TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AN ARTS PROGRAM: RULES! RULES! @#$&*#% RULES- WHEN DO WE GIVE UP ON A CHILD IN THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM?

A Dissertation

by

CORY L. ARCAK

Submitted to the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Chair of Committee,	Lynn M. Burlbaw
Committee Members,	Booker Stephen Carpenter, II
	Gwendolyn Webb-Hasan
	Jeffrey Winking
Head of Department,	Michael DeMiranda

December 2019

Major Subject: Curriculum and Instruction

ABSTRACT

This year long project was designed to provide children in the foster care and juvenile justice systems with a way to express themselves through art created under the constraints of institutional boundaries. Youth in a Central Texas residential treatment center (RTC) were provided with opportunities and materials to express themselves through their own artistic creations; paintings, sculpture, performance, while engaging with local community arts spaces and adults that served as teachers, but were not formally trained as teachers. These "teachers" consisted of a combination of RTC staff, RTC volunteers, and local artists. Due to institutional constraints, I was unable to interview and research the youth directly. Access to the youth was only available through these teachers and the RTC administrators.

Using an autoethnographic research methodology, I conducted open-ended interviews, made observations, and detailed personal reflections of the implementation of an arts-informed, community supported arts program called the TreeHouse project. This research was conducted in an effort to address the problem of the lack of representation, space, and method for the "voice" of children in the juvenile justice and foster care systems.

As a result of this study, a set of themes emerged that offer additional insight into autoethnographic research, residential treatment centers, the youth in the RTCs, and the perceptions of the teachers during the implementation of the TreeHouse Project. The three primary themes identified through this research were the constructing or keeping of

distance, a crisis of ego and self-discovery. These thematic explorations offer possibilities about the significance of this study and its implications for future research. They lend the stage to the proleptic moment when some of the teachers were able to reflect and understand how their own behavior was hindering the healing of the youth in their care.

DEDICATION

To Andrew, Arthur, the “Golden Girls,” and all the youth living in and beyond the system. Only you know how this came to be.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"If you are brave enough to live it, the least I can do is listen" Cynthia Bond

When one embarks on a task that has the capacity to challenge a soul intellectually, emotionally, and at times spiritually, it is a task that indeed takes a team. While it may be a singular exercise dependent on the fortitude of one individual, it is the team that supplies the fuel to keep the engine moving forward.

There is one soul more than others that has illuminated my path reminding me that even though we may not be shoulder to shoulder on a physical plane, our power to inspire, encourage, and to remind us of why we are doing what we are doing transcends understanding. Thank you for your light Arthur, the light that shown in your eyes when you were alive and the light that continues to shine reminding us that it is not the length of one's life that matters rather, it is the impact that that life has while it is here. Thank you for impacting me on a cellular level. You have changed me forever.

To Andrew, my eternal sunshine whose mere existence pushes me to be a better person everyday and reminds me that it is imperative to prepare our young people for the world that exists, as well as the world we hope to build. I hope I was able to do half of what you have done for me, and may you do the same for the "Nugget."

To Steve and Kathryn, enough cannot be said for your enduring patience as I waded through life and all that this research brought to my world. You both warned me that it was not going to be easy. At the time, I thought the lack of ease would be due to

the alternate research route I selected and the navigation of imbedded structures reticent to change. Maybe that is what was meant at the time, but what I found was while there was some difficulty navigating the systems and forcing academic discipline upon myself, the real challenge was in the stories, the unbelievable stories of these young people existing within the foster care and juvenile justice systems. The strength of these stories penetrated my very being.

Dr. Lynn Burlbaw for helping me pick up the pieces and focus when I allowed the research to languish for many a moon. Thank you for not giving up on me and reminding me that this too is a hurdle worthy of jumping. I would not have finished without your generosity of spirit and time.

Dr. Gwendolyn Webb-Hasan for pointing me in a direction that would provide access to the RTC and the amazing young people whose voices deserve to be heard. You provided me with a gift that is immeasurable. Thank you for your positive spirit and amazing smile. Thank you for the encouragement to continue the work as I strove to implement your idea of "catastrophic teaching." Indeed, we only have this moment. We must make it count.

Dr. Jeffrey Winking for your willingness to embark on a journey where you had no background, your willingness to assist me when the committee literally scattered from coast to coast and for your incessant curiosity of all that surrounds us. Your perspective always proved to be refreshing. I am so glad to have you on this team.

Katy, Bill, Bob, Deryle, and Jane for hashing out the original ideas of the work with me in basements, at kitchen tables and during impromptu visits as I was working to find my bearings and understand my direction. Cheerleaders every one!

To the young people, staff and volunteer teachers at the RTC where my research was conducted, obviously without each and every one of you this work would not exist. Your willingness to share the challenges, heartaches, and difficulties provided a rich window in which to view and at times engage. Thank you for your willingness to be vulnerable as we navigated this new territory. I hope I have done justice to your voice until your voice is the one we get to hear firsthand.

I would also like to thank all of the students I have had the privilege to share space with in the classroom, meeting room and all the rooms in between. You have each taught me more than you realize. As I was writing through this journey, I had the honor of attending the graduation of a student in San Diego. During that ceremony another graduate shared the following"...while we may have come a long way, we are still not there. We are each in a place of privilege and have means beyond comprehension…"Earn it Everyday." I will work to Earn it Everyday!

The support of my family near and far as I engaged in yet another year of schooling. Yes...I am finally done! And to my ladybug heart friend Karen, you grasped my hand and refused to let go just when I needed it most. Thank you for sharing this and so many other journeys with me. To ALL the friends not named, know you each have a place in my heart and have helped me in innumerable ways from positive words and Dora the Explorer backpacks, to Red Socks, adventures in the great beyond, glasses of

wine, cups of coffee and homemade chai. Each one impacted and fueled me on my journey forward. And finally to my turtle...slow and steady gets us there faster than we realize. Thank you for the unconditional love and many life lessons. You are a special "teacher" indeed.

CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES

Contributors

This work was supervised by a dissertation committee consisting of Professor Lynn Burlbaw (advisor) and Professor Booker Stephen Carpenter, II of the Department of Teaching Learning and Culture, Professor Gwendolyn Webb-Hasan of Educational Administration and Human Resource Development and Professor Jeffrey Winking of the Department of Anthropology.

All work for the dissertation was completed independently by the student.

Funding Sources

I received no funding for this research.

NOMENCLATURE

CL	Changing Lives – Pseudonym for the residential treatment center where research took place.
CPS	Child Protective Services
CPPP	Center for Public Policy Priorities
DFPS	Department of Family and Protective Services
IRB	Institutional Review Board
NOTC	National Orphan Train Complex
PMC	Permanent Managing Conservatorship
RTC	Residential Treatment Center

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"Crime Happened Here": Sometimes Beginning at the End Creates the Clearest Picture

When we met, he was just a boy, like any other boy, who wanted to be with his mother. The difference, society would say, began with his dark skin color, his hard demeanor, the way he would roll his eyes back when he did not want to listen, the raising of his voice when he wanted something and you would not listen, his vocabulary (foreign to those outside his community) provided to him at birth… a marker of his rich heritage and indicative of the neighborhood, his place of birth (the inner city), the circumstances surrounding his birth (he was not expected to live…such a tiny human being…a "crack baby" and all that that racist, sensationalized media term entails, his economic situation (below the poverty level), his educational level (middle school into high school by age, but elementary level by achievement and "boxed" into "special" education for so many other social and psychological reasons)…labeled disabled…there was nothing Dis-Able-Ing or Dis-Abled about this child except he could not read. He was just like any other boy…he had dreams…he had drive…he was going to be a football star…of course he was…when that seemed a bit too far for him to reach, he wanted to be a rap star like Lil' Wayne…an icon and a hero in his eyes, a local hero to be exact…a boy, a boy just like any other boy.

On May 10, 2008, this "boy" was shot in the head by another "boy" from the same neighborhood while they were shooting dice in an abandoned schoolyard around 9:00pm the night before Mother's Day. He had a job, but not what many Americans would call a legitimate job, he did not go to school very often because he kept getting kicked out, and he was not in control of the decisions made around him that were said to be "in his best interest," and that is how he ended up back in the inner city after the great storm.

He came to Texas in September of 2005 at the age of twelve traveling with his eighty-five year old great-grandmother and a four-year old cousin, evacuees from Hurricane Katrina. A child without his parents…a child who wanted his mother…we found his mother…we found his mother and quickly discovered that sometimes doing the "right thing" is not always the "best thing." Despite his tearful pleas to stay in his new home, to stay with his great grandmother, he was dragged back to the place of his birth…and now his death, with his mother leading the way.

After he was shot, he somehow managed to climb onto his bicycle, presumably attempting to get home, made his way off the school grounds and then collapsed in the street. He died in the hospital shortly thereafter. Of the 179 murders in New Orleans for 2008, at the age of 15, he was one of the youngest victims that year and as such, he made headlines, he made the local television station, he made it B.I.G, but not in the way he dreamed.

Today this "boy" lies in a pauper's cemetery in a re-used plot that backs up to a chain link fence and a parking lot. Scraps of old wood frame the space, while weeds fiercely embrace the earth placed upon his remains. In lieu of a traditional headstone, his grave is marked with a plastic "*Crime Happened Here*" sign provided by the local *Silence is Violence* organization. Taped to the side of the sign is a paper copy of color a photograph of the boy cuddling a fluffy black and white dog that was the pet of one of his teachers. That photograph was one of the last things the caretakers and his new teachers in a small Texas town gave to him to remember his time with us in 2005 before he returned to the chaos, before he got lost in the proverbial storm, before he fulfilled the prophecy "society" set forth. He was a boy…just a boy…just like any other boy, but now that boy is no longer a boy. Now that boy is yet another statistic.

Setting the Stage

> " *The Crazy Life* in my youth, although devastating, was only the beginning stages of what I believe is now a consistent and growing genocidal level of destruction predicated on the premise there are marginalized youth with no jobs and or future, and therefore expendable." *Always Running* Luis Rodriguez (2005, p. 7).

Like the boy now lying in the pauper's cemetery, thousands of children experience situations in which they have little to no control regarding their personal lives, their homes, and their caregivers. They find themselves within an inherently destabilizing system, whether it is the Juvenile Justice System or the Foster Care System, where adult strangers determine what is "best" for them, sometimes with input from the child and sometimes without. The most notable "voice" of children in the system is through Court Appointed Special Advocates, also known as CASA.

Focusing specifically on the U.S. foster care system within Child Protective Services (CPS), approximately half a million children and youth will find themselves navigating the foster care process because they were removed by the State from their primary caregivers, generally meaning their biological parents (Noble, 1997; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009). Removal from the home is due to any number of reasons which may include neglect, abuse, or the inability of a caregiver to provide care due to financial or health related reasons. The circumstances can be generalized, but are always unique to that child. The challenge with this situation, beyond the extreme emotional experience of the child/parent separation, is that once in the system the children tend to experience a series of destabilizing events (Harden, 2004). Depending upon the child's unique circumstances, the caseload of Child Protective Services in the child's area of origin, and/or the availability of out of home care, a child may be moved a number of times from home to home, school to school, and caregiver to caregiver (U.S Department of Health and Human Services, 2009). Noble (1997) notes, on average, a child will spend three years in the foster care system and will be moved approximately three times, experiencing three different foster families.

The frequent movement of children from placement to placement tends to result in developmental, emotional, and behavioral challenges for the children (Christiansen, Havik, & Anderssen, 2010; Crum, 2010; Gaskell, 2010; Harden, 2004; Khoo and Skoog, 2014; Sullivan, Jones, Mathiesen, 2010).

These destabilizing and challenging events can all be categorized as risk factors to the health and well being of the child (Harden, 2004) and I believe may be directly related to the unstable environment within which the child is forced to reside.

The current foster care system in the United States was designed over forty years ago to safeguard the youngest members of society, infants, children and youth (Murray and Gesiriech, 2004), all generally referred to in the system and within this dissertation as "child" or "children," and as "youth," "young men," and "boys" when specifically referencing the children living in the Residential Treatment Center associated with this research project. Because these children do not have parental protection and care, national policy and federal law influences the "placement, care and protection of children in foster care… [helping] to ensure that these children end up in safe and stable families" (Allen and Bissell, 2004 p.50). According to Christiansen et al (2010), two criteria help determine whether the foster care system is successful in caring for a child: 1) how the child is progressing in regard to development and well-being, and 2) whether the child experiences a placement and care situation characterized by stability. Providing a stable environment outside the home of origin "is generally regarded as a prerequisite for the first criterion: the positive development of the child" (Christiansen et al, 2010 p. 913). A stable environment in this case is one that is consistent, dependable, and predictive where relationships can be nurtured, built and depended upon in regard to the physical, mental and emotional care of the child.

In other words, the child is not being moved frequently from location to location and caretaker to caretaker, a movement which requires the continuous establishment and/or re-establishment of relationships and access to resources.

Generally speaking, many children within the foster care system are exposed to a number of risk factors as is indicated by the Center for Public Policy Priorities (2009). CPPP (2009) reported that children and youth in the foster care system frequently face social interaction and educational difficulties. These difficulties are commonly attributed to a history of abuse and neglect experienced during critical years of emotional, physical, and social development. "Often they begin their lives in some of the most disadvantaged families" (Gaskell, 2010 p.137) and experience issues of poverty, poor treatment, neglect, health issues, attachment disorders, compromised brain functioning, inadequate social skills and mental health difficulties (Harden, 2010). The "early childhood experiences [help to shape] the quality of attachment between child and caregiver and can create a pattern for future relationships" (Gerhardt in Gaskell, 2010, p.137). In addition, Gaskell (2010) references four separate publications from Bowlby in 1969, 1973, 1979, and 1980 and one from Gaskell (2010) that notes, "if the primary attachment is a traumatic one, future relationships can also be impaired" (p.137). Within the foster care system children have difficulty building relationships with adults as well as with their peers due to the trauma they have experienced early on in their childhood (Khoo and Skoog, 2014; Noble, 1997).

Children provided with the necessary "stability" will have an opportunity to develop healthy relationships, which will in turn further support emotional, cognitive

and physical development in a child faced with numerous challenges (Gerhardt, 2004). While it is often difficult to maintain stable home placement due to a number of circumstances, allowing the children to develop stable relationships is a precursor to their physical, mental, and emotional health (Gerhardt, 2004). However, attempting to develop stable relationships while in the system can be equally as challenging as finding stable home placement. Noting this relationship instability, an adult who experienced the foster care system as a child shared his frustration during an interview about his experience, "as soon as you were beginning to trust them [social workers] they moved on. Just as you were putting trust in them, if you did put trust in them, they were gone" (Gaskell, 2010 p.143). The same sentiment was echoed by Crystal Bentley, a young woman who spent part of her childhood in the Texas foster care system. Interviewed by the *Texas Observer* in 2014, Ms. Bentley shared "...some placements were meant to be brief, children move because a foster parent rejects them." She went on to say she "...thinks the big problem in the [Child Protective Services] system is the lack of commitment. Just because they are not your child and you don't quite agree with them all the time, you give up on them…" (29 May 2014). Gaskell (2010) highlights the frustration experienced by young people in the system as they attempt to build relationships and trust with adults with whom they interact. This lack of trust can lead to the child blocking services as a protective mechanism to prevent being disappointed again (Gaskell, 2010). Blocking of services may present itself in numerous forms, from a lack of acceptance of treatment to refusing to communicate, both which may result in a lack of verbal and emotional expression from the child.

Initially, the primary concern of my research was this lack of stability referenced that is experienced by children in foster care due to the nature of the system. However, an additional, and sometimes paramount, concern is the child's seemingly absent voice and expression that occurs when services are blocked by the child, or the child simply shuts down due to the traumatic events taking place in their lives. This lack of physical, emotional and relational stability may have an overwhelming negative impact on the child (Gaskell, 2010; Gerhardt, 2004; Harden, 2010).

Due to my personal experiences with the boy described in this introduction, as well as my personal experiences with other children in the foster care system in Texas over the past ten years, this dissertation focused specifically on the foster care system as it pertains to the state of Texas. The research included selecting a population from a Residential Treatment Center (RTC) in a rural Texas community. The identified RTC recognized the challenges of instability, the potential for blocking services, and the "silencing" faced by children in the system. Because of this recognition, the RTC sought to move beyond the state required minimums of "basic care" for the youth they served. This basic care entails housing, clothing, feeding, ensuring education, providing a safe environment, and providing necessary psychological treatment (TXDFPS, 2009). While these services are important and necessary for healthy development of children in foster care, anecdotally, this "basic care" and the practice of placing children in large group homes rather than with individual families is referred to as "warehousing" by child

advocate groups such as the Annie E. Casey Foundation and AdvoKids, a legal services resource for children in foster care in California (2017).

These advocates contend that placing multiple children in one location and only providing the minimum level of care is a short term solution and not in the long term best interest of the children.

Going Beyond Basic Care

One solution to go beyond the basic care of the youth served by the RTC in this research project was to provide an arts program that created a safe place for the youth to explore and express themselves by sharing their thoughts, ideas and emotions through various forms of art, thus expressing their voice through means beyond the traditional conversation (Brouillette, 2010). In addition, the arts program provided opportunities for the youth to engage with each other, the staff and teachers who cared for them, and community resources and community members, thus expanding the foundation the youth in care engaged with and from whom the youth received support(Schlemmer, 2017). I observed this program and the teachers who implemented this program during my research study.

Problem

There is a lack of representation, space, and method for the "voice" of children who exist within the Texas DFPS system (Whiting & Lee, 2003). With nearly half a million children in the foster care system across the nation at any given time we understand the intent of "basic care," as described earlier but U.S. society does not always seem to hear the response of the children to these solutions, to this warehousing

of their bodies and their care (Roberts, 2000). I hoped to access the youth voice and response to their circumstances through the implementation of the TreeHouse Project.

This problem is complex and multi-layered. This research was designed to access children's voices, but because the population at the RTC are both juveniles and are considered "prisoners" due to their assignment to a secured residential treatment center the children represent one of the most protected research populations. Because I cannot work directly with the children, I focused on the teachers and their perceptions of the implementation of the TreeHouse project, the arts project intended to facilitate the self-expression of children in the foster care system (Brouillette, 2010).

While this research is not intended to address disproportionality in the foster care system, in order to provide an image of the landscape in which children in the foster care system reside and to understand the population with whom the RTC teachers in this study worked, I first describe an overall picture of the existing state of affairs related to CPS in Texas during the research period. This population data is presented in depth in Chapter 2. The statistics presented are from 2009 and were taken from the 2010 Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (TXDFPS) data book the year before the first implementation of the TreeHouse project.

Statement of Purpose

The original purpose of this study was to observe child participants within the foster care system during the implementation of an arts program designed to address the lack of voice for children residing within foster care in the state of Texas. However, due to legal as well as compliance challenges put in place by the University Institutional Review Board (IRB), an administrative body intended to protect human and animal subjects during research, this study became much more complex. The research evolved from the researcher observing/working with/exploring with children participating in an arts program into the researcher being permitted to "observe" teachers implementing an arts program within a residential treatment center that cares for children in the foster care and juvenile justice systems. As the researcher, I followed the guidelines of study provided by the University Institutional Review Board, because this was the way I was able to legitimate the research to the University and the academic community as a whole and because the voices of the RTC teachers are the closest voices to the children that I could gain access to legally.

Working from the original intent of the research, a new study developed with a three-fold purpose. The first purpose was to explore, document, and analyze my experience with the rules that both prohibit and permit research with and for children in the foster care system. The second purpose was to explore, document, and observe, the implementation of an arts program designed to address issues of voice and expression

with children in the foster care system who reside in a residential treatment center in Texas. The third purpose was to document the perceptions of the participating teachers in the arts program regarding its implementation and how the voices of the children in their care emerge through the perceptions of the teachers. The teachers included research participants who were staff members of the treatment center, teachers who were invited into the treatment center from the surrounding community, and teachers who worked in arts spaces within the same local community.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study are:

1. How and in what ways does an autoethnographic researcher redefine, conduct, and experience research focused on youth in the foster care system while navigating institutional rules?

2. What are the perceptions of the teachers as they reflect on the implementation of an arts program and what themes emerge during the interviews and discussion?

3. How does the voice of the children in care emerge through the implementation of an arts program and through the perceptions of the teachers?

Research Methodology

This study primarily utilized the methodology of autoethnography. Ellis (2004) and Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) described autoethnography as an approach that attempts to describe and analyze personal experience in order for researchers/readers/participants to better understand cultural experience. Josselson (1995) notes, “we take whatever observations we have made of the external world and, making them part of ourselves, interpret them and tell a story about what we believe we

know" (p. 29). By producing research grounded in my own personal experience, I endeavored to "sensitize readers" to the issues of conducting research with/in the foster care system and the issues of implementing arts programs in a treatment center for children in the foster care and juvenile justice systems. Through autoethnography, I share this story within context of the foster care system in Texas and through lived experience both as researcher as well as subject.

In this study, I engaged narrative ethnography, reflexive open-ended interviews and layered accounts to capture the voices of the children in foster care through the experiences and perceptions of the teacher participants and myself. I served both as the researcher and research tool. With *narrative ethnography*, my experiences as the researcher are incorporated into the description and analysis. In the study I was "observing myself as both a researcher and a participant in relationship to [the participants]" (Ellis, 2004). With *reflexive interviews*, while the focus was on the participants and their stories, consideration was made for my responses to the interview as the researcher, which added context and layering to the interview results (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, 2011). *Layered accounts,* as Ellis et al (2011) note, were used to focus on my experiences alongside the data collection and analysis process.

The combination of these three approaches provided me a means to use stories, reflexivity, multiple voices and introspection (Ellis et al, 2011) to work through the data in order to capture the voices of the children through their teachers. While it was important to include the "me" in this research in order to locate the direction from which I was looking and speaking, I found it equally imperative to note that this study really

was not intended to be about the "I" nor the "me" despite how the research unfolded. Rather the research was intended to be about the children who exist within foster care and juvenile justice systems and those who are charged with their care.

However, according to Buber (1996), if we are to more deeply understand a situation then we must both intellectualize the situation creating an "it," and also see the situation as a "you" thus creating a relationship between both the observer and the observed and an understanding that I am you and you are me. Without this dual relationship we cannot fully engage in solutions because we continue to keep the challenges at arms-length.

Data Collection Methods

In order to collect data, I utilized what Guyas and Keys (2009) refer to as a number of "complimentary[sic] and integrated research methods…" (p. 24). Qualitative methods utilized are as follows: participant observation where I observed the teachers as the arts program was implemented, one on one open ended interviews where I interviewed the teacher participants after the implementation of the arts program and content analysis where I analyzed the interview transcripts to identify themes, teacher perceptions, and the voice of the youth through the voices of the teachers. I also used dialogue and/or conversations that occurred between me and the teachers throughout the implementation and after the implementation and formal interviews. These dialogues and conversations served to support the findings from the interviews and observations. They also provided in-depth details that were not shared during the interview process. Throughout the study I engaged with discovery, exploration and reflection on my own

perceptions and the entire research process. Chapter 3 provides further detail on the research methodology and methods and how these contribute to the overall research.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations

The limitations of this study were conditions and/or influences that impacted the study and were beyond my control. Primary limitations I identified were:

Access to the population - due to regulations of the University IRB I was not allowed to speak with the youth in the system as part of the research, but I did learn about them through the teachers. Ultimately it was the teachers at the RTC who became the research participants.

