The playwright in research-based theatre:

Exploring the role of the playwright

in a project on Shakespeare in the elementary classroom

by Donnard Mackenzie & George Belliveau

CHORUS (sings)

Over hill, over dale […] I do wander everywhere.

(There's a large box that will open up into a shadow screen. Teacher is packing boxes and stacking them. He turns to the audience and speaks directly to them.)

MR. CALBY, TEACHER (As the song fades, looking around.)

This is my favourite moment. It's all been said and done. William Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream *as produced at Cedar Springs Elementary by our class. (Pauses, takes it all in.) Our space. All quiet. But for the happy ghosts of what's left. Faces of our audience. Faces of the actors. We were all met here once. I can't believe how they learned their lines, painted the set. How they helped each other. How their parents helped them if they could. So much how. For five performances the wild imaginings of the forest world of Fairies was here. Puck sang his magic. Weddings were celebrated. I've been so lucky again to be here with these students. But it's no cakewalk. It's not just a walk on the beach picking up seashells. It's a real mountain to climb. And every time I have come to this moment in my career, I say—Never Again. Tonight I'm going to go for a long jog through the forest trails and then sleep until next week. Sleep, perchance to dream.*

Opening from *Naming the Shadows* (Mackenzie, 2009, p. 1)

The excerpt above from *Naming the Shadows* provides an example of a research-based theatre project in which Donnard Mackenzie, a playwright, transformed research data into a theatre script. The data for the play was derived from a three-year SSHRC-funded research project designed to examine ways of exploring Shakespeare in elementary classrooms and how these processes might help to build community.   The study took place with 6 to 9 year old students in three Montessori classrooms in Vancouver, Canada where the teachers worked on

adapted and condensed versions of Shakespeare, namely *The Tempest, A Midsummer Night's Dream,* and *Much Ado About Nothing.* Researchers conducted interviews, took field notes and collected writing samples from participants during the preparation and production of the plays. This data provided a site to examine how using research-based theatre as a methodological approach can shed light on children's learning experiences through theatre.

Mackenzie's artistic process of developing *Naming the Shadows* is derived from year two of the SSHRC-funded project, when the teacher and her students explored Richard Carter's adapted version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2008), and is the focus of this article. The authors suggest how the role of the playwright provides a critical layer of analysis in research-based theatre. Although relatively new as a qualitative research approach, research-based theatre has seen an increasing number of scholars publishing aspects of this mode of arts-based research (Ackroyd & O'Toole, 2010; Donmoyer & Donmoyer, 2008; Mienczakowski & Moore, 2008; Norris, 2009; Saldaña, 2008a), including a special edited issue by Prendergast (2010) of this journal. Research-based theatre is but one term used to express the nature of performing research data. Ethnotheatre, ethnodrama (Mienczakowski, 2001; Saldaña, 2005), performance ethnography (Denzin, 1997), performing research (Ackroyd & O'Toole, 2010), performative inquiry (Fels & Belliveau, 2008), among many other terms have been used in the literature to describe similar yet unique processes.

Health researchers, social anthropologists, sociologists and education researchers are the main proponents writing about research-based theatre, and the majority of their scholarship has tended to examine the outcomes of applying this approach for dissemination purposes (Ackroyd & O'Toole, 2010). The focus on outcomes, rather than the artistic practice, stems largely from publication traditions and platforms, as well as the ephemeral nature of theatre, which is not easily or always transferable to the page. Another important consideration is that research projects are often funded by granting agencies whose missions seek evidence of social change or knowledge translation; as such, researchers feel obliged to generate reports and articles that highlight and speak to instrumental findings (Cox, Kazubowski-Houston, & Nisker, 2009). Publications that present evidence of possible change in or impact on participants and audience members become priorities to meet funding objectives.

