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A Scoping Review of Drama-Based Interventions with Migrant Populations for Health Outcomes

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Abstract

This scoping review investigates the breadth and nature of literature that currently exists on the topic of utilizing drama-based interventions with migrant populations for therapeutic goals. This author searched for empirical studies on the topic and charted data to understand the quality, number, and type of studies that have been done, and risk factors for epistemic injustice or misrepresentation of marginalized participants. A brief overview of methods, results, and discussions of articles revealed the most prevalent outcomes, limitations, and forms of data collection. Social connection and belonging, education, communication skills, empathy, identity reconstruction, meaning making, and adaptive adjustment to the host community were prominent outcomes found in the literature. Risks associated with working with migrants are discussed along with recommendations for future practice, research, and policy.

Keywords: Drama therapy, applied theatre, migrant, immigrant, epistemic injustice, scoping review

Author Identity Statement: I am a white, U.S. born, cis-gender female living with multiple invisible disabilities that impact my daily life and how I show up as a clinician and scholar. I write this as a settler living in Lenape Nation or *Lenapehoking*. More on my identity is outlined in the introduction of this paper.

A Scoping Review of Drama-Based Interventions with Migrant Populations

Introduction

Migrant experiences are often made up of navigating multiple interrelated systems: legal, healthcare, employment, education, and more. Many must audition for acceptance in such systems, enacting obedience or adherence to a status quo in exchange for resources, services, or proper treatment within spaces intended for welfare but often designed for continued oppression. The retraumatizing effect seen through the repetition of telling personal stories as evidence of suffering (Nguyen, 2011) and designing cohesive narratives for the purpose of a legal case means that there are many people to encounter, many systems to navigate, and a plethora of personal resources to call upon while pleading for others to see, hear, validate, and accept the existence of migrants. Within these systems, many workers call upon existing evidence to build policies and protocols to guide migrants along their journeys. Those employed in refugee and immigrant services often rely on research to make decisions and build impactful, lasting structures.

Research has power, and the ways that authors share their findings carries weight. The subjective experiences of the researchers are embedded into results, and it behooves authors to include the input of participants through a member checking process or authorship status within the publications of their own narratives. Stakeholder consultation is, at times, viewed as a final and optional step, rather than an ever-present concern (Levac et al., 2010). Authors are particularly disadvantaged if they do not share their own positionality (Mollica et al., 1989) and impetus for beginning this work, so that the reader may consider social locators and viewpoints that impact the literature (Holmes, 2020). When working with participants whose identities are systematically marginalized – and it seems an impossibility that any participant does not hold at

least one subjugated identity – objectivity from a researcher standpoint seems impossible, and therefore, we must name our positions and offer insight into how these intersecting identities might inform the information as it is presented. Positionality "refers to the stance or positioning of the researcher in relation to the social and political context of the study" (Rowe, 2014, p. 627). It expresses where researchers are coming from and gives a basis for understanding one's ontological and epistemological assumptions (Holmes, 2020). My own positionality is as follows.

I am a U.S. born, English-speaking, white, cis-gendered female with invisible disabilities that impact my daily life, my living environment, and my chosen geographic location, which rests on the mid-Atlantic coast near supports and a cultural climate conducive for my health. I am privileged to choose my location on the map and find that this element of choice differs greatly from the experiences of my clients who are refugees, immigrants, and descendants of people expelled from their homeland. I lived in a port city in Italy for two years during the height of the so-called Mediterranean migrant *crisis* (Torkington & Ribeiro, 2019), blending myself into the community as a white person and feeling like a double agent, exposing myself every time I opened my mouth. I am the granddaughter of Italian, Northern Irish, and Slovak immigrants who arrived in the U.S. to flee, seek, and stick together, some with well-founded fear of persecution or death and others in pursuit of an ambiguous dream. My Irish ancestors were exposed to colonization, starvation, and sectarian violence, with one family member, my great grandfather, who migrated to Canada alone as a young adult. Despite my connection to the struggles of my loved ones, I feel at odds with this identity. As I write this, I live and build my future on the largest settler colonial project in human history.

While living outside of the U.S., I felt a sense of belonging with people from other parts of the world on the vulnerable journey of learning, adapting, working through limbo and isolation, and holding onto our homelands in small but meaningful ways. Despite the very real connections I made with folks migrating to Italy mainly from the global south, I was not able to fully grasp the ubiquitous racism and classism in Western European society and probably never will. I am married to an immigrant, and often find myself enroling as an advocate, makeshift lawyer, case manager, and cultural liaison. Most of my stories – including those lived in my lifetime and the stories enacted before I was born – feel defined by geographic and cultural locations. I take on the duplicitous task of remembering and honoring my lineages while holding responsibility in undoing the white supremacy that endorses my experiences as a dominant source of truth.

It is also important to note that I am a graduate student of clinical mental health counseling and drama therapy in the U.S. and have published on the topic of participatory action research. These experiences impact the way I have learned and internalized research standards as they exist today in the U.S. and the way that I view therapeutic interventions with special populations as a counselor and drama therapist.

My most recent work with migrants took place at a large non-profit serving hundreds of new residents each year. While there, I utilized drama interventions wherever I could. There is an emerging body of research on using theatre to support migrants, and the literature, though helpful, leaves gaps in our collective understanding of participant experiences and best practices. At this organization, frequent research studies took place with clients. Resettlement agencies are often under resourced and powered by unpaid volunteers, and during my one year at the agency, I, an unpaid intern, was a part of three studies as an interventionist in different therapeutic

treatments for migrants, one of which I started on my own to investigate adolescent, teen, and young adults' experiences with drama-based interventions. This research study is currently ongoing and continues to impact my perspective on research practices with migrants, including the ways researchers relate to participants, how challenges and limitations are addressed, how researchers take care of participants during and beyond research periods, and a simultaneous sense of compassion and curiosity toward practitioners working within underresourced systems trying to make theatre with migrants for wellbeing. Overall, I was largely unable to find sufficient resources on best practices in drama therapy and applied theatre with this population. Unfavorable dynamics of underresourced workplaces that I noticed in the offices, churches, classrooms, and online spaces where I worked were not often reflected on in the literature, posing threats for publication bias or cherrypicked results. Furthermore, if results and reported outcomes are not supported by data within the articles themselves, readers are left to wonder how the authors came to these conclusions and how implicit biases impact results. A few questions I found myself reckoning with as I read the literature were:

- Who are the authors? What are their intersecting identities and notable points of privilege? Are these items made clear enough in the article?
- What is being done with participants, in terms of protocols?
- How are participants protected, supported, and regarded by the research team?
- How is their lived wisdom represented and respected?
- How, and how much, are participants' voices represented?
- Do the manuscripts provide sufficient contextual details?
- What are the potential implications of this research? What are the lasting structures it leaves the reader with?

