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**Listening Across Borders: Verbatim Ethnodrama of Participatory Youth Research on
Immigration**

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Mercer University

© Lisa York

Lisa York, DeKalb County Public Schools and Georgia State University

lyork2@student.gsu.edu

Correspondence concerning this article should be directed to Leah Panther

Contact: panther_lm@mercerc.edu

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Abstract

This script is a verbatim ethnodrama depicting the experiences of eight youth researchers involved in a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) project focused on immigration. Presented in five scenes, the play captures the nuanced reflections, challenges, and insights of the youth as they navigate their research journey and the complex realities surrounding immigration in their communities. Following Saldaña's (2016) framework for ethnodrama and Norris et al.'s (2024) methodologies for using verbatim transcripts, the script authentically reflects each participant's language, allowing for a realistic portrayal of the youths' voices and viewpoints.

Youth researchers in this project were integral to the development and staging of the play, contributing not only their experiences but also their perspectives on how their stories should be presented. Each youth researcher selected a pseudonym for their character, reinforcing their ownership over the narrative. These ranged from playful names like Dr. Squiggles to culturally significant names like Fariha. Prior to inclusion in the play, all youth provided informed assent for their verbatim language to be used, while their guardians provided informed consent, adhering to ethical standards for research with minors. By centering the voices and agency of young people within an ethnodramatic framework, this play aims to share their lived realities and insights while promoting a dialogue on youth research through a lens of authenticity and collaborative storytelling.

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Characters¹

CHARLOTTE, 16, is a Black Ghanaian (Asante) American, child of an immigrant father, and speaks English.

DAWN, 15, is a multiracial Black (Zimbabwe) and South Asian (Indian) female, an American citizen, and child of immigrants. She speaks in Mainstream American English (MAE) but her time at an international boarding school sometimes shows as she occasionally moves between MAE and British English.

DR. SQUIGGLES, 16, is a Mexican-American Hispanic young woman who speaks both Spanish and English. She is the daughter of immigrants and a returning researcher who has been a part of this group for two years.

EFRAN, 16, is an Ethiopian (Silte) immigrant, Muslim young woman, and speaks both Amharic and English. She is a returning researcher and this is her second year in the group.

FARIHA, 15, is a Bengali immigrant, Muslim young woman, and speaks Bangla, English, Hindi, and some Arabic. She is a returning researcher and this is her third year in the group.

JAMES, 16, is a Black young woman, very sociable and talkative, and likes good music. She also describes herself as a “vegetarian trying to go vegan, but I don’t know if that’s really gonna work, y’all”. She speaks English, Black English, and Southern American English. She is a returning researcher and this is her third year in the program.

NAHIDA, 17, is a self-described “Genshin Impact Lover,” “open minded,” Bangladeshi American young woman, and child of immigrants. She speaks Bengal and English.

TANCY, 16, is a Black young woman.

¹ All character names are pseudonyms chosen by the youth researchers. Each description was provided by the youth researchers.

Act One

Prologue

An empty stage. Day.

Eight chairs sit in a semi-circle with the audience completing the circle. Two seats have what appear to be a stack of small papers underneath them. FARIHA, JAMES, and Dr. SQUIGGLES stand² centered in front of a line of eight chairs. Each chair is equidistant apart in a half circle.

FARIHA

What are you about to experience is an ethnodrama³. The following are a series of verbatim quotes taken from interviews with eight youth researchers who were a part of a youth participatory action research project where we studied the experiences of immigrants and forced migrants within our community.

JAMES

It tells the story of youth participatory action research through the voices and experiences of youth. We're talking about our own experiences as researchers instead of someone else talking about us.

DR. SQUIGGLES

Gloria Anzaldúa wrote "I am my language," so through our language you will know us. The steps we took, the mistakes we made, the joys we experienced, and the people we are.

FARIHA, JAMES, and Dr. SQUIGGLES sit down in their respective chairs, completing the half circle of eight youth. Until the end of the play, each character delivers her lines directly to the audience, as if they do not notice or hear the other characters.

Scene 1

EFRAN

Rises, walks to center.

Scene one, crafting research questions.