Limited size of the population - The number of teachers available for observation and interviews was determined by the RTC which only allowed a certain number of teachers to participate in the overall implementation of the TreeHouse arts program.

IRB - the restrictions placed on the research by the IRB prevented access to the original research population. Much of the research project was redesigned as a result of these restrictions.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the boundaries that I set for the research project, thus providing the scope. The delimitations I identified were:

Disproportionality - While disproportionality in the Texas foster care system impacted this project, it was not a focus for this particular study. This said, I do think it is important to follow up on this in future research.

Texas DFPS - I chose to only reference the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services as it pertained to the foster care system.

RTC *Changing Lives* - I only worked with one residential treatment center in the state of Texas. This was the RTC where the TreeHouse project was first implemented.

TreeHouse Teachers and Volunteers - I only researched the teachers who worked or volunteered with the implementation of the TreeHouse arts program at the identified RTC. This population had first-hand knowledge of the implementation procedures and impacts as identified from their individual perspectives.

Methodology - I utilized autoethnography and narrative ethnography as the research methodology in an effort to tell the story of the implementation of the project and to capture the voices of the teachers while capturing the voices of the students through the perspectives of the teachers.

Significance of this Study

There are a number of areas of significance that developed from this study. By using one researcher's personal experience, ideally educators and other researchers will develop a better understanding of the challenges children in the foster care system face due to issues of instability and self-expression. In addition, researchers will develop a better understanding of the challenges and rules researchers face when attempting to

research and address issues with children residing in foster care and the juvenile justice system. This research might also serve as a foundation for the further development and implementation of site-specific arts programs designed for children in the foster care and juvenile justice systems. In addition, with the assumption that caregivers provide the foundation on which children build their lives, whether they are in the juvenile justice system, child protective services (foster care) or whether they are in the home (Gaskell, 2010; Gerhardt, 2004), this research will potentially provide a foundation for caregivers/teachers working within the systems to better understand the value of arts programs for children in the foster care and juvenile justice systems. Along with better understanding the value of arts programs, the caregivers/teachers may develop a better understanding of the powerful impact viewing, seeing, engaging with, exploring, creating and reflecting on art can have for both the children within the system, as well as the teachers, while interacting with both the child and the art making/exploring process. Finally, this study seeks to provide a better understanding of the perceptions of teachers when implementing arts programs in foster care and juvenile justice systems and how this may positively and/or negatively impact the children in their care. Working with and through the RTC art program teachers, I hope the arts program, as well as the experience of the teachers that implemented the arts program, will offer a means to begin to bridge this gap.

Structure of the Dissertation

In this first chapter I offered an overview of the study at hand. Chapter 2 offers background on the foster care system in general and the foster care system in Texas

specifically, background on the Residential Treatment Center (RTC), later referred to by the pseudonym *Changing Lives,* where the arts program was implemented, and finally background on the arts program implemented called the TreeHouse project. Chapter 3 is a description of the methodology used for this research. Included is a description of the teachers who served as the care-givers of the children who participated in the arts program. These teachers are also the population observed and interviewed. Chapter 4 is a description of what I did and what happened throughout the research. The research questions presented provided a structure for Chapter 4. Chapter 5 is an analysis of the events that occurred during the research and a framework to offer my conclusions, recommendations and areas of future research.

Each chapter begins with a vignette based on either my direct experience with a young person in the foster care and/or juvenile justice system, much like the introduction to this chapter, or is an anecdotal story shared with me by one of the teachers once the youth was no longer under the care of the residential treatment center identified in this research. These vignettes, *Crime Happened Here, Baby in a Bag, Dos Coyotes Jovenes, Buried Treasures, and The Big Bad Wolf Does Exist,* provide an alternate window into the lives of these young people and provide an opportunity to be a vehicle of "compassion, empathy, and change" (Jensen-Hart & Williams, 2010, p. 455) giving further voice to our children within the system.

When I initiated this project, the goal was to design an arts informed community supported program that would help children in the foster care system find a way to express themselves and 'speak' sharing their "voice" through their art. The idea was to

create an opportunity for the children to share their feelings, ideas, and thoughts through their art as a metaphorical voice rather than through their actual voice. What I did not expect to find was the boy thrown away in a trash bag soon after birth, two boys that were trained by their families to run illegal immigrants across the border as a means of income, two brothers who watched their parents murder one of their siblings and a boy whose parents allowed the family "pet" to attack him causing irreparable damage. You hear about these stories on TV and in the movies, but when you are doing academic research you do not expect to find them a few miles down the road trying to get back on their feet and survive the system. At least, I did not realize this is what I was going to encounter…call me naïve.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND

Baby in a Bag

When I was a child my mother used to tell me I was found under a rock. I am not exactly sure why she started telling me this, but she did and I have never forgotten it. I think it may have had something to do with how she chose to explain away some of my characteristics that are so different from the rest of my family and that the only way to explain the existence of such difference was by reasoning that I was brought to the family not through biological birth, but in a different way. Although I may be a member of the family now, I was actually "found under a rock," thereby connecting and disconnecting myself with the family all at the same time. She would say her stories were only a joke, but for me my mother's story telling was the method she used to reason away my characteristics that made her uncomfortable or my behavior unexplainable. Thus without conscious intention she positioned me as an "other" within the context of "our" family, an "otherness" that I would grapple with for decades.

But what if it were true? What if my mother really did find me under a rock? Or in a box? Or under a bridge? Or in a commode? Or in a dumpster? Or in a trash bag? Or one of the many other ways unwanted babies are disposed of in the United States. What then? How would I then position myself within the family,within the world, and within myself as I sought my own identity and purpose? How would I identify my her/story?

With my place in the world? What about my family? How would my family see me? Would they make space for me?

Simply "telling" me the fiction that I was found under a rock as a joke or in sarcasm created enough of a disjuncture for me that, even if it were true, I am not sure where I would find my mooring. We do not get to choose how we are brought into this world. Nor do we get to choose who brings us into this world. I think, however, we do have something to say about how and whether we survive. Whatever our origins may be, we each only have one life to live. We must do what we can to survive that one life. No matter the circumstances, we must do what we can to survive those circumstances, whether we were found under a rock, in a commode, in a trash bag or in foster care.

Working with the young people who participated in the TreeHouse Project allowed me the opportunity to witness how they survived (are surviving) their own lives. As I witnessed the lives of the young people in the TreeHouse Project, I acknowledged it was through a window of my own construction and therefore my own perspective, my own vantage point.

One such young person, a boy, a boy who participated in the TreeHouse Project actually began his life in a trash bag. He was a real live baby in a bag, not just a story on TV that we could choose to dismiss as we went along with our day because it was too hard to believe. He was a living breathing boy, a boy who began his life not in the loving arms of his mother, as the birth fantasy describes, but rather in the suffocating embrace of a plastic trash bag.

Soon after his birth, this young boy's biological mother made a decision. He had no part beyond his mere existence in the decision she made, but her decision would impact him the rest of his life. It was a decision that he would have to survive. And while he survived the decision, his/tory is one of a disjuncture far beyond the confusion of childhood fables of rocks and parenting and families. His story, seen through the window of perception I have constructed, begins with him being severed from his biological mother and placed into a plastic trash bag. His story as seen through my window continued to the last day I saw him. He survived both on his own terms as well as the terms of others, depending on the situation. This young boy, who began his life in a bag, was found by someone before it was too late. Subsequently he was placed into Child Protective Services in Texas. He began his journey through the system from day one. By the time I met him, he had been adopted, had adoptive brothers and sisters, and had spent the better part of his now 15 years moving in and out of the foster care system for various reasons, reasons that ranged from mental health issues to behavioral challenges.

This young boy who began his life in a plastic bag had a personality that stood out from the other boys. His expression of his personality was purposeful...intentional. He wanted everyone to know that while he may be a "resident" at the RTC, he by no means "belonged" there. He was different and he wanted everyone to know he was different. He created his own disjuncture with the system and his place within it. He created his own disconnection with the other residents in an almost complete rejection of any similarities between their stories and his. He continuously shined a spotlight on

anything that made him different, which included his hair, his clothes, his innate theatrical talent, his love of all things dramatic, and his sexuality. It is the latter of these differences he would play on the most as a source of power and a means of self imposed isolation because his acknowledgement of who he was made the other boys uncomfortable with him, and more than likely, with themselves. He was brave. He was courageous. He unapologetically said SEE ME. HERE I AM. I AM DIFFERENT! Above all else, this young man who began his life in a plastic trash bag, wanted to dance. Somehow he heard about another treatment center, one that was arts based and would provide an avenue for him to express himself through multiple art forms. He begged the administration at the RTC to find out more. He implored them to let him go so he could be with others he imagined were like him, at least more like him than his current counterparts. While the RTC administrators worked hard to have him placed in the other center, and ultimately were successful in securing his new placement, his adoptive mother had other ideas.

One day, with the financial support of a church, his adoptive mother collected him from the RTC, loaded him and his personal belongings into her car, and headed northeast to a conversion therapy program for gay teenagers. His adoptive mother did not concern herself with his interest in theatre nor with his desire to attend the arts focused residential treatment center where he had been promised a place. Neither did she concern herself with any of the personal progress he had made through his love of the arts. Rather, his adoptive mother focused on what she perceived as a "cure" for his (his mother's) dis[ease]. The car ride he thought would take him to his dreams resulted in

another detour created by the decisions of yet another "parent." This latest decision would once again result in him being labeled, packed into a "bag" and discarded for who and what he was. The young boy who began his life in a plastic trash bag, would somehow have to find the strength to survive the choices of others, yet again.

Like the boy who started his life in a plastic trash bag, we all have our own unique origin story. The overall purpose of this chapter is to provide a background, foundation, and related connections for the research as it relates to the foster care system, the residential treatment center at the core of this research and the arts program TreeHouse Project. Thus, this chapter serves as the "origin" story of this research.

While the structure of this dissertation follows a seemingly conventional format, I have liberated myself from restricting the review of related literature to Chapter 2 by positioning it more broadly throughout the entire dissertation. In this chapter a brief history of the foster care system in the United States, background information for the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), the Residential Treatment Center (RTC) where TreeHouse Project was implemented and the TreeHouse project are introduced.

Foster Care in the United States

The western idea of childhood and children being individuals with personal rights rather than the property of their parents began to develop in the 18th century as a result of public policy and the growing concern for the welfare of other people's children (Bellingham, 1990). During the 19th century, the first adoption legislation in the United States was passed in Massachusetts with the 1851 Adoption of Children Act that

provided judges with the power to determine if the adoption was necessary and whether the proposed adoptive parents had sufficient ability to care for the child. It was not until 1915 that the U.S. would develop the first set of minimum standards for adoption and out of home placement. These standards were developed by the Child Welfare League (formerly known as Bureau for Exchange of Information Among Child-Helping Organizations), a child welfare organization created in New York City for the purpose of coordinating the efforts of organizations working to assist children in the local community. Within the minimum standards the Child Welfare League stipulated that adoptions and out of home placements be made by social work professionals rather than baby farmers and others interested in making a profit off the placement of children. It was due to the negative reputation of "baby farms" and an outcry from legitimate service organizations that these first minimum standards were developed.

Historically, one of the most significant efforts to place children, specifically immigrant children (Holt, 1992; O'Connor, 2001) in alternate home settings began with the "Orphan Trains" organized by the New York Aid Society, also known as the Children's Aid Society, under the guidance of Charles Loring Brace (Bellingham, 1990; Holt, 1992; O'Connor, 2001; Herman 2012). According to the National Orphan Train Complex (NOTC), a museum dedicated to orphan train research in Concordia, Kansas, the orphan train movement is widely accepted as the beginning of modern foster care in the United States. Prior to the advent of the orphan trains, children traditionally were placed in alternate home settings through the indentured servant system.

Indentured servitude can be considered one of the oldest forms of foster care within the United States and has a history that extends to the seventeenth century during the time of the colonies. It was not uncommon for the British government to remove "undesirable or potentially criminal children...British routinely gathered up-or kidnapped-poor children from the slums of London and sent them to the colonies to be bound servants" (O'Connor, 2001, p. 95). By doing this, the British were able to both remove the problem children and provide a much needed labor source to the colonies.

Under the indentured servant agreement, children would be committed or promised to a master as a source of labor by their parents or other authority figure until the child reached the age of twenty-one. In exchange, the master was to provide food, lodging, clothing, training in the craft of the master and a basic education. At the end of the commitment the master was to provide a new set of clothing, some pocket change and a bible. In the case of the orphan trains Brace believed that what children needed "was education, jobs, and good homes" (O'Connor, 2001, p. XV) and the way to get this to the children he considered victims of poor economic and social conditions was to send them to homes outside of major cities. Orphan trains differed from indentured servitude in that the children were to be provided more freedom and protection and the children were not forced to stay with the families like indentured children. The family was seen as an employer rather than a master and the relationship could be dissolved at any point by either party (O'Connor, 2001).

Between the years of 1853 and 1929 over 250,000 children from New York City and other eastern cities were loaded onto trains, river boats and other forms of transportation and sent to the midwestern and western states along with Canada and Mexico in an effort to "rescue" these innocent children from what was referred to as depraved urban settings. Some of the children were indeed orphans without biological families, others were from poor families that were unable to care for the children, still others came from single mother homes, jails, and asylums (Holt, 1992). The last orphan train left New York in 1929, the final destination was Sulphur Springs, Texas (O'Connor, 2001).

While the initial intent was to have the children adopted out to upstanding Protestant families that would assist in the Americanization of the children, many of these children never truly lost full contact with their biological families. Rather, the biological parents utilized the resources provided by the adoptive families in order to provide a better life for their children during trying economic times and would retrieve the children once they were better able to care for them (Bellingham, 1990; O'Connor, 2001). However, this was not always the case. For some children their new placement resulted in worse conditions than what they left in the cities. While potential families were to be screened by a committee made up of local businessmen, clergy, doctors and other community leaders, there was very little oversight of the families and the individuals that selected the children (O'Connor, 2001). The children were placed on display in an auction like format for potential families in train stations, churches, and opera houses throughout the nation (Bellingham, 1990; O'Connor, 2001).

The primary intent of some adoptive families, particularly farmers, was to utilize the children as a source of free labor (O'Connor, 2001).

Charles Loring Brace recognized the dual intent of the orphan trains as both a method to remove lower economic status children from urban settings thus relieving the burden on inner city charities as well as saw the opportunity to relocate these children into the midwest and into agricultural contexts and businesses as a much needed labor source. This noted, it is said that Brace believed children were better cared for by families rather than within institutions. O'Connor (2001) cites this belief as a "basic tenet of present-day foster care" (p.xvii). The results of these relocation efforts continue to inform and influence the state of foster care within the United States including Texas. Current foster care practice in Texas is to place children with family relatives. If this is not possible they are placed within the home of an approved family followed by a group home if a family is not available.

Department of Family Protective Services and Foster Care in Texas

In reference to the drop in juvenile crime in the late 1990s and early 2000 as well as several prosecutors that credited harsh sentencing to that drop in crime, Hubner (2005) states that:

> The truth is, in most states the juvenile justice system deserved the wrecking ball. With a few exceptions, most institutions incarcerating juveniles do not rehabilitate. Indeed, they are not that much different from adult prisons. At best, they are holding tanks: at worst, they are finishing schools for career criminals (p. xx).

While Hubner was speaking of the juvenile justice system in general, his comment may have just as easily been applied to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) formed in 2004.The DFPS evolved through various titles. Prior to 2004, the DFPS was known as the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services - 1991, the Texas Department of Human Resources - 1977, and in 1939 as the Texas Department of Welfare. Published accounts about the Texas DFPS that alleged waste, fraud, and abuse were so numerous that in 2004 then Texas Comptroller Carole Keeton Strayhorn launched a special investigation into the department citing her "duty to monitor the economy and expenditures" (Strayhorn, 2004, p.i) of the state. The Strayhorn report titled "Forgotten Children" cites DFPS as being dangerous to the children in their care. In Strayhorn's own words she describes the experience some of these "forgotten children" have within the Texas foster care system:

> They are everybody's children, and nobody's children. They are the forgotten children in the Texas foster care system. Some of them find homes with caring foster parents, or in treatment centers with experienced and caring providers. And some do not. Some foster children have been moved among 30, 40 or even more [times] all-too-temporary "homes." Some have been sexually, physically and emotionally abused while in the system; some have run away and joined the ranks of the missing. A few have even died at the hands of those entrusted with their care. This report gives these children something they need—a voice (2004, p. i).

Following this investigation, Strayhorn commissioned another investigative special report on the Texas foster care system in 2006. Through this second investigation she confirmed the findings in the 2004 report *Forgotten Children* (Strayhorn, 2006).

After clearly stating that the Texas foster care system was an entire failure resulting in human suffering within the first paragraph of the Executive Summary of the

Texas Health Care Claims Study - Special Report on Foster Children (Strayhorn, 2006), Strayhorn and her committee went on to propose several reforms intended to repair the system in the area of medical care, psychological care, and pharmacological issues.

These reforms were being implemented in 2011 the first year of the TreeHouse Project at the RTC *Changing Lives.* At the same time a class action lawsuit was being brought against the State of Texas in CIVIL ACTION NO. 2:11-CV-84 by a New York based litigator Children's Rights. Children's Rights specifically challenged the treatment of children in Permanent Managing Conservatorship (PMC). This is a program within the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services and is a legal term in which a judge appoints a person or entity, such as DFPS, a foster parent, a biological relative or other person, as legally responsible for a child without the need to adopt the child. According to John Kelly (2015) from the Chronicle of Social Change (2019), at the time of the lawsuit, there were approximately 12,000 children in the Permanent Managing Conservatorship program in Texas. Of these 12,000 children about 6,400 children had been in the Texas PMC DFPS system for three years or more with 500 children having been in the PMC program for more than 10 years. Also reported was the fact that more than a third of PMC children had been placed in at least five different foster care homes (Kelly, 2015; Chronicle of Social Change, 2015).

In December 2015 U.S. District Court Judge Janis Jack ruled against the State of Texas in the case. The Chronicle of Social Change (2015) noted that "Jack's ruling leveled a scathing criticism on the Texas DFPS, saying that the foster care system is "broken" especially "for Texas's PMC children, who almost uniformly leave State custody more damaged than when they entered" (p.4). There were four areas of reform expected to be addressed as per Judge Jack. The four areas were:

> "Greater efficiency in the DFPS case management system, opportunities for DFPS workers to speak to foster youth without the presence of a foster parent or group home staff present, right-sizing of the workload required of DFPS caseworkers, addressing what the Judge described as an 'unwillingness to institute corrective actions'against foster care and group home providers who violate the law. (Chronicle of Social Change, 2015, p.9)

Additionally, within Judge Jack's ruling she cited that a review of the DFPS system was initiated in 1996 by then Texas Governor George W. Bush. This review identified several areas where significant changes needed to be made. Then in 2009, Texas Governor Rick Perry formed the Texas Adoption Review Committee and charged them to perform a similar review, albeit at the time, without the knowledge of the 1996 review. Once the 2009 recommendations were made the team uncovered the 1996 report and found that 11 of their 14 recommendations were similar to the 1996 team suggesting that many of the problems had not been fixed (Stukenberg, et al vs Greg Abbott, et al, 2015). Based on this, and the previous investigation completed by Strayhorn, it appears that not only was DFPS aware of significant challenges within their system, but two governor initiated reviews had been completed along with the 2004 and 2006 Strayhorn reports and yet little to no changes were made by the beginning of the 2011 lawsuit against Texas DFPS.

As Judge Jack notes in Stukenberg et al vs Greg Abbott et al (2015), "DFPS exhibited a conscious disregard for known severe abuses, which by itself sufficiently demonstrates deliberate indifference to a child's right to personal safety" (p.240) and has "...ignored 20 years of reports, outlining problems and recommending solutions" (p255). Judge Jack stated that "...Texas does not need to provide a perfect foster care system; just one that no longer violates the constitution" (Kelly, 2015, p. 8).

2009 Statistics for Children in Texas DFPS Care

In 2009, according to Texas DFPS there were 27,422 children in the Texas foster care system. Of these, 15,932 were in actual foster care homes ranging from independent caregivers and treatment centers to emergency shelters. Another 9,253 were in "other care" situations such as kinship care[2] or adoptive homes with the remaining children in various levels of the system from basic care to intense plus care depending on the experiences and needs of the child (Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, 2009).

Statistically, of the 12,107 children removed from their homes in the state of Texas in 2009, Latinx children (referred to as Hispanic in state documents) represented the highest percentage of removals at 37.6% followed by Anglo children at 31.3% and African American children at 27.9% (Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, 2009). While Latinx children make up a higher percentage of children in foster care, African American children are disproportionately represented when compared to the overall population of children in Texas.

In 2009 African American children made up approximately 12% of Texas's overall 6.5 million children ranging in ages from 0 to 17 years, yet made up approximately 28% of the children in foster care.

Depending on the child's specific situation and case, the average term of service within the system can be anywhere from 7.2 months to 26.1 months with a rate of between 2 and 4 placements prior to their return to the familial unit, adoption, placement with substitute care or aging out of the system (TXDFPS, 2009). While 2 to 4 placements is average, some children experience up to 7 placements prior to landing in a stable home. The change in placement generally means they will also change neighborhoods, schools, and sometimes caseworkers, all which require the child to go through a series of adjustments in order to simply survive the system let alone deal with the history that brought them to the system in the first place. With each placement and physical and emotional destabilization, a child is subject to the loss of approximately one year of education.

Once in the Department of Family and Protective Services System, if a child continues to be relocated from family to family and/or is not provided with treatment or an intervention solution, social and educational difficulties may become exacerbated, following the child throughout his or her life and negatively affecting future social, familial, and educational interactions (Gaskell, 2010). These negative interactions in turn may have a negative impact on society as a whole by perpetuating a vicious cycle of neglect and abuse that the child carries into their future relationships (Gaskell, 2010).

Studies completed by the Department of Justice (2009) and the recent ruling by Judge Jacks in 2015, revealed that children who age-out of the foster care system ill equipped to face the issues of independent living have a higher incidence of incarceration and need for public assistance compared to the general population.

This data provides a sense of the number of children impacted by the conditions of the Texas foster care system in 2009, the year before the research for this project began. This population data provides an idea of the disproportionality within the system and mirrors the population of the children residing within the RTC *Changing Lives* during the research period.

Service Regions in Texas

For purposes of management and oversight the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services divided the state into eleven regions of service as seen in the image below.

Figure 1. Texas Department of Family and Protective Services 11 service regions.