I list these questions to candidly name a few of my biases and proclivities as I begin this project. These questions represent many moments of witnessing the harms that can be done when research misrepresents an entire population, nudging results toward ideal outcomes that create funding opportunities, saviorhood status for the least impacted, or unearned organizational glory. It is also a result of many hours spent searching for literature to understand best practices with this population and not finding examples that adequately reflect on the challenging, unique nature of this work in light of all its perceived benefits. It was also difficult to understand the literature from the perspective of the participants, which left me to wonder how researchers know what they claim to know about the reported outcomes.

With this review of literature, I hope to gather and organize for the community what has been reported so far. A path forward might look like providing deeper accounts of the uniqueness of this work with the inclusion of participant perspectives and "rich, contextualized understanding of some aspect of human experience through the intensive study of particular cases" (Polit & Beck, 2010, p. 1451). It can also lead to more quantitative and mixed-method studies that seek to understand and create an evidence base for the reported outcomes (i.e. empathy, language acquisition) to target more specific lines of inquiry. Arts-based research also can provide a unique lens into understanding migrant experience, as art tends to contain and belong to culture, and can bypass language-based methods of communication moving into non-verbal data.

Who are "migrants"?

The use of the term migrant aims to be an inclusive, non-legal term, defined by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as "a person who moves away from their place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or

permanently, and for a variety of reasons" (IOM, 2019). Aside from the simplicity of this term for ease of writing, this paper uses the term migrant to refer to any person living outside of their homeland. For the purposes of this paper, *migrant* will include only those who have moved from their homeland within their lifetime, including as children.

Refugees, immigrants, evacuees, and other more specific terms are bound by legalities, which include a set of systems, ideologies, and semantics irrelevant to this study. This paper investigates the literature focusing on migrants of all backgrounds and labels regardless of status defined by law. Language is a purveyor of shared reality and can build a world of justice or oppression; at best, terms such as *refugee* or *immigrant* are often used inaccurately, and at worst, terms like *illegals* and *aliens* uphold derogatory stereotypes and *us-versus-them* dynamics for relating to migrants (Hoops & Braitman, 2018). Terminology can also impact empathy toward migrants (2018). Using language as specific as possible whenever possible will be utilized throughout this paper. However, when speaking broadly of the literature at large, the term *migrant* will be used in attempts toward accuracy and neutrality.

Migrants and drama therapy

The use of drama with migrants for personal and social wellbeing is well documented. Much has been written on applied theatre with migrants (Alshughry, 2018; Skeiker, 2021), autoethnography (Penny & Kingwil, 2018), the Sesame Approach (Portokaloglou, 2018), psychodrama, and many other approaches used in a variety of contexts including classrooms (Landis, 2021; Rousseau et al., 2007; Yüksek, 2018), community settings (Apergi, 2014), refugee camps (Sakhi et al., 2020), and more.

Legal and welfare structures imposed by colonial forces often demand that migrants tell and retell personal stories of oppression for their case, with services and status hinging on the

telling of a cohesive narrative. Trauma-focused talk therapy may prod too closely to the trauma narrative and invoke harmful dynamics of having to prove one's own sense of fear or lack of safety in their homeland. For some, directly speaking about an experience may be outside of their window of tolerance (Landis, 2021). Drama offers various approaches to effectively address personal and collective experience, nostalgia, and identity fragmentation that often follows migration. Drama-based interventions can provide experiential and non-traditional means for health-related goals, which matters for groups who may not respond to clinical settings (Sakhi et al., 2020) as well as adolescents who may not be ready to talk about their experience (Landis, 2021; Rousseau et al., 2007).

Scoping reviews

Scoping reviews are a broad review of literature that exists on a topic. They gather and summarize an existing or emerging body of evidence on a topic and can be the first stop for readers planning to work with this population or even start a study of their own. It maps our "current state of understanding" and pinpoints "the sorts of things we know and do not know" (Anderson et al., 2008, p. 194). The focus is on the nature, volume, or characteristics of the literature and gaps in the evidence (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). Summarizing the content of findings might then be disseminated to policymakers, leaders in organizations working with the population, practitioners, and researchers. Identifying trends and dynamics can also be achieved through scoping reviews.

Outcomes of a scoping review are tied to the purpose of the study, which, in this study, is twofold. Firstly, the purpose is to identify common outcomes for practitioners, organizations, policymakers, and researchers to incorporate into their practice or continue investigating, addressing the areas that require more evidence. Secondly, this review aims to instill the need

and urgency for epistemic justice with migrant populations in future literature, and a moral obligation to honor migrant wisdom as a valuable source of evidence for building and testing theories. Holding the wisdom of clients and participants alongside our own wisdom can allow a new wave of research results, investigating how one's position interacts with data and equally providing participant perspectives to support or contradict. My personal hope with this project is to wonder about how we know what we know, to question and challenge it, and to encourage new ways of knowing and collecting data with migrant populations.

Epistemic injustice

Epistemic injustice was described by Fricker (2017) as, "a form of discrimination" to subjects "in which someone is ingenuously downgraded and/or disadvantaged in respect of their status" (p. 53), particularly with regards to their role as a *knower* or beholder of information. This lens represents personal biases interacting with the way that one hears and understands information about another. Warning signs in research may show up in the absence of information, rather than outright misinterpretation (2017). Thin descriptions of contextual details, absent positionality statements, little data on participant experiences, and a lack of reporting protocols, methods, and procedures of analysis all reduce credibility, which, in turn, can lead to epistemic injustice that impacts the ways that academics, clinicians, leaders, policymakers, and researchers take in and value this information. Furthermore, the absence of racial or cultural identities of researchers and participants may be working to reaffirm a white supremacist worldview which assumes whiteness as neutrality, a common issue in psychology research (Roberts & Mortenson, 2023).