Nonetheless, a growing body of writing is emerging in the field of research-based theatre in which scholar-practitioners explore the complexities of weaving art and research, discussing

the collaboration of artists and researchers (Mitchell, Jonas-Simpson, & Ivonoffski, 2006; Norris, 2009; Prendergast, 2010; Rossiter et al., 2008; White & Belliveau, 2010). This recent literature provides insightful discussions on issues pertaining to the conditions, complexities and parameters of working artistically within a research context. Ironically, with few exceptions (Belliveau, 2008; Dobson, 2010; Goldstein, 2001; Saldaña, 2005, 2008b), most of the printed literature still exists without the actual play scripts, or at most only with a few brief scenes. (We are fortunate to have the full script available for readers in this journal issue). As such, the playwright's contributions in research-based theatre are often non-apparent in scholarly writing, both in terms of their actual play script and the critical analysis offered within their approach. Saldaña (2008b), Turner (2008) and Goldstein (2008) have shared perspectives that touch on the contributions of the playwright in this field, focusing on questions around verbatim/non-verbatim dialogue; art-driven/research-driven plays; intended audiences; and trained vs. untrained artists. However, the multiple questions and directions a playwright considers when writing a play based on research, and how playwriting resonates with traditional forms of qualitative inquiry, have yet to be thoroughly and critically examined. Norris (2009) makes a strong argument as to how playbuilding and collective devising approaches are forms of qualitative research, yet he does not focus on a playwright-based approach. This paper/discussion builds on existing literature yet aims to provide new insights on the artistic and scholarly contributions a playwright offers to research-based theatre. The authors are guided by the assertion that the playwright as researcher is not new, as playwrights have been researching and reflecting on the human story for thousands of years, "making the invisible visible" (Brook, 1977, p. 63). As we discover and report within this paper, this is the continuing challenge for practice-based researchers: how to make what is usually a more implied and perhaps private process, more immediately apparent.

As co-authors we chose to share our ideas and thinking as dialogic, within an accessible and conversational tone, offering varying perspectives. As well, we wanted to closely examine the researcher and artist voices that are often at the heart of the planning and creation of research-based theatre. And, finally, this dialogue represents the format frequently used in performed research—a dialogue/interview, or data put into a script format.

Yet, the piece that follows is not intended to be a playscript, it is a conversation, a constructed dialogue between George and Donnard. This approach dates back to Plato's *Dialogues* and has been subtly refined and utilized throughout literature and storytelling, such as

the framing found within Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, or even the kindred epistolary works found in *The Bible*. There is also a long history in the art of theatre to use one or more of its own techniques to both express and comment upon the art; for example, works by Shakespeare, Pirandello, or more recently, the adapted film of Wallace Shawn's two character theatre-based work, *My Dinner With Andre* (Malle, 1981). George, with other drama-based collaborators, has also previously published in this manner, see particularly Belliveau & Beare, 2008; Belliveau & White, 2010.

……….

This is not a performance text! (Saldaña, 2006)

George is the original researcher of 'Shakespeare in the Elementary classroom: Building community,' a SSHRC-funded project.

Donnard is a playwright and wrote *Naming the Shadows,* based on data gathered from an elementary class' journey with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

George: When I first proposed that you share aspects of your playwriting process, you were hesitant. In fact, you questioned whether it was even possible to truly examine one's own work. I was reminded of Harold Pinter who was known for discussing broad political concerns that may relate to his playwriting. And, yet he was hesitant to discuss process and meanings for his plays. In his Nobel prize-winning acceptance speech, Pinter said: "I am often asked how my plays came about, I cannot say." (2005).

Donnard: Yes, George. I believe my hesitation may arise from the feeling that to investigate one's practice in order to find unspoken meaning has the danger of becoming wholly self-reflexive. And while I was working I have to admit that I was concerned it might lead to watching my decisions, and that can lead to censoring the writing because of hyper-questioning. Once the work is complete, one hopes it speaks for itself. If not, one could become trapped like Beckett's character in *Krapp's Last Tape*.

George: A meta-theatrical experience indeed! But tell me, as a playwright, do you think the request for reflections on your process affected the outcome of your work?

Donnard: Maybe. I kept more notes of my conceptualizing than I usually would. Also, I expanded my notes to give the research team [J. Beck, G. Belliveau, G.W. Lea, A. Wager] context for many of the decisions I made about dramatizing the data into a fully realized play.

George: It is worth stating that much of this project was reflective. Even within the data collection, the elementary students and the teacher were asked to reflect on the process of their play production, by asking themselves what it meant to them.

