

Metanoia And Our Legacy:
The Fostering Of Student Agency Through Devised Theatre Education

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ABSTRACT

Education is in many ways a by-product of life. As global discourse continues to push towards reform that would allow populations around the world increased agency over their lives, one of the most critical conversations in education today concerns how to allow students greater agency over their own learning. Scholars like Paulo Freire argue that the capacity of students to be able to assert power over their own learning processes is critical for those of underserved backgrounds so that they might become masters of their own thinking and, by extension, potentially their lives. While research into this area continues to expand, little of it focuses on theatre education, and almost none explores the agentive potential of devised theatre. This collaborative performance methodology emphasizes multiple perspectives and encourages non-verbal artistic forms.

In this dissertation, I present the results of an exploratory, multiple-case study designed to examine how two groups of public high school students on the Hawaiian island of O‘ahu asserted agency during the spring and autumn of 2021 within two devised theatre classrooms: one online and one in-person. Working with established devised methodologies, creative writing, improvisation, various theatre games, and a new dramaturgical methodology, the participants created two digital performances exploring contemporary issues, largely in relation to the impact COVID-19 had on their community. Based on quantitative and qualitative analyses of survey results, group interviews, and field observations, I argue that a devised theatre educational methodology aimed at allowing students as much agency as possible has the potential to celebrate student cultural differences as assets, to validate student efforts outside of the classroom, and to foster collaborative learning over remote learning environments. Further, I believe that the collaborative nature of devised theatre allows for the cultivation of different

forms of agency, including those that arise both individually and collectively. Finally, I make the case that the flexibility and adaptability of devising make it a formidable learning methodology in an increasingly shifting and unpredictable world; and as a result, it has the potential to play an essential role in the ongoing discourse on student agency and broad educational reform in the twenty-first century classroom.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Arriving at the Studies

“It’s not good enough.”

I hate hearing this from my students. I have worked as a playwright and theatre producer in New York City and Ireland on and off since 2006, creating shows ranging from no-budget street theatre to full Broadway productions;¹ I also taught playwriting in a number of different capacities, including as an instructor at Writopia, a Manhattan based writing school for youth, from 2016 to 2019. I love working with teenagers in particular because they have so much to say and their work never fails to push me to consider the world in a different way. I believe that writing helps them; there is no feeling like building a playworld from nothing and having others draw meaning from it, to feel that your voice *matters*. But when the time came for my students to submit their writing for performance or publication, many declined because they felt their work was not good enough, meaning that they believed their writing lacked the insight, humor, or poignancy to be considered compelling to readers or audiences. Then within a few years, more often than not, they stopped writing and creating art altogether, assuming that their creative output was no longer worth the effort they put into it. Further, I have noticed that a much higher percentage of my teenaged BIPOC students at Writopia declined invitations to submit their work in comparison to my White students. Many of them told me that they didn’t see the relevance of their stories in comparison to what is reflected in various media and on stage.

¹ From 2014-2018 I worked at The Foxboro Company as Director of New Script Development. During my time we produced three shows that were performed on Broadway stages: *Love Letters* (2014), *M. Butterfly* (2017), and *Latin History for Morons* (2017).

I began to wonder if there is a way for young people to engage in theatrical storytelling that allows them as much agency over their creative processes as possible so that they could tell stories on their own terms and minimizes the pressure to compare their work to a dominating cultural tradition that may not relate to their experiences. I shifted my focus from artistry to theatre research, and in 2018, I enrolled in the doctoral theatre program at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. It was here that I began a journey that culminated in the creation of two digital theatre pieces² with the students at O‘ahu’s Waipahu High School in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic and left me an advocate for devised theatre education as an effective tool in perhaps the most widely discussed initiative in education today, one with the potential to be a catalyst for broad educational reform in the twenty-first century: the fostering of student agency in classrooms, both online and in-person.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

As a doctoral student, I began finding research to support the theories I had developed from teaching at Writopia. Firstly, and unsurprisingly, I learned that creative expression among young people does indeed improve their literacy and overall academic performance (Crick et al., 2004; Hope, 2010; Kumpulainen et al., 2010; Ewing, 2011). It is widely believed that the arts in education are such an effective pedagogical tool because they solicit self-directed learning habits that allow students to exercise agency over their own educational engagement (Mishra et al., 2013). Education scholars such as Guy Claxton argue that theatre is a particularly effective

² The term “digital theatre” is complicated because it was used throughout the past few decades to refer to the incorporation of digital technologies into live theatre spaces, such as the use of digital projections, whereas much of the theatre that became widely available during COVID-19 quarantine is technically “cyber-performance,” which is performance that is designed to be experienced online (“An introduction to cyber performance,” 2014). However, the term “digital theatre” has become so ubiquitous in referring to cyber-performance over the past few years that I believe it is the now most productive terminology when referring to theatre streamed over a digital medium.

means of educational praxis because of its potential for goal-oriented outcomes and community validation, which, in turn, can help cultivate lifelong learning habits. That is, students who receive the right validation for their academic efforts are more likely to continue learning outside of school into adulthood (Claxton, 2008). However, as I have observed in my teaching, engagement in creative expression usually ends in adolescence. Soviet psychologist and educational scholar Lev Vygotsky (2004), in exploring this concept through the guise of visual art, explains this by saying, “The child begins to have a critical attitude toward his own drawing, his childish schema cease to satisfy him, they seem too subjective, and he comes to the conclusion that he cannot draw, and, for this reason, he stops” (pp. 35-36). Then, in contemplation of the divide between my White and BIPOC students’ propensities for submitting their work, I began to consider that the vast majority of contemporary Western commercial storytelling is dominated by realism, a text-based narrative genre of dramatic theatre deriving from a White Eurocentric patriarchal tradition, that attempts to convey real life through metaphorical representation (Hallam & Marshment, 2000, p. x). The cultural encoding of realism has consequences: 80% of all plays produced in America are written by White men (Editors, 2020), and while on-screen diversity has improved in recent years, there is still woeful underrepresentation in television and film, particularly for Latinx, Asian, Indigenous and LGBTQ communities (Zorilla, 2021). As author Grace Barnes (2015) notes, on stage, “In the same way that the woman’s true voice in musicals is displaced by the voice of the male writer, the depiction of Black, Asian, or South Pacific peoples is a White person’s idea of those particular races” (p. 161). When this happens, she asserts, those characters are speaking with a voice that has been imposed on them by someone without a true understanding of the culture they are purporting to represent. So, with many of my anecdotal observations confirmed with

empirical research, the question then became how to design a playwriting pedagogy aimed at addressing some of these issues.