Methods

Scoping reviews follow a six-step process, which includes (1) choosing a research question, (2) deciding how to select relevant studies, (3) selecting studies based on inclusion criteria, which will be informed by the research question, (4) charting the data with a form of extracted data, as well as analyzing results with a coding procedure, (5) summarizing and reporting results, and (6) consulting with stakeholders to gain new insights and apply suggestions from appropriate sources (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005).

The process includes deciding on a research team. It is ideal to have both a content expert on the topic and someone with expertise conducting scoping reviews (Levac et al., 2010). This research team consisted of myself, librarians at Lesley as experts in searching for literature and building search criteria based on my research question, my thesis consultant, Fadi Skeiker, who is experienced in working with this population, Brooke Ferguson, a cohort member, who enroled as a research assistant and read abstracts of the chosen literature to add a second validation, deciding whether or not it belongs in this study based on inclusion criteria, and consultation with researcher Dr. Christine Mayor who supported me with knowledge on conducting scoping reviews. Finally, consultation with community stakeholders as content experts fulfilled the sixth step. For this step, I presented my findings to the international student organization at Lesley University for discussion and feedback.

The research question is, "what is our current understanding of the health outcomes of drama therapy interventions with migrant populations?" and a sub-question, an exploratory question on epistemology in multicultural research, "how do we know these outcomes?" This research question informed the inclusion criteria for studies and required definitions of key concepts, such as "drama therapy" and "health outcomes".

Though scoping reviews typically do not evaluate the quality of studies, my exploration of the results from the lens offered by Fricker (2017) are a central element to this paper. A column was added to the data chart for vulnerabilities in the paper toward instances of epistemic injustice, including absent positionality statements and prevalence of supportive participant data represented in the publication.

Key concepts

To find studies relevant to the research question, core terms based on key concepts were identified and operationalized. The key concepts and definitions are as follows:

migrant: a person who moves away from their place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons. (IOM, 2019)

health: subjective experiences of well-being located within personal, interpersonal, and societal realms. This concept is supported by WHO (n.d.) which defines health as involving "physical, mental and social well-being".

drama therapy: the "intentional use of drama and/or theatre practices to achieve therapeutic goals" (NADTA, 2022). Some theatre practices may not identify as drama therapy but may be included in this framework if the goals are therapeutic, leading to *health* outcomes.

Inclusion criteria

- Peer reviewed academic papers
- "Grey" literature including theses, dissertations, journals that are not peer reviewed

- Literature concerning health* outcomes of migrants* due to drama-based interventions
- In English
- Published and/or written during or after 2004
- Is empirical research, which includes quantitative, qualitative, arts based, or mixed methods research with a defined methodology
- Worldwide

Exclusion criteria

- Literature that includes theatre and migrants but does not align with the health*-related goals of drama therapy
- Book chapters
- Published before 2004
- Is not empirical research, which includes theory papers, clinical commentaries, reviews, editorials, periodicals, and publications without a defined methodology

Identification of studies

Search terms were entered in the databases Academic Search Premier, APA PsycArticles, APA PsycInfo, DigitalCommons@Lesley, ERIC, FLO Catalog, FLO eResource Catalog Lesley University, FLO Union Catalog, Humanities International Complete, OpenDissertations, SocINDEX with Full Text with terms “drama therapy” OR dramatherapy OR “applied theatre” OR “theatre of the oppressed” OR theatre OR drama AND migrant OR immigrant OR refugee OR evacuee OR “special visa holder” OR undocumented OR international as found in the subject or abstract (n = 103). Journals including *Arts in Psychotherapy (n = 1), Dramatherapy (n*

= 3), and *Drama Therapy Review (n = 2)* were hand searched leading to a sample size of (*N* = 109).

The studies were then imported into the systematic review analysis software Covidence. A research assistant read titles, abstracts, and if needed, full texts of articles chosen to screen for eligibility. Between the two readers' choices for study inclusion between the options yes, no, or maybe, a proportionate agreement of 0.79487 and Cohen's Kappa of 0.24638 was reached, indicating a fair to moderate inter-rater reliability. Each disagreement led to a meeting to address misunderstandings until reaching consensus. We further operationalized terms within the inclusion criteria, leading to adjustments of the above definitions. Sources of ambiguity were often due to lack of clarity within articles as to whether the publication had a research question, decisions on whether and when to include case studies as empirical research, and informal methodology sections within articles, leaving the reader to wonder if the literature is original research or theoretical based on past research. The result of these meetings led to inclusion criteria of empirical research to mean *articles that include a study aim, research question, and employ an unambiguous methodology toward the research question within the publication*. These discussions also led to the appraisal of studies, not typically done in scoping reviews. I decided to notate quality assessment of studies, indicating completeness of outcome data, selective reporting, and other sources of bias left unaddressed in the publications, writing notes on each concern throughout the screening process. A comprehensive list of quality assessment is not addressed in this current paper. Rather, the notes served as an exercise for the researcher to become familiar with the data and reflect on the literature's nature. The data chart does, however, reflect the amount of participant data represented within publications. This was measured by checking if participant data (including quotes, artwork, measures, or other) were presented in the

publication for each reported outcome. For example, if a reported outcome was symptom reduction, reported results on all symptom measures used would be considered *moderate*, which is to say sufficient or relatively enough. If there were more data types to support and contextualize that outcome, such as participant quotes or artwork, that would result in a *high* participant data representation. If each reported result was not supported by data within the publication, that would be considered *low.*