The RTC in this study is located within Austin's Region 7. Of the over 12,000 Texas children removed from their homes in 2009, Region 7 removed 1,546 (CPS, 2009). Region 7 is ranked fourth highest in terms of removal numbers. This ranking is only surpassed by regions encompassing major cities such as Houston, Arlington, and

San Antonio . While Region 7 is responsible for removing, placing, and/or caring for over 10% of the total number of children removed in 2009, this number does not include the children who were already in foster care prior to the addition of the newly removed children. According to CPS (2009), Austin's Region 7 accounted for 2,726 children with the county where the RTC is located, caring for between 101 and 500 children of this total at any given time during 2009. While these are the 2009 statistics for Region 7, the RTC cares for children placed in their facility from all over the state and representing all eleven regions, not only Region 7.

History and Background of the Residential Treatment Center (RTC)

Changing Lives

A Residential Treatment Center (RTC) is a live-in facility designed to care for children and youth that have emotional, physical, or substance abuse challenges. The American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry describes the RTC as a place "designed to provide intensive help for children and youth with serious emotional and behavioral problems" (2019, p.1). This help comes in the form of behavioral, psychological, and drug therapies on an individual and family basis and/or in a group format with other residents of the RTC. These therapies are designed to assist the child in working through their challenges and to develop coping skills that will aid them once they return to a home setting whether that is their biological family, foster home, or group home. If the child does not respond to treatment at the RTC then they will be transferred to a juvenile detention center or medical facility. In many ways, from my

perspective, the RTC is their last chance before being incarcerated in a secure location behind bars.

In an effort to maintain the privacy of the Residential Treatment Center, the staff and the residents involved in this research, the RTC will be referred to by the pseudonym *Changing Lives* (CL). In addition, the Director of the Center will simply be referred to as "Director" and the other research participants will be represented by pseudonyms in order to prevent the sharing of identifying details about the Director, the staff and/or any of those participants interviewed throughout this research.

I selected *Changing Lives* as the pseudonym because the focus of this center is to change the lives and behavior of the youth that participate in their program. *Changing Lives (CL)* was one of the fifty-five Residential Treatment Centers contracted with the Texas Department of Family Services to receive youth from Child Protective Services and the Juvenile Justice System at the time of this research (TXDFPS, ND). *CL* was established in 2001 by a family from the local area. From my perspective it was truly a community born program initiated to assist youth within the system.

The family behind this RTC grew up watching their Mother open their home to local youth and friends of her children, sharing all that they had. From encouraging basketball games in the front yard to sharing meals, the family embraced the community concept of supporting children no matter whose children they may be. The siblings grew up developing successful careers from lawyers to caterers, to professions within the juvenile justice and child protective services systems.

No matter the field, a majority of the family members tied their profession back into serving the marginalized and underserved youth in their local communities and across the state of Texas. Today, the third generation of this family continues to be influenced by the actions of their matriarch. Her grandchildren are now pursuing degrees in areas that have the potential to impact the Texas Child Protective Services and Department of Family Protective Services as well as the Juvenile Justice System.

Changing Lives **Today**

Formally, *Changing Lives* is a private, not-for-profit 501(c)(3) residential treatment center housing up to 44 boys at a time ranging in age from 9 to 18 years old and "... is specifically designed for boys who have experienced the things we do not like to talk about...and it is a place for the children nobody wants to believe exists" (Director, personal communication, 2012). According to the Director, things "we do not like to talk about" include, but are not limited to issues of drug abuse, neglect, physical abuse, and chronic sexual abuse and/or molestation (personal communication, 2012). The center strives to "help families and youth to stabilize, energize, and provide the resources to establish a nurturing environment" (Director, personal communication, 2012) in the biological home and/or other home environment such as foster care or a group home for youth.

An introductory letter from the Director appears in the information packet *Changing Lives* presents to potential supporters. The letter begins with a quote from Robert Lieberman, the former Public Policy Chair of the American Association of Children's Residential Centers in Washington D.C. "These are throwaway kids. These are the kids people don't want to think about."

Further in the *Changing Lives* introductory letter, the Director of the RTC describes the young people he works with and the purpose for the center:

> "Residential Treatment Centers are modern society's answer to what to do with homeless young people who are too ill for their homes, too ill for traditional foster care in other people's homes, too ill for "just medication" and day-treatment programs, but not quite ill enough for psychiatric hospitalization. They largely hail from urban centers. Increasingly, they suffer from serious psychiatric disorders unforeseen even five years ago. Many [of their] parents who were, and are, substance abusers. Many have suffered from years of physical, emotional, sexual, and psychotic [psychological] abuse."

Changing Lives receives funding from the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services – Child Protective Services Division. This funding provides support for "basic care." At the time of this research basic care included essential food, clothing, and shelter. The Director noted "growing boys require much more than just the basics" (personal communication, 2012). In an effort to provide resources beyond basic care the center reaches out to the community for support in the form of clothing, school supplies, scholarships to attend youth focused programs or to participate in school sporting activities, and/or for birthday and holiday gifts throughout the year. When *Changing Lives* solicits requests, the support requested remains in the realm of things the more privileged in our society take for granted and would describe as "basic" needs: "school

supplies, backpacks, twin sheets, pillow-cases, towels, personal hygiene products, socks, underwear, and recreation equipment" (Director, personal communication, 2012).

When the young men (often referred to as residents by the RTC staff) arrive to the center they are provided with an orientation handbook outlining the policies and expectations. The environment is open but secure and provides care at the moderate, specialized, and intensive levels for young men that range from 9 to 18 years old for up to 24 months. Behavior is managed through a checks, points, level or token system which if needed may result in the restriction of privileges, personal restraint, time out, and/or psychotropic medications as needed. All restrictions and/or steps taken are considered natural or logical consequences for the adverse behavior presented by the youth according to the RTC processes and procedures.

Great care is taken by the RTC staff to provide the young men with a "physically and psychologically safe environment, which is structured and predictable" and that allows for the opportunity for the youth to reach "self-awareness in a structured environment which allows privileges as they relate to a systematic behavior program" (Director, personal communication, 2012). The primary goal is to establish an approach to treatment that will utilize "all aspects of the child's living environment as therapeutic tools" and allows for the youth to advance in their treatment and healing (Director, personal communication, 2012).

Staff available on a daily basis and/or by contract includes a psychiatrist; psychologist; social workers; recreational therapists; counselors, including substance abuse counselors; medical doctors; education representatives; and food service staff (Director, personal communication, 2012). Other resources available include individual, group and family therapies, on level education access throughout the year, work-study, and therapeutic recreation (Director, personal communication, 2012).

While the primary population of the RTC represents the state of Texas and the disproportionality of the Texas foster care system, the facility accepts young men from throughout the country. Facilities run by the state are required to take any youth sent to them and do not have the option to decline someone who may not fit well with the existing/current RTC program/population and/or environment. Because this facility is private, the administrators have a say over which young men they accept and decline. Because this agency has a say in the young men who will become residents, the administrators are better able to build the population and ensure personalities and needs are aligned for the residents and staff. This is not always the case for state run institutions given that the state run institutions must take any youth sent to them.

Treehouse Project

"Sometimes there are things that cannot be told…the suffering…insiders already know" (Aroztegui, 2014)

Just as Aroztegui mentions that sometimes there are things that cannot be told in reference to the suffering of female prisoners in Uruguay, Henry, a participant in this research said that "*there are things we don't want to talk about*" (Henry, 9 September 2011) in reference to experiences of the children in the juvenile justice and foster care systems in Texas. The "we" who don't want to talk that Henry was referring to included the children who had the experience, the parents, foster parents, professional staff, social organizations and so forth. It was this lack of "voice," this capacity for silence from multiple perspectives despite enduring challenging circumstances just as I experienced first hand with Arthur, the young man in the introduction of this research, that resulted in the birth of the TreeHouse Project.

The TreeHouse Project is a local community supported arts informed program designed to provide an alternate avenue of communication and voice for children in the juvenile justice and foster care systems. The TreeHouse Project provides a space for the child participants to create and construct an alternate identity, one that society can engage with without previously assigned labels and pathologies because the living circumstance, backgrounds and/or diagnoses of the children are not shared with the participating community members, artists, and organizations. When the children are participating in TreeHouse and are in the community, they are simply referred to as children in an arts program interacting with and in the community.

Initial ideas for this research were hatched in the basement of the campus student center at the conclusion of bi-weekly risk management meetings that I participated in as a part of my role as the assistant director of a campus arts space. I knew after my experience with Arthur that I wanted to do something for children and specifically children in the foster care system because, from my perspective I saw children within the system as lacking a role and an opportunity to express voice in their personal situations (Chapman, Wall, & Farth, 2004; Whiting & Lee, 2003), My experience with Arthur was such that while he was speaking, it was as if no one was listening, thus in essence silencing his voice. I was not really sure how doing something would play out or what it would look like. It was after these meetings that I brainstormed with two colleagues of what might be possible, what it might look like, and whether my ideas were feasible. Once I had the basic structure down, which was to create a space that was child centered, supported and guided by the community, and arts focused, the TreeHouse Project was born. I was still unclear as to whether this idea was feasible and whether I would actually be able to complete the research at the graduate level at Texas A&M University, but despite the uncertainty I moved forward with the project. Eventually the TreeHouse project was implemented for the first time during the summer of 2011 at an RTC in a rural central Texas community with a predominantly white population. It seemed that I, along with my co-conspirators, successfully navigated the environment and institutional boundaries for the moment. We excitedly anticipated the next steps.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

"Put teenagers in a safe setting and they will relish revealing what has happened to them. They have an almost desperate need to talk about themselves. And that is understandable, because no one has ever listened to them." (Hubner 2005, p. 45)

Dos Coyotes Jovenes
(Two Young Coyotes)

During the 2nd implementation of the TreeHouse project in 2012, I observed an interesting moment during a group field trip to a local art gallery. The art pieces on display were oil paintings of Texas landscapes. There were images of cattle, wide open skies, tumbleweeds, parched terrain and fishing boats. As we were exploring the space and the artwork I was asking questions about what the youth saw and what memories came to mind, if any, when they looked at each image. One particular painting of a small river bed surrounded by dry earth and cactus seemed familiar to one of the young men. When he saw the image he stopped and stood by the painting just looking at it. He waited for me to be out of earshot then gathered a small group of peers around him and began to tell a story. I could tell he was excited because his actions were animated and he was jovial as he recalled some past adventure. He would say something, laugh, scan the room for possible interlopers, use his hands to express action and continue. It was clear this story was only for the group he had gathered. As I craned my neck to overhear at least small excerpts of the story he told, I caught a few words here and there that indicated he was talking about crossing the border between Mexico and Texas.

From my perspective this was a moment of success because it seemed the painting had jogged a memory and now that memory was being shared with others. This was one of the goals of TreeHouse, to use art as a vehicle for communication. I was very excited. To me the TreeHouse project was working and I wanted to share my excitement with the group leader. When I walked over to her to tell her what was transpiring right before our eyes she asked me what he was talking about. When I told her he was talking about crossing the border she immediately gasped and said "Oh God!" It was clear she was concerned and that he was not supposed to be talking about this particular event and especially not to the other boys. She then proceeded to tell me that this particular boy used to be a "coyote" and would bring illegal immigrants across the border into Texas. This was how his family taught him to make money…the boy was no more than 15. There were many thoughts that crossed my mind. I was both shocked and surprised. The word "wow" ran through my thoughts over and over, and thoughts of "wow, he would smuggle people across the border?!" Followed by "wow, he's only 15!" followed by "WOW, he's so young to be involved in such a serious business." These thoughts and the surprise about the boys smuggling activities was quickly followed by thoughts and concern for the people that would entrust their lives to such a young person. All I could think was "oh my god, these people put their lives in the hands of a mere child in an effort to find something more for their families…" So a "mere child" in whose world? Mine for certain, but clearly not his…

I would later discover that this boy was not the only teenage "coyote" in the group. There were two "coyotes," ages 14 and 15 who guided people across the Mexico-Texas border. Two young coyotes leading the way across the borders of our lives into an unknown future.

The coyote in world literature takes on various roles, from trickster to guide… "creator of the world as it is," (Hyde, 2010 p. 7). At times upsetting the status quo and at others providing comic relief (Vogler, 2007) all the while guiding humans across the landscape of life. In much the same way, this chapter will guide the reader through the methodology that guided me through the research both as creator and participant, guide and buffoon. In many ways I took on the role of a coyote as I crossed the boundaries and landscapes of the university system rules, the Institutional Review Board rules and the Texas residential treatment center rules in search of the voice of the youth within the Texas Foster Care system. I spent my time within the context, as well as on the periphery, as I went in search of the "rules" that would guide me on how I should behave in order to access the youth. As a boundary crosser and coyote in my own research, it was at the well guarded borders of the system that I had to be, as Hyde (2010) wrote, especially creative and fluid in order to proceed. And it was in this crossing of multiple borders that I was able to locate representations of youth voice through the voice of teachers and the engagement with art works created by youth in a Texas residential treatment center.

Purpose and Research Questions

As mentioned in Chapter 1, this study had three purposes. The first purpose was to explore, document, and analyze my experience with the rules that both prohibit and permit research with and for children in the foster care system. The second purpose was to explore, document, and observe, the implementation of an arts program designed to address issues of voice and expression with children in the foster care system who reside in a residential treatment center in Texas. The third purpose was to document the perceptions of the participating teachers in the arts program regarding its implementation and how the voices of the children in their care emerge through the perceptions of the teachers.

Each of these purposes was explored and analyzed using the three research questions below. Research question one was informed by the findings in purpose one. Research question two relies on knowledge from the second purpose while question three is related to purpose three.

1. How and in what ways does an autoethnographic researcher redefine, conduct, and experience research focused on youth in the foster care system while navigating institutional rules.

2. What are the perceptions of teachers as they reflect on the implementation of an arts program and what themes emerge during the interviews and discussion?

3. How does youth voice emerge through the implementation of an arts program and through the perceptions of the teachers?

Methodology

This is a study utilizing autoethnography and ethnography methodologies as the research framework. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people construct, make meaning, and experience the world (Merriam, 2009). Denzin and Lincoln (1994) describe qualitative ethnographic research as a form of research that requires the researcher to hold an "attitude of detachment toward society" (p. 23) in order that the researcher is able to observe behaviors of self and others, understand the workings of social processes and to explain why and how the behavior and social processes occur all in an effort to better understand cultures and societies. Ellis (2004) and Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) describe autoethnography as an approach that attempts to describe and analyze personal experience in order for researchers/readers/participants to understand cultural experience. Josselson (1995) notes "we take whatever observations we have made of the external world and, making them part of ourselves, interpret them and tell a story about what we believe we know" (p. 29). Jensen-Hart and Williams echoed Buber's I and Thou philosophy in their 2010 *Journal of Teaching in Social Work* article "Blending Voices" stating that by engaging with autoethnography as a research method in social work we "...are encouraged to acknowledge [our] personal experiences of pain and suffering so that [we] may better understand and empathize with others (specifically offenders) (p.457). As in Buber (1996), I must first understand me in order to engage with you and understand us. It is in the understanding of self that we are better equipped to positively address the other because the other is simply another version of us.

Utilizing these methods, I tell the story of what I think I know, what I think I learned and what I observed throughout the research with the teacher participants, all in an effort to better understand the institutional structures surrounding children in the foster care system so like the coyote I could cross institutional boundaries and access youth voice through their teachers.

By producing research grounded in personal experience, I endeavored to "sensitize readers" to the issues of conducting research with/in the foster care system and the issues of implementing an arts program in a Texas residential treatment center for children in the foster care and juvenile justice systems all in an effort to access youth voice. With autoethnography, I share this story within context and through lived experience both as researcher as well as subject. I speak both in first-person, recounting events I personally observed, and in third-person in an attempt to bring the reader into scenes (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011) and make the text accessible to a wider audience. This process required me to engage in critical reflection and allowed space for multiple selves to be present within the research (Jensen-Hart & Williams, 2010).

Through autoethnography, I engaged with narrative ethnographies, reflexive interviews and layered accounts. With *narrative ethnography*, my experiences as the researcher are incorporated into the description and analysis. I observed myself as both a researcher and a participant in relationship to [the participants]" (Ellis, 2004). With *reflexive interviews*, while the focus was on the participant and their story, consideration was made for my responses to the interview as the researcher, which added context and layering to the interview results (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, 2011).

With *layered accounts*, as Ellis et al (2011) note, I focused on my experiences alongside the data collecting and analysis process. This enabled me to utilize stories and vignettes, reflexivity, multiple voices and introspection (Ellis, 2004; Ellis et al, 2011) as I worked through the data. While it is important to include the "me" in this research in order to locate the direction from which I am looking and speaking, it is of equal importance to note that this study was not intended to be about the "I" nor the "me." Rather, this study was intended to be about the children existing within the Texas foster care and juvenile justice systems and those who are charged with their care. While this research was not intended to be about the "I", if I follow the philosophy of Martin Buber, I must include the "I" the "Thou" (you), and the "It" in order to make connections and to truly address the challenges of accessing youth voice within these systems (Buber, 1996). It is by utilizing the methodologies of autoethnography and ethnography, that, ideally, multiple perspectives are represented without solely focusing on the self. As such, in order to not focus solely on the self, we require all participants and viewpoints in order to make meaning and thus understand (Spry, 2011). The idea of the I, the Thou, and the It working in unison to understand the challenges (as addressed by interviewees) and to suggest alternatives will be addressed in Chapters 4 and 5 of this text.

Ethnography and Autoethnography

Ethnography, as defined by Bernard (2006) is a common methodology in the field of anthropology and focuses on studying "the other" through participant observation and interviews in an effort to understand why people do what they do.

Anthropology is a "...discipline that is born out of concern to understand the "other" [and is] nevertheless also committed to an understanding of the self" (Vidich & Lyman, 1994, p.24) Autoethnographic research is an extension of ethnography in that rather than focusing on "the other" it focuses on the researcher within a cultural context as the site for cultural inquiry and provides an opportunity to break open and investigate the notion of a dichotomous relationship between other and the self (Ellis, 2004; Hughes, Pennington, & Makris, 2012). Jensen-Hart & Williams (2010) make the observation that autoethnographers are relieved of the pressure of speaking for "the other" because the autoethnographer is "the other." However, in this research I am both "the other"as autoethnographer and at the same time I attempt to speak for "the other" through participant observation and interviews.

The methodologies of ethnography and autoethnography are not "... an innocent practice. Our research practices are performative, pedagogical, and political" (Denzin, 2006, p. 422). As Denzin (2006) notes, it is through our research, our writing and our talking that "we enact the worlds that we are studying" (p. 422). Working with (auto)ethnography in this way helps the reader to better understand how we as the researcher see and interact with our researched space/world. Ideally, autoethnography gets us to think about personal and social tensions, about the past and the present and about how we know ourselves. This knowing may lead to an ability to empathize with others (Ellis, 2004; Jensen-Hart & Williams, 2010).

"Writing autoethnography reminds us of our own vulnerabilities and struggles, thus causing us to acknowledge and address the power difference[s]" (Jensen-Hart & Williams, 2010, p. 463) that exist in various cultural settings between the researcher and researched.

Reflexivity.

Within autoethnography, one engages ideally with reflexivity. Pillow (2003) defines reflexivity using Chiseristrater's explanation…"[reflexivity] demands both an other and some self conscious awareness of the process of self scrutiny" (p. 177). Pillow (2003) continues that "to be reflexive...not only contributes to producing knowledge that aids in understanding and gaining insight into the workings of our social world but also provides insight on how this knowledge is produced" (p. 178). Thus the researcher is acutely aware of how their privilege, position, and interests in the topic will influence every stage of the research and that reflexivity is an ongoing process and will effect the research up to and even after publication (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Jensen-Hart & Williams, 2010; Madison, 2005; Pillow, 2003). I engaged directly with reflexivity throughout the research project in an effort to not only better understand what I was observing, but to also remind myself of my position in the research. Retracing my steps and repositioning myself in the research from the first vignette with Arthur through to the analysis of the data allowed me to see the work from multiple perspectives and how I as a researcher directly impacted the research and the research impacted me.

Layered accounts.

As we engage with reflexivity a layering of the story becomes visible. Autoethnography and reflexivity calls for the revisiting of events, the layering upon one another of personal experience and interpretation of such experience through my own eyes as the researcher and through my interpretation of the experience of the teachers (Ellis and Bochner, 2006). Layering in narrative inquiry is a tool that can be used to decenter the authority of the researcher by allowing for the expression of multiple voices through the pen of one (Ronai, 1998). This form of inquiry identifies the layered, skirted, and pleated texts (Aroztegui, 2014) derived from multiple distinct voices and tries to "show" this overlapping recursiveness by "folding" multiple story lines and voices against one another throughout the text (Ellis, 2004; Lincoln). It is an attempt to "describe and systematically analyze personal experience" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 273) and identify the change in me that took place as a result of this research. It also allows for an "empathic" approach through storytelling that allows the reader to better understand the personal experience of the storyteller and how that experience is situated within a larger social and cultural context (Jensen-Hart & Williams, 2010).

Throughout this research and writing process the text has folded back on itself with multiple starts and stops in an effort to describe and detail multiple layers and connections throughout.

It has been challenging to simply write it all down because as Lincoln (2006) describes, “Such texts fold back on themselves; frequently have multiple beginnings; seek to re-create the start and stops of life, or of a story; demonstrate the layered texture of experience; retrace the changing understanding of circumstance with time…” My experience and the stories of the teachers and youth I encountered changed as my understanding of the circumstances and the system matured. In addition, as may be found in layered accounts throughout the remaining chapters of this study, I use vignettes, reflexivity, multiple voices and introspection as tools to demonstrate the layering (Ellis, 1991). “It’s like a layer cake” (Carpenter, personal communication, 2014) albeit the results may not be as sweet.

I engaged with this form of critical autoethnography to investigate myself as researcher throughout this project and to investigate the perceptions of teachers during the implementation of an arts program in a residential treatment center for young men 12 to 17 years of age currently living within the foster care and juvenile justice systems in a Texas based residential treatment center. Due to an Institutional Review Board decision, my focus throughout this research was on the teachers who implemented the arts program rather than the youth who participated in the TreeHouse Project.

Population and Sample

As a reminder, this study was undertaken at a residential treatment center (RTC) in rural central Texas referred to in this study by the pseudonym *Changing Lives*. The surrounding local community is predominantly conservative, White, and Christian.

The youth served at the Center reflected the population within the Texas foster care system with the largest percentage being African American, followed by Latinx and then White. These young men ranged in age from 10 to 18 and had spent approximately 3 to 4 years in the foster care and juvenile justice systems with some spending as many as 10 to 15 years moving in and out of the system and from placement to placement. This particular facility was owned and operated by a local family rather than owned and operated by a corporation or the state.