Dr. Keith Cross, a rapper, and academic who, up until recently, served as an Assistant Professor of Education at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, introduced me to the work of Brazilian educational philosopher Paulo Freire and the concept of student agency in education. In Freire’s seminal book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), he explores the relationship between consciousness and reality: how the oppressor’s consciousness shapes the world in their image and how the oppressed have to acquiesce to those shapes. Freire argues that the goal is not just for the oppressed to see their present circumstances for what they are, but that they are the inheritors of everything that came before. It is not just about dismantling oppressive power structures; it is about finding the strength that the oppressed have through “consciousness raising” (Freire, 2014, p. 95). He contends that the oppressor/oppressed dynamic in contemporary society, and indeed all societies that have come before us, is a complex problem. The solution is an empowering education; one that is not provided in the traditional Western classroom, where the teaching of “facts” and the forcing of students to regurgitate those “facts” does not teach or liberate. What is needed, he asserts, is an educational dynamic of communication that eradicates the traditional student-teacher hierarchy. “Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students” (p. 72). Freire is advocating for an egalitarian classroom where students and teachers engage in an equal exchange of ideas. Unfortunately, he admits that such a classroom is not presently possible because those in power are usually ignorant of the realities of the oppressed, and instead, the oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption. This is where the role of student agency in

education (the capacity to be able to assert power over one's own learning process) is critical for those of underserved backgrounds so that they might become masters of their own thinking and, by extension, potentially their lives:

The important thing, from the point of view of libertarian education, is for the people to come to feel like masters of their thinking by discussing the thinking and views of the world explicitly or implicitly manifest in their own suggestions and those of their comrades (p. 124).

Professor of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Minnesota, Bic Ngo (2017), echoes this sentiment, emphasizing the necessity of students asserting agency over their own learning processes and offering that such empowerment happens when they understand that the circumstances of their lives are not just by their own actions but also by broader social, political, and historical forces (p. 41). I should note that, as I will explain in Chapter 2, many contemporary scholars hold a more traditional view that students can only learn with strong teacher direction and believe that the current emphasis on student agency in education is ultimately detrimental to student learning. However, based on my own observations of student agency being tied to their success in my arts education classrooms, like many academics, I believe that fostering that agency ultimately benefits their learning broadly, and as such, I will argue the same throughout this dissertation. The concept of a creative process, then, aimed at allowing its participants as much agency as possible, and one that also encourages engagement in current social issues, could not only allow students to tell stories on their own terms, but has larger implications for their general sense of wellbeing. As such, the role of agency struck me as not only a tangible educational goal of a playwriting methodology that can potentially connect with young people and motivate them to continue to engage with the arts past adolescence, but also as the basis of a metric to assess whether such a methodology would ultimately prove successful.

The question then became what kind of playwriting methodology did I feel would be best suited to foster student agency. As I will discuss in Chapter 2, one of the complex characteristics of student agency is that in addition to presenting from individuals, it can also emerge collectively from a group. One aspect of my playwriting that I have rarely enjoyed is the role of solitude; when writing a play, I often work in isolation for months or years before a script is ready to workshop with other artists. Therefore, I began to consider forms of playwriting that involve collaboration, which I hoped would help foster relational agency: one such form is devising. I will discuss devised theatre in more detail in section 2.5, but devising is an umbrella term for a number of different collaborative theatre creation methodologies born out of twentieth century European and American political upheaval; it is commonly typified by performances that resist traditional dramatic structure. I was first introduced to devised theatre while studying playwriting in Dublin in 2012. Although it is itself in the Western tradition, it does not start with a single playwright creating a script but rather begins with a group of artists³ working collaboratively to create performative material. This is to say, from my perspective, it is a form of playwriting, just a very different form from what I had learned in my playwriting training hitherto. Further, as I will explain in the next chapter, because devising is a process of simultaneous creation and performance, it combines the educational benefits of self-directed learning and honing of personal voice of creative writing (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 54) with the team building and escapism of theatre education (Kondoyianni et al., 2013, p. 2).

Based on existing research and my own observations, I, along with my co-facilitator Kat Rothman, developed a devised theatre methodology that aims to give as much agency to

³ When I refer to “artists” throughout this dissertation, I am indicating individuals who, according to their own definitions, express themselves by applying creative skill and imagination to create something for the purpose of being engaged with by others, regardless of how well that art is then critically received.

participants as possible. One element that makes our process distinct is our emphasis on the role of dramaturgy. I will discuss dramaturgy in detail in the next chapter, but it is originally a German concept that refers to the architecture of action in performance and in contemporary theatre serves as an umbrella term, one that can encompass many responsibilities related to performance interpretation, including research, editing, serving as an outside eye for the audience, and much more. I am emphasizing the role of dramaturgy in our methodology because it has typically been overlooked by teachers within devised theatre classrooms for the sake of expediency, and as a result, students in such environments have often lacked a key tool to exercise agency over their creative processes. As I will explain, within a devised theatre context, dramaturgical responsibilities can largely be oriented around the identification of the thematic patterns which emerge from spontaneous collaborative work. The “participant-driven dramaturgy” methodology I am offering, therefore, involves participants identifying patterns in their work, using those patterns to work out their own “show question,” and then examining all generated material through the lens of that question. While it will be impossible to empirically assess the efficacy of this aspect of our methodology in this research project without a control group, I will nonetheless argue that dramaturgy is another tool that can allow students to feel agency over their generated material, which could, in turn, help support a self-directed creative learning environment; and recorded positive shifts in agency from the students could be an indicator that my argument is correct.

1.3 Research Questions

To test my theories regarding whether a devised theatre educational methodology aimed at allowing students as much agency as possible over their creative processes would improve their

outlooks on learning and foster an increased overall “sense of agency” (a concept I will explain in section 1.5), I completed two case studies to examine how two groups of O‘ahu public high school students exhibited agency within a devised theatre classroom. Working with established devised methodologies, creative writing, improvisation, various theatre games, and our dramaturgical process, the participants created two digital performances exploring contemporary issues of 2021. Because these studies took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, the first study was conducted entirely in a remote learning environment, and the other study was held in person. Therefore, although it was not my intention to investigate the efficacy of our methodology in a remote learning environment, in addition to the other areas I am investigating, I ended up doing just that.

My primary research question, then, was: *How do young people assert agency in a devised theatre classroom?* In addition, I addressed the following sub-questions:

- *Did this particular devised methodology meaningfully affect the students’ overall sense of agency?*
- *Can these instances of agency be at all connected to outlooks on learning?*
- *Might the participant-driven dramaturgy model be a particularly effective methodology for cultivating student agency?*
- *How does this methodology differ in an online vs. in-person environment?*
- *Given that devised theatre has largely been associated with White artists, can this be an effective methodology for Asian and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander⁴ students?*

⁴ As I will discuss in section 1.5, I am using the terms “Asian” and “Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander” because they come from empirical research that I am citing, but they are also too broad to fully reflect the diverse backgrounds of the students in these studies.

The information gathered to address these questions is not meant to be decisive, as I will explain in Chapter 3. Larger sample sets, a control group, and a longer timeline would be required for that. Rather, the goals of this research project are to provide additional data to an area that requires more research – the role of student agency in a devised theatre classroom – as well as to suggest hitherto unexplored avenues of further investigation.