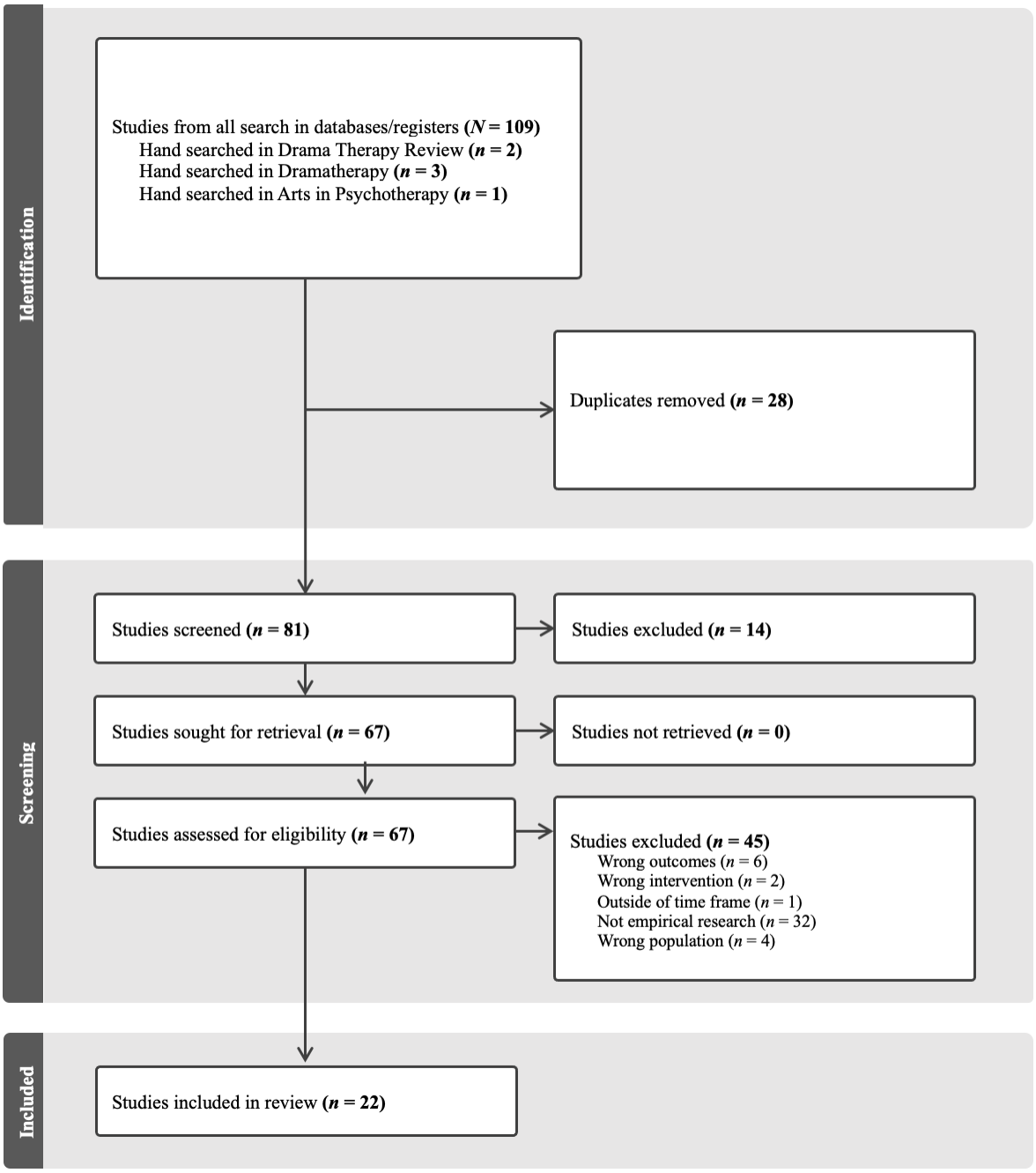
Based on the findings (N = 109), the following publication types were identified:

1. Empirical research studies
2. Case vignettes, observational reports, and case studies without a clear methodology
3. Manuals and intervention protocols
4. Theory papers
5. Reflexive researcher self-studies and clinical commentaries

All the above publication types are important and necessary to inform a complete picture of working with migrant populations, which I discuss more in the discussion section of this paper. This scoping review, however, focuses on the first publication type, which is empirical research studies, and specifically, those investigating health outcomes of research participants.

Table 1

PRISMA flow diagram



Results

Chart 1

Data chart for selected studies. SC/B = social connection/belonging; ID = identity reconstruction; ER = emotional regulation

Authors	Country	Publication	Study design	Drama intervention used	Protocol provided	Population	Setting	Outcomes	Positionality statement	Participant data representation in text
Alshughry, U. (2018)	Turkey	Academic journal	Case study, mixed methods	Theatre of the oppressed	No	Syrian refugee women aged 21-54	Community center	Communication skills, violence prevention	Yes	Low
Coleman, S. (2012)	USA	Thesis/dissertation	Mixed methods	Autobiographical theatre	Yes	Migrant youth, grades 6-8	Schools	SC/B, education, communication, ID	No	High
Damra, J. K. (2022)	Jordan	Academic journal	Quantitative; Randomized control study	Psychodrama	Other: Naturalistic process, 12 sessions, 90m each	Syrian abused refugee women ages 19-45	Refugee camp	Violence prevention, symptom reduction	No	Moderate
de Smet et al. (2019)	Belgium	Academic journal	Case study	Applied theatre	Yes	Syrian refugees ages 18-26	Community center	SC/B, adaptive adjustment, meaning making, civic engagement, ID	No	Moderate
Doukmak, R. (2019)	UK/Turkey	Thesis/dissertation	Case study	DiE	Yes	Refugee students grades 10-12 and teachers	Refugee camp	ER, SC/B, education, communication skills	Yes	High
Edelbi, K. (2020)	USA	Thesis/dissertation	Qualitative	Playback theater	Yes	Palestinian adolescents ages 15-16	Community theatre	SC/B, education, meaning making, empathy	No	High
Flagler, M. (2018)	USA	Thesis/dissertation	Qualitative	Digital storytelling, applied theatre	Yes	6th grade Spanish Speakers in TX, USA	Classroom	Education, SC/B, communication skills, empathy	No	High