Returns to seat.

DAWN

I felt like I was in college. I felt like I was, I'm pretty amazed on what we did here because I felt we started from the ground up, like we had nothing. It was like a blank page.

² Standing will be used to denote contextual, narrative, or organizational language that was added and not original to the youth. All lines spoken from a seated position are original and verbatim to the speaker (Norris, et al., 2024).

³ This term is drawn from Saldaña (2016).

CHARLOTTE

So, start with the research questions, like figuring out what you're passionate about and your purpose for doing the research. I remember the first day I asked, like, what are we looking to find? Like, what is, what's the reason that we're doing this? Because you can't make questions without knowing.

DR. SQUIGGLES

We came up with a question first. And then we try to find out, like, what do we want it to be, and we all had different thoughts and ideas on it.

TANCY

I feel like we went all over the place on, like, the first day.

JAMES

I don't think I helped out that much with the research questions.

TANCY

And it was all about, like, trying to figure out where we were gonna, like, end. So, it, like, became the first question being, "How do you define an immigrant?"

NAHIDA

I think at first I was a bit confused about like, how, how are we going to focus this? Like, is this strictly on immigration? Is this strict?

DAWN

And then we said immigration, and then we said we're going to be doing interviews with people around Tucker. Because I thought we were going to be looking through pictures, records, looking through the books [at the library]⁴, and we'll be doing our research from there.

EFRAN

Walking to the center.

Tucker is our home. We all live there —

CHARLOTTE, TANCY, DAWN, FARIHA, EFRAN, NANCY, and JAMES raise their hands.

go to school there —

⁴ Bracketed text refers to missing contextual information that the actor can choose to include to help the audience make meaning, or not include to stay reflective of the verbatim response from the youth researcher.

FARIHA, EFRAN, and JAMES lower their hands.

or once did —

Dr. Squiggles raises and lowers her hand.

along with 37,000 other people. 28% of the homes speak a language other than English.

Everyone with their hand still raised lowers it.

FARIHA

Standing.
Including mine.
Sitting.

NAHIDA

Standing.
And mine.
Sitting.

DR. SQUIGGLES

Standing.
And sometimes mine.
Sitting.

CHARLOTTE

Standing.
Half of mine.
Sitting.

EFRAN

And mine. 17% of households are immigrants to the United States, like mine.

CHARLOTTE, DAWN, FARIHA, NAHIDA, DR. SQUIGGLES

Standing.
And ours.
Sitting.
EFRAN returns to her seat.

DAWN

And so then I was like, okay, so, so what are the questions?

FARIHA

I think that was actually, I think the hardest part, like coming up with the questions, like, because it's like from one question, we were trying to get conversations out of people instead of just like straight interviews. So trying to come up with like questions that could lead to conversations. That was a little hard.

TANCY

“How do you define an American?” I really liked that question. And I felt like that brought a different aspect to everything. It's a question I never heard before. It made me think. I feel like it's, there's not a definite answer for how you describe American or how you define American.

FARIHA

I'm not gonna lie. I do think our questions could have been a little better.

CHARLOTTE

And you talk to people and you're like, oh, the questions are wrong.

NAHIDA

Um, but I think like I mean, yeah, we talked, and like we worked it out, and then also I think, just starting the work. Let's just start writing the questions, and I was writing them and I was like, okay, you know what? I'm not gonna think too much about it now. I'll just write what I think is important to know.

CHARLOTTE

And then you make some new ones. So, yeah. I think it starts with a big question, and then you break it down into smaller questions. But the, the thing is, like, your final list of questions, it has to follow a theme. It has to follow what you're looking for.

DAWN

I didn't know where to start with that, so I'm glad other people had an idea of what they were thinking of when they thought immigration. So I had something, I, I could work off what they were thinking.

NAHIDA

When we went over them together, it was like, okay, well, you know, we came together to decide, should this be just about Tucker or just community in general? Or like, should this be just for immigrants? Well, not everyone was an immigrant. So how can we expand this beyond immigration? Um, and beyond physical location. Um, so I think it's just important to start and then talk with, you know, your group.