1.4 Researcher's Stance

My background is that I am a White identifying, able-bodied cis male from a middle-class New York City family. I am also a playwright, theatre producer, educator, and researcher. As a playwright, I always endeavored to create a platform for pressing social issues, exploring topics such as American military torture,⁵ post 9-11 patriotism,⁶ and digital-era neurodivergence.⁷ As mentioned previously, I lived in Dublin, Ireland, sporadically from 2006 to 2012, studying and creating theatre, where my concepts around storytelling were expanded beyond my American worldview by professional European devised theatre practitioners. I brought concepts of postdramatic storytelling with me when I moved back to my hometown of New York City and began teaching creative writing to teenagers from a variety of different local communities, at which point I began considering whether collaborative storytelling would serve my students better than the individually focused realism methodologies I had been teaching.

I met my artistic and research partner Kat Rothman in a devising class at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Together, she and I worked with six amazing non-binary undergrads to create *Corpus Interruptus*, a devised theatre piece exploring gender and identity in contemporary

⁵ *Antenora*. Dublin 2008; New York City 2010; London 2014.

⁶ *The New York Monologues*. Dublin 2009; Vancouver 2010; New York City 2011. Available from Carysfort Press (Poblete, 2013).

⁷ *Surfacing*. New York City, 2018.

Hawai‘i and the United States. It was through this process that we developed our devising methodology. It was our assumption going into this research project that young people, if allowed as much agency as possible over their own work, would respond positively to the process and experience an increased sense of agency, which can theoretically, in turn, lead toward lifelong learning habits. I have always been dubious about the egalitarian promises of devised theatre (Dolan, 2016; Wessendorf, 2018) as every social dynamic has *some* hierarchy to it, but we were confident that our methodology would offer a unique flexibility of form that would allow the students to feel agency over their creative processes in both online and in-person environments.

Because of the privileges afforded to me by my background, it is, of course, impossible for my teaching not to bring with it a colonial tradition that has devastated some of the population that I would be working with. Open, ongoing communication with the classroom teacher, who knew the students well, was paramount in carrying out this research project. This is a point I will return to throughout this dissertation.

1.5 Definitions

Throughout this dissertation, I will reference “agency,” a complex and contradictory process of interaction with material resources, social institutions, and the collective efforts of individuals (Rainio, 2010, p. 60); therefore, I will spend some time discussing its complexities and its role in theatre education classrooms in Chapter 2. However, as a general concept, I will be referring to agency as the capacity of an individual to feel and exercise control over their surroundings. There are a number of synonyms for agency used in education scholarship, including “self-efficacy,” which is “the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to

produce the outcomes desired” (Bandura, 1977, p. 79), and “student autonomy” or “learner autonomy,” which refers to “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning” (Holec, 1981, p. 3). Additionally, there are elements of agency specific to creativity, such as “creative control,” which is “the mechanism by which educators design learning experiences to meet specific outcomes or educational goals,” and “creative freedom,” which is “the means by which students experience true authorship” (Hobbs, 2019, p. 213). For consistency, I will eschew these terms in favor of “agency,” which encompasses all of these ideas.

More specifically, I will refer to three different categories of agency. The first is a “sense of agency,” which refers to the broad understanding that an individual is the initiator of their actions, that is, how much broad control an individual feels over their life (Tapal et al., 2017, p. 1). This form of agency can come in two forms, positive or negative. High positive agency indicates a strong sense of control that an individual feels over their life, while negative agency is a pessimistic and potentially de-motivating form of agency that Tapal et al. describe as being akin to existential helplessness (p. 6). The second category refers to the distinction between “individual agency” and “relational agency.” Individual agency refers to a single individual’s sense of control and their subsequent actions, and relational agency references forms of agency distributed over a group (or groups) of individuals (see section 2.2.3 for more information). The final category refers to “instances of agency,” which are single actions of assertion by individuals or a group, or groups, that can present in different forms. Based on Anna Lehtonen’s research (2015), I have organized the instances of agency in this dissertation into three categories: a) constructive, b) passive, and c) resisting (see sections 3.7.1 and 6.2.2). These three broad categories are intertwined, and in the case of the second and third categories, there is

overlap. For example, we observed instances of constructive relational agency and passive individual agency throughout both studies.

Throughout this dissertation, I will also refer to “devised theatre” and not “applied theatre.” Applied theatre is a terminology referring to theatre that largely operates outside of institutional, product-oriented theatre⁸ models and can follow any theatre creation process, including devising; as such, the plays created from my studies could accurately be referred to as “applied theatre.” However, devised theatre is more specific to the methodology that I am employing; therefore, this is the terminology I will use, with the understanding that by creating theatre with and for individuals within their own communities within educational institutions, as opposed to exclusively aiming for commercial and critical success, the methodologies I discuss are process-oriented.⁹

I will also refer to “theatre education” rather than “drama education.” While both of these terms refer to the use of theatre techniques to support classroom learning (Idogho, 2013, p. 240), in drama education, these techniques can be applied in any number of ways across any field, whereas theatre education implies that a literal theatrical performance is being created (p. 233). As the latter is the case for my research project, I will be using the term “theatre education” throughout this dissertation.

Finally, I will use the terms “Asian” and “Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander” when referring to the demographics of the participants of this research project. These terms come from the U.S. Census and the National Center for Education Statistics, the sources of all of the

⁸ Product-oriented theatre refers to a model where the primary goal of the producing team is to create a play that will be received well by audiences and critics and/or sell a high number of tickets. Commercial theatre, such as shows that appear on Broadway or the West End, are product-oriented.

⁹ Process-oriented theatre refers to a model where the primary goal of the producing team is to create a play that will benefit the artists involved in that play and/or audience members of the local community through the process of its generation. Theatre in education is process-oriented.

empirical demographic data in this research project, as all other data I have regarding the ethnic backgrounds of the participants are purely anecdotal, and gathering more specific data proved challenging (and, per the classroom teacher, inappropriate). However, putting the Kānaka Maoli (the Indigenous peoples of the Hawaiian Islands) in the same category as the descendants of the over 10,000 islands of Oceania is wildly inaccurate as well as part of a destructive colonial legacy of reducing the vast and diverse cultural histories, mythologies and cultures of all Oceanic peoples into a single Pan-Polynesian label (Hyland, 2020, p. 8). This is in many ways also true for the term “Asian,” which does not sufficiently reflect the students’ diverse backgrounds. Further, these terms do not distinguish students who are first-generation immigrants from those whose families have lived on the Hawaiian Islands for generations. However, I cannot, nor would I want to, ignore the role of race in this research, so these terms, though flawed in their broadness, are nonetheless helpful for my purposes. That said, further research would benefit from further demographic specificity if gathering that information would be appropriate.

