to fix their disability rather than embrace it and modify their surroundings. The monologues also caused a transformation for me and my understanding of disability. Leah’s monologue gave me hope that by talking about our experiences, there could be a change in theatre to make it more inclusive for disabled actors. Rather than fighting people who say, “you can’t do this,” you can invite them to collaborate and break boundaries. Samuel’s monologue resonated with me in his final words, inviting people to look at him rather than being the object of stares and being insecure. This is an opportunity for people with disabilities to have autonomy over who gets to stare and how it affects them.

Personal Reflections

When I began this research, I used my personal experiences as a guide to determine what I wanted to ask in my study. During my high school years, I was the only one in my drama and music theatre classes who had a physical disability. I had a positive experience during that time and made some of my closest friends. My teacher encouraged me to continue in drama every year, and even after graduating, we still talk and reminisce. However, I realized that my experiences would not be the same as someone else with a physical disability.

Reflecting on the interviews with participants and looking at the notes in my personal journal, I could see many similarities between my experiences and theirs. Participants had expressed that they enjoyed drama because they could be somebody else. As Claire mentioned, it was an escape from her disability. This resonated with me as I used to dislike bringing any

attention to my disability and deformities, and often pretended that they did not exist. As Leah and Samuel stated in their monologues, I was used to having people stare at me, and it made me uncomfortable to have so much attention on me. In Samuel's final line in his monologue, he says, "However, on stage, I'm empowered with the decision to allow people to stare." This was a revelation for me because it made it seem like people with disabilities had a choice to be the object of attention and they could either hide from it or embrace their differences. Working on this research, I have become more vocal about my disability and experiences.

Like my participants, I made friendships through my drama education that have lasted long after graduation. I found myself laughing as participants told me about inside jokes they had with friends or pranks they pulled backstage during rehearsals. It reminded me of my time being in musical theatre. Some of my fondest memories revolve around those moments, as Samuel also expressed during one of his interviews. I was fortunate that I had never been bullied during my school years, and I had friends that included me in everything they did.

Similar to Leah, though, I felt I was overlooked for some roles because I walked differently. As showcased during one of my autobiographical narratives, "The Witch," my music director expressed that while I had a good voice, I would be better suited for roles that might call for someone with a limp. This made me question if I could have gotten a lead role if I did not have my disability. Leah also reflected on this, saying that through our conversations, she wondered if she did not get the roles that she wanted because she could not dance like the others or had to have accommodations. This made me wonder if this is usually the case for students with physical disabilities and if teachers choose other students because they look the part. I appreciated Leah's line in her monologue, where she states, "Let's think outside the box

together!” It made me consider my future teaching practices and how I would want to work with students with disabilities to change the way people see drama and how we can break boundaries.

Thinking about my own drama teacher, I had a great relationship with him during my high school years. He made it known that he cared about all his students and ensured that we were doing well. My teacher made a huge impact on my life, influencing me to become a teacher like him. I can still recall us sitting in our drama classroom in a circle, singing to “Hey Jude” by the Beatles while he played his guitar. Like Samuel, I am still friends with my drama teacher to this day. However, I could relate to stories told by Claire and Leah about liking their drama teachers because they were nice, but not seeing them as great educators. I have had teachers in my past that only made me feel seen for my disability. It was not until high school that I felt people seeing me as the person beyond my disability and gave me the opportunity to perform.

Before my interviews, I answered my own question, “What does drama mean to you as someone with a physical disability?” In my writing, I stated:

For me, drama shaped my identity. It allowed me to become somebody else, and yet let me be myself. . . . Yes, I could pretend to be another person and embody that role, but the actual space where we created drama, I was free to be weird and outgoing.

I believe this was an over-arching message from participants: we felt at one point or another that we could be ourselves in the drama room and build our confidence. I found that I could identify with my participants in different ways. Like Claire, I had been shy and found drama as an escape, a place where I could be myself with no judgement. I understood the feelings of being overlooked, like Leah, and just wanting a chance to be in the spotlight. Samuel was grateful for his teacher, Jenny, for coming into his life and introducing drama to his school; I thank my drama teacher all the time for giving me a chance in grade nine. In my response, I concluded,

“To me, [drama] means freedom. It means hope. It means that I’ve been given a chance, which is all I ever wanted when I was growing up.”

Looking back at this question after all the interviews and finishing my work, I realize that my thinking has transformed through talking with my participants. I would still say that drama is a way to express and explore identity, but I would also go beyond. To me, drama means connection. Connection to self, to peers, to teachers, and even to disability. Most people will say that they long for connections, and through drama we can explore that. I realize that the participants in this study used drama to find connection in some way. All three found connections with peers and connections to their own identities. In future research, it might be worth looking into how people with disabilities find connection through drama in school and the influences of those connections.