Donnard: Yes, reflection seemed to be at the heart of the data. And, of course the play *A Midsummer Night's Dream* deals with dreams …

George: … and it contains characters rehearsing/performing a play.

Donnard: Exactly, so with this meta-theatricality embedded within the data, I felt the research play demanded I make apparent the theatre and its devices. Hence my use of the world's greatest amateur actor, Bottom, as the character who helps the teacher find meaning in *Naming the Shadows*. I used the device so as to honor the long tradition exemplified in Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* …

George: … which traces back to the 'Mousetrap' in *Hamlet* …

Donnard: … and 'Pyramus and Thisbe' in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. So in using a meta-theatre frame in *Naming the Shadows*, I was suiting the work to the data, which we realized must include Shakespeare's *Dream*. (In this context Carter's (2008) adaptation.) And, I was building on a tradition. As a playwright, I am heir to the history of great writers of the theatre, Sophocles, Shakespeare, Chekhov, O'Neill, Mamet, Tremblay, Thompson… I mention a few who have written their way into my bones. I know that they are there when I write, but I don't necessarily make it apparent.

George: But in the academy the cultural norm demands you make apparent those who have influenced your work. Cite your sources Monsieur Playwright! As researchers we also

continually asked you questions during the process, which I suspect encouraged further reflections.

Donnard: I too asked further questions. I think this is customary for any play while in development—questions that lead to exploration. But I was aware we needed to move quickly towards getting the play on its feet, at least in a workshop form. To do this, I needed to see more specific parts of the original data, including pictures of the classroom setting, costumes. That's when I noted the shadows on the wall, the plants brought in by parents. This provoked more refinement of the script …

George: … and I suspect an opportunity to note more considerations about the playwriting process.

Donnard: Beyond the questioning, I have to stress that the creation of theatre needs the production element to reveal a richer substance. This is evident from how the students learned. Working towards the goal of an in-class production deepened their learning. They work in tandem: a play needs to be performed with an audience for the full meaning to be seen and heard. I learned about the process most effectively through an exercise in retrospective introspection— by looking back and thinking about my choices after the play had been publically presented twice.

George: So our engaging in this dialogue provides another opportunity to reflect on and recognize specific choices you made in writing *Naming the Shadows*. Yet, much of this could not have happened, you would agree, without staging the production.

Donnard: Performing the art, in this case theatre, informs practice …

George: … and theory …

Donnard: … and vice versa. Theatre needs to be performed. We need the audience.

George: Interesting that a number of research-based plays, in fact most of them, are never performed or published (Saldaña, 2005). They are often created as conference theatre (Beck,

Belliveau, Lea & Wager, 2011), which is most often a staged reading or reader's theatre sharing of an early draft of a playscript.

Donnard: Playwriting is often about re-writing after a live reading or workshop, or at least after hearing how it plays and sounds with actors. In the workshopping and performing, layers and nuances are teased out, making their way in the re-writing.

George: Let's return to reflecting on how you began the process of writing *Naming the Shadows*. We briefly discussed meta-theatre as a form, but what were other starting points?

Donnard: Like Shakespeare says of poets in a *Midsummer Night's Dream*, I start with *airy nothing*. To name that nothing is an active process of finding and filling the empty space. I read Brook's *The Empty Space* (1977) when I was sixteen and his thinking deeply influenced my own work for many years: "I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all I need for an act of theatre to be engaged" (p. 11). I usually start with an imagined empty space. Just space. Gradually, over the course of drafting and reading or workshopping the play, my space is defined within an imaginary box. Along the way, that box helps write and then refine the play.

> *BOTTOM*
> *I'm in it for the love of it all, like you and your young players. (He goes to light the box.) People who say you have to think outside the box have probably never made a box and learned the magic that they can contain inside...*
>
> (Mackenzie, 2009, p. 3)

George: Can you expand further on this idea of the box and how it may lead to playwriting considerations?