1.6 Conclusion

Having explained the rationale behind and the necessity for this research project, in Chapter 2, I will provide context for my research by exploring the areas of student agency in a classroom, characteristics of environments and habits conducive to lifelong learning, the benefits of arts education, characteristics of devised theatre, processes of evaluating student agency within arts education, characteristics of educational devised theatre, broad Indigenous learning frameworks, and dramaturgy in devised theatre. Then, in Chapter 3, I will outline the methodologies I employed in carrying out my two studies as well as discuss my perceived limitations and biases therein. In Chapters 4 and 5, I will provide comprehensive accounts of the two studies, one

conducted online and one in-person. In Chapter 6, I will report my findings, and in Chapter 7, I will use those findings to answer my research questions and offer recommendations for further research and how to employ a devised theatre curriculum within a high school theatre classroom.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Having introduced the critical role of student agency within learning environments – the educational benefits of the arts broadly and devised theatre specifically, as well as the elusive concept of dramaturgy – I will now provide scholarly context for each of these concepts as well as demonstrate a gap in published research in the area in which these fields intersect, which this dissertation seeks to address.

2.2 The Role of Agency in Education

2.2.1 Agency, Broadly

I will first discuss the concept of agency broadly through the scholarship of Anna Pauliina Rainio, docent at the University of Helsinki and one of the leading researchers of the role of agency in arts education. She asserts that agency is a complex and contradictory phenomenon, and how we understand it is really a culmination of central historical debates in the human sciences (Rainio, 2010, p. 15). Agency has been defined as the socioculturally mediated capacity to act (Ahearn, 2001, p. 112), the understanding that an individual is the initiator of their actions (Tapal et al., 2017, p. 1), the capacity to impact and eventually transform an individual's life circumstances and practices in which they are engaged (Rainio, 2010, p. 5), and it is associated with the concepts of engagement and ownership with the ideals of individual choice, freedom, intentionality, empowerment and cultural transformation (Lehtonen, 2015, p. 1887). In their comprehensive 2010 study on the relationships between agency and classroom learning *Learning*

Bridges: Toward Participatory Learning Environments, Kumpulainen et al. explain that agency plays a critical role in shaping a person's (or a community's) identity, which is formed through participation, acting with authority, and accountability:

Agency can be regarded as an intrinsically important feature of human life. It gives one a sense of competence, ownership and commitment, a sense that one can really influence one's own and the community's matters and that it is worth trying to influence them. (Kumpulainen et al., 2010, p 24).

For Rainio, agency is highly political. In her 2010 dissertation *Lionhearts of the Playworld: An Ethnographic Case Study of the Development of Agency in Play Pedagogy*, she takes a pluralistic approach to examining agency by exploring it from the vantage points of social theory, post-structuralist and feminist theory, and cultural psychology. She positions our current Western concepts of agency in the political, scientific, cultural, and moral programs of liberal humanism and romanticism in the eighteenth century, which, she emphasizes, celebrated the individual, which was perceived at the time as a White adult male. Because of this, she argues, adults are often conceived as having the privileges enjoyed by adult European White men of that era, i.e., being able to freely choose how to live their lives without consideration of the societal constraints oppressed individuals experience that hamper that freedom (Rainio, 2010, p. 5). She notes, "Agency becomes a matter limited to those who are accredited as responsible agents and are thus already involved in the process of this distributed, social agency" (pp. 7-8). She asserts that marginalized members of society, such as women and children, have historically been considered to be irresponsible for their own actions and, because of this, also outside the realm of collective societal agency (p. 8).

According to Rainio, the fact that our contemporary concepts of agency are constructs from a White patriarchal tradition can be observed in five contradictions. The first is that agency is seen as both continuous and enduring, as well as situational and contingent. She emphasizes

that agency must, then, be analyzed on both of these levels simultaneously. The second contradiction is that a person is seen to experience agency as an autonomous individual in Western society when in fact, that same agency is a product of our societal interactions. She emphasizes that in our society, it is necessary for individuals to be viewed as separate but not as totally independent from one another. This contradiction speaks to the roles of individual and relational agency in classrooms, a topic I will explore throughout this dissertation. The third contradiction involves the idea that agency both involves following rules as well as breaking them. She explains that learning to live in a society “requires internalizing the traditions and laws received from those who teach them to us. At the same time, being an agentive member of society means renewing and developing these same laws and traditions” (p. 16). The fourth contradiction refers to the paradox that agency involves engaging with the real world but also requires boundless imagination. She explains that, in one sense, we as individuals are tethered to material reality, but at the same time, we are encouraged to widen our possibilities through play and art. She argues, then, that the act of imagining and dreaming are also important parts of agency, emphasizing the necessity of being able to mentally escape society’s constraints. This speaks to the critical role arts education can play in fostering student agency, as I will discuss in section 2.4. Rainio’s fifth and most profound contradiction of agency speaks to the heart of Freire’s argument for an egalitarian classroom, that children are meant to exhibit agency in a world where their very existence is predicated upon “some form of coercion from the part of the adult” (p. 17).¹⁰ To this end, she notes that because “the structure and organization of the Western classroom typically creates a situation where the (inevitable) need for control and order makes it hard for teachers to support students’ personal involvement in and motivation for

¹⁰ This contradiction also speaks to the tensions explored by the scholars arguing for a balance between student and teacher agency, as I outlined in section 1.2.

learning,” this particular contradiction, between control and agency in education, is not just philosophical or ideological but very practical (p. 25).

2.2.2 The Role of Student Agency in a Classroom

The role of student agency in contemporary classrooms is one of the most important conversations in educational theory right now because it examines student motivation, which has always been the greatest challenge in education. Traditionally, parents and educators have believed that because students are still developing, one of the roles of schools is to teach young people how to behave and interact well with others (Lamboy et al., 2020, p. 60). The view was widely held that students do not know what they do not know, and therefore it is the job of the teacher to shape the students’ curriculum; so, to instead give those students agency over their own learning process would effectively be asking them to do the teacher’s job for them.

However, in recent decades there has been a large movement in education to empower students to assert themselves and share their voice with their learning environments and to go further by asserting agency over their own learning processes. Indeed, research supporting these assertions dominates much of current educational discourse (Jääskelä, 2021; Keefe et al., 2017; Nieminen & Tuohilampi, 2020; Rainio, 2010; Zacarian & Silverstone, 2020). Nonetheless, resistance to this increased emphasis on student agency has also been considerable. For example, educational scholars Katrina Skewes McFerran and Daphne Rickson (2014) caution that students can often feel lost if teachers are not asserting control over their classrooms (pp. 82-83). Karen M. Higgins and Jean Moule (2009) of Oregon State University conducted a study where university education students observed urban classrooms that were comprised largely of African American students. These education students were struck that the teachers’ strict “authoritarian” teaching

methodologies (which emphasized teacher agency rather than student agency) seemed to be both compassionate and effective, despite these approaches being contradictory to the student agentive pedagogies they had learned at their university. To this end, scholars like Carla R. Monroe and Jennifer E. Obidah (2004) and Franita Ware (2006) warn that African American communities require specific educational considerations that are often overlooked by American educational theories that prioritize White communities, and these considerations often involve strong classroom control from instructors. Other scholars argue for the benefits of learning environments that promote student agency but contend that such methodologies should be balanced with tactics that assert teacher agency as well (Rolo'n-Dow, 2005; Graham, 2017; Benade et al., 2021). Tara Fenwick (1998), Professor of Professional Education at the University of Stirling, discusses the tensions that can manifest in classrooms where teachers are simultaneously trying to maintain control while allowing for student agency:

... when teachers managed the space of a classroom they were engaged in balancing various tensions simultaneously: the tension between protecting and punishing students to create a 'safe place' for all; the tensions between 'work' and 'play' embodied in the manipulation of structures; and the tension between teacher control and student agency in constructing the space. (p. 624)

These tensions speak to Rainio's fifth contradiction of agency regarding the need for both teacher control and student agency in a classroom. Notwithstanding, as an educator, I have observed that when my students have been permitted to assert agency over their learning, particularly when that learning has a creative component, they put in more effort and learn more than when their assignments have been solely crafted by myself. Therefore I, along with a number of scholars that I will discuss shortly, believe that pedagogies aimed at fostering student agency ultimately benefit those students' learning broadly.