DAWN

So anyway, once we got the questions done and those interviews at the plaza, I felt I had a better idea on what my goal was. When I first heard about the topic of immigration it wasn't something that sparked a wow in me. So I had to look, okay, what can I do that can change that and make me spark something? So that's where I, well, that's where I came to the idea of learning about people's stories. I like learning about that background, where people came from, where you are now, and how you got there. I felt this is the way to enjoy what I'm going to do.

DR. SQUIGGLES

I feel like, like, because there's a lot of different, like, things we want to share, that it just makes it better. There was a lot of different types of questions, but I think they were just mainly about trying to know a person's life and story.

TANCY

I guess that was more of a surprise. . . just how we got so far, just from simple conversation and asking questions.

Scene 2

TANCY

Walks to center

Scene two. Collecting data.

Returns to seat.

CHARLOTTE

Um, it's weirdly, like, people focused, because I think in terms of, like, scientific research, a lot of times you're, like, culturing, uh, bacteria. Or you're like going into, or you're reading someone else's work, you know, you're not actually talking to them. But when it comes to research overall, especially research that has to do with populations and like communities, you actually have to talk to people.

DR. SQUIGGLES

We didn't interview men.

CHARLOTTE

Um, we used, oh, I love the camera. I didn't know I liked taking pictures, but I really do.

EFRAN

We didn't only take photographs like that. It was just, um, the camera was just for goofing around. I didn't really take any serious photos.

CHARLOTTE

But that was so fun, and to collect data, uh, visual data, I think it's honestly one of my favorite things that we've done. Pictures really add to the story.

DR. SQUIGGLES

We went out to a Walmart Plaza and it was just to start off and get a feel for it. So we just started interviewing people on their regular lives and I feel like it really, it really shaped what we wanted it to be.

NAHIDA

The first person we walked up to in HomeGoods, I stared at and I was opening and closing my mouth because I didn't know how to start. I was like, so, um, we're from, we're Linguistic. . . and then Charlotte was like, I thought you were gonna start? And then she had to do most of the talking. But like, I just, I didn't know how to start. Once you open your mouth, then it just flows. The hardest part is opening your mouth.

EFRAN

I felt like during the interview I did a little bingo because we didn't like exactly stick to the questions that we had.

JAMES

The cards, if I'm being honest, the cards felt unnatural for me.

CHARLOTTE and NAHIDA pick something up from under their chairs, stand, and walk to center.

CHARLOTTE

The cards were a game we created to make interviews more conversational

NAHIDA

More intimate or personal.

CHARLOTTE

We gathered our questions on the cards.

NAHIDA

Yellow for deep, orange for deeper, and black for deepest.

CHARLOTTE and NAHIDA start handing out the cards to audience members so everyone has one⁵. JAMES begins to speak before they finish, and while JAMES is still talking, they return to their seats.

⁵ For a printable version of the cards visit <https://www.linguisticjusticecollaborative.com/about-georgia/storying-tucker-the-story-of-us/>

JAMES

Like, they were a good conversation starter, but that was it. Like, unless the conversation came to a pause, that's the only time you really need the cards. Other than that, it should be like a conversation. Like, you shouldn't *have* to have cards because you're not going to have that actual conversation.

EFRAN

We kind of went a bit off track.

CHARLOTTE

I think I would go out and ask questions earlier, like immediately. What we found, again, is that we were just like throwing out questions because our original questions weren't good enough for us to reference them again. And we didn't really know what we were going to ask. We didn't know what we wanted them to tell us.

JAMES

It's really easy for me to listen to people and be like, oh, I'm interested in hearing more about that.

TANCY

I think it just helped me realize what to do and what not to do when interviewing someone, which is important. I feel like I wasn't prepared at the time. And then as the days went on, I was more and more prepared. I like jumping into things and not really sitting down and planning it.

DAWN

I think there were times where I was a bit nervous on how this was going to turn out. When things were going a little shaky, like after those Walmart Plaza interviews, I would keep a positive outlook like, "Wow, I just interviewed some strangers, and I got some information, and now I need to figure out what to do with it. But that was a crazy experience that I just did!"