Family ownership of this facility is significant because having autonomy in the foster care and juvenile justice systems allows the Director to select the young men, often referred to as residents by the staff, who are housed within the walls of the center. This autonomy in turn allows control over the dynamics of personalities, histories, and potential challenges and opportunities that the residents, staff and facility may face in the future and/or on a day-to-day basis. State run facilities do not have the flexibility of selecting the residents. If Child Protective Services or the Juvenile Justice System assigns a youth to a specific state run center, that specific center must then accept the youth despite the potential challenges the youth may create with the existing population within the center. *Changing Lives*, the RTC central to this study continues to contract with the state and is required to meet the guidelines for care required by the state, but is not controlled by the state. As an independent contractor, this RTC can say "no" and/or can provide and do more for their residents than is required such as engaging in community events and/or implementing alternate therapeutic activities such as the TreeHouse project.

This is not to say that a state run institution does not or cannot provide additional forms of service. It simply means that an independent contractor generally has more flexibility in what they are able to provide. This may be due to the independent contractor having access to additional resources such as additional staff, community connections or even a more robust budget.

The second reason family ownership of *Changing Lives* is significant is that many of the staff members at the Center are related by birth and/or marriage. Many of the services that support the facility are provided through the family trades and talents, among which include, but are not limited to fundraising, counseling, legal services, and groundskeeping. More often than not, a family member is involved in everything the Center does or provides for the residents. This is significant because the residents at the center have the opportunity to observe the inner workings, dynamics and support of a strong, successful, healthy African American family from a local community. In essence, from day one, the youth at the center have a role model for a healthy family, which is one of the most significant factors missing from their daily lives. This family atmosphere flows over into the non-related staff members as well. One way this family atmosphere is expressed is the way the administrators ask about the health and welfare of the employees and their families in conversation. Additionally, the staff know that their children are welcome to the events organized for the residents whether that is the family style holiday dinners or one of the many other off campus events such as trips to the local cinema, museums or theatre performances.

The core family opens their arms and welcomes in not only the youth, but also the other staff members. They all become honorary family members with family benefits as well as family responsibilities.

Population Interviewed.

I observed and interviewed the "teachers" who facilitated and assisted in the implementation of the arts program TreeHouse Project during the summers of 2011 and 2012 for this study. These implementations took place during the summer for six and seven continuous weeks respectively. Each implementation was two days a week, two hours per day for a total of 24 hours during the summer of 2011 and 28 hours for summer 2012. The TreeHouse project consisted of a series of art activities both at the residential treatment center as well as in the nearby community.

For the purposes of this research I define "teacher" as any staff member, volunteer, and/or community member who worked with the youth in a teacher type role throughout the project either in literally teaching/introducing them to specific art skills, sharing with them their personal experiences with art, or presenting as a facilitator during the implementation of the arts program. The term teacher does not indicate the participant was formally trained as a teacher. Indeed, none of the participants have a formal background in teaching. I was one of the identified teachers. The other teachers are provided with pseudonyms throughout this text to provide anonymity. The pseudonyms in no particular order are Henry, Clara, Rebekka, Salvador, Taylor, Neil, Amiri, Jesse, and Andy.

There were a total of ten research participants. Four participants were women and six were men. In regards to ethnicity, one identified as Hispanic, four self-identified as African American or Black, and five self-identified as White or Caucasian. Within this group of ten, one participant was from an international background and three were born and raised in states other than Texas. The ages of the participants ranged from 22 to 65 years of age at the time of the program with a mean average of 40 years old. I did not ask for specific ages of the participants. Collectively, the participants had over 70 years working in or with the RTC/CPS systems and over 50 years combined working with or in the art world. Of the ten, four teachers were directly engaged in the art world on almost a daily practice with the instruction, the making of and/or the facilitation of the making of art. One was a classically trained pianist, one engaged in craftwork on a regular basis, three "enjoyed" the arts but did not engage in the making of art and one did not engage with art in any capacity (aside from listening to music) because this participant felt the "arts" were for women and it held no interest for him personally.

Seven out of the ten teachers I observed and interviewed were employed or volunteered within the Residential Treatment Center and as such, part of the family dynamic (Taylor, Salvador, Rebekka, Henry, Clara, Jesse, and Cory). Other teachers I interviewed were community members from a local university and from local arts spaces who participated in the Arts Program either as direct teachers sharing art techniques and

approaches or facilitators in the local art spaces during group outings the summers of 2011 and 2012 (Neil, Andy, and Amiri).

Nine adults, plus myself as a volunteer and researcher, were involved, interviewed, and observed throughout the 2011 6-week implementation and the 2012 7-week implementation process. Each interview lasted between one and two hours depending on the open-ended question process and the depth of interaction allowed by the interviewee. One participant who visited during the project was a volunteer at a local arts space. Two participants were professional artists who came to the facility to share art making skills. These two participants spent a total of two implementation days at the RTC which consisted of a total of four hours of direct interaction with the residents during each implementation. The seven participants directly related to the facility through employment or as a volunteer fulfilled the roles of counselor, chaperone, and mentor. These seven participants spent a majority of the 24 to 28 total hours of implementation with the residents.

Procedure – What I did

This study complied with human subjects research protocol and was approved by the Texas A&M University Institutional Review Board (IRB Protocol# 2011-0501). The research was deemed of minimal risk to the participants and the probability of harm was no greater than what may be encountered on a normal basis. Each participant received an information sheet regarding the research and their rights as a participant.

After reading the consent form, participants had the opportunity to ask any questions about the research and procedures we would follow during the implementation of the program as well as during the interview phase of the research. Prior to individually interviewing the participants I asked if they were comfortable with participating in the interview and whether I had permission to audio record the interview for use during the analysis of the interview. In addition, each participant had the option to end the interview process at anytime if they felt uncomfortable with the questions, the process, or the direction the research was headed. Only one participant declined to be audio recorded and no one ended the interview process early.

Data Collection.

I used a number of "complimentary(sic) and integrated research methods" (Guyas & Keys, 2009, p. 24) to conduct this study, which included participant observation, one on one open ended interviews, content analysis, dialogue, narrative, discovery, exploration and reflection.

Participant Observation.

The researcher (me) and the participants were research instruments. For a portion of the research I was a participant observer. Participant observation, according to anthropologist H. Russell Bernard (2006), involves imbedding oneself in a group in such a way that the group members feel comfortable going about their daily routine in the researcher's presence. The researcher participates in the group to a certain extent all the while observing and recording the groups activities in their "natural setting" through field notes, photographs, audio recordings, videos, open ended interviews and so on

(Bernard, 2006, Merriam 2009). As a participant observer I was able to be present during the implementation of the TreeHouse Project arts activities, field trips, and group meetings with the residents. Observations took place during the implementation of the arts project for two hours per day two days per week for 7 consecutive weeks during the summer of 2011 and for two hours per day two days per week for 6 consecutive weeks during the summer of 2012. Observations were also made during interactions between participants (teacher to teacher), between participants and the youth engaging in the project (specifically with a focus on the teacher not the youth), as the participants interact with the environment, and as the participants interacted with the arts project itself.

Interviews/Conversations.

In order to collect data that would not otherwise be available throughout the observation of the implementation process and to better understand how the participants experienced the implementation process (DeMarrais and Lapan, 2004), I conducted interviews and had informal conversations with each participant. DeMarrais and Lapan (2004) defines the interview as "...a process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study" (p. 54). I interviewed participants either in their offices at the RTC or at a location of their choice and convenience. I wanted to maximize their privacy given we were discussing their place of work in some cases.

I selected a semi-structured interview process that would allow for flexibility of interviewee expression within the interview, but also allowed for the use of an interview guide which consisted of a basic set of questions and topics (Bernard, 2006; Merriam, 2009) that I wanted to cover during the interview. I designed the interview instrument and asked questions based on my primary research questions. The instrument also allowed for open-ended questions in the case that a response opened the door to further questioning. Further questioning allowed me to probe to achieve a deeper understanding of the perceptions of the teachers, the sharing of the voices of the youth through the perceptions of the teachers, and/or shared the successes and challenges of the implementation process. These interviews were documented, transcribed and analyzed.

In addition to the interviews, I also observed conversations and dialogue that unfolded between participants, between participants and me, and between participants and the youth involved in the arts program.

Content Analysis.

The content I analyzed for this project included one on one audio recorded interviews between myself and the participants, transcriptions of these recordings and my handwritten field notes. The recordings offered the sounds of verbal intonation present and/or absent in the voices of the participants as I discussed the implementation of the project, how the boys responded to the project, and/or how the participants answered the open-ended questions during the one on one interviews.

By making recordings, I was able to obtain information I may have missed if the interviews were only recorded in my handwritten notes. More importantly, I was able to

hear my own voice, the presence of my own intonation, the manner in which I led the interviews, and how I began to form ideas based on the answers provided by the participants. The transcriptions allowed for an additional level of information that I could more easily return to when I had a question from the recordings and the field notes. By utilizing all three forms of content I was able to produce more reliable data than if I depended solely on one format (Tessier, 2012).

I triangulated the data using myself and my personal perceptions and analysis of activities taking place as one data point, observations of participant behaviors during the implementation of the project as a second data point, and finally the one on one conversations and open ended interviews with the participants as a third data point. Additionally there was a prolonged engagement with the research site and the participants which allowed for the development of trust and relationship which a shorter research project would not have necessarily supported.

Self-Assessment.

Because part of this project involves my own narrative, I reflect on my experiences prior to the study, during the design of the study and with/in and through the project . I attempted to "examine" my biases and assumptions before, during and after the research (Merriam, 2009 p. 26). My self-assessment included the use of narrative, personal exploration and self-reflection throughout the process from the first days of plotting the project to the final days as I wrote this manuscript.

Self-assessment was a necessary and crucial method to engage with in order to keep myself honest and transparent personally and as a researcher. For autoethnography,

questions of reliability come down to whether the reader is willing to believe me, the researcher, as a credible source as I tell this story (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). This reliability relates to validity in that the reader, again, must be willing to believe that the "experience[s] described is lifelike, believable, and possible" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p.282). As unbelievable as some of this experience was to me, it was the lived experience of others.

CHAPTER IV

WHAT I DID

"Early on I became interested in the incongruity between what people said and what they did." (Carolyn Ellis, 2004, p.27)

"Buried Treasures"

When I was a young girl my mother began saving things for my "hope chest," for that day in the future when I would become a bride and have my own home. I did not fully understand the potential impact of this behavior, but I did understand that in this seemingly simple act of saving utensils, pot holders, and other household items there was a sense of excitement, hope, and the future. There were no promises made or contracts secured and in actuality there was not even a chest, but there was an idea, a concept, an image constructed in my imagination as we collected these precious treasures…all built on hope, the potential for love and a future…at least for me.

What do people imagine when they think of a chest or a trunk? What do people do with chests and with trunks? Maybe we imagine the pirate stories of our youth and finding buried treasure in our back yard; trunks and chests that hold secrets and adventure. We put our hopes and dreams inside and safely store our memories for future generations. Blankets, clothes, toys, photographs, treasures. Our treasures. Their treasures. Other treasures…itty bitty pieces of our lives. These treasures are what we hide away safely in trunks and chests stored in our attics and garages and closets.

What you do not imagine is two young boys watching their parents use a stun gun on their sibling and subsequently shoving the body of the sibling inside a trunk, a trunk that was placed in their shared bedroom. What you do not imagine is a sibling trapped, a sibling trapped alive inside a trunk, …with no food. No water. No toilet. No air. No help.

After some time, after the passing of some precious time, the sounds from the trunk grow silent and are replaced by a strange... and unusual... odor. The two brothers watch and listen. They know the consequences of touching the trunk. The trunk that holds the most precious of treasures. They dare not touch the trunk lest they suffer a similar fate. Still, the odor continues to seep through the crevices of the trunk and grows stronger and stronger with each passing day. Yet, the brothers stay in that room. They stay in that room day after day after day. Watching. Listening. Breathing in the stagnant air trapped within the room. All the while, the trunk filled with the most precious of treasures slowly…slowly…ever so slowly... transforms into an unwilling coffin.

And unlike the chest of my youth that brought hope into my imagination, this chest brought fear, violence, tragedy and death into the lives of two very young boys as they witnessed the precious treasure turn into a living nightmare.

Today...today I developed a new image when I think of trunks and chests, one I do not want in my head. Today, I learned what someone else decided to put in their trunk. Today I learned that two young brothers witnessed a horrific act perpetrated on their brother by their biological parents resulting in the brother's death.

Today I learned that these two brothers lost a precious treasure as they watched him get...Beaten...Tased...Shoved into ...and Locked inside a trunk and... left to die.

What do people think of when they imagine a chest or a trunk, these objects that symbolize safety, security, history, adventure, and are sometimes the keepers of a promised future or of family secrets…yes, sometimes the keepers of deadly, deadly, and horrific family secrets?

As I have moved through each chapter, I endeavored to release the secrets held within the research, to bring to light the process followed. In chapter one, I introduced you to Arthur, the young man that inspired this work and I provided an outline to the research. In chapter two, I shared a brief history of foster care in the United States and in Texas, and described the history of Changing Lives, the residential treatment center (RTC) in Texas where the TreeHouse Project was implemented. In chapter three, like the young men turned *coyote,* I guided the reader through the research questions and explored the research terrain through a number of methods. Specifically, I described the autoethnographic methodology that guided the research process. As a result of this methodology I gathered data from interviews and conversations with "teachers," recorded observations of the implementation process as field notes in my journal, and reviewed audio recordings of teacher participant interviews. I also reviewed works of art created by the youth involved in the TreeHouse project as well as the art created by the "teachers" when it was available.

As I open the trunk of this chapter to reveal the contents within, I describe the path the research has taken to this point, analyze the data gathered from the conversations, interviews, observations, and my personal reflections on the process. I use the research questions as a framework to organize the chapter, describe the process and to point out barriers encountered throughout each stage of the research. Through the exploration of each question I chronicle the planning process, the implementation of the project, and the interviews following the project implementation. I conclude with final thoughts and recommendations in chapter five.

Organization and Analysis

Data in this chapter was presented in a narrative format consistent with the autoethnographic methodology (Ellis, 2004; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). The reader is also reminded of the pseudonyms and general characteristics of the teacher participants in the project. However, as mentioned in Chapter 3, specific characteristics and other identifiable details of the participants and the RTC *Changing Lives* are not included in order to protect the anonymity of each participant, the RTC, and the youth residing in the RTC. However, all quotes from the participants are verbatim in order to preserve the voice of the participant. I did this realizing that some readers may project stereotypical views onto the participants based on vocabulary choice and the implicit bias and sedimented preceptors of the reader (Daspit and Weaver, 1999).

Research Questions

As a reminder, the three questions that guided this research were:

1. How and in what ways does an autoethnographic researcher redefine, conduct, and experience research focused on youth in the foster care system while navigating institutional rules?

2. What are the perceptions of the teachers as they reflect on the implementation of an arts program and what themes emerge during the interviews and discussion?

3. How does the voice of the children in care emerge through the implementation of an arts program and through the perceptions of the teachers?

These research questions provided a basic framework to analyze the data that emerged and served as the organizational structure for the remainder of this chapter. There is a movement between the layers as the data blends from one question into another. Rather than utilizing a strict framework with identifiable markers, I have allowed the material to emerge at will and within the moment in a free flowing manner throughout the narrative descriptions consistent with storytelling (Ellis, 2004; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). Like the literature review, the data and the analysis of the data is found throughout the body of this text and comes to light as the story naturally unfolds.

Research Question 1

How and in what ways does an autoethnographic arts- informed researcher redefine, conduct, and experience research focused on youth in the foster care system while navigating institutional rules?

At the risk of sounding crass or sarcastic, after my months long experience, which led to multiple years, with this research and the institutional rules, my initial response to this question is…VERY CAREFULLY and VERY CAUTIOUSLY!!! After multiple discussions with the University IRB, colleagues in anthropological and science based research disciplines, and social workers at the time of this research, arts research and arts researchers were relatively unfamiliar to their respective research communities and to state run agencies such as the foster care system (personal communication, 2011). After discussions with the *Changing Lives* administrators, I learned that arts research is also relatively unknown to the independently run residential treatment centers within the state of Texas (personal communication, 2011). Because arts research is relatively unfamiliar, this question is particularly important to researchers who look at challenges within these systems from different perspectives. How can "we," as arts informed researchers get through these systems in our effort to learn more and to improve the current situation children find themselves within in state run systems or in privately owned institutions like *Changing Lives*?

I explored Question 1 throughout the research process from the initial design phase to this final document. As I was confronted with barriers, due to veering from

what may be considered traditional research in academia, I was consistently challenged to maneuver and backtrack like the *coyote*.

This maneuvering was essential in order to access resources and to reach my destination, ultimately the voices of the youth. I went from my Advisory committee to the RTC to IRB back to the committee then to the RTC on to the Thesis Office and then back to the IRB. Throughout this time I sought guidance on possibilities and processes as to the rules from more experienced individuals. In an effort to remain agile within the institutional rules, I reformulated the original research questions and the research focus. This reformulation required me to rely on the experience of the IRB staff. The IRB staff guided me in what would and would not be allowed as per the University research rules and protocols. This in turn required me to refer back to the RTC administration for what was allowed and not allowed within the RTC system when working within the personal space of the youth and staff. It was like participating in a dance where I went from partner to partner and had to synthesize the steps from each while taking care not to step on anyone's toes. Because the original research focus was altered from working directly with the youth during the implementation of the TreeHouse Project to observing the implementation of the project through the perspective of the teachers, I too had to alter my own perspective and focus. This challenged me given that I spent the first two years of this research process focused in one direction and on one goal of creating an avenue for voice and a space of stability for children in the foster care system. Below I detail the earliest stages of the TreeHouse Project research because it was from this initial

investment that the final research project was born. We must begin at the beginning to be understood afterall.

The process to get to the process...

While this story began when I met Arthur in 2005, the venture into research began three years later in 2008 in the basement of a campus student center at the conclusion of bi-weekly meetings that I participated in as a part of my role as an assistant director of a campus arts space. With the memory of Arthur heavy on my mind and in my heart, I knew I wanted to do something for children and specifically children in the foster care system. After my experiences with Arthur and my surface exploration of the foster care system in Texas, it was my opinion that children within the system lacked a legitimate role in their own care. It seemed they lacked an opportunity to express voice in their personal situations. While this was my concern, I was not really sure how to go about creating change or what that change might look. The last thing I wanted was to be perceived as trying to "save the world." This was a lesson I learned when working with Arthur and trying to be his "hero" by finding his mother after the big storm. And this was a lesson I did not want to repeat.

I brainstormed possibilities for change with two colleagues, along with what that change might look like, and whether my ideas for change were feasible. Once I had the basic plan, which was to create a space that was child centered, supported and guided by the community, and arts focused, the TreeHouse Project was born. Despite the numerous basement conversations with my colleagues, I was still unsure as to whether this idea

was feasible and whether I would actually be able to complete the research as PhD research at Texas A&M University. Having completed a Masters in Anthropology that documented a new conservation research method for glass recovered from shipwrecks, I too was steeped in the positivistic research process due to my previous education and experience. I was only just beginning to understand the various options for making meaning and finding understanding in and through research.

Once the idea was in hand with the basic details outlined, I continued forward with my journey and consulted an arts educator in the College of Education to see if the development and implementation of an arts project within the foster care system would be the kind of research supported by the Department of Teaching, Learning and Culture in the College of Education and Human Development. In addition, I wanted the perspective of a professional inside the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. To get this perspective, I called a caseworker for Child Protective Services to ask their opinion of how a project like this would be received, if at all, in the child protective services system and whether there was even a need for programs such as this.

The conversation proved to be enlightening in that the CPS worker explained that this project would be well received in the current format, but would be received even more readily if it had an overnight or camp component that would allow foster parents to have a break from their responsibilities with the children in the foster care system that were in their charge. The CPS worker indicated that sometimes the foster parents need a break and/or want to go on vacation without the children. Being completely candid, this thought process immediately troubled me in that, from my perspective, an adult that took

on the responsibility of a child within the system was also taking them into their family in essence as a member of their family and to go on vacation without them was counterintuitive to me.

I will again restate that this was counterintuitive to me, but may not be the case for others that better understand the system. And while this was one of many system details that "troubled" me throughout this research, this is a particular topic that is not explored in the research chronicled here. I do believe the topic should be taken up at a later date to allow for in-depth research in order to better understand why the foster parents make the decisions that they do and what thought processes are impacting decisions, specifically decisions to allow or not allow the children to participate within more intimate dynamics of the family such as vacations.

Navigating the Institutions.

Having received positive feedback from both the art educator in the College of Education and the Texas CPS Caseworker, I decided that the project was doable and that I would move forward by officially designing and implementing the project as a part of the dissertation process. The entire time my focus was clearly and steadfastly on the children, not the parents, not the foster parents, not the caseworkers, not the system itself, but the children.

At the two year mark, with the course work completed and the basic design of the TreeHouse Project down on paper, the dissertation committee formed and informally approving the research, a population of youth in a Residential Treatment Center identified, support of said RTC for formal implementation received, the prepping for the

research proposal underway and the application for the Institutional Review Board in process,

I was confident that the formal implementation of the program was inevitable. Then I received an email from the IRB administrators and the real adventure began.

While I was completing the formal process and paperwork seeking approval to engage in research through the University and prior to receiving the initial email from IRB, I followed the protocol for approval to work with the Residential Treatment Center *Changing Lives.* In order to "volunteer" with *Changing Lives* I had to complete a series of paperwork that included providing personal and professional information as well as my educational background. In addition, I had to undergo an in-house drug test, tuberculosis (TB) skin test - all paid for out of pocket - (General Residential Operations - GRO 748.509 p.38), and a name-based criminal background check (GRO 745.615 p.279). While there is a personal cost through the loss of privacy of laying your life open to be scrutinized by the *Changing Lives* administration, the most embarrassing part of this entire process was the drug test simply because I had to take the test at the center and provide a urine sample to one of the staff members with whom I had already been working. It was embarrassing both to me and to him. It was one of those moments when a semblance of anonymity would have been a blessing. Anonymity was not an option so I went into the bathroom with my plastic receptacle and upon exiting the bathroom handed the plastic receptacle to the now gloved staff member for him to then take into his work space and test. It sucked. It was the last step in the process not because of any administrative issue or protocol, but simply because we were both avoiding the

inevitable discomfort of the process. I passed without any issues and we were both relieved to have the test completed.

The one thing that became glaringly apparent to me throughout this part of the process was that I was extremely happy that I had not "experimented" with any recreational substances. Getting to this stage of the research process took two years and with one failed drug test I would have thrown away all of that work and the ability to officially implement the arts project at the RTC. All of my work would have been compromised. Realizing and fully comprehending how choices I made in my personal life could have had a devastating impact on this research that I had poured so much into became one of the most powerful personal lessons on choices and consequences that I encountered. It is a story I continue to share today with graduate and undergraduate students alike.