Implications for Practice

One intention of this study was to share the voices of students with physical disabilities so that their stories of experiences might influence the way teachers instruct drama education in high school. Based on the results, it is apparent that teachers can heavily influence the experience of their students. Inclusion in the classroom is important for students, as can be seen in previous studies mentioned in chapter 2 (e.g., Alves, Grenier, Haegele, & Duarte, 2018; Asbjørnslett, Engelsrud, & Helseth, 2014; Curtain & Clarke, 2005; Place & Hodge, 2001), as well as the participant interviews. Participants were grateful to have the opportunity to participate in drama classes and school shows. Teachers should make their classrooms welcoming and safe for all students and promote students with disabilities to take part as well, and not only secondary or supporting roles; students with disabilities need to be given opportunities to perform in leading roles. Teachers should ensure that their classes truly include and are accessible for all learners.

Students also look for encouragement from their teachers. This could include positive affirmations such as, “Great performance” or, “I liked the way you did this.” In my own experience, when teachers encouraged me, I felt a better sense that I belonged in the classroom. Participants also echoed this sentiment, stating that when teachers gave them encouragement, they felt more connected to the class. Building trust is also just as important between teachers and students. When students trusted their teachers, their confidence improved, and they felt comfortable being in their classrooms.

To avoid students from feeling excluded, teachers should encourage them to work in groups rather than isolate them by making them work on assignments on their own. As noted in this study, by working in groups, participants were able to build social connections with their classmates and work on their communication skills in the drama classroom. Activities or assignments may need to be modified to accommodate students with disabilities, such as using certain props during a scene. Teachers should also give opportunities for students with physical disabilities to perform onstage during school shows or skits in classes. For works in drama classes, teachers could rotate leads when reading plays, giving everyone an equal opportunity to perform. It would also be helpful to hear what students are thinking and give them an opportunity to voice particular roles they may want to play, which the teacher could take into consideration. Based on participant responses, students mentioned that they thought they were overlooked for roles because of their disabilities. Educators should build trust with students so the students can voice these concerns and help inform teachers’ practices.

Implications for Future Research

As there is little research in this area, this study can be used as a starting point in examining students with physical disabilities in drama education. By listening to the voices of

participants, researchers are able to have a better understanding on the benefits and challenges people with physical disabilities face in high school. This study also adds to the literature about inclusion in school and students with disabilities.

The use of monologues can also be adapted as a data collection method for future research. While using monologues is not new in educational research (Carter, 2010; Schonmann & Kempe, 2010), it proved an effective tool in this study that allowed participants to express their inner thoughts and think creatively about the question that was given to them. Researchers who are interested in using monologues might want participants to perform their work themselves to see their own interpretations. They could also have multiple people perform the monologues to gather different interpretations and new insights. Alternatively, like me, researchers may wish to perform the monologues themselves, and use the artistic processes of embodiment and interpretation to gain understanding of their participants' experiences.

Limitations of Study

Participants ranged between the ages of 23-62 in this study. The purpose of this research was to have participants reflect on their time in high school and how their experiences had transformed them into the people they are today. While many participants could remember specific moments from high school, there were times where they expressed they could not remember specific details because so much time had passed. Though member checking was used to confirm that narratives and facts were accurate, certain details could have been missed which might have added to themes. Future research could seek participants who are currently in high school or who have graduated within the last two years, for example, which may help to provide more detail into experiences.

In addition, each participant explained that they attended schools that were either located in smaller towns or had small populations. Leah had mentioned in one of our interviews that her experiences and outcomes might have been different if she had attended a bigger school or lived in a bigger city. Going forward, researchers may be interested in finding participants from larger cities or schools to determine if that makes a difference in student experience in drama.

Researchers could also increase the number of participants included in the study to compare different experiences and possibly uncover new themes.

Since this study also examined my personal stories, it is important to acknowledge potential bias. As stated in chapter 3, I tried to keep my thoughts separate from those of the participants by writing them in a journal. However, themes could have been over-emphasized and drawn to focus as they would have been present in my own experiences. Future researchers may want to take a step back from this personal connection to the study to confirm themes and possibly expand on the ideas mentioned.

Conclusion

This study stemmed from personal experiences and a curiosity to know how other students with physical disabilities experienced drama education in high school. Through the use of interviews and monologues, I sought to give people a voice to talk about their experiences and reflect on their memories. By working on this study, I felt that I was able to find my own voice and become vocal about my disability. The interviews showed that students with physical disabilities want to be included and given the same opportunities as their non-disabled peers and look for encouragement from their teachers and friends. It gave participants a sense of purpose and a creative outlet to be themselves. They were able to build confidence and create lasting friendships that made lasting memories.