Grant, A.S. (2021)	UK	Thesis/dissertation	Qualitative, ethnography, SSIs, observation	Participatory theatre-making; TfD	No	Adult female migrants	Community theatre	SC/B, conflict resolution, empathy, confidence	Yes	Moderate
Gürle, N.Ş. (2018)	Turkey	Academic journal	Qualitative	Image theatre, drama games	Yes	Syrian refugee children ages 10-12	Informal education center	Emotional regulation, communication skills, empathy	No	Moderate
Horghagen, S. & Josephsson, S. (2010)	Norway	Academic journal	Qualitative and arts-based	Autobiographical theater; public performance	No	Asylum seekers aged 20-30, intl.	Reception center (asylum-seeker housing)	SC/B, adaptive adjustment, meaning making	No	Moderate
Keisari et al. (2023)	Israel	Academic journal	Mixed methods	Playback Theater	Yes	Older adult Holocaust survivors		SC/B, symptom reduction, meaning making, ID	No	Moderate
Moneta, I. & Rousseau, C. (2008)	Canada	Academic journal	Qualitative; case report study (Stake, 1995)	unspecified	Refers reader to Rousseau et al., 2005; Rousseau et al., 2007	Immigrant adolescents with behavioral difficulties	School	ER, empathy	No	High
Ouellette-Seymour, J. (2023)	Sweden	Thesis/dissertation	Qualitative case study (Yin, 2014), observation, and SSIs	DiE; Public performance	Yes	Adult language learners	Classroom	SC/B, education, meaning making	No	Moderate
Peleg et al. (2013)	Israel	Academic journal	Qualitative	Testimony theater	No	Holocaust child survivors	unknown	SC/B, meaning making, ID, empathy	No	Moderate
Penton, J. (2017)	Australia	Thesis/dissertation	Qualitative	Devised theatre, public performance, peer-led workshops	Yes	Migrant youth 14-25	Community theatre	SC/B, identity reconstruction, empathy	Yes	High

Rousseau et al. (2007)	Canada	Academic journal	Quantitative	Playback theater; forum theater	Yes	Immigrant students aged 12-18	School classroom	Education, adaptive adjustment	No	Moderate
Rousseau et al. (2012)	Canada	Academic journal	Mixed methods; Observations and Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire	Drama therapy framework	No	Immigrant and refugee adolescents	Classroom	Education, adaptive adjustment	No	Moderate
Rousseau et al. (2014)	Canada	Academic journal	Quantitative	Unspecified	No	5th-8th grade	School classroom	SC/B, education, adaptive adjustment	No	Moderate
Sakhi et al. (2020)	Lebanon	Academic journal	Qualitative	Five phase model	Yes	Refugee women ages 18-71	Refugee camp	ER, SC/B, symptom reduction, confidence	No	Moderate
Smokowski, P. & Bacallao, M. (2009)	USA	Academic journal	Quantitative; Experimental pre-post design	Psychodrama	Refers reader to Bacallao & Smokowski (2005)	Foreign-born Latino adolescents aged 12-18 and their parents	Various - agencies, churches, community centers	Conflict resolution, symptom reduction	No	Moderate
Vitsou, M. & Kamaretsou, A. (2020)	Greece	Academic journal	Qualitative; action research	DiE	Yes	Language learners aged 9-13	NGO classroom	ER, SC/B, education, communication skills, violence prevention, ID, empathy	No	Low
Yüksek, C. (2018)	Turkey	Academic journal	Mixed methods	Forum theatre and social theatre	Yes	Students ages 17-20	Classroom	Symptom reduction	No	Low

I begin by discussing the outcomes gathered from the studies based on prevalence. I then go into the broad concept of finding stability through limbo – a common thread throughout many of the studies. Finally, I share the most cited risks, limitations, and forms of data collected. Results, outcomes, limitations, and forms of data were each carefully notated from all studies and then formed into broad themes for conciseness of language. It is important to note that all studies included in the review were done with groups, not individually (n = 22).

Outcomes

Table 2

Reported outcomes found in selected studies

Reported Outcome	**Prevalence**
Social connection and sense of belonging	14
Education and/or language acquisition	9
Empathy skills	8
Communication skills	6
Meaning making	6
Identity reconstruction	6
Adaptive adjustment to host community	5
Violence prevention and conflict resolution	5
Emotional regulation	5
Symptom reduction	5

Social connection and belonging. The most commonly reported outcome was social connection and belonging, mentioned in nearly all studies, but specifically named as a research outcome in twelve of the studies included in this review. The processes associated with drama offered a structured space for experiencing personal continuity through major changes and mirroring the experiences represented by other people in similar positions. Drama-based skills promoted empathy and communication skills, and these factors closely related to the outcome of social connection and belonging.

Empathy, communication, and conflict resolution. Communication skills learned through dramatic means also led to violence prevention by researcher observation and quantitative measures, and participants seemed to gain competency in conflict resolution skills (Alshughry, 2018; Damra, 2022; Grant, 2021; Stokowski & Baccallao, 2009; Vitsour & Kamaretsou, 2020). Performances, public sharings, and bringing teachings from drama into participants' personal lives led to mixed results. Elements of emotionally and socially adaptive dynamics learned within the groups, such as modeling understanding of one another's perspectives through empathy, were sometimes mirrored by the community when participants opened their process. For example, non-violent communication techniques learned by one part of an intimate partnership were then brought into the family structure (Alshughry, 2018). Another example was a performance with adolescent boys and the subsequent transformation of their relationship with their mothers after the vulnerable experience of expressing oneself and being seen (Edelbi, 2020). These findings were supported by follow-up data, at times from multiple reporters.

Identity reconstruction. With or without public sharing, the use of drama often led participants to consider how they artistically represent themselves and construct their self-identity (Peleg et al., 2013; Penton, 2017), leading to a high prevalence of the concept of identity reconstruction in drama-based interventions for people who have experienced displacement. Drama and playmaking helped participants construct cohesive narratives of their life stories and a growing comfort level of labeling and sharing lived experiences (Peleg et al., 2013; Penton, 2017).

Education and language acquisition. High engagement in action-oriented processes was frequently mentioned as a phenomenon, and authors reflected on observations of participants becoming more "engaged and talkative" (Gürle, 2018, p. 168) or more confident over time, and

that this type of engagement aided educational goals. This connection between active engagement and better educational outcomes was often reflected as a general observation in line with social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). Language learning was sometimes an explicit or implicit goal within the studies, and action-oriented processes led to higher literacy and confidence with speaking the new language (Coleman, 2012). Educational growth was associated with "learning through implementing" (Edelbi, 2020, p. 67) which contrasted the difficulty for school aged participants to learn by "listening to instructions" (p. 67) or by engaging in talk-based control groups (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2009).