While the Minimum Standards for general Residential Operations (GRO) manual only provides basic guidelines on volunteer qualifications (p. 50-53), the RTC treated me as if I was incoming staff as per section 748.723 in the GRO manual. The GRO states that "a volunteer or contractor that performs any employee function must meet the same requirements as an employee who performs that function" (2010, p. 51). Because of the amount of time I was to spend with the youth, I was asked to complete several steps that are required of incoming staff members. This was to ensure that all bases were covered for me, for the safety of the youth living at the center, and for the RTC as a whole. Though the process was uncomfortable and required a great deal of time and personal investment, I believed in the work I was attempting to accomplish and was therefore willing to complete all tasks and tests set before me. However, according to the

RTC administration, this is the phase that tends to deter researchers and volunteers from moving forward due to a lack of personal resources and time. For example, when I relayed all the steps I needed to accomplish in order to move forward with *Changing Lives* to a colleague from the Educational Psychology department that also wanted to volunteer at the RTC, she told me that she had been put through the same menagerie of exams. In her case, she was declined as a volunteer due to a "failed" TB prick test. However, she did not have TB. She neither had the time nor the resources to continue with the screening process and was therefore unable to volunteer at the RTC. Because of the extensive, time intensive, and costly screening process intended to protect the youth, the youth lost access to a valuable resource in this volunteer.

Since the completion of this research, an additional requirement was added to the processes and procedures for volunteering at the RTC. Texas DFPS now requires each potential volunteer to have an FBI fingerprint based background check. This background check comes at a current cost of $41.45. This fee is an additional out of pocket cost that is covered by the volunteer. As the state moves to further protect the youth from potential hazards, the barriers and access for volunteers continue to rise.

The University, the Institutional Review Board and the RTC.

Working within the traditional framework of the scientific method at a conservative research institution can be and is challenging when looking at problems from an arts informed perspective. Issues arise due to the lack of familiarity with alternate research methodologies. In this case, from my perspective, the IRB literally rejected the "other" (the alternate research method and the original research project)

because it did not fit into the traditional framework and because the IRB did not understand how this "other" might positively impact the youth in the RTC.

By being willing to follow the rules required by the institutional bureaucracy and by pairing myself with progressive thinkers (co-conspirators) on the campus, I was able to develop this project within the confines of traditional research while still completing the work through the lens of an arts informed researcher. This allowed for a progressive approach and the development of a hybrid project that successfully navigated the institutional rules.

In order to accomplish this successful navigation, one of the most important first steps was to find allies within the institutions that were involved with the research. Once I found allies within the University (my committee members), the real challenge came from the University being unable to alter the dictates of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Though my committee approved my research, in order for me to move forward and implement the research I, like all other researchers working with human subjects and/or animals, needed the approval of the IRB. The IRB is a federally mandated board that resides within the Office of Research Compliance and Biosafety. The official IRB website in 2011 listed, the first guiding principle for the Office of Research Compliance and Biosafety as a commitment to the protection of human and animal research subjects and to ensure the safety of faculty, staff and students that are involved with research involving humans and animals. The protection of research subjects and the safety of the researchers was followed by a concern for the welfare of the public.

As stated in the IRB Investigator Manual, the researcher is not allowed to move forward with any type of research without the review, written consent and approval of the Institutional Review Board (2018). If a researcher chooses to move forward without written approval of the IRB, all the data gathered is considered inadmissable. This meant all work on the development of the research had to be exploratory and preliminary in nature and not a documented portion of the research.

When I began working with the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I filled out the general submission forms and understood that this project would potentially be delayed or even denied due to the nature of the project and the fact that it was autoethnographic, social science-based research rather than research based in a positivistic approach. As a reminder, autoethnographic research is an approach that attempts to describe and analyze personal experience in order for researchers/readers/participants to understand cultural experience (Ellis, 2004; Ellis et al, 2011). A positivistic research approach is one in which there is "a notion of a single, objective reality" (Merriam, 1991, p. 44) that is researched using the scientific method. This is not to say that autoethnographic or social science-based research is not approved, this is simply a note that in 2011, at my institution, autoethnographic research was uncommon and required much more explanation to be understood by the IRB approval committee.

In order to complete the IRB submission I referred to previous IRB approved applications submitted by colleagues in the anthropological field who work with human subjects and produced ethnographic research. I cannot stress the importance of

remaining flexible when working with the IRB enough. In speaking with other graduate students and faculty members, I learned that there are times that the IRB is seen as a police force set in place to protect the University from lawsuits rather than an entity put in place "to protect the researcher, the subject of the research, and the research itself" (IRB webpage). Based on my experience with IRB and this study, my advice to other researchers is that it is in their best interest to remain on good terms with the IRB administrators in order to successfully complete the process and move on to the intended research. Afterall, without the IRB approval the work cannot move forward as sanctioned University supported research (Investigator Manual, 2018).

IRB: *You may want to abandon this population*

My first submission to the IRB resulted in "Administratively Withdrawing" my application. It was a given that I was working with a "vulnerable" population because I was working with children which is one of the populations specifically listed as vulnerable by the IRB. Other examples of vulnerable populations according to the IRB include pregnant women, human fetuses and neonates, prisoners, economically disadvantaged, socially disadvantaged, educationally disadvantaged, cognitively impaired and/or disabled individuals (Research Compliance and BioSafety, 2012). Because I was working with children, I was fully prepared to endure a Full Board Review. Full Board Review meant that the IRB deemed the research as greater than minimal risk to the participants, would require an annual continuing review and would require a primary and secondary review with an IRB meeting (Research Compliance and

BioSafety, 2012). The other IRB approval options were Exempt and Expedited. Exempt is when the study poses little to no risk and fits into one of the exempt categories. This type of study is approved by an IRB staff member. Expedited approval is listed as minimal risk with prospective data, with an annual continuing review and a single IRB member can approve. Understanding that I was working with children and they were in a residential treatment center I was willing to go through the Full Board Review approval process because I believed in the work and in the children. As it was, the IRB communication to me in February 2011 stated what I anticipated, that "*Due to the vulnerable population, this study would be sent to Full Board review*…"(personal communication, February 10, 2011).

The February 10, 2011 email was sent to me, the IRB, and my committee advisors. After much back and forth with my advisors, speaking with the RTC and a couple of brief phone conversations with IRB staff asking questions, it was clear that my research would not be approved.

The back and forth

Administratively withdrawing an application sounds frightening and very serious to a graduate student. What it actually entails is simply removing all of your paperwork from the system and moving forward as if you never sent paperwork forward in the first place. Why did this happen? Because, from the perspective of the IRB process, I proposed a very challenging project…challenging in the fact that the "population" I would be working with was considered "vulnerable" and having a lack of parental

consent were considered by the "rules" to be "prisoners" and to be in the custody of the state thereof.

The following are excerpts from the email I received from the IRB with my thought process interjected:

The email from the IRB stated that:

> "…*it was noted that the subject population was children in foster care that currently reside in residential treatment. This raised a question for the IRB regarding who would be able to provide consent*…" (personal communication, February 10, 2011).

Because the youth were in foster care the biological parents were not available for the consent process. It was my argument that since the biological parents were not available for consent and the youth were under the care of the RTC, the RTC was for all sense and purposes now the "parents" and could provide the consent necessary for the youth to participate in the program. I mean, after all, the RTC was responsible for the education of the youth, they housed, clothed, and fed the youth. They tended to all the psychological and medical needs of the youth, so in my mind and through my logic the RTC were now the parents albeit "foster" parents and they could provide consent. I should note that this is how the administration within the RTC also saw the matter. Prior to applying to the IRB I questioned the RTC regarding consent issues just to be sure that I could move forward and to be sure I was asking the appropriate legal authority.

After speaking with them and receiving a letter of support and approval from the RTC to include in my application I felt confident moving forward. This however, was not the way the IRB saw the situation:

> "…[we] *approached (TAMU) legal counsel to verify your belief that the residential treatment center could provide consent for research for foster children in their care. We have been advised that while the treatment center can provide consent for medical matters, research is not considered medical necessity*…"(IRB, personal communication, February 10, 2011).

The IRB was essentially saying that yes, the RTC could provide for the education and medical needs of the children and were given the authority to do so, but the RTC was not considered the overall legal authority with the power to make decisions on the children's participation in research activities or anything that was not deemed medically or educationally necessary. This was partially due to the fact that the children were children in the foster care and juvenile justice systems, which meant that while they were under the immediate authority of the RTC, overall they were under the authority of the state. The RTC was only able to make decisions on "medical treatments" received by the children and this is because the children were considered "prisoners" by the mere fact they were either required or were voluntarily sent to a "treatment center" for care based on previous behavioral, psychological, and/or legal issues that required "treatment."

There were two issues at hand. One, the children were in foster care and the state was the only entity who had "parental" authority according to the original email from IRB. When I asked for clarification on this thought an IRB staff member shared that it was likely that"...*in this case, [IRB] would most likely require a court order allowing you to approach the children for their participation and explicitly names the children within the court order*" (IRB, personal communication, February 10, 2011) This meant that IRB *might* allow me to move forward if I received a court order for participation from a judge for each individual child. If I chose to pursue the court orders for the children, it was made clear that the financial burden would be mine. The financial burden, coupled with how slowly the court system proceeds, made this option impossible to pursue. If I had the financial means, it was likely that by the time I received the court order, if I received the court order, the children would already be in another location making them no longer accessible for the program at the RTC. In addition, IRB made it clear that even if I did receive the court orders, IRB would likely still not approve the research. Throughout this communication I wondered whether the IRB reaction, and for me a seemingly overreaction with the mention of court orders, was one of protecting the institution rather than supporting research that might have the possibility of changing lives.

The second issue was that the children were in a Residential Treatment Center which is looked upon as a type of incarceration because the children are not free to leave. Therefore, they were also considered a type of "prisoner." This meant they had a double vulnerability. They were both children and "prisoners."

The reality was that despite my attempts at logic, despite my arguments of the potential value of this program to the children and their needs, IRB was digging in and was not going to budge…once "legal counsel" had been consulted and provided their "view," the IRB was not going to approve the research.

Salvaging the research

In an effort to salvage something of the last two years of my work, I responded to the email and requested a meeting with the IRB to discuss the future viability of this project and/or some form of this project. I was confused and frustrated, but determined to find a solution and an alternate path forward. The following was my email response to the IRB:

> "*Due to the need for "court orders" as a form of "parental consent" and my desire to continue with the research in some form I would like to sit down and discuss the parameters, possibilities, and alternatives that I can work with and still remain within the IRB guidelines*…" (Cory, personal communication, March 25, 2011)

The first reply to my email from an IRB representative was over the phone. The IRB representative said, "*you might want to consider abandoning this population*" (IRB, personal communication, March 25, 2011). The phrase, "abandoning this population" was ringing through my head...abandon...is that not why I was pursuing this work in the first place. These kids had already been *abandoned* in some form or fashion in the past. Abandoned by the system, abandoned by community, abandoned by parents, and now abandoned by the "rules."

Racing through my head was the tearful voice of Arthur…"Cory PLEASE come get me!" *How can I come get you Arthur when "they" will not let me?* Prior to Arthur's return to New Orleans this was a frequent conversation on the phone. He would call me and ask me to come get him and return him to his great grandmother. Arthur called me because my phone number was the only number he had of someone that both knew him and his great grandmother. He knew I knew where he wanted to go. Every time he called, every time he asked me to come get him, I would have to tell him that I was not allowed to pick him up. I was not biologically nor legally related to him in any way therefore, I was not allowed to transport him. As much as I wanted to circumvent this part of the system, I was not able to figure out how to successfully navigate the boundaries of the legal systems in play without incurring negative consequences for both of us.

Following the IRB phone conversation about the court order email, I made an appointment with the IRB representative and spoke face to face with this person March 29, 2011. I did not get angry or complain, yet I was in shock and shared the response with my co-advisors. In reflection, that meeting with an IRB representative was crucial in the completion of this study. This representative made the suggestion of looking at the teachers rather than looking directly at the youth in the RTC. It was the first step towards the change of direction for the research. I found that by maintaining a positive relationship, the professionals working within the IRB can help to facilitate the research process and the production of formal IRB paperwork that will and can make it through the bureaucratic system.

Without my positive relationship with this particular IRB administrator, I would NOT have been able to move forward with my research in the original form nor in the form that the research evolved into throughout the process. In many ways this person became a co-conspirator in the process. bell hooks (2003) mentions this type of "gap" in the system. It was "a reminder of the reality that there are no closed systems, that every system has a gap and that in that space is a place of possibility" (hooks, 2003, p. 23).This person understood my intent with the research as I explained it, she understood the rules and regulations of the system and rather than simply replying "no" after legal counsel was consulted, she figured out a way to both comply with the system rules and move me forward into the actual research with the RTC. She was my "gap." She joined me not only as a co-conspirator, but also as a coyote and helped me cross the boundaries and navigate the system that protected the institution and prevented the original research.

I received expedited approval on 23 June 2011, Protocol number: 2011-0501 for an approval period to gather data from 23 June 2011 to 22 June 2012.

Residential Treatment Center.

Throughout the implementation of the project, the Treatment Director of the RTC oversaw the entire process to ensure the project fulfilled the treatment needs of the residents and did not cause harm. As outlined previously, there were multiple stages of paperwork, background checks and physical exams that were required before I was allowed to enter the RTC space as a volunteer. This was all completed as per the requirements of the RTC and in fulfillment of state requirements. The paperwork, exams, and background checks were completed prior to my interaction with the youth at

the RTC and before any in-depth conversations with research participants that were employed at the RTC. Throughout the implementation of the project I was accompanied by an RTC staff member. This was for the safety of the youth because I was only a volunteer and not approved as an official caretaker of the youth. It was also for my own protection to prevent any potential questions about my interactions in the space. I was to always have a "witness" which prevented any potential he said/she said scenarios with the youth.

The building and the working space

One quick lesson I learned is that I did not know what was a rule or regulation in the RTC and what was a matter of habit, formality, and choice. In short, I did not know what I did not know and it took patience, curiosity and a willingness to ask questions in order to understand. When I walked into the space I thought everything that was done and/or everything that I saw, from the color on the walls to the arrangement of furniture, was influenced by the state and guided by rules and regulations. I quickly learned that this was not the case in the privately run RTC in which I was researching.

I set an appointment with the Treatment Director to discuss the potential project. We agreed that I would meet the Director at the RTC so that I would have the opportunity to see the space, or *the campus* as the RTC staff refer to it, and meet the boys. When the day finally came for the beginning of what proved to be an amazing adventure, the weather was not exactly cooperating. This facility was in the middle of a wide-open central Texas landscape where you can see sky for miles.

As I drove for what seemed like forever, I passed cattle, horses, barbed wire fencing, and a great emptiness devoid of neighborhoods, houses, cars, and other people. That great sky was sporting the beginnings of an amazing storm with dark clouds rolling in and a general heaviness spreading across the landscape. I quickly wondered what exactly it was that I was doing driving out into the middle of nowhere all alone to meet complete strangers at a facility that housed young people that had been in trouble for any number of reasons. In truth, I was nervous and I called a friend to let them know where I was and what I was up to and that if I did not call them later in the day then they needed to come looking for me. I do not believe I would have felt the same way if the sun had been shining, but maybe, just maybe I was experiencing the exact same kind of discomfort and/or fear that others experience when confronting the unknown. I allowed my imagination, my memory of scary movies and more importantly my own implicit bias to get the better of me. Imagination, implicit bias, what we think we already know, are all real issues and impact research. Our lives (and our past experiences) do intertwine with our classrooms as they do our research (hooks, 1994). There is no real way to separate the two.

Once I arrived and met the staff, the crazy ideas I manifested in my imagination abated and we got down to work. Yes, the youth at the RTC were being held and cared for for a number of reasons from parental abandonment to multiple arrests for breaking the law, but they were still kids, children, young people, boys, the youth and any number of labels we might give our own children.

The physical space

The physical space provided by the RTC for the arts program was a multipurpose room inside of the administration building. This area was used as a kitchen, cafeteria and meeting space. There were three windows looking out onto a grove of trees, but the blinds were closed nearly the entire time due to the brightness of the sun pouring through. The only other light was the fluorescent ceiling lights that left an oppressive blue gray glare on the space. The walls were painted white and posters with the RTC rules and emergency first aid were hung in various locations. One side of the space held metal industrial style appliances used to prepare food for the youth at the RTC. We used the deep sinks for clean up and the long prep table held the art supplies. On the other side of the room were plastic white folding tables with brown metal folding chairs. The chairs were stored on a large hanging mechanism that lived in one corner. The tables were stored against the walls under the windows until needed. Each day when we entered the space we arranged the tables and chairs for the days activities. The RTC teachers kept the space orderly and controlled in order to manage the behaviors of the youth. Some of the volunteer teachers found the space to be sterile, oppressive, and confining. Their first question upon seeing the small room was whether the tables could be removed so that there was more room to move, more freedom for creativity and breathing.

When I first saw the space I did not think moving the furniture was an option, again this was because I assumed the space and everything in it was controlled by the state and there was surely something I did not understand about the configuration.

My primary goal was to work with what we had because, this is what we had and flexibility was key. It was not until later that I would come to understand that the furniture placement, wall color, and lighting was all controlled by the Director and the staff of the RTC. The staff had no background on the use of color to calm or gave thought to the rapid flashing of the fluorescent lights hanging above our heads and how that flashing might irritate the youth. The primary focus of the staff was to manage behaviors and to keep the youth safe, not redecorate.

Again, the youth at the RTC came from an array of backgrounds and presented any number of diagnoses with one common diagnosis being anxiety. From my perspective, some of the symptoms from the diagnoses might be positively influenced simply by providing a different wall color and turning off the lights in the space. While I did not ask to change the color of the walls, we did keep the lights off throughout the entire implementation. On days when we forgot to turn the lights off you could feel the difference in energy level from both the staff and the youth. We were all just a bit more calm when the only light was the natural light pouring through the windows.

The experience with the physical space reminded me not to assume that a space cannot be changed. Sometimes a space is as it is simply because paint, furniture, and lighting are not the first priority of the caregivers and may not even be a second or third thought. Sometimes it takes curiosity from the outside to assist in bringing simple positive small changes to a situation or in this case, a space.

Research Question 2

What are the perceptions of teachers as they reflect on the implementation of an arts program and what themes emerge during the interviews and discussion?

While there were many perceptions held by the participants throughout this project, in an effort to maintain a specific focus, I will only highlight two main areas of perceptions that were identified during the research. Once introduced, I will go into more depth in chapter five as to the impact of these perceptions on the everyday lives of the young people cared for in the RTC.

Two primary areas where the teacher perceptions were most prevalent were in the value and role of art and what it can do in an RTC setting, and in the perceived abilities or lack of abilities of the youth who participated in TreeHouse. Both of these areas of perception were influenced by the labels placed on art and the youth in the RTC by the teachers. These areas were selected for further investigation in an effort to highlight what I perceived as misperceptions not only about the value of art in an RTC setting, but also the misperception of the lack of ability ascribed to the youth living in the RTC. A discussion of these labels, the themes that developed related to these perceptions and the implications of the findings is addressed in Chapter 5.

Perceptions

Perception 1: The role and value of art.

The perceptions regarding art included what role art played and what value art has in the RTC setting and/or with young people according to the teachers. As Slattery (2001) acknowledged was the case during his own youth, prior to their experience with

the Tree House project, five of the nine teachers thought that art was “a woman’s… pursuit” (p. 371). Some of the staff at the RTC explained that they felt the boys would not respond to such a “feminine” endeavor and would not be able to relate. They also explained that art to them was something that did not “speak” to the issues and situations that the boys found themselves. This was a similar finding that Shaw (2018) discovered when researching why urban school districts cut the arts in predominantly low socioeconomic schools. Working with a similar population as the RTC, the school boards did not believe the arts were valuable to these inner-city children when they were unable to complete the “basics.” The RTC teachers also thought that young men would not have an interest in art and that they would be more interested in sports. While this tends to be a typical stereotype (Slattery, 2001), one staff member that was hesitant to have the art group because if her lack of experience with art (Leonard & Odutola, 2016) and hesitant to have group work in general, ended up creating their own art pieces and working closely with the youth by the end of the program. In subsequent years this staff member became one of the most supportive employees at the RTC when we had TreeHouse. She continuously volunteered her time and provided ideas to the youth while also asking them to complete art projects for her and her family. I witnessed the development of a strong relationship between the staff member, the youth and the support she provided as they engaged with the art (Schlemmer, 2017). This observation was supported by Clara one of the other teachers. Clara too noticed a marked difference in the staff member’s behavior towards art, group work, and the youth (Clara, 6 September, 2011, 22:03).

One staff member was positive about the project from the beginning. Taylor thought the project would be "fun." Taylor enjoys art and witnessed some of the initial activities. Taylor was excited about being able to join the art project and have fun with the boys even though Taylor's role was to supervise the boys and make sure they did not get into trouble. She appreciated the opportunity to engage in this type of activity. She was also very positive about the project as a whole and thought the boys, especially the younger boys, would enjoy the art projects and visiting the museums in the community.

Jesse on the other hand was strictly involved for safety purposes. His whole role was to be sure there were no physical altercations between the boys. He not only did not expect the boys to like the art or to create art, he fully expected them to physically fight with one another and to rebel against the project as a whole. He shared with me that on the first day of the first implementation he spent almost an hour watching from his window waiting to jump in in case there was an altercation during the "mobile art gallery" activity where all the boys had their hands in the paint and were physically applying paint to the plastic sheeting. It is important to note that there were two primary reasons why Jesse was on alert for altercations; one reason was because he did not believe in art as a therapy and that the boys would not like the art project overall. The second reason was that this particular group of boys exhibited several different types of challenges from ADD to ADHD, to anxiety issues and anger issues, introversion and so on. When the group was formed, the administration knew there were several boys that clearly did not like each other, but they grouped them together any way to give it a try. The administration acknowledged that other therapeutic methods at the RTC had not

worked so they thought why not give the boys one last try by working with the art. This was the primary reason why Jesse felt that there might be a problem and was waiting in the wings to assist just in case.

Overall, the teachers believed the younger RTC boys would have more interest in the art than the older boys. Taylor thought that the younger boys would be the most interested in the TreeHouse Project and the creation of art because from her observation "*I feel like young kids like doing more projects than the older kids. They [the older kids] tend to start not caring*" (20 September 2011, 3:15). She referenced the young kids as those who were 12 and 13. From her experience she did not think the art projects would maintain the attention of the older boys. Later in the interview she would indicate that she thought the older boys "*would get bored after a while*" (Taylor, 20 September 2011, 5:10). Amiri held the same perception about their interest with two differences. The first difference is that he did not expect indepth engagement from any of the youth and second, while he did not expect indepth engagement from any of the youth, when it came to the older youth, he did not expect any engagement at all. He did not think they would put themselves in a vulnerable situation by acting out a scene on the stage and was surprised when one of the older boys willingly participated with a little bit of encouragement from the other staff (Amiri, personal communication, 3 October 2011). He based his opinions both on personal experience with previous programs he participated in in other states and from observing one specific young man in the TreeHouse group.