Kumpulainen et al. (2010) argue, for example, that agency is necessary for learning because human beings are built to learn by doing, and agency is doing:

If we want to bring up children and young people who have a sense of being in control of their own lives and fare well in their lives, we must pay true attention to supporting the development of their agency. Only in this way can they grow into active agents who are in control of their own lives and believe in having a say on community affairs. (p. 26)

Rainio (2010) concurs, arguing that people “are not born as agentive beings; instead, we gain our agency through participating in social institutions such as language and education” (p. 10). Further, Kumpulainen et al. (2010) offer that this relationship is reciprocal: education is critical in cultivating agency. They note, “Agency is not a condition for action but an outcome of action and participation” (p. 30). Therefore, they argue anyone’s agency can be developed at any age from any background.

Looking at the role of agency within a classroom, Luo et al. (2019) explain that student agency is the “capacity of students to act purposively towards individual goals, change the established pattern of classroom interactions, and actively evaluate learning practice for the specific context” (p. 821). They go on to argue for the positive effects of student agency on academic performance, cognitive development, and learning experiences, noting evidence from various empirical studies (Pym and Kapp, 2013; Reeve & Tseng, 2011; Lindgren & McDaniel, 2012) (p. 22). Kumpulainen et al. (2010) agree, arguing that because knowledge has become so accessible to everyone in contemporary society (or at least to everyone with the technological resources to access it) that the classroom teacher can no longer be the sole gatekeeper of learning. In fact, they offer that “children can become experts in their own fields of interest and know more about them than the teacher does” (p. 28).

Perhaps the most widely known pedagogical methodology aimed at giving students as much agency over their own learning as possible is “self-directed learning.” Scholar Malcolm

Knowles introduced self-directed learning in 1975, and it was further developed by Maurice Gibbons (2002), an Education Professor Emeritus at Simon Fraser University, who explains that, in self-directed learning, students gradually take over most of the traditional classroom teaching responsibilities until they are designing their own learning activities (p. 3). In his research on expertise, he found that experts seem to consistently employ some kind of self-directed learning methodology to master their disciplines (Gibbons et al., 1985, p. 43). He observed that the experts he studied tended to “develop their expertise through active, experiential, self-directed, situational, often challenging means rather than the passive, abstract-theoretical, teacher-directed means which often occur in classroom situations where the challenge is predictable and controlled” (p. 47). He offers that students require a broad spectrum of positive attitudes to be successful self-directed learners, which include interest, confidence, determination, courage, and especially agency (Gibbons, 2002, p. 44). Perhaps it is for these reasons that, despite dissent from proponents of traditional teacher-directed learning education models, many scholars today advocate for a self-directed learning approach to education (Burgos & Olivier, 2021; Du Toit-Brits et al., 2021; Giuseffi, 2018; Mentz & Oosthuizen, 2016; Rennie et al., 2019).

This is all to say that student agency plays a critical role in classrooms; the assertion of agency over one’s own learning process is a common characteristic in individuals who become experts in their field, and despite criticism, allowing students agency over their learning is a widely pursued goal in current educational theory. Further, allowing agency to students to direct their own learning is very much in line with promoting the kind of egalitarian classroom Freire believes is necessary for students to become masters of their own thinking. There are, however, a number of different forms of student agency to consider in forming an educational praxis.

2.2.3 Individual and Relational Agency

Rainio (2010) asserts that agency is simply a social status that is artificially distributed between people as opposed to an innate state of being human. She positions agency as “a process that is distributed and produced in networks and different dependencies between both human and non-human actors, such as artifacts, organisms, technologies and institutions” (p. 7). Scholars like social psychologist Kenneth J. Gergen agree, arguing that concepts of agency have long been defined as perceptions of *individual agency* which derive from a Western notion of individuality that is not only patently false but also highly damaging. Rather, everything we are, including our inner psychology, is, according to Gergen, the product of relationships. He argues, “Independent persons do not come together to form a relationship; from relationships the very possibility of independent persons emerges” (Gergen, 2009, p. 38). Professor of Social Sciences at the University of Bradford Ian Burkitt (2016) expands on this concept to introduce the idea of “relational agency,” where “individuals are to be thought of as ‘interactants’ rather than as singular agents or actors,” operating within “webs or networks of relations and interdependencies, both interpersonal and impersonal, in which interactants and their joint actions are embedded” (p. 323). Kumpulainen et al. (2010) too argue that agency can and should be examined as communal action because it always manifests through interaction (p. 25)

One of the leading scholars on relational agency is Professor of Education at Oxford University Anne Edwards. She explains that relational agency involves a capacity to offer support and to ask for support from others and “a capacity to align one’s thoughts and actions with those of others in order to interpret problems of practice and to respond to those interpretations” (Edwards, 2005, p. 168-170). She claims that relational agency emphasizes the role of mutual responsibility and a capacity to recognize others as resources in what she refers to

as a “distributed intelligence,” which she defines as a resource distributed across people, which is then accessed by those with access to those people (p. 173). She explains that the benefits of a high collective sense of relational agency are many. “In joint action a wider range of concepts or other resources are likely to be deployed on the object or problem space than is the case with individual action and it is more likely that the object is expanded” (p. 174). Further, she argues that collaboration can improve individual agency. Brooklyn College Professor Shequana Wright concurs, explaining that relational agency allows individuals to collaborate across fields and various boundaries. She emphasizes that within this context, differences can be seen as a resource, as respecting differences becomes a requirement for collaboration (Wright, 2015, p. 631). Kumpulainen et al. too (2010) offer that for learning to be successful, children must be accountable to one another (p. 28).

However, Edwards (2007) notes for relational agency to be effective, it needs to be evident outside the institutional shelters of established systems (p. 8-9). Rainio (2010) goes further to say that agency “lies in the individual or group’s capacity to recognize and to resist, subvert and change the discourses through which they are being constituted, and in that sense, to master these discourses” (pp. 8-9). Therefore, she argues, the issue is not whether an individual does or does not have agency per se, but whether or not an individual is aware of the forces society presses upon them and whether they have the means to resist or change said forces if they are deemed unwelcome. She then outlines three necessary resources to enact agency among individuals and, subsequently, as a collective: 1) resources that allow an individual to understand the choices available to them, 2) an individual’s belief that agency is possible, and 3) the social resources to interact with others in a way that enables agency (pp. 9-10).