It is important for teachers to hear from students and read experiences like the ones presented in this study. As a drama teacher myself, I hope to give opportunities to all my students and create a safe space in my classroom. These stories hopefully show the importance of encouragement and how teachers can impact the experiences of their students. In my personal experience, I saw my confidence falter after receiving one negative comment from my musical director. Teachers should be able to read the results of this study and see the importance of inclusion in their teaching practices. Hopefully, it will also allow them to communicate with their students, whether they have a disability or not, and determine how they can positively influence their students' high school experiences.

I hope this study will allow others to speak up about their experiences and help change the way we think about drama and disabilities. Like Leah wrote in her monologue, "Let's break down walls and change theatre together!" As the drama world is constantly changing, there are more opportunities from disabled actors, such as Ali Stroker, a physically disabled Broadway actor. During her speech, after winning the Tony award in 2019 for best actress in a featured role in a musical for her portrayal of Ado Annie in *Oklahoma!*, Stroker exclaimed (as cited in Andrew & Ahmed, 2019), "This award is for every kid watching tonight who has a disability, who has a limitation or a challenge, who has been waiting to see themselves represented in this arena. You are."

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Appendix A – Monologues

Leah's Monologue

When I walk in the room,
You the table of people will probably wonder what I am doing here,
Here. Here I stand in this spotlight before you.
I'm here because the acting bug doesn't choose who its bitten.
And I'm a sad case for sure because I live in a world where disabled actors aren't even hired for the disabled roles.
The allure of acting has been described as a primal urge that allows people to put on a mask of sorts and do things they normally wouldn't do.
And I'm brave enough to go out and prove that I can be Maggie the Cat from a hot tin roof because I think as a disabled person playing Maggie, I can show that I love. That I am sexy. I am the same as the next actress coming into audition.
Sure, all you see are my canes and how I don't "fit" the part.
Why can't this character have a disability?
Why can't that be part of the story?
Let's think outside the box together!
Let's break down walls and change theatre together.
Let's Collaborate together!
I'm used to people looking at me because they felt sorry for me, just like you are now but get ready to look at me like a star!

Theatre is about no limits so why are you putting limits on me?
Think of all the shows in this business who talk about the underdog.
So many roles of characters who won't let the world get them down; who don't apologize for who they are.
These stories we tell on this stage about the underdog getting their time to shine:
So, like Funny girl *"Don't tell me not to fly — I've simply got to. If someone takes a spill, it's me and not you."*
Like Once *"You have suffered enough and warred with yourself, it's time that you won."*
Like Wicked I say *"everyone deserves a chance to fly"*
Like Jekyll and Hyde *"This is the moment, when all I've done — all the dreaming, scheming and screaming, become one!"*
Like Hamilton *"I'm not throwing away my shot, I'm a diamond in the rough, a shiny piece of coal, tryin' to reach my goal."*
Like the Newsies I am here to *"Seize the Day"*
Like Waitress *"To fight just a little, to bring back the fire in her eyes"*
and in the movie greatest showmen *"I'm not afraid to be seen this is me"*

Samuel's Monologue

Drama means the same for everyone, with or without a disability. It's an opportunity to role-play before a "live" audience while portraying a character through storytelling. In doing so, for the actor with a disability, it is the opportunity to free oneself of the stigmas of being seen as a "disabled" person.

As a baby boomer, I watched a lot of television growing up and more specifically numerous variety shows and TV specials. Most of these shows were taped before a live audience. After long hours of rehearsals over a few days, the performers would showcase his/her talent in a near-perfect performance.

At the age of fourteen, I auditioned for the school's first musical play. Jenny Schuster was hired as the new music teacher and persuaded the faculty to allow her to offer a theatrical experience for middle and high schoolers. The musical chosen was *Oliver!*, the story of an orphan in 1830-40 London.

When the cast list was posted I learned that I landed the character of the Artful Dodger, a young, incorrigible and talented pickpocket with a thick Cockney accent. I was ecstatic!

During the rehearsal process, I became a sponge. I work extra hard learning my lines, the accent, and the songs but I also absorbed how the theatre operations worked off stage. It was exhilarating. However, I did start out with a grueling moment of stage-fright. Jenny smiled and mouthed the word "louder" which was enough to kick start my lifelong passion for theatre.

Later, I learned that my older sister spent part of the first act weeping because it was her first time seeing my schoolmates. You see, this was no ordinary education institution it was a public school for children with disabilities. This was so inspiring, not because of the tears but because of the pride she displayed for the performers.