Donnard: First I tried out the idea of using a box as a visual metaphor for the theatrical and educational journey. I was also playing with a children's shadow box idea and I knew this would allow the ephemera of the original play a new life, and give some easily executed theatrical engagement. In my first scratch notes on the play I used Shakespeare's Snug the Joiner

as a possible character. As a carpenter, I thought he was the most logical to present the meaning of a box. But Snug was not as compelling as the Bottom character. Bottom straddles both the fairy world and the world of the day. He loves theatre and I could see how he could more easily philosophize on the value of theatre for educational purposes.

George: In this case the resources are not only defining the box, but become part of the structure of the play.

Donnard: Exactly, the data and resources pointed me there. This led to having the teacher as the central character around which I could tell moments of the journey of the original classroom production. I mulled over how that might express community and allow the children's experience to be seen. I also questioned whether a male actor could play the female teacher from the data, and left out naming that character as male or female until after the first draft. I called the character Mr. Calby, an echo from the teacher who had played Caliban in her class' previous production of *The Tempest*, which I learned from reading your paper (Belliveau, 2009) on the teacher's decision around playing the *monster.* I also wanted to find and present many of the important moments for the students and the teacher during their journey with Shakespeare. Building the play based upon moments is similar to the process identified by Moses Kauffman and his work on *The Laramie Project* (2001).

George: The challenge then becomes which moments to choose. But this is not unlike most qualitative analysis, where we select re-occurring themes, outlying moments, and pieces from the data that speak most truthfully to what happened. So, how did you come upon the moments for the play?

Donnard: As Bottom asks Mr. Calby in the play, "What's left?", which alludes to how Peter Brook suggests that after the whole experience of attending a play, through the later sifting and reconsideration, we ask and we remember, "what's left." (1977, p. 153). In other words, we intuitively identify what is essential or, more pointedly, what is viscerally elemental. After the elementary class' production is over what shadows have remained? As a playwright-researcher, I asked myself what moments arose or resonated from the research data. What data could I first

pull apart and then reconstitute as stage action? Further in the search for stage-worthy material, I asked the same questions the researchers did. How do we illustrate how producing a play by Shakespeare helps to build community? What are the fears of the children as they confront something new to them? For example, several of the students talked about the challenge of learning lines and making sense of them. So I have that within the piece. How does the work on the play enter into their daily lives? Then I presented these moments around the chronological pattern of the production of the play, from first casting to final presentation.

George: You make it sound simple. But how were you able to transform the data into theatrical dialogue?

Donnard: Stage dialogue is different from daily conversation. It's not people just talking, although I hope it rings true to life. The dialogue must carry action and suggest character. And for me, the dialogue contains elements of theme. Let me share a specific example. I received the following piece of data:

> *Another fun thing at home was that she sometimes used Shakespearean type language in ordinary situations, surprising me and eliciting a well-earned laugh. She really enjoyed the ongoing nature of the play, as she had time to think about it, and enjoy it on many different levels. It was a great experience for her, and for the whole family as well.*
>
> (Parent 2, interview, June 2008)

I don't know this student or the parent so I can't recreate the verbatim experience. I am not interested in that really, but I can capture the essence or spirit. This piece of data seemed like a perfect moment, a shadow of what's left from the student's own life experience. I gave the moment a physical stage action by setting it in a home kitchen. Here's the scripted dialogue from near the middle of the play:

> *SHADOW THEATRE: Flowers on a rainy day. There is a sound of rain. Other shadows as per the text.*

> *STUDENT*
>
> *Good Mother, The blue sky flowers weep in the rain.*
>
> *PARENT*
>
> *Um yes...did you just make that up?*
>
> *STUDENT*
>
> *Shakespeare is my constant good friend, wondrous words.*
>
> *PARENT (Laughing)*
>
> *Yonder are the eggs, shall I batter them liquidy yellow?*
>
> > *They laugh, Shadow lights go out.*

(Mackenzie, 2009, p.5)

I imply the stage action of cooking in the dialogue, but I don't explicitly give a stage direction. I chose an egg beater and egg to be used as shadows for the scene.

George: The dialogue clearly shows how introducing Shakespeare rippled into parts of the young girl's home life. What do you make, though, of it being non-verbatim?