We can consider the efficacy of both individual and relational agency within an educational context by returning to Freire. He argues that what is needed for the oppressed to achieve a “mastery of thinking” is an educational dynamic of communication that eradicates the traditional student-teacher hierarchy. In agreement with Rainio, he offers that, “Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students” (Freire, 2014, p. 72). Freire’s solution is a “problem-posing education,” a broad learning strategy based on the idea that students themselves are resources of knowledge, where a teacher or student poses a problem and the class collaborates to find answers (p. 86). Freire is effectively arguing that when a dynamic shifts from the individual agency of the teacher to the relational agency of the entire class, an egalitarian classroom dynamic can be established where teacher and students can all learn from one another. These thoughts are not only in line with those of education philosopher John Dewey (2009), who argues that institutional education runs the risk of being irrelevant to the needs of a community if it is too one-sided (pp. 17-18) but also with the writings of philosopher Jacques Rancière (1991), who calls the practice of teachers keeping students away from the knowledge in order to maintain the student/teacher dynamic “enforced stultification,” which is the practice of dulling students’ alertness and engagement so they might obediently receive information from the teacher without question (p. 7). Rancière believes in a non-hierarchical approach to education he calls the “equality of intelligences,” (p. 117) based on the belief that every human being shares the same level of intelligence.

Agency, then, a socio-cultural phenomenon in the first place, is far from being solely an individual circumstance and may also be considered relationally, where individuals interact with one another, react to one another’s actions, and potentially collaborate to create a distributed

intelligence that can then inform collective actions. It is by recognizing the potential of this balance between individual agency and the distributed intelligence of relational agency that scholars like Rancière, Dewey, and Freire argue for a non-hierarchical approach to education, where students and teachers can learn from one another, but where students can also potentially cultivate the agency over their own learning processes required to engage in lifelong learning.

2.3 Lifelong Learning

Regarding Rainio's first contradiction of agency, that it is seen as both situational and enduring, this research project engages with student agency in a highly situational setting, that of a devised theatre classroom. So, to increase the likelihood that a devised theatre educational methodology like mine might endure, that is, that it might encourage the students to want to continue to engage in the arts once the studies are complete, I must consider whether the learning environment I am designing shares characteristics with classrooms that are conducive to promoting lifelong learning habits. To empirically measure the impact of our devised theatre methodology on the students' lifelong learning habits would require a longitudinal study where data is periodically gathered from the subjects over a period of years, along the lines of Arthur Reynolds' analysis, *Chicago Longitudinal Study, 1986-1989* (2009) and Heidi Knipprath and Kathleen De Rick's study, *How Social and Human Capital Predict Participation in Lifelong Learning: A Longitudinal Data Analysis* (2015). Unfortunately, I lack the resources to execute such a study. Instead, in this section, I will examine what current scholarship says about the characteristics and habits of lifelong learners, which I then used as a basis to design a survey that attempted to assess whether the students' views on *learning in general* shifted as a result of the studies.

Crick et al. (2004) define lifelong learning as “learning that takes place throughout the lifespan” that “includes the main types and classes of learning, both informal and formal education, as well as self-directed learning” (p. 250). They explain that, in their study, they found that the learners who scored highly in the dimension of “creativity” were able to look at things in different ways and understood that learning often requires playfulness as well as systematic thinking (p. 257). Rainio (2010) echoes this sentiment, noting that “in play the child can act differently than in real life due to the imaginative component of play” (p. 38). She argues that play is the one area in children’s everyday life where their intentions and concepts of meaning are more important than the actions they take; that is, play is a realm where children can just be themselves. In Crick et al.’s research (2004), they observed that agency, commitment, creativity, and strategic awareness were strongly correlated. They identify four broad categories necessary for successful lifelong learning: 1) learning capacities, which are dispositions and skills; 2) learning identity, which are the beliefs, values, and attitudes about learning, self, and knowledge held by the learner; 3) learning story, which is the socio-cultural formation of learners over time; and 4) learning relationships (pp. 248-249). Regarding this last category, their research indicates that the learners who showed high amounts of agency and commitment prefer to learn with others and have strong ties to their communities (p. 259), thus emphasizing the importance of relational agency in lifelong learning.

Claxton (2008) explains that, in contrast to traditional understandings of intelligence as having a fixed status largely dictated by biology, today, a more common understanding of learning emphasizes the habits that students have learned through various social processes, which are then tied to their capacity to grow or change (pp. 3-4). He emphasizes that this is important because if an individual believes that “finding things difficult” means that this

individual “lacks ability,” it looks smart from that point of view to give up. Claxton introduces the idea that relevance cannot be assumed but, rather, must be learned. “Acquiring the ‘skill’ is only a part of the learning that is required; the rest involves slowly discovering when and how and for what purpose it can be used” (p. 4). He explains that evidence suggests that “thinking too much” interferes with learning, which corresponds to the common axiom in the performing arts that one cannot freely generate meaningful creative material if the process is overthought. Ultimately, Claxton argues that community validation (parents, community, school displays, and video archives) is required to support learning (p. 11). Applied theatre practitioner and scholar Anne Smith agrees, noting from her own experiences that community recognition liberates theatre participants from the fear of not being good enough and promotes action and the exploration of new possibilities. She argues that “the disruption of hierarchy through play, reciprocal care relationships and supported acts of independence and innovation, with the encouragement of the wider community, can have a significant impact on participants’ perception of their capacity to act” (Smith, 2014, p. 187). She offers that a collaborative theatre methodology can encourage people to develop their sense of agency which can, in turn, have an impact on participants’ abilities to make choices in life outside the project (p. 179). Kumpulainen et al. (2010) too note that “from the point of view of developing agency, it is important to give public recognition at school to students’ ideas whenever a student does or thinks of something significant” (p. 27).

John R. Kirby, Christopher Knapper, Patrick Lamon, and William J. Egnatoff (2010) emphasize that the endeavor to continue to learn throughout one’s life requires a balance of formal, non-formal, and informal education, involving learning outside of formal educational settings, including in the workplace in various social contexts (p. 292). They identify five

characteristics of lifelong learners, who they say are able to “(1) set goals, (2) apply appropriate knowledge and skills, (3) engage in self-direction and self-evaluation, (4) locate required information, and (5) adapt their learning strategies to different conditions” (pp. 292-293).

Interestingly, they note that their research indicates no correlation between a student’s propensity for lifelong learning and their achievement of high grades in school. This means that, rather than assessing this propensity through academic achievement, I will seek to measure whether the students’ views on learning in general shift as a result of the studies.