As long as I can remember people have always stared or made comments of pity toward me. I'm a wheelchair user and have both scoliosis and hand deformities. As I grow a bit older, six or seven, I began to resent those adults. Whenever I'd heard a child asking their mom what's wrong with that guy, as they'd point at me, then that parent would yank the arm of this young inquisitive mind so hard I thought it would break.

However, on stage, I'm empowered with the decision to allow people to stare.

Appendix B – Approval Letter From GREB

September 06, 2019

Ms. Nissa Sills
Master's Student
Faculty of Education
Queen's University
Duncan McArthur Hall
511 Union Street West
Kingston, ON, K7M 5R7

GREB Ref #: GEDUC-966-19; TRAQ # 6027401

Title: "GEDUC-966-19 Stories of experience from students with physical disabilities in high school drama: A study of impact"

Dear Ms. Sills:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled **"GEDUC-966-19 Stories of experience from students with physical disabilities in high school drama: A study of impact"** for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPS 2 (2014)) and Queen's ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (Article 6.14) and Standard Operating Procedures (405.001), your project has been cleared for one year. You are reminded of your obligation to submit an annual renewal form prior to the annual renewal due date (access this form at <http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html>) click on "Events;" under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Annual Renewal/Closure Form for Cleared Studies"). Please note that when your research project is completed, you need to submit an Annual Renewal/Closure Form in Romeo/traq indicating that the project is 'completed' so that the file can be closed. This should be submitted at the time of completion; there is no need to wait until the annual renewal due date.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one-year period (access this form at <http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html>) click on "Events;" under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Adverse Event Form"). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example, you must report changes to the level of risk, applicant characteristics, and implementation of new procedures. To submit an amendment form, access the application by at <http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html> click on "Events;" under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Request for the Amendment of Approved Studies." Once submitted, these changes will automatically be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, Ms. Gail Irving, at University Research Services for further review and clearance by the GREB or Chair, GREB.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dean A. Tripp".

Chair, General Research Ethics Board (GREB)
Professor Dean A. Tripp, PhD
Departments of Psychology, Anesthesiology & Urology Queen's University

c: Dr. Benjamin Bolden, Supervisor
Dr. Pamela Beach, Chair, Unit REB
Haven Jerreat-Poole, Dept. Admin.

Appendix C – Letter of Information/Consent Form

Study title: Stories of experience from students with physical disabilities in high school drama:
A study of impact

Name of Principal Investigator: Nissa Sills, Faculty of Education, Queen's University

Name of Supervisor: Dr. Benjamin Bolden, Faculty of Education, Queen's University

I am inviting people with physical disabilities who have had experience in drama during their high school years to take part in this study. The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of students with physical disabilities in drama in high school, with a focus on using stories from participants, emphasizing student voice. If you agree to take part, I will invite you to take part in three interview sessions that will take approximately 45 minutes each at a public location of your choice. If interviewing in person is not possible, we can set up a video call to do the interviews. Time commitment for this study will take approximately 135 minutes (3 interviews taking 45 minutes). Some of the questions may be sensitive and may upset you. If you feel upset after the interview, you can text the Crisis Text Line Canada by texting HOME to 686868 or call the Telephone Aid Line Kingston (TALK) at 613-544-1771. There are not direct benefits to you as a participant, but study results will help inform educators and other students how people with physical disabilities experience drama education in high school.

In addition to the interviews, I will be asking you to write a monologue based on the prompt, "what does drama mean to you as someone with a physical disability?" There are no limitations in terms of content or length of the monologue. More information will be given during the first interview. The monologue would be given to me during the second interview. This portion of the study is optional.

Participation is voluntary. You don't have to answer any questions you don't want to. You can stop participating at any time without penalty. You may withdraw from the study up Dec. 31, 2019 by contacting me at 1lnkas@queensu.ca. You may also request to have your data withdrawn from the study up until Dec. 31, 2019 by contacting me at 1lnkas@queensu.ca.

Your confidentiality will be protected, to the extent permitted by applicable laws. I will do this by replacing your name with a pseudonym in all publications. The study data will be stored on an encrypted hard drive. I will keep your data securely for at least five years per Queen's University Policy, after which the data will be deleted and destroyed from the hard drive. The Queen's University General Research Ethics Board (GREB) may see your study data for quality assurance purposes. I will be the only one to have access to this data.

I plan to publish the results of this study in academic journals and present them at conference. I will include quotes from some of the interviews when presenting my findings. I will never

include any real names with quotes. I will do my best to make sure quotes do not identify participants. During the interviews, please let me know if you say anything you do not want me to quote.