Adaptive adjustment, emotional regulation, and symptom reduction. Adaptive adjustment to school environments and transformed roles within families was reflected in the literature and may have contributed to better adjustment within the larger community (de Smet et al., 2019; Horghagen & Josephsson, 2010; Rousseau et al., 2007; Rousseau et al., 2012; Rousseau et al., 2014; Smokowski & Bacallao, 2008). Emotional regulation and symptom reduction were commonly found in results by way of validated measures, verbal reports from participants, and observations. It is also worth noting that many studies reported participants simply having fun while doing drama interventions and feeling more relaxed during, and after sessions (Grant, 2021; Ouelette-Seymour, 2023) – an experience that may contribute to overall symptom reduction.

Stability through limbo

Though not reported as a formal outcome, the idea of drama interventions offering stability through limbo was represented in many of the studies. Many drama-based interventions outlined in the studies offered a separate space that was consistent and associated with possibility and stability (de Smet et al., 2019; Doukmak, 2019; Grant, 2021; Horghagen & Josephsson,

2010). Doukmak (2019) referred to this as the "space for agency" (p. 219) where participants could think and act differently from everyday life in an unstable context or get role relief from dominant social roles and expectations. Limbo in host communities was associated with boredom for some and overwhelming responsibility for others; some participants awaited immigration outcomes with limited opportunities while others experienced an excess of new responsibilities such as applying for jobs, securing housing, providing and caregiving for family members, and navigating new bureaucratic systems. Regardless of the uniqueness of each participant's experience, the rehearsal process consistently seemed to offer enough stability within which participants could creatively explore their identities and relationships. de Smedt (2019) defined this phenomenon as a "sense of personal continuity in exile" (p. 6).

Notable risks

Risk and fear of expression within community was prevalent in the studies, as participants were often invited to try new ways of being, expressing, and interacting with the world around them (Edelbi, 2020; Penton, 2017). This served as both a reparative function and a point of tension within communities. The issue of limited access to participant samples was a common limitation found in the studies. Participants are often a small sample of the community and must return to their everyday lives with some level of incongruency; in Alshughry's 2018 study with women in intimate partnerships, participants "feared of the reaction of the other party" (p. 173) after having learned new ways of communicating and relating to others.

Storytelling and recollection of distressing memories is another considerable risk. In Peleg et al. (2013), participants both wished it could continue while others were ready to move on after having "scratched the wounds" (p. 416).

Other risks involved physical safety risks, which was the case for a study done in Palestine in the West Bank (Edelbi, 2020), with youth participants mourning the murders of their peers, being stopped at military checkpoints, and experiencing an overall lack of safety due to the presence and interference of the Israeli military occupation on Palestinian lives. This level of severity of risk was not common throughout the studies but mirrors the adaptability, flexibility, and learning-through-experience that researchers were required to adopt.

Common limitations

Table 3

Reported limitations found in selected studies

Reported limitation	**Prevalence**
Not generalizable due to small sample	8
Not enough time for intervention to have major impact	8
High attrition	4
Unstable, unsafe, or unpredictable environments	4
Language or communication barriers	3
Insufficient trust either among group members or of the researchers	2
Need for flexibility	2

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Time. Time was often a lacking resource (Coleman, 2012). The subjective depth or impact of the work was assumed to be caused by the lack of time, as interventionists report not having enough time to provide scaffolding, containment, or sufficient trust built in the time allotted to the program. This issue may interact or overlap with funding, attrition, or participants' inclinations or hesitations to engagement with outsiders. Authors frequently reflected on how the projects could be sustained and continued for longer term study and as a community resource or offering that could last (Flagler, 2018; Peleg et al., 2013). Participants often expressed wishing the intervention program could last longer (Edelbi, 2020; Moneta & Rousseau, 2008).

Language. Language was a barrier (Coleman, 2012; Doukmak, 2019; Ouellette-Seymour, 2023) as many authors could not speak the target language. High literacy was often required unless the program itself was about language acquisition. Some studies controlled for participants who could engage with the intervention because they had a high literacy level. Authors reflected on having to balance offering drama-based interventions as a resource to the community while also controlling for variables to support the intent of the research (Gürle, 2018). Language was a significant barrier in practice, despite the common theoretical stance that art can transcend verbal communication for migrants (Dieterich-Hartwell & Koch, 2017). Researchers needed to verbally communicate as language is a critical access need, and when they couldn't verbally communicate with participants it hindered interventions and data collection. Interpreters were often difficult to obtain due to lack of resources.

Trust. Trust among participants was often built or strengthened with time. However, some trust issues arose between participants and facilitators, leaving interventionists in need of additional support (Rousseau, 2014). The Rousseau study (2014), a cluster randomized trial in a school setting with a high sample size, low attrition, and strong research design, cited complicated relationships between intervention teams and participants, leaving the reader to consider the effectiveness of the intervention if, at face value, the participants are not enjoying their time or perhaps are not being granted active, ongoing consent to be a part of the study. Researchers must consider the costs of following a rigorous design with a population that needs more flexibility; what are the risks and benefits of fitting this population into the mold of a traditional research design? Community-level trust was also fragile toward researchers who worked within larger foreign systems such as UNICEF or upheld unfamiliar ways of facilitating (Doukmak, 2019).

Flexibility. Flexibility was often required as researchers learned participant needs as the project went on (Coleman, 2012; Doukmak, 2019) and continued to build functional relationships with participants and their communities. Researchers coming from external communities should consider their intentions of doing research with migrants and consider how they may become a part of the community ecosystem, offering rather than demanding, and partnering with the community rather than performing research *on*.

Attrition. Researchers shared struggles with attrition due to a wide variety of factors, including but not limited to unstable environments, holidays, community events, life demands of participants, and more. Adolescents often must enrole as translators, financial providers, or cultural liaisons elders in the community, and studies included in this review frequently reflected on that reality (Yuksek, 2018). Drama work for adolescent migrants provided relief from these dominant roles. However, this phenomenon affected attrition.

Generalizability. Most studies identified that they are not generalizable. However, Ouellette-Seymour (2023) wrote that the goal is not generalizability but transferability to similar contexts (p. 73). Smaller samples and flexible research designs allowed many researchers to present deeper stories with rich data, and identified their work as case studies, studies to be replicated, or the beginnings of understanding a phenomenon with more research needed.