Donnard: You and I have discussed that a number of times, what are the rules? *Naming The Shadows* makes a small reference to this debate (p.8), which is part of the larger construct that theatre must be an authentic recreation of life to the point we would have live bunnies, and babbling brooks onstage.

George: A concept that carries to the extreme the Ancient Greek idea of theatrical verisimilitude.

Donnard: Exactly! And that very challenging idea is discussed in research-based theatre literature (Mienczakowski, 2001). From my reading, I made a choice along the way that I would make use of verbatim data whenever possible, but to write scenes with full artistic integrity, I needed more than the exact words from the research data (Saldaña, 2005). Yet I kept in mind Dobson's (2010) personal caveat that one must be wary of "flights of fancy" (p. 5). Somehow, the play must remain grounded in all that the researchers have defined as viable data.

George: The data you received from the research team was pre-analyzed so that given the time constraints, you would not be overwhelmed and only choose to review all the written data, interviews and videos, if you felt it necessary. The written data included letters and other forms of writing from parents and students, research observation notes, an extended interview with the teacher, and the adapted script of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. These were thematically sorted into short verbatim texts of not more than fifty words, some less than ten. These selected texts were colour-coded, and thematically organized, under categories of parents, researchers, students and the teacher.

Donnard: And that is when I was invited as the playwright to participate in an additional sorting/analysis. We arranged, in a semi-artistic fashion, a collage of the pieces. Collectively, the researchers and I glued the various data texts onto a large roll of paper. It looked like an ever widening river, with various eddies and undercurrents. The collage flowed from the broadly based source question: What do *I* get out of it … towards … what do *we* get out of it? (See accompanying article in this issue, Mackenzie et al., p. 38, for a photo of this stage of the research process – Ed.)

George: In this way, we helped focus your playwriting lens.

Donnard: Yes, you did. From the start, I was drawn into finding connections between the data pieces, further groupings, by circling and giving additional reference names to these groupings.

George: This was the beginning of your playwriting process.

Donnard: Yes, I suppose it was. I then went away to read them numerous times, organized them, re-organized them, trying to find threads, an artistic way of showing the moments of this classroom story, or at least to find a shape in the form of the play.

George: Your close reading then opened up new themes?

Donnard: And, I brought in other pieces to the research.

George: How do you mean you brought in other pieces?

Donnard: I went to see the classroom where the original research took place, where the children were busily at work on that current year's play *Much Ado About Nothing*. So visiting the site influenced my writing. As well, having worked in schools in various capacities for several years, knowing this milieu informed my work. And although I had not witnessed the process or the children's production, I have seen various productions of a *Midsummer Night's Dream* and performed monologues from the work.

George: Your past experiences came into play.

Donnard: I don't think it is possible to fully distance ourselves from who we are and our past in our writing.

George: I agree. So we have further analysis, new themes through the playwriting process.

Donnard: Any playwright will tell you, the process of writing and distilling data into stage action through dialogue is riddled with analysis—which themes, characters, moments, words to pursue? From what perspective will it be told? Where will it be set? The analysis may not be obviously apparent within the work as a play or presentation. In fact, I try to avoid showing the analysis, by not being too obvious. I think theatre should be a bit of a puzzle where the audience has an opportunity to make discoveries without a playwright pointing them out.

George: This reflects the feedback we received at various conferences where the play was performed (CSSE/CATR in Ottawa, ON, May 2009; IDIERI in Sydney, AU, July 2009; Drama Institute, Vancouver, BC, July 2009), which suggested that perhaps the most effective feature

was how *Naming the Shadows* artfully and aesthetically embedded the research and data analysis.

Donnard: My objective was to select playable moments of truth from the data and I kept circling back, testing and retesting initial impressions. A constant thought while writing was that I didn't want it to be boring.

George: "The theatre must never be boring" (Prendergast, 2005, p. xiv).

Donnard: Yes, I wanted to make sure I was going to create theatre that was engaging. I was determined to find a way to develop a piece that would not compromise the art and yet also compliment the research.

George: This harkens back to Aristotle's implied expression, which Horace more explicitly stated, that theatre needs to please in order to instruct …

Donnard: … and you can't have one without the other.

George: Why *Naming the Shadows* as the title?