This one particular boy, who sat in the back during the performance presentation, appeared to be disengaged throughout the exercise. Amiri (3 October 2011) attributed this to his age and did not feel the boy was going to engage nor that he himself was going to be able to get the older boy to engage…"

> "...*when he sat at the back and I said I mean just looking at that there was no way this guys gonna come up front. I'm not even going to try. And I don't recall whether it was you or one of the 'handlers' calling out and someone was saying hey you, are you going to do it? and in my mind I said no, I didn't say it out loud, but I was saying 'he's not going to do it' reminding myself of these ages of these young kids"* (21:09).

However, after the initial interaction Amiri realized that his assumptions regarding age and interest were unfounded and he saw that with some coaxing all the youth would participate regardless of age. From that point forward he no longer allowed the youth to not participate based on his ideas of age and participation interest.

Like Taylor and Amiri, Henry did not think that the older youth would engage and was surprised to find that it was the younger youth that grew bored quickly while it was the older youth that would work on their behavior all week in order to have the opportunity to participate on the art days.

> *"All I can think of is the kids were different cuz these were older kids so when the younger kids really wanted to do it cuz it was fun, the older boys was like maybe this is a waste of my time, but then I noticed the younger kids grew tired of it quickly but when the older boys got into it they would always want to do it. It was like they would do everything they could throughout the week to make sure they could go to art therapy.* (Henry, 9 September 2011, 2:07)

This reaction from the youth surprised Henry because, based on his professional experience, he acknowledged that in general it is more difficult to reach older youth in the system.

Sometimes this is due to the length of time that a child has been in the system and the experiences they have endured. Blocking of services is more common as the youth age and continue to be disappointed by those around them. By blocking services, and in essence blocking those around them, they develop a sense of security and safety only allowing who they choose into their safe space (Gaskell, 2010). Henry also thought, like many of the other teachers, that art making was best suited to engage younger youth.

After conversations at the end of the first implementation with three of the participants employed by the RTC, I discovered that in large part they did not expect the youth to engage with the artwork nor that the artwork would "reach" the youth within the given 6 week time frame if ever. For two of the participants these assumptions were based on the participants long personal and professional experiences within the Juvenile Justice system and what they have witnessed as the standard process and length of time it takes to get a youth to open up and respond to treatment. As Henry mentioned, it can take up to six months for a child in care to begin to respond:

> "*I didn't think they would buy into it so quickly. I thought it would take at least a good six weeks, right when the program about to end they would buy into it. That's how they are. That's how long it takes us, you know, three to six months to build a rapport and get them to open up and talk about their past, because they don't trust. They trust hard, they have abandonment issues. So it's real hard to get to them because they think everyone like, 'why I tell you? I'll be gone in a year. I'll be gone in three months so why even start?' so I figured everyone would be hard to open up but they...they bought into it. They wanted to do it."* (9 September, 2011, 19:54)

Henry would later say that along with thinking the youth would not open up so quickly, that he did not think it would work because from his perspective "art was boring."

After the first implementation he realized there was more to art and that there is a story behind every work of art and that is what is interesting. The third participant based his assumptions on his ideas about art and the impact art might have on the male youth. Clara noted that she "*hoped the program would work, but did not expect to see such positive results*…"(6 September, 2011, 18:17). Clara also mentioned how one of the assisting staff members did not believe in group therapy much less therapy based around art. By the end of the first implementation, this particular staff member could be found making artwork side by side with the youth. They had come to realize the benefit not only to the youth, but also the benefit to themselves. They enjoyed engaging with the youth and acknowledged how the program improved the overall behaviors of the youth participating (Clara, personal communication, 6 September 2011).

Unlike the staff from the RTC, I had no idea what challenges the boys faced or who did not like who and so on. I had no background in child psychology, social work or the processes and procedures of an RTC. For me, we were a group of people that were going to have fun with art and that is how I proceeded. Jesse, as well as the other administrators, were pleasantly surprised that we had no incidents the first day and that this group of young men worked very well together despite the prescribed labels that would make one believe otherwise. By the end of the 6 weeks this group of young men defended one another against the larger group at the RTC.

Reward/Punishment Tool

Once the teachers realized that the TreeHouse project had a positive influence on the boys, there was a tendency for them to use the program and the art as part of a reward and punishment system at the RTC. During the interview process, Clara indicated that from the beginning, unbeknownst to me, the RTC administration used the art program as a privilege. First they gauged the interest of the boys and asked whether they wanted to participate in an art program. Once they had a list of youth who were genuinely interested and/or curious about the program, the RTC staff made a final selection based on the current behavior levels of the youth on the list. As Clara stated, "*It was put out there as a privilege, that somebody's coming out to teach you about art."* (Clara, 6 September 2011, 12:26) As the program continued there were verbal threats by some of the teachers that individual youth would be removed from the program and/or not permitted to participate if they did not behave in a given manner depending on the situation. The following example was observed by me on one of the outings. As we were all sitting in a parking lot waiting to return to the RTC, a teacher wanted someone from the group to decide on a radio station. When no one from the group spoke up the teacher identified a specific youth member and told them to decide on a radio station. When that individual did not respond the teacher let the individual know that if they did not decide on a radio station immediately then they would no longer be allowed to participate in the art program.

Another example was when a boy was not completing the chores he had been assigned in his living area at the RTC, a teacher told the young man that if he did not comply by doing the chores then he would no longer be allowed to participate in the art program. I was witness to both of these examples and each time, from my perspective, the art program was being used to force the boys to comply with the demands of the teachers. It did not matter that the behavior of the young man in that moment had nothing to do with the art program itself. It was simply that the teacher wanted the boy to do something and he was not behaving in a desired manner according to that particular teacher. The teacher knew the young man enjoyed the TreeHouse project and that it could be used as incentive to get the young man to comply.

This was one of the most challenging aspects of the research. TreeHouse was designed with the intent of including everyone and providing a platform for voice for all of the youth regardless of behavioral levels. The idea was that the youth would have an opportunity to express themselves through art and/or to learn about various expressive techniques at the very least, not for TreeHouse to be used as a reward for appropriate behavior or used as a threat when behavior did not reflect the desires of the teachers.

Unfortunately, the use of TreeHouse as part of the reward and punishment system developed as a trend from the first implementation to the last. Some teachers continued to use the program and the extracurricular activities such as field trips and participation in the art making process as rewards. On the very last day of the project, one teacher asked another teacher to pick out her favorite pieces so that behavioral levels could be assigned to the students whose artwork was selected as the “best.”

This was a heartbreaking moment in that we had been working with the youth cultivating the use and benefit of art in expressing themselves. We did not focus on ability. We focused on expression through the art and here was one teacher deciding that it was ability that mattered most despite all the work and communication to the contrary. It was a reminder that even after you have worked with the same people for multiple years, when you are no longer present they will decide for themselves and your project will and can be bastardized despite the best intentions of all parties involved.

Mirroring the disciplinary behavior they were witness to, when the youth were asked at the end of the first year how they would select participants for the program, they too said it should be based on behavior and that if the behavior was not on level then the youth should not be allowed to participate. I brought the irony of this statement to the attention of the youth because if we chose to implement a behavior policy as a requirement for participation many of our original group would not have been allowed to participate because they were not on level when we began the program. They rethought their ideas and decided a behavior policy might not be such a good idea.

Perception 2: Abilities of the youth.

A second area of perception that was common among the teachers was the area of the RTC youth ability in and with art. In general, the teachers employed at the RTC did not expect the youth to have artistic abilities. Taylor, like many of the teachers, was surprised at the ability of some of the youth. She related their negative behavior to their ability to create art. If they misbehaved she expected less from them.

She did acknowledge that she was not sure what she expected, but based on her response she did not expect the skill she witnessed in the final projects,

> "*I'm not really sure what I expected because some of them came out really really good and that surprised me. I was like 'wow' ya know, because just from their personalities ya know, outside of the program, how they act on campus itself, getting into trouble you know. You don't expect this great little...creation that they made…*" (Taylor, 20 September 2011, 9:24)

At the same time Taylor defended the youth and their abilities when she was asked what kind of responsibility the community had towards youth in care. She wanted it to be known that "*kids in placement can still act just like 'normal' children and get the same learning and education from these projects as a regular normal family child*" (Taylor, 20 September 2011, 21:14). She did not seem to notice the contradiction that she carried within as she related to the youth. In one breath she expected less because of their behavior and then in the second breath defended them from those that might judge them and think less of them because of their situation.

When Clara was asked whether the artwork produced was what she expected, she exclaimed that it was "*beyond*!" (6 September 2011, 30:36) what she expected of them. As we continued the interview, I asked her why and she shared that

> "*I didn't expect them to be so creative. Like I was actually blown away with some of the sculptures and their thought. I didn't in my wildest dreams think that they would connect some of the things that they connected and how what they were thinking when they were creating some of these, like one, he'd start doing something with something in mind and then it evolved to something else. It was absolutely REALLY neat to watch him"*(Clara, 6 September 2011, 31:19).

Clara acknowledged that the youth were more aware of themselves than she had given them credit for and that they thought more deeply than she expected. Jesse had a similar reaction.

He shared that *"The results were better than expected. I saw that the boys were learning about themselves. Everything tied together "*(Jesse, personal communication, 23 August 2011).

On the other hand, Salvador and Rebekkah shared a sense of disappointment in the abilities of the youth. It was not that they did not expect the youth to be able to create art, it was that what they created did not fulfill their expectations. Rebekkah expected skill that would come from formal training. She was uncomfortable with the free expression encouraged in the project and preferred that the young men follow formal artistic guidelines (Rebekkah, personal communication, 30 August 2011). Salvador's disappointment was that the young men did not create the type of artwork he anticipated. Because of the ethnic and cultural makeup of the population at the RTC and because of what he witnessed at the RTC outside of the project timeframes, he expected the young men to do pencil drawings and create rap songs:

> *"I expected some of the kids to have some fantastic hand drawn drawings because that's what they do...I kind of expected one or two to rap like I said because it's cultural for a lot of the kids here and it's something they bring with them from all areas...The White, the Black, the Hispanics, they all rap. They all draw and I expected more or less one or two of them to end a project with a rap song or a poem, but everything was hands on and abstract…" (Salvador, 30 August 2011, 12:44)*

While the RTC teachers were either surprised or disappointed with the abilities of the youth, I found that the volunteer teachers that were engaged with art on a regular basis did not have an expectation in regards to ability. Rather, as mentioned above, with the first perception, they simply did not expect the young men to be interested in creating art at all.

I believe both of these ability and or interest perceptions from the teachers stems from the labels placed on the youth. Either as Taylor said because they had bad behavior which meant they would not be able to create art the teachers considered "good art" or because they were men and men are not interested in art or because they were from a cultural group that traditionally raps they should be rapping. In this case, the identifiers placed both on the art and on the youth were incorrect.

Another area of ability, or rather inability, expressed by the teachers was that the young people would not be able to work with the art for the length of 2 hours. The teachers believed that the patience of the youth would be spent and that 2 hours was too long (Clara, 6 September 2011, 22:51; Henry, 9 September 2011, 19:04). Based on what we saw, while at the end of the 2 hours yes, the youth were getting fidgety, they continued to ask for more time, more days, and more projects. The staff too wanted the program to continue, despite their initial reservations. While I believe this is an area that deserves further evaluation, I simply made note of the reaction. This positive reaction from the teachers was counter to their initial perceptions that the youth would have no interest or very little interest in the project and in art. It taught them something new about the young men in their care and allowed for an opportunity to view them in a different light.

It is important to understand what themes emerged from this research so that we better understand the impact of the TreeHouse project for the teachers. Understanding the impact will help inform future projects, how the participants perceived the project, whether there was growth and what that growth may lead to in the future.

The three primary themes that emerged from the teachers perceptions were the constructing or keeping distance, crisis of ego, and self discovery. -these are defined and explained in chapter 5

Research Question 3

How does student voice emerge through the implementation of an arts program and through the perceptions of the teachers?

This question was answered through personal analysis and reflection on the data collected through the observations, interviews, and discussions with the participants that assisted in the implementation of the project at the residential treatment center. Data was also provided through participant observation and interpretation of artwork the youth created during TreeHouse. Finally, small windows into youth voice are also included at the beginning of each chapter in the form of vignettes. These vignettes provide a quick look into poignant moments within the life experience of youth that reside at the RTC. Each story was either shared with me by the teachers or one I personally heard during the implementation of the project.

Types of Voice.

There were three primary sources of youth voice that emerged during the research. These sources were the actual voice of the youth as relayed by the teachers, the voice of the youth through the production of artwork as interpreted by the teachers, and the voice of the youth as interpreted through the words of the teachers.

Actual Voice.

The TreeHouse Project in and of itself created an opportunity for conversation between the youth and the teachers both inside the classroom during the implementation and outside the classroom when the youth were engaging in other activities. Taylor was frequently asked by the youth if art was happening that day and if she was going to be participating with them. According to Taylor, one particular youth who generally had a stubborn demeanor, expressed excitement the days of the project and would be angry if he was prevented from participating due to his negative behavior:

> "[he] *liked the project cuz he got mad if he got dropped and wasn't able to go...he was actually excited for art. He would be like 'I have art today!' as soon as I got there and he woke up. I'm like 'I know' and then he's like 'C'mon Tay' and I'm like 'I'm not sure that I'm staff" and then like he'd leave and then come back and be like 'I told you you're the staff coming, c'mon' and I was like 'ok' so he's, ya know I think it was helping him, like he'd get excited for it*" (Taylor, 20 September 2011, 23:34)

From the youth's negative reaction to being dropped and his excitement from the moment he woke up on "art days" the teachers were able to see that he was enjoying the project and wanted to participate. Clara received a similar response from the youth that participated in the project. She would hear such questions as "*When are we gonna meet*? *Why can't we meet more*?" (6 September 2011, 16:55) and at the end of the program when the youth were asked, they said that they wanted more art activities and more of the program itself despite the fact that many of them complained during the program (Taylor, personal communication, 20 September 2011).

According to Rebekkah, some youth went so far as to share their experiences with their families when the families came to the RTC for scheduled visits (Rebekkah, personal communication, 30 August 2011).

If we only focused on behavior throughout the program or only heard their complaining rather than looking deeper, it might be inferred that the youth did not like the art or the program. But, because we went further, asked questions, and listened to their voices, we learned from them that the TreeHouse program overall was well received and of value to the youth. Not only did it provide them with something to do, but it allowed them to interact more closely with the staff, engage in the community and learn to express themselves through a different format. They also developed relationships among themselves and began helping one another complete their art projects. As Clara noted, she enjoyed seeing the older participants helping the younger ones and develop a coaching manner with them saying things such as "*hey ya know, come on you can do this*." and "*let me help you*." (Clara, 6 September 2011, 17:37). Clara and Salvador both identified this as the older youth beginning to develop empathy for the younger youth. They did not want to see the younger participants give up on their artwork just because it was difficult in that moment.

TreeHouse also provided an opportunity for the youth to share their past experiences during the reception and exhibition held at the end of each implementation. Each youth was asked to share their artwork with the TreeHouse group. They were asked to show us what they did, tell us about the materials they used and why, tell us what the title was and if they wanted to they could tell us what the artwork meant to them.

This was not a forced presentation and each youth knew that they only had to speak to the TreeHouse group. During the first year, one of the boys took the presentation a step further and actually spoke about a traumatic experience from his past. He was present the day his cousin was caught in the crossfire between two gangs on a city street which resulted in the cousin being shot to death right in front of the young man. This young man's voice and the pain he carried four years later was heard loud and clear as he presented his artwork to the group. The administrators and teacher participants were surprised that this young man made himself so vulnerable in front of the other group members. The teachers indicated that sharing vulnerabilities is not common because it shows weakness and the other boys may take advantage of it during later group counseling sessions or when they were alone, in essence using the sensitive information against one another.

Once the TreeHouse group saw the presentation of the artwork, then the rest of the youth of the RTC were brought in to view the work and speak with the youth artists. I observed that the TreeHouse artists were not as open with the other residents of the RTC. It was as if these other young men were not part of the cohort that developed throughout TreeHouse and the TreeHouse artists were not going to share their work with them. It appeared to be a combination of the other youth not belonging to this project and the TreeHouse artists being unsure of how their work would be received by the larger group. The TreeHouse artists would later regret their lack of openness with the others because in the end they enjoyed sharing their artwork and getting the feedback from the larger group.

Their initial silence through their behavior would later turn to full conversation with the other RTC youth once the artists felt comfortable in the space and with the reaction of their peers.

Voices In and Through the Artwork.

One of the most poignant forms of youth voice was the "voice" that was shared during and through the creation of artworks by the youth. This "voice" was witnessed by several of the participants, myself included. Jessie specifically mentioned that he could " '*see' how the boys were 'feeling'* " (personal communication, 30 August 2011). This comment was in reference both to viewing the artwork created as well as by watching the creation of the artwork. For example, one piece of art was a work completed with paint and found objects that were worked into a diorama. In the middle of the work was a toy deer and surrounding the deer were several plastic army men with all of their guns pointed at the deer. Rightly or wrongly, Jessie interpreted this to mean that the boy was scared and felt the world was against him. Another boy would consistently take clay and pound it on the table. The boy never really created anything specific. He would work and roll and pound the clay over and over as if he was frustrated about something and he was working it out on the clay. He would leave the project seemingly more calm and in general, more personable. He said so many things without saying a word.

In another case the teacher named Andy provided the boys with simple tools to express emotion that remained within the "rules" of the center. The RTC has rules against writing profanity, gang names and/or anything that may cause disruption. Knowing this, Andy encouraged them to write anything they wanted.

However, he asked them to write what they were thinking and/or feeling over and over again on the same line so that the words blended together and essentially became illegible. Through this exercise, because they had been, or inspite of the fact, “silenced from full expression,” (Fine, 2003, p. 15) Andy created a space for their voices, for the voice that might curse, cry out, break the verbal rules of the center, yet still be expressed without being “heard”and at the same time remaining theoretically within the rules, but not.

Another young man who tended to strongly voice his opinions and was always ready to defend his space, loved painting. He painted and painted and painted. Much of the time he used a small foam roller and would mix several paint colors together on his canvas creating a beautiful palatte of color. But as he would roll and roll and roll with his foam tool, all the colors would blend together eventually turning every canvas he completed purple... dark purple, medium purple, light purple, but always purple. For him it was not about the end product. It was all about the motion of the roller and how he was using his new found tools to calm himself down when he was frustrated.

A caution with interpretation:

While it was clear to everyone that the young men were sharing ideas, feelings and plans with the teachers through their artwork, I would caution future implementers and researchers of this project, and other art programs, to resist the urge to interpret the artwork of young people without guidance from the creator of the work itself. I say this because, during the implementation process, I observed teachers deciding what the artwork meant for the young men and making judgement calls on the emotional state of

the artist rather than asking the artist what the intent was, what the work meant or what the young man was attempting to convey. The teachers decided how much one young man was suffering in comparison with other young men based on the materials that were used in the artwork. This happened more than one time and happened sometimes without the foundational knowledge of how to interpret artwork, how that particular student was progressing in the project overall, how their artwork evolved throughout the project, without knowing the title of the artwork and without speaking to the artist themselves. One glaring example came to light when I discussed artistic expectations with Salvador (30 August 2011) and how he interpreted some of the final projects during our interview (12:44):

> Sal -"...you know a lot of them were negative. When they named their project it Was like 'My Burdens' or 'The Fort of Rage,' right and another kid had his black, the looking at the moon…"
>
> Me - "oh, that was "Love Moon"
>
> Sal - "Love Moon?" Now that one was different, but the wolf was dark, the moon as so small ya know, so…"
>
> Me - "That was only because that's what he had access to, somebody printed that out for him so he…"
>
> Sal - "Oooohh"
>
> Me - "He requested a wolf and that's the image he was given."

And almost in an effort to prove his point about the artwork being negative and saying something about the emotional state of the youth he continued:

Sal - " Oh ok, but there were others that were negative, I can't recall"

Understanding where he was going with interpreting the titles as negative I suggested a title he might be thinking of to see if my own train of thought about his direction was correct.

> Me - "Swirls of Death…?"
>
> Sal - "Right, Swirls of Death, you know, but I did expect that because a lot of the kids have anger issues and they deal with their [issues], I think through the words you know as an outlet or as a hint of what's going on inside" (15:05)

While Salvador may be correct in some cases, in both of these situations his ideas were inaccurate. What I did not say after his final thought was that the same boy that painted "Swirls of Death" also painted "Swirls of Life" and "Swirls of Love," so while "Swirls of Death" may have been an indication of how he was feeling or what he was thinking, we also need to consider the other emotions his artwork might be conveying all at the same time, not just what may have been deemed negative at the time.

As David Lomas states in Healing Arts: The History of Art Therapy, "an uneasy relation to power and authority runs through the history of art therapy and can be seen in the dilemma over whether or not to interpret the visual material" (2001, p.15).

The TreeHouse project was not designed as an art therapy program, attempting to interpret the artwork might lead the teachers to the wrong conclusions about the youth.

The teachers are in a position of power, to incorrectly determine the "voice" of the youth and may lead to a misdiagnosis or treatment.

The Voice of the youth through the words of the teachers.

I specifically chose to highlight this form of "youth voice" because the most common form of youth voice we find within the system is that of the adult caretakers as they represent the youth. Representation is challenging. At times we represent accurately and other times we do not. This is the voice that is influenced by our own beliefs and ideas as individuals and individuals in a community. Hall (1997) notes "Representation has consequences: How people are represented is how they are treated" (p.). As with the caution of interpreting the meaning of the artwork, I would again caution us as caretakers and adults responsible for the lives of others. We do not always get it right when we think we know what the youth are saying based on our observations of their behavior and translation of their words. Consider the following identified through the research:

1. The RTC teachers thought the boys would not like art, but they did.
2. The volunteer teachers thought the boys did not like them, but they did.
3. The volunteer teachers did not think their work was affective, but it was.
4. The RTC teachers believed that the boys had no ability with art, but they did.
5. The RTC teachers decided what the art created by the youth meant and shared those ideas with other teachers, but they were wrong.
6. The RTC teachers did not think that they boys would be able to work together based on their diagnosis, but they were and they did.

7. The RTC teachers thought the boys would not be able to sit still for 2 hours.

How accurate is that voice?

"Can we truly represent another? …Whose story is it – the researcher or the researched?" (Pillow, 2003 p.176)

While the above list identifies moments when the teachers were not correct in their translation of the youth and essentially their voices, there were times when the teachers correctly identified how the youth were feeling and reacting. Taylor believed that the young men were happy and excited participating in the project. In her words, she believes the freedom of expression without the feeling of being judged changed their own mindset about themselves, As she says:

> *"They just, they would get excited when it was time for art. They were excited while they were in the program, being able to be expressive I think, without feeling judged or gonna get in trouble and I think that gave them that little bit of freedom to make them feel better about themselves"* (20 September 2011,).