DR. SQUIGGLES

Then we started interviewing people about their story. Because the plaza was more about like, asking people's opinions. And then we moved on to like, stories. Having a person's story, like, it's like evidence for what they're trying to say. So there's your opinion, and then there's the evidence. Their story is the evidence.

NAHIDA

When we were going up to people at like, you know, stores, I think that's different from like when people come to you voluntarily. Because if someone's coming to you voluntarily, that means that they're willing to like talk about something.

DR. SQUIGGLES

It made me realize, like, the other person's perspective matters.

NAHIDA

That's like, that's me putting trust in someone who's placing their trust in me to share their information and their story. I think it's a mutual trust thing, because we're speaking our truth and they're speaking their truth. And I think that it's just a mutual trust thing.

EFRAN

And I think we just like, took notes from what everybody else was doing.

DAWN

It definitely took some time to be comfortable with it. I know when we first got there and we first got our notebooks, I saw Ms. York open it up and start taking notes immediately. And I was like, what am I, what am I looking for here? So, I just, I just kept my notebook closed until we went to those Walmart interview plaza ones. And even then, I didn't take notes there either. I took it after the interviews. So, it definitely took some comfortability.

DR. SQUIGGLES

I think writing notes helped me get like a more, better sense of like what they're trying to say to you. Because when you write it down, I feel like you think about it more deeply rather than just listening at it too. And then you can always go back to it.

NAHIDA

My thing was, you know during the interview, I'm not one to take notes during an interview because I want to give my full attention to the person I'm talking to. I just can't multitask like that. If I have a pencil in my hand, I'll think about the pencil in my hand. I need to focus on one thing with all of my attention. When I look at a person and I'm hearing the words that come out of their mouth, when I see the expressions on their face, and how they react with their body, it's like you can understand someone so much more.

CHARLOTTE

I took notes, but I know that some people write actual, like, full on notes. For me, what I was doing was taking note of the time, and then writing something I need to remember about that time period. So, at 19:29, "what is immigrant status/immigration". It's just timestamps and like key words or ideas.

TANCY

I just kind of listened to people during interviews and whatever popped up in my mind, I wrote down. Also, whatever they said I wrote down, too. We were talking about how immigrants attack or are prejudiced towards other immigrants to try and fit in. So then, I was like, there's a thin line between fitting in and being normal.

DAWN

When I was taking notes, I knew that this was for, I knew that my goal was getting a snapshot. So I tried to get quotes that I think would be interesting, you know, great quotes, while also

trying to hear what she was saying. And sometimes, sometimes I'd be more listening than writing down, or more writing down than listening. There wasn't so much of a balance. So again, it definitely took time to try to be comfortable with the writing, I guess.

CHARLOTTE

We took recordings, all of these are with people that we talked to, of course, um, which are really cool, but they're even cooler when you can read them, um, in the transcripts, which are crazy. The AI is wild. The recordings are really good. I've done recordings, but I just don't like listening back to them, so the transcripts were really helpful.

JAMES

It was also the interviews and what the group was saying, too. So, I think I pulled I pulled a lot from [a community member's] interview, but I felt like some of the interviews really shifted, shifted me with the whole immigration thing. I felt like we went on a whole like 'nother path, but it was, it was still nice. But to me, the interviews, looking at the transcripts, reading, Tancy's writing, all that really helped.

DR. SQUIGGLES

I did look at the transcripts with [on community member]. . . there were some things that I'd missed. Um, or like, I didn't get the quote. So, like, the transcript was of help. Then we looked back, and I loved that she like, questioned the questions. Like, what does it mean to be American? Or like Americanized, right? And then we asked [her] that question, and then she was like, What do you mean? Like, she started questioning herself. She was like, was it when like I lost my accent? Was it like when I gained my citizenship? Like, she questioned the questions. And I really like that. 'Cause then, like for some questions, there's never a direct answer. You always have to like really process it.

Scene 3

DAWN

Walks to center.

Scene three. Data analysis.

Returns to seat.

CHARLOTTE

I feel like we did data analysis every day during our debriefs. So we were talking about what it could mean, or we were going over what the data itself was. And we were talking about what it could mean, how they're all connected.