So then, agency, both individual and relational, is linked to lifelong learning. Further, there are a number of characteristics of lifelong learners that coincide with many of the skills and responsibilities involved in creating devised theatre. Per Crick et al.’s four categories for successful lifelong learning, it was necessary for me to design a curriculum that emphasized learning storytelling and performance skills, to demonstrate the direct application of those skills to the final show they would be creating, to allow the students the agency to apply those skills in a way that would be relevant to them as well as allowing them to work together to foster relationships in their learning. Also, to Claxton’s, Smith’s, and Kumpulainen et al.’s point that community validation outside of learning environments is necessary to promote lifelong learning, we needed to set up the performances themselves in a way where that validation would be clear, which turned out to be a challenge in a remote learning environment. Finally, per Kirby et al., our curriculum would need to permit the students to set as many of their own goals as possible, teach and encourage them to meaningfully critique themselves and one another, and allow them enough agency to adjust their approaches in response to shifting learning conditions.

Having established the importance of student agency in education, considered pedagogical strategies to increase the propensities for learning in general, and examined common

characteristics of environments and habits that foster lifelong learning tendencies, the question becomes whether there is an educational approach ideally suited to promote these areas. I will now discuss research that supports my assertion that arts education, and theatre education, in particular, are effective learning approaches in their capacity to foster student agency.

2.4 The Benefits of Arts Education

2.4.1 Creativity in Education

Kumpulainen et al. (2010) connect agency to creativity by explaining that “Agency is often connected with a creative aspect, questioning and opposing matters regarded as self-evident and seeking unconventional ways of action” (p. 23). Professor Emerita of Education at the University of Sydney, Robyn Ewing, argues that studying the arts improves student performance across all disciplines and provides a broad range of personal and social benefits. These include increased self-esteem, development of artistic skills, improved communication skills, a sense of achievement and well-being, and an increased connection to their communities. She also emphasizes that arts education may have particular resonance in Indigenous communities, where specific cultural issues can often be discussed more effectively (Ewing, 2011, pp. 25-26).

As a theatre educator, I believe that teaching my students performance skills and allowing them to apply those skills to their creative work with as much agency as possible will have benefits far outside of the rehearsal room. In addition to Ewing’s research, Vygotsky (2004) argues that cultivating creativity in school-age children is critical for their development (p. 84). Creativity, he posits, is a skill to be developed like any other. He further argues that it can be highly beneficial to young people who face challenging circumstances since a life with obstacles

provides the basis for fruitful creativity (pp. 28-29). He identifies puberty as a crucial age for imagination and creativity:

This age is critical or transitional; this is the age where childhood's physiological equilibrium is disturbed and the equilibrium of the adult has not yet been achieved. Thus, during this period imagination undergoes a revolution, destruction of the previous equilibrium, and a search for a new equilibrium. (p. 35)

Here again is why it is so important to engage young people in the arts, because it is during this crucial time of adolescence that they will either continue being creative or abandon structured creativity as they shift into what they perceive to be the practicalities of adulthood.

Rainio borrows a concept from Vygotsky, the "Zone of Proximal Development," to refer to the relationship between development and instruction within a classroom, a critical period where a gap exists between a child's willingness to act and their capacity to act independently (Vygotsky, 1978). She notes, "For this process it is necessary that children and pupils have possibilities to act with agency and to develop a sense of themselves as such actors" (Rainio, 2010, p. 11). She goes on to say that the creativity that comes with play, when a child makes the distinction between the real and imagined, is an optimal process to provide those possibilities. As I touched on previously, Rainio argues that with play, children explore the limits of the real world, become the authors of their own activities, and define relationships with one another. In this way, she argues, play and games are the first mediums through which individuals assert agency (pp. 12-13).

Punya Mishra, Chris Fahnoe, Danah Henriksen, and the Deep-Play Research Group (2014) agree, offering that for learning to be effective, learners must be able to see connections and synthesize information both within a body of knowledge and across various disciplines, and that requires creativity. They emphasize that for creativity to manifest, learners need a deep knowledge of their chosen discipline and the capacity to draw upon different knowledge bases

(p. 10). As noted previously, Crick et al. (2004) concur, who found in their research that agency is intertwined with commitment, creativity, and strategic awareness (p. 257). Further, Mishra et al. argue that rather than trying to teach creativity directly, creativity can only arise from conducive environments that are flexible enough to allow students to experiment, collaborate, and problem-solve. They posit that “when students understand that they are creative agents, responsible for and capable of self-development and self-determination of their goals, their self as an agent will provide the motivation necessary for self-regulation” (Mishra et al., 2013, pp. 11-12).

2.4.2 The Arts in Education

In “A Case Study in Personalising Learning: Relational Agency in a Visual Arts Studio,” arts scholars Mary Keeffe, Valerie Lovejoy, Deborah Spencer-Jones, and Vaughan Prain outline their analysis of the dynamics of a college visual art class, where they focused on the conversations between participants; use of technology and resources; learner confidence, agency, uncertainty, and levels of participation; teacher guidance and facilitation; classroom organization; group activities; individual attention; and student collaboration. They conclude that within their visual arts classroom relational agency enhanced the students’ creativity, engagement, and effort, noting that “negotiated interactions between participants build each student’s self-determination and confidence in their own abilities” (Keeffe et al., 2013, p. 108). They observed that the students exhibited relational agency by working with one another and critiquing each other’s artwork, which led to the incorporation of new ideas and techniques. They emphasize the importance of allowing students the agency to make their own choices. “The freedom to make a choice also comes with taking responsibility for that choice ... An emphasis on goal setting and

planning encourages student responsibility and autonomy as well as a meta-cognitive awareness when reflecting on development” (pp. 120-121). They conclude that relational agency underpins all aspects of a personalized learning classroom. Echoing concepts of relational agency, Ewing (2011) explains, “Collaborative strategies common in creative dance, music, visual arts, and drama activities have been shown to achieve an increase in brain synchrony and associated bonding” (pp. 33-34). Gergen (2009) concurs, noting that creativity itself, far from the Western narrative of the lonely genius, is very much the product of relationships, which then allows educators to consider the learning conditions that would best cultivate creativity (pp. 93-94).

In his research, Dr. Keith Cross (2009), my former instructor at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, argues that the arts can lead towards patterns of lifelong learning by introducing the concept of “domain traversal,” a process where a learner’s identification and pursuit of expertise within one domain promotes that learner’s engagement and increased pursuit of knowledge in other domains (p. 2). Using the example of creative writing, he argues that writers must constantly draw upon various outside sources to create rich works requiring a wide knowledge base that allow for previously abstract and inapplicable material to be perceived as relevant. He emphasizes that the agency of the artist to decide for themselves what they want to learn, and how they are going to learn, creates a different learning structure from traditional educational models, which are formed from external teaching curricula (p. 4). Keefe et al. (2013) echo this sentiment, observing that one of the biggest challenges moving forward for both the students and teachers who participated in their study is their capacity to transfer the self-determination they experienced in the visual arts classroom into other aspects of their learning (or teaching) and into their lives more generally (p. 123). Critically, Cross (2019) notes that with domain traversal, a teacher is not necessarily required for this learning to occur (p. 5), which, as Gibbons (2002)

notes, is a key characteristic of self-directed learning (p. 3). Cross (2019) offers that this is particularly important for individuals who feel alienated from academic spaces for any number of reasons. He argues that creative pursuits, such as writing rap music, do not require one to relinquish their inherited self, “and in fact, bringing those aspects into the discipline innovatively is celebrated” (p. 10).