Forms of data

Table 4

Reported data types in selected studies

Form of data	**Prevalence**
Observation, field notes	12
Interviews, focus groups, and recorded verbal communications	12
Surveys and measures	9

Had multiple reporters (teachers, audience members, parents, etc.)	7
Photo documentation of art and/ or setting	6
Video recordings	2

Observations were the most prevalent form of data, followed by qualitative interviews, focus groups, or other forms of verbal expression that were not arts-based. Surveys and measures were used in quantitative and mixed methods studies to mixed outcomes – however, supportive contextual information is often lacking for a fuller understanding of the results. The studies with highest levels of in-text participant representation were studies that included multiple forms of data, such as Doukmak's 2019 dissertation, using photography, art, field notes, WhatsApp group chat screen shots, and transcribed interviews and focus groups to grant a thick description and perspective from which readers can view results.

Discussion

In this section, I will attempt to connect the nature of the literature to how it relates or does not relate to the factors of epistemic justice including but not limited to raw representation of participant data, the sizable presence of key contextual, personal, and interpersonal information, and perceived transparency with participants throughout the research process, and how these factors are addressed or left unaddressed. I will also offer recommendations for practice, policy, and future research, in line with the purpose of scoping reviews (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005).

First, the type of publication matters. Page count, breadth and depth of data, and personal inquiry alongside participant inquiry unsurprisingly led to clearer stories and were at a lesser risk of selective reporting. Student work allows for more cultural and procedural humility, as student

researchers typically are not yet considered experts or *knowers* in their fields and may experience their own forms of epistemic injustice. Student work also tends to contain more reflective writing, transparency of bias, and a greater page count to invite nuance, which, arguably, could serve as a practical counteraction to covert forms of ignorance. Mills (2015) refers to this as white ignorance, a *non-knowing* strategy rooted in privilege and maintenance of the status quo. More space granted by a thesis or dissertation usually led to thicker descriptions, clear positionality statements, clear protocols, supporting documentation of the project, multiple forms of data such as documented art, interviews, self-reflective journal entries, and detailed field observations, multiple reporters, and often included multiple analyses. Student papers also were more likely to include contradictory evidence of outcomes, which extends an invitation to the reader to understand the complexity of results.

Academic journals, generally, did not include positionality statements, had thin descriptions, had higher risks of selective outcome reporting, and higher potential for bias, likely due to the lack of space in the manuscript to report details. The results often were not sufficiently supported with participant data in the publication itself, leaving readers to wonder how writers decided on the results. Although students are in a learning position and may not have the level of skill in facilitation of interventions or research, the quality of reporting was generally higher. For example, Coleman (2012) depicts reflective questioning, transparency, and informative details on working with participants of multiple languages:

> Even in my attempts to be open to all the languages and cultures, I preferenced one language (Spanish) over another due to my familiarity with the language. As a white, female, native English speaking American citizen I entered the classrooms with privilege due to all of these identity markers… I wonder, when do I need to

> openly mark the difference between myself and the students in an attempt to further deepen the dialogue around diverse identities in the classroom? (pp. 55-56).

As a researcher, these details allow me to see from the researcher's perspective and inform my understanding of the results. They also invite me to reflect critically on myself: How has my work been similar or different? How might I be unknowingly facilitating inequity in the group based on the knowledge I have or don't have? How does this reflection inform my work with migrants from multiple language groups? Absence of bias should not be a goal, but rather, the transparency of researcher positionality. Each of these items matter for epistemic justice as they reveal worldviews, contextual details, and the circumstances participants were under that may have shaped the relationship between researchers and participants, and how that impacted the data that emerged, the worldview and voice of the person or people who analyzed the data, and information into how the two-dimensional, text-based representations of participants came to be.

Very few articles referred to approval from an institutional review board. Many studies were vague in the process of receiving consent from participants to be a part of a study and, furthermore, for their data to be used in a paper. This issue is particularly concerning when it comes to photo documentation of participants and their work. Though faces are often blurred or cut out, migrants deserve protection, and readers are left to wonder if this choice was granted and sufficiently understood. Researchers should invite participants in to understand the results through member checking, which should become the standard when working with vulnerable populations whose lives are often impacted by such reports. It is important to note that zero publications in this scoping review reported a process of member checking. Researchers should be in communication with participants and share age-appropriate, culturally relevant forms of the

manuscript and its findings, extending viable opportunities for feedback and criticism throughout the analysis process. However, more inquiry is needed to understand how researchers can be in conversation about the research process in appropriate ways without displacing unwarranted labor on participants.

Another risk to consider for participants is that of sharing stories in environments that are currently unsafe and require self-censorship, especially if being recorded by an authority figure such as a researcher, teacher, or interventionist. Practices of surveillance by participants' origin governments and the host government may be a source of stress or fear. In addition, researchers must consider their relationship to participants. Not only in the sense that participant may like the researcher, but that the researcher may represent authority, access to resources, or other associations that impact results – particularly results from surveys and verbal communications. Friendliness and social desirability bias (Nederhof, 1985) informs of the dynamic that many migrants must abide by: that of remaining socially desirable or obedient to ensure receiving of aid, resources, services, security, and fair treatment. This reality may impact how migrants relate to authority figures or organizational structures, given the extensive character reviews many migrants must endure prior to being granted residency in a host community. Arts-based methods of data collection and analysis may provide safety and opportunities for aesthetic distance (Landy, 1983), which, in turn, may lead to trust and truthfulness in responses.

Researchers should also make it clear what consequences, if any, come from participating in or dropping out of a study. Overall, informed consent practices with multicultural and multilingual participant groups remains an area of critical need for growth and further research based on the major absence of reporting such processes in the above studies. Lack of language access can lead to insufficient consent among participants of lower literacy levels.

Researchers should ensure that interventions are age appropriate, especially for migrant youth working with personal stories. Clear scaffolding and a solid understanding of the developmental age is paramount, even if the researcher has cultural knowledge or experience with migrants of all ages. Some studies done with adolescents represented resistance or bullying behaviors toward facilitators. The root causes of this may not be known, but given the location of the interventions (immigrant students placed in a special classroom, young people having to tell their story in a large group) we must continue to consider what we are asking of participants and whether or not it is age appropriate, or appropriate for the potential traumatic experiences they may have had in their country of origin, during displacement, and in the host community. Many migrants do not have the privilege of being metaphorically *after* their trauma, and this should be a primary consideration for research with populations who may have experienced trauma. Authors came from various professional orientations, and while therapists need not be the only practitioners working with people who have experienced trauma, it is important to consider one's own scope of practice and the potential for harm.