DR. SQUIGGLES

Analyzing, I would say we tried, uh, to get like the highlights of the interviews. So, like quotes from the people.

CHARLOTTE

Um, and then, obviously today we've been putting it all together through writing. And then, um, for James and the other podcasters, it's through talking and through recording.

DAWN

Okay, first it started with reviewing the notes and realizing this isn't going to work. Then writing down everything I remembered, and then taking that, building it into my topic, and then going back, looking at the notes with a fresh perspective, and then attaching everything together. So a very step by step process, you really have to break it down, and then build it back up.

EFRAIN

It was just on the spot. Like, we read what they said. We went over it. The notes that we had for the people we were like talking about and then we just gave our opinions like what they said if we agreed if we disagreed like at some point we started having like on the second episode we had like some argument over like um African Americans versus like African Americans.

JAMES

And then we're like, okay, let's discuss this. So here's the, here's what we're talking about. Let's discuss this. Here's their views. Let's discuss what she said. You know?

DAWN

My appreciation for audio memos has grown.

CHARLOTTE

Um, yeah, I think the analysis has just come from conversation and then we're putting that conversation on paper.

FARIHA

I think we all had our different ways. Mine was like, going home and reading, like rewatching or listening to the interviews so that I could talk about them on the podcast. When I got home and like, I realized, like, Listen to it. Like I can, I, there were some things that I was like, oh yeah, we should talk about this.

DAWN

That role of reflection was in there. I feel that these interviews reinforce that reflection because I'm not familiar with doing interviews with strangers. I would come home after the interviews, I would think about how that went and how that made me feel. That's reinforcing my introspection.

NAHIDA

We were talking about, um, finding the themes and stuff with, like, repetition and whatnot. And then also our emotions.

TANCY

I wrote everything on the board. I just kind of took the notebook and like, looked at everything we had from like, recent interviews and just write everything down, and things I remember being said, and that I had in my notebook. And then taking that and figuring out what goes under each, like, umbrella.

NAHIDA

You're matching words and stories. I think I think the emotions are so important when you're like, you know, trying to, if you're trying to take meaning from a conversation, I think you need to look at the emotions that came up and what, like what brought those emotions and like, what does that mean? When you're analyzing your data, especially from people, I think emotions are just really important.

TANCY

I don't really do a lot of research writing. . . The way I went about things was like writing on the board and everything. That's just kind of how I thought was the best way to write for research, because I think I did that before. Because I'm not really a planner.

EFRAN

We haven't really decided yet, but like, I wanted it to have like, the history of Tucker incorporated into it, because [the community member] has been here since day one. She's spent her whole life here. So I feel like it's important to include that in there. So it's time to go dig in for some information.

NAHIDA

I mean, if I was doing this for like a different kind of thing, like a personal thing, I would want to go into a database. I would want to look at, like, the science behind certain some things and put it together into some form of writing. Um, but right now I'm doing snapshots, so I'm just writing little blurbs about the people we interviewed, I think it's great to share stories of people in little small but meaningful, um, you know, writings.

DAWN

It's a pretty common thread with my analysis, um, really with anything, you have to, if it looks too much, like it's just really overwhelming, you just have to break it down and take it piece by piece. And you have to move backward, move forward, it's a lot of, it's a lot of going around things.

NAHIDA

There are things that will come up multiple times because it's like a theme that like, you know, we understand. Uh, like there are things that we understand, and then there are also things that we understand, but they speak to us and they're like, we have our story.

Scene 4

CHARLOTTE

Walks to center.

Scene four. Dissemination.

Starts to return to seat, then stops, as if thinking, turns around and comes back to the center.

You have a card with a question, I know you do because Nahida and I handed them out. Have you read it yet? Have you answered it in your mind yet? Will you ask it of someone else before the end of today?

Waits a few moments, making eye contact with audience members just until it starts to feel uncomfortable, then returns to seat.

DAWN

I think step one, number one, step one, was making sure you knew what you were doing and really understanding the topic and the goal.