Donnard: The working title had the word *weaving* in homage to Bottom the weaver, and as a metaphor for the process of research-based theatre, which weaves research and art. I was close to having an image of weaving within the set and physical action. But very soon that idea was overtaken by the shadows, which had deeper resonance. The final title arose naturally from the content of the data, including Shakespeare's play. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has Puck's famous speech, "If we shadows have offended." I also felt the fairy world of Shakespeare is akin to Freud's concept of the unconscious world: shadowy and hard to carefully access.

George: I would add that *Naming the Shadows* metaphorically describes an implied goal of academic research: to find or name truths, or even a truth in the data collected. As arts-based

researchers in the academy we often feel pulled towards something measureable even though we know that this is only an illusive form of certainty.

Donnard: We offer one certainty and that is the vigour earned by the essential liveness and immediacy of theatre. The liveness makes I think the task of what you and I are now referring to as naming difficult, yet not impossible. In the play, I catch only the essence of 'what's left'—a shadow of the passing life we have witnessed. On rare occasions, I might understand that shadow well enough to give it a name.

George: By the play's end the character Bottom calls this "a good life's work" (Mackenzie, 2009, p.18). He then becomes a shadow and beckons the teacher, Mr. Calby to join him.

Donnard: I thought that would bring the play full circle, in that it begins with Calby reminiscing, looking at the boxes, the shadows, memories, artifacts that are left, and wondering what the journey was all about.

George: It then ends with an invitation to re-consider the value and meaning of his journey of doing Shakespeare with elementary children.

Donnard: Was it worth it? What evidence—shadows—can support the value of engaging in this journey? Why bother? Those were the key questions.

George: And they were left reverberating with the audience. Left for them to decide if it was worth it. The value seems evident though, after witnessing the various moments from the data of the children, the parents and teacher … the richness of the learning.

Donnard: I tried not to create a heroic teacher journey. Though at times this was challenging because much of the data suggested a positive experience for those involved. However in the reading and re-reading of the data, and particularly in the scripting, moments of tension did surface. As I was writing the teacher's first monologue (referenced at top of this

paper), I could detect from the tone of voice, the pauses in the interview data, that amidst the joy of doing this work there was tension, hesitations, all the challenges of doing Shakespeare with such young children.

George: The challenge for the children was there as well:

Three Students are discussing their roles

STUDENT AS OBERON
Look how many lines! I can't do this. It's too much.
STUDENT AS BOTTOM (really excited)
I'm cast as Bottom. I get to be a donkey!
STUDENT AS LION
I'm the lion. I don't know if I can do this.
STUDENT AS OBERON
But it's mostly roaring.
STUDENT AS LION
I know, that's the problem. I don't like roaring. I can't roar. At least not loudly.
STUDENT AS OBERON
You'll be fine.
STUDENT AS BOTTOM
My granddad says you learn it one line at a time.
STUDENT AS LION
But I'll never be able to roar. Really, I get too scared.
STUDENT AS BOTTOM
By the opening, you'll be scaring all the other Grade twos with how loud your roars are.
Just you wait.
STUDENT AS LION (She tries to roar, it comes out as a squeaky whisper.)
Rrrrroar.

(Mackenzie, 2009, p. 4)

Donnard: In the data, the child who played the Lion was very nervous and almost inaudible in the beginning, but by the time of the production she had gained her confidence through the rehearsal process, she had found her full voice and she ROARS. To illustrate this simply in the staging, I called for a small lion with a little roar as the shadow, and then in the later part of the play, the shadow is a large lion with a BIG ROAR.

George: The data in this case becomes embodied, transformed through the creation of the shadows. I suspect this is a significant thread in your writing that you choose to embed the research within the dramatic action and characters to maintain the artistry.

Donnard: My personal aesthetic for the theatre begins with dialogue, the text. But I also celebrate the notion that theatre is much more than words. We must create that empty space of Brook's—it doesn't just happen. It is a series of selections …

George: … or analysis!

Donnard: Sure. We consciously define that space and what we put into it. And theatre, like life, must be a sensual experience. In *Naming the Shadows*, I also wanted to have visual presentation, a story, a struggle, a lead character you care about…and I wanted there to be physical action as well.