Migrants are not always easily accessible and often have various gatekeepers to protect from harm (Doukmak, 2019). This presents a paradox as it relates to research: there needs to be radical transparency in what researchers are offering to be authorized access to the community if they are outsiders. However, once granted access, researchers must prioritize flexibility when working with this population to meet their needs properly. By partnering with the community, flexibility in research design may allow for more exchange and safety through the process.

Finally, policymakers and those in power should create funding opportunities to allow more time for programs for longer-term research studies and installation of programs beyond research periods for community benefit, particularly studies with a participatory action research

(Macdonald, 2012) framework or philosophy. Leadership of the most impacted (Sins Invalid, 2016) should be encouraged and, when possible or desired by a community, accessible training opportunities should be offered to facilitate creative exchange and empowerment of migrant communities. If we are to seek epistemic justice for migrant participants in research, we must be willing to locate migrants as the *knowers* (Wee et al., 2023) and that attitudes toward migrants reflect a position of respect for their personhood, sensitivity toward their experiences, and a genuine curiosity of the knowledge they hold.

Table 5

Recommendations for practice, research, and policy.

Recommendations for practice:

1. **Locate yourself socially and professionally.** Consider what brings you to this work and how that may impact the individuals you are working with.
2. **Collaborate** with professionals from other fields to offer comprehensive support to participants.
3. **Consider age-appropriateness.** Use caution and learn about the developmental needs of the population.
4. **Engage in ongoing assessment and inquiry into community benefits and risks.**
5. **Utilize aesthetic distance and artistic agency**. Offer options for participants to share and explore what they wish.
6. **Work within the participants' language of origin when they wish to.** Though arts-based forms of communication are valuable, they are not sufficient for receiving consent or leading with transparency. If you do not speak participants' language sufficiently, pursue interpreters or cultural liaisons.

Recommendations for research practices:

1. **Position participants as the *knowers***. Invite participatory methods to encourage this.
2. **Be honest and forthcoming in your impetus for beginning your research.** State your positionality as it interacts with the work.
3. **Report methodology unambiguously**. Include key information such as informed consent processes and intervention protocols for replicability and transparency.
4. **Member check** with participants through the analysis process.
5. **Create research opportunities that benefit migrant communities**. Negotiate the importance of your research with potential risks.
6. **Invite readers to understand the nuance**. This may look like having multiple reporters, forms of data, analyses, or anything that offers a more complete narrative.

7. **Replicate studies and develop a research trajectory**. Consider how your research may move beyond pilot programs and initial case studies and into long-term explorations with diverse methods.

Recommendations for policy:

1. **Fund long-term research**. Consider ways you can resource your professional spaces for more program offerings and iterative research.
2. **Utilize or create an Institutional Review Board** to promote safer research practices at your workplace.
3. **Install programs beyond research periods for community benefit**.
4. **Encourage leadership of the most impacted** (Sins Invalid, 2016). Develop accessible training opportunities to facilitate this.

Limitations of the current study

In choosing the articles for the review, key concepts were not sufficient for the breadth of literature found. Some health outcomes had to be assumed, as they were not clearly stated within the research question. For example, it was implied that with Holocaust Child Survivors (Keisari et al., 2023), using testimony theatre was introduced for the purpose of bettering participants' mental health. This ambiguous line of using judgement to understand whether health outcomes were implied as a research goal was a major limitation in understanding what to include in the final sample.

Another source of confusion regarding the inclusion of articles was the question of what constitutes empirical research. Many papers referred to their work as "research" or "research studies" but lacked a formal methodology section or adherence to a form of going about the research. Others identified as research but were instead a description of a protocol used with migrants but that authors did not collect data on. Overall, there was a general lack of clarity on the content of papers by reading the abstract alone, and full texts had to be read to understand if articles met inclusion criteria.

By opening the search up beyond this author's professional field (drama therapy) and into other fields that use applications of theatre, a lack of consensus on the meaning of *research*, *research study*, and particularly the lack of clarity on what a *case study* is provided difficulties in deciding which articles to include. While the author and research assistant held meetings to discuss what should be included, an outsider may not be able to understand why some papers were left out while others were considered eligible. Exclusion of any papers that otherwise seem to fit the inclusion criteria are welcomed by this author to be considered in an iterative process of understanding the nature of literature on migrants, drama, and health outcomes as it exists in 2024.

Finally, all studies were done with groups. This does not reflect how drama-based interventions work at an individual level. It is my belief that this factor may have led to the outcome of social connection and belonging as the most prevalent outcome.

Conclusion

The use of drama with migrants for health-related outcomes is, by now, well founded by numerous empirical studies and is well supported by existing theories. Scoping reviews offer the chance to look at where we are in one area of research to know how to move forward. My hope with this project is to encourage a clearer pathway for expanding on the findings already published on this topic so that the community – which includes drama therapists, applied theatre practitioners, teachers, social workers, non-profit workers, and more – can organize and operate toward a shared research trajectory and praxis.

Theatre happens wherever it can and with whomever has the resources to facilitate it. Therefore, isolating ourselves within our professional communities is not conducive for this type

of work that demands we exist in the in-between spaces: lunchrooms, church basements, refugee camps, resettlement agencies, housing courtyards, and various makeshift environments. Much like the participants represented in the studies, professionals working with migrants often must operate in uncertain conditions and with limited resources. Interconnectedness among parallel professions is necessary to provide functional, long-term offerings for migrant communities.

The difficulty of implementing many of the above recommendations is not lost on me. From my own observations in the field, migrants still struggle to obtain sufficient resources for their most basic needs in host communities and an emphasis on research should not overshadow this pursuit. However, as artist-researchers, we hold the responsibility of dreaming about a world that is *yet-to-be*. It is our role as creatives to imagine the world we wish to see and slowly start enacting changes, seizing even the most minor opportunities to start building more emancipatory structures.

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THESIS APPROVAL FORM

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Title: A Scoping Review of Drama-Based Interventions with Migrant Populations for Health Outcomes

Date of Graduation: _____May 5th, 2024_____
In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

Angelle Cook

Thesis Advisor:_____