NAHIDA

When you look at a database or something, they're putting things into percentages and like they're putting this personal information into numbers. And I think sometimes that's just very hard to understand on a personal level. When you look at numbers, you're not thinking about the stories of people. You're just thinking about, Oh, that's a large group of people, you know? But when you talk to people, you can understand them, and you can learn new things that you wouldn't have ever gotten from a database.

DAWN

Does this sit right with me? Is this really what I wanted? Is there a way I can modify it to my taste? Finding that enjoyment.

DR. SQUIGGLES

That's why I wanted to do, like, um, an article or a podcast or just create something where it shows somebody else's story so people have to see it, you know? It makes a connection and it makes people, like, intrigued. It's like, oh, it doesn't make them, like, just viewed as immigrants, it makes them viewed as a person.

CHARLOTTE

First, we started with like what people wanted to do, like what they enjoyed. So, there were the photos, there was the art, which we didn't really end up doing as much, but it really just came along the way. Like when we were talking about the Let's Get Deep [game], like making our own, um, that was something that just popped up. And I feel like the ways that we decided to make our data accessible also just popped up.

DAWN

Because I had an idea of what I was looking for, there wasn't so much trial and error that I might have thought there would be. Because I knew it wanted to be short and sweet. I knew it wanted to be clear. And, again, kind of concise. Um, so I had such a vivid thing.

EFRAN

I'm shocked we actually, like, finished the podcast⁶.

JAMES

So, we had the whole notebook and we were, you know, reviewing everything that happened and they made me the spokesperson. So, I was reading off the notes, but pretty much I'd start off with like little introduction of who the person was and what we were talking about. And then I get into like, different stuff. So I would, I would take like highlights of the interview and then put them out there so we could hear what the other girls wanted to say about that. And then that's when we start getting to the discussion, debates, arguments. Well, really not an argument, but a debate, I guess. I feel like most of the times we did agree, but I do feel like there was um, there were like, certain points where we were like, nah, this is why I think and I'm like, nah, this is what I'm thinking. We just going to leave it at different points.

FARIHA

I'm thinking about the podcast, and, like, honestly, the only reason like I didn't want to do the podcast when James kept wanting to do it is because like I just didn't think I had it in me to like be able to join in and talk about, like, the topics, and even then when we first started the podcast. But then I kind of got a hang of it.

EFRAN

I think at times, like, when we were recording that first podcast, we got really lazy. I don't even know how we finished it yesterday. It was just, we sat around for 20 minutes. We talked for like a good amount of time, just random stuff. And then we started. And then we got sidetracked, and then we started again. And then we finally finished it. It was like a really nice process.

FARIHA

Oh, I think our podcast could be a little controversial because we did talk about like certain things. Like the textbooks. I don't know if we're allowed to keep that in. Like, you know, the whole controversy about how they're not, like, used right, and they have so many lies in them, and, like, it's not actual history.

CHARLOTTE

It's hard to put it all together. I think that's the most difficult part. Um, but having other people there, like having a research team makes it easy.

⁶ To listen to the youth podcast, visit <https://www.linguisticjusticecollaborative.com/the-ljc-podcast/>

JAMES

So like, really what I was thinking is, once we have the podcast out there, bam, it's on the Instagram⁷. Go check out the podcast. Once you have the articles out there, bam, here's the articles, go check that out.

DR. SQUIGGLES

I feel like I would just like to see it everywhere. You know, it is our work. But, um, I'm happy where it's at right now, like on the website.

TANCY

I didn't really care how we shared it as long as I got to write, so, um, whether it was on the website or on another website, I didn't really care. . . I got to write, that's all that matters to me. Look at it and be proud of it. And be a published writer.

JAMES

And then the last one is the Instagram. The Instagram is really, it's really for people to get a view of the process. And I'm still trying to figure out how do I want to do like, Hey, on the Instagram, let's get deep. Let's get deeper, how to get people to interact to that. Because we do need to get up our following list before we do that. But for me, the Instagram is a really like, show, hey, here's our community, here's what we're doing, you know, come show support, and it leads them to other like, places.