George: But you had the box—physically for the shadows … and literally you were boxed in, by the data provided, then by other boxes such as, what resources were readily available to develop and execute the project? What, who goes in the box? What, who is outside of the box?

Donnard: That's like any theatre really. You must survey your resources, and suit your work to those resources. I learned quickly that the most you can typically hope for in research-based theatre is a workshop production, or a reader's theatre presentation. As well, for this project, I had only one trained actor. So, my challenge was how to demonstrate that introducing Shakespeare in an elementary classroom builds community … with only one actor?

George: This led you to consider what else was in the box, and the strengths of the other researchers!

Donnard: That's right. I knew the other researchers had various strengths, one played music, another had set design experience, and one was a stage manager. I had been thinking that a shadow presentation was fitting with the themes, and the researchers could manipulate the shadows. I wanted to keep the presentation simple to execute.

George: That helped define the box.

Donnard: With these resources in mind I refined the script during the few rehearsals that we did have. I wanted to create ways to have everyone involved.

George: My initial thought when you mentioned the box was that you felt boxed-in, constrained.

Donnard: Practically the opposite, it was freeing. The constraints of the box—the data— lead me as the playwright to a structuring journey for the play. I continually learn in my work that a defined box provides something to push against. It's a metaphoric process, but sometimes it can feel physical so I use the word push. You push, but the force of the box pushes back. Creative solutions happen within that process.

George: I am sure the process is unique for each individual play. But in general, is the box different when creating research-based theatre versus theatre for the general public?

Donnard: I question the term versus, because theatre is theatre. However, the key difference overall is the intended audience. They become part of the box. With *Naming the Shadows* I felt the audience was an informed one of researchers and teachers and other interested parties, including the participants themselves. This is a highly specialized audience, an 'integral'

versus 'accidental' audience (Prendergast & Saxton, 2009, p. 22). But they still deserve to be engaged by whatever theatrical means available from the art.

George: Engagement is key, I agree. How do you know you have helped create theatre with your script?

Donnard: It seemed to have connected with those involved. The script provided a space for that to be imagined and felt. Then the researchers, artists and audience met in that live moment and together filled the empty space even more. We collectively and individually found openings, meeting points to different ways of understanding and seeing the research through the art form. I think this place can only be created within this form of ephemeral, sharing of research.

George: Research-based theatre allows for researchers, participants, and audiences to experience the work cognitively and emotionally. Similar to our research data, where the elementary children's process of working on Shakespeare was further illuminated during their quest towards a production, research-based theatre reaches a different level when an audience participates with the creators in the sharing of the work.

Donnard: I believe that the product can only exist when shared with an audience, even with a small audience. Canadian Theatre pioneer actor and director Joy Coghill attended a play I produced. With slight apology I informed her that it would be a small house that night. She replied with the strong-jawed conviction honed from fifty years of experience, "It doesn't matter as long as there's one person in the house."

Students are talking with their audience, post performance

GIRL STUDENT
Any other questions? You can ask us questions like--Did you like the
costumes? We made them. Did you like the set? We made it too.
Did you like the play? We made it. Well, Shakespeare wrote the
story. He lived a long time ago. Um are there any other questions?
(Shadow lights out.)

TEACHER

More questions.

BOTTOM

I'm really on the verge of tears thinking of how proud those parents

must be.

TEACHER

Yes--I--

BOTTOM

--We're sensitive, we artists.

TEACHER

--I'm a teacher too.

(Mackenzie, 2009, p.16)

As the (one) reader of this work at the moment—our audience—we hope to have taken you on a journey, a journey through a playwright's process of working with research material derived from the efforts of elementary students doing Shakespeare. Peter Brook cautions in *The Empty Space* that experimenting with the ever-changing circumstance of live theatre "will make these conclusions inconclusive again" (1968, p. 112). This is one journey through the immediate challenges presented by the box. As the playwright asked through the writing of the research based drama, *Naming the Shadows,* what is left? We consider two images from the play, shadows and a box. Sharing what we have learned through this dialogue reminds us that shadows are caused by the presence of light.

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