Jesse had a similar experience with his observations of the youth throughout the project. At one point he witnessed the youth "*laughing and smiling, being kids. For some of them, it was the first time I saw them smile since they [arrived at the RTC]*" (Jesse, personal communication, 23 August 2011). While Jesse did not know if it was the art itself making the young men smile, he was able to identify that participation in the TreeHouse project as a whole was positive for the youth and that they were enjoying the program.

Both the list of incorrect and correct assumptions are limited, but each set of examples provides a small window for consideration in how we "decide" for the youth what they are saying and feeling, however (in)accurate that may be. Gratefully, it was

through teacher observations of the overall positive response and positive behavior of the boys that “said” to the RTC administration that TreeHouse was a beneficial experience for the youth, that the youth enjoyed it and it was this observation and “voice” that supported continuing the project into the future...so we did.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

"It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men" Frederick Douglass

The Big Bad Wolf Does Exist

I began my day admiring a pair of tiny Carolina Wrens building a nest in a folding chair on my porch. They moved about so quickly picking just the right leaf and the most perfect blade of dried grass to ensure their home would be the ideal place to raise their future family. So much care, so much planning, so much energy all to create the best environment for survival using the resources at hand.

Just a few hours later I was standing in the Residential Treatment Center with a staff member discussing some of the young people that have gone through the program. It was a particularly challenging weekend for the staff because a handful of these young people chose to runaway for various reasons. One of the runaways was a recent TreeHouse Project participant.

What changed everything for me today was being allowed in on the backstory of this young man. Upon first meeting him he was a quiet, well spoken, and kind hearted person. This never changed throughout our time together and he never let on that he began life in the way that he did.

This young man was born to two people strung out on drugs. The parents and the child shared a house with a pet. This pet was a wolf. I'm not sure where or how they got the wolf, but it had been "tamed" and allowed to live with them.

Sometime before his second birthday, the young man was attacked by the wolf. Now, this does not seem surprising given that a wolf is a wild animal and we frequently hear about domesticated dogs attacking babies and young children, so why wouldn't a wolf attack a child given the close proximity in which they were living. You catch your breath when you hear that the wolf attacked and you imagine the words that will be shared to describe the scene, but that is not what took my breath away. It was the manner in which this boy was attacked and the response of the parents that changed my day and brought disbelief and an inability to form a cogent thought on the matter.

When this baby boy was attacked, the wolf ripped his genitals from his body. His biological parents videotaped the entire episode.

No other details of the incident were conveyed to me except that after the child healed, he was adopted out to another family. Because of the damage caused by the attack, from that day forward in order for this young man to develop biologically into a man he has had to take male hormones. He will need to take these the remainder of his life. He now has an implant where his penis once was and will most likely have impotency issues. He will never be able to have biological children of his own because he is sterile. While he may not remember the incident itself, he knows the story. He knows what happened to him. He knows what his biological parents did, but he will probably never know why. He will forever be reminded of how his life began. There is no running from it. The scar is very real and has and will continue to impact his entire life.

A few days before he ran away he found out that his adoptive mother no longer wants him and has forbidden him to contact his adoptive brothers. Both families, the biological and the adoptive, have abandoned him. Two families, one literally and the other figuratively, threw him to the wolves.

Today I watched a pair of Carolina Wrens carefully building their nest…

It took me many hours to process this story and many many more days to process the choices of the parents. Choices, choices that impacted a child so deeply that I cannot even imagine the long term effects. There was a literal silence that descended upon me as I worked to wrap my head around the words shared with me. These stories are hard to hear, some more so than others, but we must give voice to those that are unable to speak for themselves, for those that we choose to silence through our institutional structures, our labels, sedimented precursors and implicit biases and fears. Throughout this document I endeavored to bring you, the reader, closer to the realities of some of the youth residing within the foster care system and more specifically some of the youth living in a residential treatment center in Central Texas. And while I was unable to directly research with the youth in this situation, I was able to access teachers that worked directly with these youth. My reflection on this entire process will weave in and out of the text as we continue to forge new pathways through the landscape, crossing boundaries and circumventing borders, including the borders we build within our own minds as we seek the voices of our youth.

Summary of the Research

This year long project was designed to provide children in the foster care and juvenile justice systems with a way to express themselves through art created under the constraints of institutional boundaries. The youth that engaged with this project lived in a Central Texas residential treatment center (RTC) and were all male ranging in age from 10 to 18. They mirrored the disproportionality found within the Texas foster care and juvenile justice systems with an overwhelming number of youth of color represented despite their lower representation in the overall general youth population of the state. The youth were provided with opportunities and materials to express themselves through their own artistic creations; paintings, sculpture, performance, etc… while exploring local community arts spaces and engaging with RTC staff, community volunteers, and local artists that served in the capacity of "teacher," but were not formally trained as teachers.

Due to institutional constraints, access to the youth was only available through these teachers and RTC administrators. Using an autoethnographic research methodology, I conducted open-ended interviews, made observations, and detailed personal reflections of the implementation of an arts-informed, community supported program called the TreeHouse project. This research was conducted in an effort to address the problem of the lack of representation, space, and method for the "voice" of children in the juvenile justice and foster care systems. This problem was explored by documenting the perceptions of the teachers throughout the implementation process.

Findings

As a result of this study, a set of themes emerged that offer additional insight into autoethnographic research, residential treatment centers, the youth in the RTCs, and the perceptions of the teachers during the implementation of the TreeHouse Project. These thematic explorations offer possibilities about the significance of this study and its implications for future research. They lend the stage to the proleptic moment (Slattery, 2001) when some of the teachers were able to reflect and understand how their own behavior was hindering the healing of the youth in their care. Through this process these same teachers consciously chose to make a change in their approach to youth in the RTC.

These three themes were identified through the following research purposes and questions.

The three-fold purpose for this research:

1. To explore, document, and analyze my experience with the rules that both prohibit and permit research with and for children in the foster care system.

2. To explore, document, and observe, the implementation of an arts program designed to address issues of voice and expression with children in the foster care system who reside in a residential treatment center in Texas.

3. And to document the perceptions of the participating teachers in the arts program regarding its implementation and how the voices of the children in their care emerge through the perceptions of the teachers.

The three-fold purpose of this research guided the following research questions:

1. How and in what ways does an autoethnographic researcher redefine, conduct, and experience research focused on youth in the foster care system while navigating institutional rules?

2. What are the perceptions of the teachers as they reflect on the implementation of an arts program and what themes emerge during the interviews and discussion?

3. How does the voice of the youth in care emerge through the implementation of an arts program and through the perceptions of the teachers?

The three primary themes identified through this research were the constructing or keeping of distance, a crisis of ego, and self-discovery. I identified these three primary themes through the analysis of the data collected from the open ended interviews. This interview format allowed for exploration and reflection of the implementation of the TreeHouse project and how this implementation impacted the teachers. Without taking the time to dissect and reflect on the process through conversation, I would not have been able to glean the information and the teachers may not have had the personal realizations they shared (Brophy and Alleman, 1991). I expand on each theme below.

Constructing or Keeping Distance

This first theme ties directly into all three research questions. Through my own research experience, the perceptions of the teachers, and the identification of the various forms of youth voice throughout, boundaries were developed or maintained. Teachers kept their distance through labels, negative perceptions, and assumptions of abilities, both their own individual abilities as well as the ability of the youth.

By keeping a literal and figurative distance the teachers did not/do not have to fully engage with the youth, the art, the potential change of approach in treatment or acknowledge the challenges with institutional processes.

Rebekkah and Salvador kept a physical and participatory distance from the TreeHouse project. Initially, they chose not to fully engage with the youth because they were not comfortable with the method. Both teachers enjoyed art, but they were only familiar with learning art and participating with art in a clearly structured and formal manner. The TreeHouse project, while structured, allowed for free expression through nontraditional materials such as recycled plastic, cardboard, sponges and any other objects at hand. For example, rather than use paint brushes, we used spatulas and spoons to paint along with a myriad of other implements we might have on hand.

Because Rebekkah and Salvador were unfamiliar with this type of approach, it took them almost 3 weeks to fully engage with the youth as the youth created art and explored various mediums. Once the teachers saw the positive reaction of the youth and became more comfortable with the process itself they slowly moved in and began to ask questions, assist the youth with their individual projects and to contribute to the group as a whole.

In addition, some of the RTC teachers were uncomfortable fully engaging in the art making process with the youth because of their traditional role (or label) at the RTC as a disciplinarian. Rebekkah (30 August 2011) was clear when she said "*I don't like that part"* (3:52) as we discussed her role at the RTC and in the TreeHouse project. She felt there was no way to merge engaging with the youth and monitoring their behavior at

the same time. The "disciplinarian" title allowed her to avoid or prevented her from engaging and crossing the boundaries into experiencing the art making with the youth. She indicated that if she had been told she was just engaging in art and was not responsible for discipline that she would have interacted more with the youth.

The teachers also kept a distance and prevented full engagement with the youth by placing labels on the youth. The TreeHouse project was intended for all of the youth no matter their behavioral level, background etc...But for some of the teachers, they would have prevented participation based on the markers placed on the youth by the teachers themselves. Youth they did, or attempted to, keep a distance from were referred to as "*major behavioral problems*" in some cases. Others were referred to as "*...sneaky...they steal and they are always hiding in corners*" (personal communication, 30 August 2011). These are the labels placed on the youth by those in charge of their care and treatment. It begs the question of how the implicit bias of the teachers impacts the treatment of the youth in care (Harris and Benton, n.d.; Payne, 1973; Payne and Vuletich, 2018) and whether the teachers are aware of their own preconceived notions and how these biases impact their interactions with the youth.

Community

Taylor observed that the local community also keeps its distance from youth at the RTC due to the labels placed on them, specifically the "placement kid" label and she encouraged the community to "*show them [the youth in care] that they belong cuz alot of them, they're, the community kind of looks like...they're labeled cuz they're "placement kids" and a lot of people don't realize that placement doesn't necessarily*

mean prison"(20 September 2011, 20:21). She indicated that she felt the label "placement" was keeping the local community from interacting with the youth because the community feared the youth thinking this term somehow meant the youth were literally prisoners or people to be feared, but she reiterated that "*kids in placement can still act just like 'normal' children and get the same learning and education from these projects as a regular normal family child*" (20 September 2011, 21:14).

Jesse, along with a majority of the RTC teachers, also recognized the reticence of the community to engage with the RTC youth. He shared that if he were to be speaking to the local community he would remind them that "*there is good in all if given the opportunity and the guidance...children are resilient. We need to work together*" (personal communication, 23 August 2011). At the same time Jesse also noted that the RTC itself tends not to reach out to the local community because the RTC administrators are protecting the youth from the potential negative repercussions.

He acknowledged that some of this negativity may be because the local community does not understand what it means to be in placement, what the role of the RTC is in the lives of these young people and how the local community has the potential of being a positive influence on these young people and thus the community as a whole (Jesse, personal communication, 23 August 2011).

In full transparency, I too was guilty of "keeping a distance" on my first drive out to the RTC. I was driving into an unknown with my own preconceived notions just like Rebekkah and Salvador when the art project began.

It was not until I took the time to meet the teachers at the center and the youth in their care that my preconceived notions melted away and I was able to fully engage.

It should be noted that from my experience with this research, I found that our systems too are built to keep a distance both literally and figuratively. The rules that guide these systems protect them from us and us from them. Whether that is the IRB protecting the institution by not permitting certain research or it is the processes and procedures of the state and RTC that create boundary after boundary that must be successfully crossed in order to reach the youth. In Stukenberg et al vs. Greg Abbott et al Judge Jacks found that once a child was designated in the permanent managing conservatorship (PMC) designation, as mentioned in Chapter 2, many times the child's length of stay in the system would increase, visits from caseworkers would decrease, thus further distancing and silencing the child in care. With the extended length of stay and the decrease in visits from the caseworker, there are fewer avenues for the child to speak and fewer connections to the world beyond the system. I believe this happens because in one sense the system found a solution (or label, PMC) for that child, albeit a temporary situation. In reality, from my perspective, because there was a solution, they would move on to the next case and would "forget" about that child however unintentional. Keeping these distances keeps us "safe." If we keep a distance between the challenges, the youth, and the system then we do not have to face the challenges we have created in our social structures. We keep the issues as the "it" and intellectualized rather than the "you" which requires relationship between I and Thou (Buber, 1996). In essence, by keeping the distance, we do not have to do the work...the work of change.

Crisis of Ego

"It sucks." That's what Andy said.

The second theme was identified by answering Research Question 2. Through the reflective process, open-ended interviews, and conversations throughout the research, the teachers were able to express the impact of the implementation. Unintentionally, this project elicited guilt from the teachers. Participating with this project brought to the fore what these young people were experiencing and what these adult individuals specifically were not doing, from their perspective. Both Andy and Amiri felt they should be doing more, that they as individuals were privileged to go home to their families and children and that it was not fair that the youth were in the situation they were in. And though it may make us uncomfortable, "we are touched by others whether we want to be or not" (Jensen & Hart, 2010, p. 463), Andy and Amiri were both "touched" by what they saw and experienced. They both questioned the value and impact of their chosen art focused professions. Like DeLuca and Maddox (2015), they felt guilt for not doing more because they could not see how what they were doing professionally was impacting the situation with the youth at the RTC and or "ameliorating the social injustices and inequities…" (p. 291) they were now witness to. Andy and Amiri were both fundamentally changed from the project and the opportunity to engage with the RTC youth. As Andy (27 October 2011) shared at the end of his interview:

> *"No, I mean, it's just, it's embarrassing to go through this, because it's just another one of those things where you, you do this and you feel like 'that was meaningful' and then you have to admit to yourself that you're putting off the meaningful work for another day, you know….(long pause)...it sucks. It does. It sucks..."* (38:59).

This interview was conducted approximately two and a half months after the implementation of the TreeHouse project. Throughout that entire time, Andy had been turning his experience over in his head, working through the emotions the project elicited. I, as the researcher was so focused on the youth, I did not realize the impact the project would have on the teachers. It was a reminder that indeed, "we are touched by others whether we want to be or not" (Jensen & Hart, 2010, p. 463) and this includes all of us, the child, the teacher, the administrator, the researcher.

Attacked the artists ego

In addition to eliciting feelings of guilt from some of the teachers, the project also created a sense of discomfort and a questioning of their artistic abilities. Initially the volunteer teachers, who were also artists, thought that the young men would like them based on previous experience with similar age groups. Both Andy and Amiri thought the boys might think they were cool because they painted cool images and played musical instruments etc... However, because the boys did not react in the way that the artists are used to seeing (overt excitement and interest), they thought they were not performing well. Both teachers became self conscious about their performance and about their artistic ability. And while Andy felt like he was not reaching the kids, the teachers that observed his interactions with the boys felt just the opposite.

Counter to how Andy felt, Taylor, an RTC staff teacher, noted that she thought the boys related well to Andy and that they liked him and felt comfortable with him, "*I think they really really enjoyed him…[he] let them express themselves and I think that made them feel a little more, I guess comfortable, but they were paying attention to him*" (20 September 2011, 13:45).

From everyone's perspective except Andy's, he made a clear and immediate impact on the boys. Prior to the beginning of the program they had an opportunity to attend a lecture by Andy where he was discussing his artwork and sharing his vision and purpose for making art. This positively impacted the boys in that they wanted to see more, they wanted to talk with him and they wanted him to teach them how he does what he does. In addition, they were seeking his affirmation and approval throughout the time he spent with them. In their words he was "cool."

Andy provided an exercise that showed the youth that each and everyone of them had the ability to draw. This is something the boys doubted from the beginning of TreeHouse. Andy did this navigating through the drawing "rules" from a different perspective by having them draw upside down without letting them know what it was they were doing. Every young man that attempted the exercise was successful. Andy proved to them they were able to do art by changing their perspective. In addition, he engaged in a little harmless subversion by teaching them how to say whatever it was they needed to say by writing it over and over, one line on top of the next until no words were legible. He created space for the silenced voices (Fine, 2003).

He continuously talked about intuition, affirming what the children already knew within themselves, though may not be able to recognize, acknowledge, or find valuable.

Because Andy had an attitude of exploration, fun and excitement and because he did not treat the boys as if they were something less than, but rather as equals and co-conspirators he was able to reach even the most challenging personality in the group. I am curious to know what would have happened had he spent more time with them…would they have continued to respond and progress positively or would there have been a break down? Although he was experiencing his own personal crisis about his ability with them, he still responded to them at their level, talked about topics they were familiar with and were interested in. He asked them questions about themselves, their likes and dislikes. He was in their world, in their sports, clothes, and music. Andy engaged with them thinking about his own life, his own experience and related back to what they might be feeling. His "I" was blending into "them" and forming an "us."

However, if Andy and I had not discussed what occurred during his visits, he would have left the project feeling like a failure based on how he was reading their physical behavior. He did not know what he did not know. Time and again the behavior and actions of the young men proved to the adults that the boys and their behavior were both being misinterpreted.

While the volunteer teachers were experiencing guilt from their privilege and questioning their artistic capacities, the RTC teachers were having feelings of discomfort due to a sense of a lack of control. The TreeHouse project itself calls for a loosening of rules, a flexibility in structure and a willingness to directly engage with the youth as they

created the artwork and experienced the materials. Clara noted that one of her concerns was with the staff and not the youth in participating with the art program. She said that "*... I was more concerned about how staff was going to react to the kids and letting, letting their hair down and letting the kids get dirty, letting them experience…"* (10:48). This was a concern because she realized that the staff were trained to "control" the young people and spontaneity was not an area the young people were allowed to experience because of the need to be able to anticipate their behaviors and actions. This is part of the general staff training. This control "method" is implemented in an effort to keep the environment and the young people safe, but it is also a deterrent to fully experiencing the project.

Creativity, imagination, and flexibility are the bedrock of the TreeHouse project. In the end, while the staff were alert and I imagine concerned throughout the program, they were able to release small amounts of control and the need to know what was next in an effort to allow the young people to fully experience the program. This release may have come sooner for them and caused less discomfort if there had been a full briefing concerning their roles and how they fit into the project as facilitators rather than behavioral monitors.

However, we elected not to provide too much information on the project to any of the teachers in an effort to document as much of an authentic reaction to the project as possible.

As I observed, it was certainly a growing experience for the teachers as they worked through their respective discomfort of not controlling every situation.

It also allowed them to see a different way of interacting with the young people that allowed for positive outcomes across the board. In turn, it allowed the youth to see the RTC teachers in a different light. The youth were able to see the RTC teachers as more than disciplinarians. They were able to see them as people they could connect with.

Self-Discovery

Like the keeping of or constructing distance, the final theme was identified by answering all three research questions. Overall one of the most profound findings in this research was when the teachers, whether staff at the RTC or from the local community, realized that their assumptions and perceptions were holding the boys back from their own personal growth. This was primarily due to the labels they placed on the youth, labels that were socially and culturally constructed. These assumptions were made evident through the lack of supplies brought to functions because the teacher did not think the youth would engage, evident in the low expectations of the youth, evident in post event comments of how "well behaved" the youth were in public settings, evident in the admission that the teachers were so focused on the "pathologies" of the youth that they forgot to see the youth as youth, evident in their amazement of the skill and talent expressed in the art works of the youth as if they might not have artistic ability or that the youth might not be interested in creating works of art in the first place.

Amiri recognized how based on his own experience and what he witnessed in US culture, that society in the US ends up linking anti-social behavior with race and social class without realizing what we are doing (3 October 2011, 13:07). Ironically, Amiri's

low expectations of the youth ended up being fulfilled by his own actions rather than by the boys actions. For example, Amiri expected the youth to be distracted and hard to manage when in reality, in the museum it was Amiri that was distracted by all the movement around him and the environment as a whole. He noted that because he was able to recognize this challenge in himself he was also able to "*be a little more forgiving when the kids were distracted*" (3 October 2011, 19:21).

> "*...because sometimes, even in my own story I lost track of my own story a couple of times so that was , that was something interesting but that was an artistic expectation that I...I tried to go to their side, to go there with as little expectation as possible...saying, let me go in the moment"* (3 October 2011, 19:37).

This example highlights the importance of embracing Buber's I and the Thou and recognizing ourselves within these youth so that we can and will share more compassion and understanding, which is exactly what Amiri did in the future interactions by minimizing his low expectations. Minimizing his low expectations of them resulted in a richer experience.

Amiri also realized he was feeding into racialized stereotypes when he assigned the role of a monkey to a black youth during a performance storytelling session with TreeHouse. Amiri is also black and as soon as he assigned the animal and realized what he had done he regretted his decision, but allowed it to play out (3 October 2011). As Amiri was realizing what he had done in his head, one of the youth said something out loud about the monkey being assigned to a black youth, thus to Amiri confirming his thoughts that he had indeed fed into the stereotype albeit it a completely subconscious decision. It was in this moment he recognized how pervasive this stereotype is and even he, someone who is very conscious of these circumstances, is not free from it.

For Clara, in reflecting on the results of the program, she allowed herself to bear witness to her own preconceived notions of the youth, their creativity, and their self awareness:

> "*I didn't expect them to be so creative. Like I was actually blown away with some of the sculptures and their meaning behind some of the sculptures and their thoughts. I didn't in my wildest dreams think that they would connect some of the things that they connected and how what they were thinking when they created some of these.*" (31:19) .

This was in reference to an art piece "Bad Friends" that was completed by a young man in reference to a negative interaction he had with friends during a camp that occurred during TreeHouse. When Clara asked about the meaning of the piece, the young man mentioned that sometimes when someone says they are your friend, they really aren't (Clara, 6 September 2011). Digging deeper I asked Clara what the final art products taught her about the youth. Her response further supported the fact that she had misjudged the abilities of the youth and that she too, one of their greatest allies in the system, had misjudged them and "labeled" them.

As she said:

> "*...that they are a lot more aware of themselves and they think a lot more than we think they do. They have, just because they act out, they have a lot of feelings and NORMAL and I don't use the word "normal"...*This is when I interjected and said *"...They are just like everyone else…"* and she excitedly said "*exactly, exactly and that blew my mind. Because they are thinking those things even when they're acting out. Those things still go through their mind and I didn't think that, I thought. I, I was so stuck in the pathology of what they're going through to see that normal thinking process which would be nice*…" (32:44)

Amiri (3 October 2011) noted how watching the youth resonated with his personal experience:

> "*I that for me they were, self discoveries of me in them. My, being able to see some of my anxieties, reflected there. Being able to see some of the things that tick me off. Because I have developed certain social skills. I would be ticked off by certain behaviors the same way I would see the kid ticked off. I would react differently, but when they were ticked off by that I would say "I would be ticked off by that too*" *so these are the sort of things seeing ourselves, I think that they are no matter what we might think, they are us.*" (1:10:12)

As he was allowing himself to open up to the boys and to engage he began reflecting on himself and how these young men were mirroring emotions, frustrations and challenges that he too feels and has felt in the past . The key difference is that he reacts differently.