CHARLOTTE

So, just, we just decided based on what formats would best, um, serve the data, I guess

Scene 5

DAWN

Walks to center.

Scene five. Reflexivity.

Return to seat.

FARIHA

Honestly, it was pretty great, and researching, it sounds boring. It was pretty fun because we were gathering our information from, like, interviews and, like, talking to people. And so that was really cool. And I love that people, like, actually, what's the word I'm looking for? They, they worked with us.

⁷ Follow James' posts on Instagram @linguistic_jc

JAMES

Each time we have a new group of people, they'll show you what they want to see. Like, we'll get there. We all come together and at that moment we'll, like, tell each other, hey, this is what we want to see, this is what we want to do. There's a constant of us doing something different, because we're always with different people while experiencing different things.

DR. SQUIGGLES

It was such an amazing group. Like, it was really just such an amazing group of people.

EFRAN

I think everybody worked well with each other. Like, I didn't get the hint that somebody did not like somebody else. They were all open to criticism. Like, they were willing to take feedback and, like, improve everything.

DR. SQUIGGLES

I really like how this group worked.

TANCY

I normally am not that good at working with others. I liked working with everyone.

DR. SQUIGGLES

Everybody wanted to be here.

DAWN

I felt the whole team was really working as a team. Everyone wanted to be here, and I felt that everyone was collaborating.

DR. SQUIGGLES

There were just a lot of different opinions, beliefs. Like everybody's different.

CHARLOTTE

I think if we had been, or any one of us had been doing this by ourselves, it would have been horrible and hard and just isolating. You always have someone to ask, someone who has an opinion, someone who will tell you what you need to hear, even if you don't want to hear it.

NAHIDA

I value how we as a group have been able to work on each other's things and like work as a team. Um, like with the cards, it was like, I loved how we all just went through them together. And like, we didn't move on until everyone was happy with that question. We would talk through it.

DAWN

I didn't feel that I, I, I became a leader here. I feel like I was definitely a collaborator. And I liked that.

CHARLOTTE

I think the goal is to have learned important things. And I think we've, we've met that goal.

For the first time, all eight characters turn and look at each other, making eye contact, smiling, even laughing as the invisible walls between them are broken. They stand, hug if it feels right to do so, and exit the semicircle in pairs and groups.

Afterward: Ethnodrama as Arts-Based Language and Literacy Research

This ethnodrama is grounded in the theoretical traditions of critical literacy (Gutiérrez, 2008; Luke, 2012; Morrell, 2008) and linguistic justice (Baker-Bell, 2020) as an arts-based result of Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) (Cammarota & Fine, 2010; Mirra et al., 2015). These intersecting theoretical and methodological commitments challenge conventional boundaries between research, storytelling, and activism. Drawing from Freirean pedagogy and the broader field of critical qualitative research, the work positions language not as a neutral conduit of meaning but as a site of power, identity negotiation, and cultural production (Alim & Smitherman, 2012; Metz, 2020; Rosa & Flores, 2017). Through this lens, ethnodrama becomes more than a method of representation: it is a methodology of resistance to reclaim narrative forms and center voices historically marginalized in academic discourse. Several popular methodological approaches today focus on youth yet talk about them rather than with them. Likewise, such research will sometimes center youth of Color but not center BIPOC voices. And while we might see interpretations of (im)migrant voices, we do not always allow those narratives to speak for themselves. We seek to address these shortcomings with the development of this ethnodrama.

By adopting ethnodrama as both method and strategic dissemination genre, we take seriously the linguistic textures of youth speech: their code-switching, translanguaging, metaphor, repetition, and rhythm. Each linguistic move drawn from their linguistic flexibility is meaningful as data and as literary devices. In contrast to traditional thematic analysis or quantifiable survey results, the dialogic form of drama allows us to preserve the cadence, silences, and improvisations of youth storytelling. In doing so, we frame language not only as something youth use, but as something they shape, contest, and perform.

It is our hope that this script invites audiences to listen with intention to youth researchers and their research (Schieble, 2021), to reflect on the role of youth agency in shaping public conversations about (im)migration, and to reconsider the generative possibilities of language-centered, arts-based research in literacy education.

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