If you have any ethics concerns please contact the General Research Ethics Board (GREB) at 1-844-535-2988 (toll free in North America) or chair.GREB@queensu.ca.

If you have any questions about the research, please feel free to contact Dr. Benjamin Bolden at ben.bolden@queensu.ca or 613-533-6000 ext. 77762.

This Letter of Information provides you with the details to help you make an informed choice. All your questions should be answered to your satisfaction before you decide whether or not to participate in this research study. Keep one copy of the Letter of Information for your records and return one copy to the researcher, Nissa Sills. You have not waived any legal rights by consenting to participate in this study.

Consent

By signing below, I am verifying that: I have read the Letter of Information and all of my questions have been answered.

- ☐ Yes, you have my permission to audio record
☐ No, you do not have my permission to audio record

- ☐ Yes, you have my permission to use quotes
☐ No, you do not have my permission to use quotes

_____ Signature of Participant/ Substitute Decision-Maker	_____ PRINTED NAME	_____ Date
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_____ Signature of Person Conducting	_____ PRINTED NAME & ROLE	_____ Date
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Appendix D – Recruitment Email

Hello,

My name is Nissa Sills and I am a Master of Education Student at Queen's University.

I obtained your email address from...

I am conducting a study that examines the experiences of people with physical disabilities during their time in high school drama. I am looking for someone who has already graduated high school, has (or had) a physical disability, and participated in drama either in a curricular or extra-curricular context. I will be interviewing participants about their experiences and about their physical disabilities. If you are interested in participating and would like some more information, please contact me at lnkas@queensu.ca. I have also attached a Letter of Information to this email.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you very much,

Nissa Sills
Faculty of Education, Queen's University
lnkas@queensu.ca
519-533-8550

Appendix E – Interview 1 Questions

1. Can you please describe your physical disability and when you were diagnosed? Please provide as much detail as you can.
 - a. How did your physical disability make you feel as you were growing up?
 - b. What are some limitations that you have with your physical disability, if applicable?
 - c. What were some ways that you have overcome your disability, if applicable?
2. When did you start participating in drama? This could be before high school or during high school.
 - a. Why did you become interested in participating in drama?
 - b. What does drama mean to you as someone with a physical disability?
3. In what context did you participate in drama in high school? (i.e. drama class; extra-curricular)
4. What were some opportunities for you in your high school drama experience?
 - a. Please describe a positive experience during your time in high school, if applicable.
5. What were some barriers or challenges during your high school drama experience?
 - a. Please describe a negative experience during your time in high school, if applicable.
6. In what ways did your teachers influence your high school drama experience?
7. In what ways did your peers influence your high school drama experience?
8. How did your time in drama during high school shape you into the person you are today?
 - a. Do you still participate in drama in any context now that you have graduated?
 - b. Do you believe your time in drama during high school was a transformative experience for you? Please explain.
9. How did your time in drama during high school change the way you see yourself?
 - a. If it didn't, why did your self-perception stay the same?
10. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your experiences of drama in high school?

Participants will be given more information about the monologues and will be asked if they would like to participate in this activity or not.

Appendix F – Interview 2 Questions

(This interview discussed themes that were found during the first interview and differed for each participant):

1. What were some themes that you believe came up in our last conversation?
2. I identified themes of... How do you believe these themes accurately reflect your high school experience in drama?
 - a. What are some themes that you believe are the most important for you and why?
 - b. What are some themes that believe are inaccurate and why?
3. Why do you believe these themes appeared? Please provide extra context if necessary.
4. How do these themes make you feel now that you have graduated from high school?
 - a. Are some of these themes still relevant to you today? If so, which ones?
5. What are some additional stories or experiences that you feel are important to share to reflect your experiences in drama during high school?

Appendix G – Interview 3 Questions

(The final interview discussed the initial retellings and narratives that I have written between the second and third interviews):

1. How does this narrative accurately reflect your experiences?
2. What are some ways to improve the narrative? Are any details missing or misinterpreted?
3. What are some new insights that you have gained from reading this narrative?
4. After reading this narrative, would you change anything about your high school experience in drama if you were able to? If so, what would you change?
5. How has this process of participating in this study changed you, if applicable?

Appendix H – Interview 4 Questions: Leah

1. What were your original thoughts and interpretations when writing your monologue?
2. Do you believe my performance reflected your original interpretations? How so?
3. What did you enjoy about the way I performed your monologue? Why?
4. What were some new insights you had from watching my performance of your monologue, if applicable?
5. What would you have me do differently if I performed your monologue again?