I would propose that both of these teachers experienced a proleptic moment (Slattery, 2001) that resulted in transformative learning (Mezirow, 1996) and a "revision of a frame of reference in concert with reflection on the experience" (Taylor, 2008, p.5). Participating in the implementation of TreeHouse and the subsequent reflection through the open-ended interview process "jolted" (de la Garza, 2011, p. 184) the teachers frame of reference just enough to make a shift in their thought process and approach to the boys from that point forward. One was able to now clearly see himself in them and as them and the other realized that the labels she placed on them prevented her from seeing them as children first. Rather, she saw their files, their diagnosis, and their "pathologies." These discoveries were unexpected for them and for me and it was like a light turned on beaming so bright that you could not help but shed a tear.

"But for the grace of God there goes I"

Every adult that had the opportunity to interact with the youth throughout the research process had a positive reaction. They enjoyed interacting with them, having conversations with them, and sharing their professions with them. More often than not,

they were surprised that the young men were so well mannered. More than once I was pulled to the side by a community member so that they could tell me how well behaved the boys were. These well-meaning community members too, have preconceived notions of how a young person in the system behaves when in a public setting. They expect misbehavior and a lack of manners. This is one of the reasons the young people are brought into the community under the TreeHouse name rather than under the Residential Treatment Center name. I attempted to "protect" the boys from negative reactions.

I am not sure if this was the right thing to do or if bringing them into the public and saying yes, these young people have been in trouble, they are in the system, they have a history, now let us have a conversation about how best to include them rather than exclude them would have been better for them and in the end for the local community. I do not know. Afterall, if we allow ourselves to know someone on a personal basis the "stereotypes and myths often fall away" (Jensen-Hart and Williams, 2010).

Once the local community members allowed the opportunity to spend time with the youth, they did walk away with a new perspective and were more willing to welcome the next group of TreeHouse participants.

Looking at this project through an autoethnographic lens shines a light on the challenge of using labels to categorize and identify the youth in RTC. If we use autoethnography and we are able to develop empathy based on our experiences and the critical reflection on those experiences then people will no longer easily fit into the categories we place them in or fulfill the role we identify them as taking (Jensen-Hart & Williams, 2010).

This is a key area that combines with the problem of language. Not only do we as a society use these negative labels, but these labels allow us to see the kids as "other," different, unequal, less than, I could go on and on (Osterholm, 2001). Based on these labels we begin to fear these kids and we push them farther and farther into the system and under the proverbial covers so that we do not have to see them, we do not have to address the societal issues that have perpetuated these challenges.

Sandy Brown, a former football coach at the Giddings State School in Texas stated it well, "what is necessary, he explains, is an understanding that the youth are not the Other. It is being able to see the humanity reflected in them" (Hubner, 2005 p.101). We forget that we too were once the same age experiencing some of the same emotions, some of the same experiences and simply "by the grace of god there goes I." One step, one decision, one paycheck, one death, one accident, but by the grace of God there goes I.

Future Research and Recommendations

Bochner (2002) asks, "to what uses might the story [stories] be put?" (p.). The preceding chapters of this dissertation each began with a story about an individual child or youth that I encountered before or during the research process. We began the journey together with Arthur, the young man that inspired this research and helped me to see his world from a different perspective. This was followed by Baby in a Bag in chapter two and Dos Coyotes Jovenes in Chapter three. Chapter four introduced you to the Buried

Treasures violently tucked away into a trunk followed by the traumatic experience of a baby and a wolf in The Big Bad Wolf Does Exist.

These chapters contain stories about the children, the caregivers, researcher, and the facility. How might these stories be of use to me and to other researchers in future work? One of the primary challenges I had throughout this process was "believing" that such atrocities occur to our children, that this abuse is not just on a television program or in a movie where we can disassociate ourselves and in some way "forget" and rationalize inaction.

This difficulty to "believe" such tragedies fall upon our children is in direct challenge to the validity of autoethnography in that the reader must feel the experience described is "believable and possible" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 282). If I as the researcher had a hard time "believing" what I was hearing and seeing how could I then ask the reader to "believe." Yet in turn, Aroztegui calls us to action and reminds us that sometimes the first step towards change is that we must first "acknowledge that humans can actually do such a thing" (2014) that "humans can be so cruel to other human beings" (Aroztegui, 2006, p. 27).

WE MUST SEE

We must believe that adult human beings are capable of perpetrating such atrocities on their/our children. The vignettes, the stories of the lives--past and present--of the young people in this research represent a small step forward. By bringing these stories of suffering and survival to the attention of the reader, maybe in some way we can

"believe". While we still have the option to distance ourselves or dis/believe the reality of the text, I hope that in some way the reader is able to reach around and through the text to gain some comprehension of reality within the system. And maybe it is possible that in reading and dare I say feeling these true stories, we have some foundation, however painful, to stand upon and make change for our children, for our communities, for ourselves.

As I move forward with this work, and as other scholars respond to and build upon the foundation that I have established through these stories, these vignettes, these lives of these young people, several possibilities for future research, and considerations emerge. In this final section I offer suggestions and possibilities for myself and other scholars to use as points of departure.

Future Research

Focusing solely on this research and how this research project might be different if attempted in the future:

1. Expand the population of teachers beyond one RTC with an extended study that includes a larger population of participants.
2. Develop a comparative study by looking at RTCs from other states and make a comparison of the youth, the teachers and their training and the impacts of the implementation process.
3. Develop a comparative study by researching the local communities of the RTCs and compare the impact this arts project has on community member perceptions of the youth in care.

4. Consider disproportionality and how this impacts the youth in care and the RTC staff caring for the youth.
5. Investigate implicit bias in the staff at the RTCs and how this impacts the implementation of the project and the interactions between the youth and the staff.
6. Explore whether gender, ethnicity, and work experience impacts the implementation of the project and how the RTC staff interact with the youth.
7. If at all possible, include the RTC youth beyond the perceptions, voices and translations of the RTC staff.

Recommendations

In addition to possible areas of future research, there are many areas that have come to light where we as a society might be able to address the juvenile justice and foster care systems, the care we provide our youth that are within those systems and the staff members that care for the youth within those systems. I will address three here:

1. Change Perspective

Ronai (1998) relates a story during her youth of learning to draw the human figure. Her instructor bellows the word "DRAW"

then ERASE...DRAW...ERASE….DRAW….ERASE (p.408). It is a lesson for Ronai in letting go of preconceived notions of what the human figure is supposed to look like, a figure that has been informed by cartoon characters with voluptuous lips, impossibly small waist lines, and curves that do not exist. The instructor forces Ronai to SEE the

living breathing human form in front of her rather than allowing her to "rely" on the ideas formed throughout her youth in her head. As a society and individual community members, we must be willing and capable of seeing what is right in front of us and letting go of our notions, ideas, and labels placed upon the youth before we can understand more fully. But this method requires, patience, effort, endurance, strength. It will lead to an understanding, but in understanding we may have to make a change and that too takes work and effort that we may not be willing to put in in this moment. Buber (1996) noted that in order to understand we must see the you in me and allow that relationship to develop. Are we ready? Andy was able to teach the young men that they ALL were able to draw, but they first needed to change perspective.

We must "rethink the fundamental principles in which we are educating our children…" (Robinson, 2007). While Robinson was referring to fostering creativity in our children within their education, I would argue that we need to look at the fundamental principles in which we are both educating and incarcerating our children in the foster care system and the juvenile justice system. We need to "see our children for the hope that they are"(Robinson, 2007) rather than the burden we think they are and treat them as such.

2. Training for RTC staff - Implicit Bias, Self-Reflection, Personal Counseling

In order to reframe our perspective we must understand what that perspective is and have the tools to make the change. The staff must engage with self-reflection, critical reflection in the RTC setting (Fook and Askeland, 2007). I have a great concern for the staff at RTCs. From my experience, these are hardworking, well meaning, caring individuals doing incredibly difficult work. Work with this population moves so quickly

that I did not see an opportunity to stop and reflect on what they as individuals were experiencing, feeling, and processing. These teachers were so heavily involved in the day to day and the "fixing" of the youth that they did not even see how their own biases seeped into their interactions and treatment of these young people.

I found that our opportunities for conversation and reflection on the implementation turned into a moment for them to share some of the heaviest stories they were carrying in their hearts. It was a moment to confide in a stranger and to take a breath in some ways. Because the interview was part of the entire TreeHouse implementation, the staff scheduled time for the conversations. Had this component not been present, I do not believe we would have identified the three themes present and I do not believe the teachers would have reflected on the process. Time needs to be prioritized for staff training and staff counseling within the RTC setting so that they are better equipped and so they do not burnout due to the immense pressure they work under caring for some of our most vulnerable in the community.

3. Implement Alternative Programs in the RTC setting - going beyond the text

Implementing arts informed programs in the RTC and participating in ethonographic and autoethnographic research within the RTC setting followed by sharing the results of these programs and research would be beneficial to those in the field. We learn from one another when we hear about the lived experiences of our colleagues. It is beneficial to understand what programs work and what programs do not work while implementing alternative programs in any setting. In the case of arts informed projects, we are asking the youth and the staff to potentially go beyond their

current experience with the treatment center. By utilizing art as a source and resource for voice not only are we challenging the youth to use their creative thinking skills, but we are also asking them to "do the work," to look inside of themselves and to reflect on their decisions, their choices, their actions and how they may or may not want to make decisions as they move into the future .

I would suggest that this project be used in conjunction with prescribed therapies. While this project is not intended to be a therapy, it does allow the youth a safe place to explore their reality, their experiences and piece together a plan, an idea, a something to be able to move forward. It helps to begin the conversation. Pairing this work with community partners will help to develop a framework and safety for the youth and the staff within their own community. It would provide an additional opportunity to flip the script and change the perspective for the community towards the RTC and for the youth towards the community.

As a result of the interviews and conversations had with the teachers, a marked change occurred with two of the teachers at the RTC. They began to include art activities and alternative modes of expression when counseling the youth. This change occurred shortly after the first implementation and continued on for at least two more years. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the alternate approach of accessing youth voice through the arts has been successful when attempting to connect with young people who might not otherwise share their ideas, thoughts, emotions etc….In essence, the teachers became my co-conspirators as they began to metaphorically color outside the lines seeking new pathways to the treatment of the youth at the RTC.

If researchers are to create programs that are potentially useful to the system itself and to the children and youth residing within these systems, it is crucial to understand how those who will be tasked with implementing these programs perceive the process and usefulness for the children they serve. While we may potentially create a groundbreaking project, if those implementing the program are not in agreement, do not understand it, and/or simply are not on board then the program is useless to the children because more than likely the children will never have access to the project.
It is in this case that those that are supposed to be "helping" these children become a barrier to progress.

Through this research, like Pelias (2004) followed by Denzin (2006) I have worked to enact a "methodology of the heart" (p. 423). It is through these stories, these heartbreaks and heartaches that we as a society have the opportunity to see the filtered reality of what it is like for children in our foster care and juvenile justice systems. And, it is by facing these truths and speaking from the heart that we can "learn how to love, to forgive, to heal, and to move forward" (Denzin, 2006, p.423). We need to move forward, our children need to heal, to forgive, to love and to be loved.

Conclusion: What the #$&@ Are You Going To Do?

Early on in this research I had the opportunity to hear Dr. Gwendolyn Webb-Hasan of Texas A&M University speak about the concept of "catastrophic teaching." And while the word *catastrophic* brings to mind tragedy, catastrophic teaching is anything but catastrophic. In brief, Dr Webb - Hasan defined catastrophic teaching as an

opportunity to deeply impact the students and people around you in a quick and powerful way by being intentional in each and every moment because that moment may be all that we have with that individual. I embraced this concept on a cellular level throughout the research because from my perspective I really only had the moment I was in. My interactions with the youth were temporary and fleeting. They may be removed from TreeHouse for a multitude of reasons ranging from behavioral challenges to removal from the RTC.

Much like embracing the concept of catastrophic teaching, Buber said our encounters with the "you" are fleeting and we must make the most of it before the "you" becomes an "it" again and we distance ourselves once more from the reality of these young people. As Buber suggests that the "I," the "you" and the "it" are one in the same, Vogler (2007) suggests one role of the "trickster" is to "help us realize our common bonds" (p.77).

> "trickster stories are radically anti-idealist; they are made in and for a world of imperfections. But they are not therefore tragic….These stories do not wish away or deny what seems low, dirty, and imperfect that their hero otherwise enjoys such playful freedom. Trickster is the great shape-shifter, which I take to mean not so much that he shifts the shape of his own body but that, given the materials of this world, he demonstrates the degree to which the way we have shaped them may be altered."
> (Hyde, 2010, p. 91)

While we may be prone to feel great sadness learning of the realities of the lives of these young people and we may want to ignore these realities...look away from the chaos and suffering...if we can instead remember the great lesson of Buber (1996) that I am you and you are me and in the end we are one then maybe we can look at these young people as the "tricksters" that they are. Maybe we can see that no, their lives are

not perfect, our lives are not perfect. But these lives do provide a window into the system (into our own lives). These windows allow us to see the experiences of the young people without denying the "low, dirty, and imperfect[ions]" (Hyde, 2010, p.91) of the their situations. Instead, we can see this as an opportunity to shine a light on the "hypocrisy...by drawing attention to the imbalance and absurdity" (Vogler, 2007 p.77), by drawing attention to the disproportionality of the system. This means we can then take these truths and alter them if we so desire. We created the rules and the system...it is not ideal. Now maybe we can reshape the system and alter our own experiences and the experiences of the young people and end the suffering we have created.

Through this research, like Pelias (2004) followed by Denzin (2006), I have worked to enact a "methodology of the heart" (p. 423). It is through these stories, these heart breaks and heartaches that we have the opportunity to see the filtered reality of what it is like for children in our foster care and juvenile justice systems. And, it is by facing these truths and speaking from the heart that we can "learn how to love, to forgive, to heal, and to move forward" (Denzin, 2006, p.423). We need to move forward, our children need to heal, to forgive, to love and to be loved. Spry (2011) says that "Hope resides in unruly bodies, articulate bodies, bodies performing theory from the edges and failures of coherency, heterogeneity, and autonomy" (p. 210). These "unruly" bodies emanate hope from the edges, the edges of society where they have been placed, within a system they must survive. If we allow for the experience of the layering of and on, then we will be witness to this hope. We must be brave and follow the tricksters

across the borders. Afterall, “they are the natural enemies of the status quo...they bring about healthy change and transformation” (Vogler, 2007 p.77).

If we are brave enough to cross the borders with these young people and give voice to their stories then we will be witness to, experience, and be part of the change that is needed to shine a light on the beauty of all of our children.

The day after Arthur died on the streets of New Orleans alone and broken, I received a message of concern for me and the loss... my loss...our loss, from the colleague that was with me the last time I saw Arthur alive. The message conveyed a hope for our future. He wanted to remind me of how he saw the world. He said:

> *We can still reach out. I recall the story about the woman walking down the beach picking up starfish and pitching them back in the water so they could live. There were millions of them up and down the beach. A man nearby who was watching, saw what she was doing and told her that there were too many of them and she couldn't make a difference. She picked up another one and tossed it into the water and said, "It made a difference to that one."* (personal communication, 12 May 2008).

As my colleague said, sometimes we make a difference and sometimes we do not, but if we do not try how will we ever know? What will you do in your space, in your time, with your resources to make a difference? If I am you and you are me then what the #$&@ are WE going to do? Are we really going to give up on another child?

REFERENCES

Allen M. & Bissell M. (2004). Safety and stability for foster children: The policy context. *The Future of Children,* 14(1), 49-73.

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. (2019). Residential treatment programs. Retrieved from https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Residential-Treatment-Programs-097.aspx

Annie E. Casey Foundation (2019). Retrieved from https://www.aecf.org/

Aroztegui, C. (2006). *The calabozo: Virtual reconstruction of a prison cell based on personal accounts.* (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from https://oaktrust.library.tamu.edu/handle/1969.1/3736

Aroztegui, C. (2014). *After thoughts of a research process.* Personal Collection, Texas A&M University, College Station TX.

Bernard, H. R. (2006). *Research methods in anthropology: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (4th ed.). Lanham, MD: Altamira Press.

Bochner, A. (2002). Perspectives on inquiry III. In *Handbook of interpersonal communication* (73-101). London, England: Sage Publications.

Brophy, J. & Alleman, J. (1991). Activities as instructional tools: A framework for analysis and evaluation. *Educational Researcher,* May, 9-23.

Brouillette, L. (2010). How the arts help children to create healthy social scripts: Exploring the perceptions of elementary teachers. *Arts Education Policy Review, 111*(1), 16-24. doi:10.1080/10632910903228116

Buber, M. & Kaufmann, W. (1996). I and thou: A new translation with a prologue, "I and you" and notes by Walter Kaufmann. (1st ed.) Touchstone.

Center for Public Policy Priorities (2009). Retrieved from https://forabettertexas.org/

Christiansen, O., Havik, T., & Anderssen, N. (2010). Arranging stability for children in long-term out of home care. *Children and Youth Services Review,* 32(7), 913-921.

Chronicle of Social Change (2015). Retrieved from https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/

Crum, W. (2010). Foster parent parenting characteristics that lead to increased placement stability or disruption. *Children and Youth Services Review,* 32(2010), 185-190.

Daspit, T., & Weaver, J. A. (Eds.) (1999). *Popular culture and critical pedagogy:Reading, constructing, connecting.* New York, NY: Garland Pub.

De La Garza, J. (2011). *A paramedics story: An autoethnography of chaos and quest.* (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved http://hdl.handle.net/1969.1/ETD-TAMU-2011-08-9802

DeLuca, J. & Maddox, C. (2015). Tales from the ethnographic field: Navigating feelings of guilt and privilege in the research process. *Field Methods,* 28(3) 284-299.

DeMarrais, K. B., & Lapan, S. D. (Eds.) (2004). *Foundations for research: Methods of inquiry in education and the social sciences.* L. Erlbaum Associates. Retrieved from http://proxy.library.tamu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat03318a&AN=tamug.2213123&site=eds-live

Denzin, N. K. (2006). Analytic autoethnography, or deja vu all over again. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 35*(4), 419-428.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.) (1994). Handbook of qualitative research. London, England: Sage Publications.

Ellis, C. (1991). Sociological introspection and emotional experience. *Symbolic Interaction, 14*(1), 23-50.

Ellis, C. (2004). The ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography. AltaMira Press.

Ellis, C. & Bochner, A.P. (2006). Analyzing analytic autoethnography: An autopsy. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography,* 35(4), 429-449.

Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research,* 12(1), n/a.

Fook, J., & Askeland, G. A. (2007). Challenges of critical reflection: 'nothing ventured, nothing gained'. *Social Work Education, 26*(5), 520-533.

Gaskell, C. (2010). If the social worker had called at least it would show they cared?. young care leaver?s perspectives on the importance of care. *Children & Society, 24*(2), 136-147.

Guyas, A., & Keys, K. (2009). Arts-based educational research as a site for emerging pedagogy and developing mentorship. *Visual Arts Research, 35*(2), 24-39.

Harris, M. & Benton, H. (N.D.) Implicit bias in the child welfare, education and mental health systems. *National Center for Youth Law.*

Herman, E. (2012, February 24). *The adoption history project.* Retrieved from http:// pages.uoregon.edu/adoption/

Holt, M. I. (1992). The orphan trains: Placing out in America. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.

Hubner, J. (2005). Last chance in Texas: The redemption of criminal youth. Random House.

Hughes, S., Pennington, J. & Makris, S. (2012). Translating autoethnography across the AERA standards toward understanding autoethnographic scholarship as empirical research. *Educational Researcher,* 41(6) 209-219.

Hyde, L. (2010). *Trickster makes this world: Mischief, myth, and art*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Jensen-Hart, S., & Williams, D. J. (2010). Blending voices: Autoethnography as a vehicle for critical reflection in social work. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work,* 30(4), 450-467.

Josselson, R. (1995). Imagining the real: Empathy, narrative, and the dialogic self. *The narrative study of lives.* 3, 27-44.

Kelly, J. (2015). Texas loses child welfare lawsuit to children's rights. Retrieved from https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/featured/texas-loses-child-welfare-lawsuit-to-childrens-rights/14892

Lincoln, Y. (2006). Life under construction: Autoethnography of a researcher. *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research, 21, 1-38.*

Lomas, D. (2001). Foreword. Healing arts: The history of art therapy (p.15). London: Jessica Kingsley.

Madison, C. A. (2005). *Critical ethnography: Method, ethics, and performance*. Chapel Hill: Sage Publications.

Merriam, S. (1991). How research produces knowledge. In J. M. Peters & P. Jarvis (Eds.), *Adult Education* (pp.42-65). Lanham, MS: Jossey Bass.

Merriam, S. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Mezirow, J. (1996). Contemporary paradigms of learning. *Adult Education Quarterly,* 46, 158-172.

O'Connor, S. (2001). Orphan trains: The story of Charles Loring Brace and the children he saved and failed. Chicago, IL: Houghton Mifflin.

Osterholm, K. (2001). *The effects of labeling students as learning disabled: A qualitative and quantitative secondary analysis*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved http://proxy.library.tamu.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/275998164?accountid=7082

Payne, W. (1973). Negative labels: Passageways and prisons. *Crime and Delinquency,* 19(33), 33-40.

Payne, K. & Vuletich, H. (2018). Policy insights from advances in implicit bias research. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences,* 5(1), 49-56.

Pelias, R. J. (2004). A methodology of the heart: Evoking academic and daily life. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Pillow, W. (2003). Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education,* 16(2), 175-196.

Robinson, K. (2007, January 6). *Do schools kill creativity.* Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iG9CE55wbtY

Ronai, C. R. (1998). Sketching with Derrida: An ethnography of a researcher/erotic dancer. *Qualitative Inquiry,* 4(3), 405-420.

Slattery, P. (2001). The educational researcher as artist working within. *Qualitative Inquiry,* 7(3), 370-398.

Spry, T. (2011). *Body, paper, stage: Writing and performing autoethnography.* New York, NY: Left Coast Press.

Strayhorn, C. K. (2004). *Forgotten children: A special report on the texas foster care system* Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts.

Strayhorn, C. K. (2006). *Foster children: Texas healthcare claims study - special report* Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts.

Stukenberg, et al vs greg abbott, et al, 2015). Retrieved from http://www.childrensrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/2015-12-17-Memo-opinion-and-verdict-of-the-court-2.pdf

Taylor, E. (2008). Transformative learning theory. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education,* 119, 5-15.

Tessier, S. (2012). From field notes, to transcripts, to tape recordings: Evolution or combination? *International Journal for Qualitative Methods,* 11(4), 446-460.

Texas department of family and protective services. (ND). Retrieved from https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/

Texas department of family and protective services (2010). Minimum standards for general residential operations.

Vidich, A. & Lyman, S. (1994). Qualitative methods: Their history in sociology and anthropology. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), Handbook of qualitative research (pp.23-59). London, England: Sage Publications.

Vogler, C. (2007). *The writer's journey: Mythic structure for writers.* Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions.

Whiting, J. & Lee, Robert. (2003). Voices from the System: A qualitative study of foster children's stories. *Family Relations,* 52, 288-295.