Scholar Yan Zhao (2014) believes that the use of creative writing with second language students has implications across all academic disciplines as a tool of self-empowerment because it helps cultivate a sense of identity, which, he explains, is inseparable from the person’s sense of agency and self-esteem (pp. 452-454). This works, he argues, because “writers, whichever language they use, cannot avoid enacting self-representations in what they write” (p. 458). Ngo notes that writing programs focused on creating rap lyrics and spoken-word poetry provide urban, low-income youth with avenues to examine their lives and engage in social commentary. Referencing the research of Andrea García and Amy Gaddes (2012), she argues that when youth are exposed to writing exercises that connect with issues and emotions relevant to them, they “author themselves in a way that may not have been accessible to them before, thus enacting their sense of agency in their own cultural worlds” (Ngo, 2017, pp. 41-42).

2.4.3 Theatre in Education

Vygotsky (2004) discusses the benefits and challenges of creative expression in the forms of illustration and creative writing, but emphasizes that theatre practices have a unique capacity for creative expression:

The dramatic form expresses with greatest clarity the full cycle of imagination ... Here the image that the imagination has created from real elements of reality is embodied and realized again in reality, albeit only the contingent reality of the stage; the drive for

action, for embodiment, for realization that is present in the very process of imagination here finds complete fulfillment. (p. 70)

He cautions that simply offering avenues of creative expression is not enough, but that a special culture is needed for students to take ownership of their artistry (p. 84). This ties into Claxton's (2008) point that the "relevance" of artistic skills cannot be assumed but, rather, must be learned through discovery (p. 4). Ewing (2011) emphasizes that theatre education in particular fosters agency in students by allowing for the sharing of power and risk-taking between them and their teacher (p. 41), which in turn enables those students to push boundaries and liberates them from Rancière's concept of "enforced stultification."

Educational scholars Alkistis Kondoyianni, Antonis Lenakakis, and Nikos Tsiotsos (2013) note that "the practice of theatre helps people deeply understand each other, regardless of their physical, ethnic and cultural differences" (p. 3). They argue that theatre has the ability to condense real-life stories and broad social concepts into digestible offerings and emphasize that collective action, the compliance to the rules of the play with the aim of a common achievement, as well as the reflection over the collective fictional experience, provide opportunities for participants to step into each other's shoes (p. 5). They offer a number of benefits of theatre education, including expanding areas of self-control such as self-esteem, confidence, a capacity to self-assess, goal-setting skills, and a number of self-awareness skills, including awareness of rights, values, attitudes, strengths, and weaknesses (pp. 8-9).

Peter Wright (2011), an Associate Professor of Arts Education and Research Methods at Murdoch University, uses the framework of intersubjectivity to argue that theatre education offers unique opportunities to cultivate agency with students. He argues that the forms and structures of theatre practices enable individuals to become "creative and active constructors of knowledge," which, in turn, makes them cultural producers rather than cultural consumers (p. 2).

He goes on to say that these practices allow individuals to be intentional and active in creating their identities rather than being passive receptors of external action. Further, he offers that “Drama and notions of agency enable us to think of young people as being ‘at promise’ rather than ‘at risk’” (p. 2). He contends that theatre develops participants’ capabilities of being agents in their own lives through their understanding of how their world is socially constructed and their own feelings that comprise their unique identity (pp. 2-3).

A question then arises regarding what attributes of a theatre education classroom cultivate high levels of creativity. Samuel Hope (2010) outlines eleven characteristics of such an environment, which include a commitment to open-ended work; a pursuit of the unknown rather than the known; space of all kinds where time, facilities, and quiet are plentiful; low consequences for failure; an understanding of different types of knowledge and ways of thinking and working, and the ability to mix and match these ways to the task at hand; an assumption that creativity has a higher value than technique, technology, or ideology; an ability to evaluate moment to moment as the effort proceeds, and to make adjustments accordingly; and a willingness to wait, that is, an understanding that results often appear spontaneously after many failures, and thus that planning, while important, is not necessarily the primary driver of creative success (p. 45). Gibbons et al. (1980) concur, offering that “Self-education is best cultivated in a warm, supportive, coherent environment in which people generally are active, and there is a close relationship with at least one other person” (pp. 53-54).

The arts, then, are an effective educational tool: studying the arts improves student performance across all academic areas, and improves self-esteem, communication, connection to one’s community, and a general sense of achievement. Cultivating creativity in young people is important for their development, and is a skill to be developed like any other. Further, the arts

often allow students to express themselves on their own terms, which is critical at an age when young people are forming their identities. Arts education is so effective because – per Crick et al., Ewing, and Gergen – it helps promote student agency. This is important because many scholars believe that relational agency is the basis of all aspects of an effective classroom, and thus it is necessary for creativity to take hold. Theatre education is ideally suited to promote student agency because it combines the benefits of creative writing and performance and allows for the sharing of power and risk-taking. Further, theatre can foster agency by allowing participants a further understanding of how their world is socially constructed, as well as their role within it.

However, Assistant Professor at the University of Minnesota Sonja Kuftinec (2001) cautions that theatre education has its own challenges, and important attributes that are lacking in many programs include collaboration, ensemble building, idea development, interdisciplinary approaches to creating art, listening, conflict resolution, community engagement, and application of artistic skills in a wide range of settings (p. 46). Here her recommendations are in line with Burkitt's and Edwards' observations of the benefits of relational agency. She goes on to cite Freire in advocating for a more student-centered pedagogy (p. 51). Her concerns about American theatre education, born largely out of the tradition of drama, echo the concerns I articulated in Chapter 1 around the solitary nature of contemporary Western playwriting. I will, therefore, now argue that devised theatre offers an approach to theatre education that addresses many of these concerns due to its collaborative nature.

2.5 Devised Theatre

The scholarship of Anna Lehtonen, the Professor of Education at the University of Helsinki, heavily influenced the methodology of my research project, as I will explain in Chapter 3. She argues that the devised theatre methodology creates an ideal environment for creativity by encouraging active participation and decision-making, which in turn allows for agency to be cultivated by its participants (Lehtonen, 2015). As a playwright, I was at first resistant to the idea of a theatre form that defies textual authority, but after experiencing the work of European devising groups like Forced Entertainment,¹¹ Società Raffaello Sanzio,¹² and Rimini Protokoll,¹³ I became convinced that the devising methodology allows for expression in ways that cannot be accomplished in the traditional Western dramatic form. These companies are all comprised of White practitioners drawing from Eurocentric traditions, but, as I will argue, I believe that the collaborative methodologies these companies employ are far more open to multicultural influences than the dramatic playwriting techniques in which I was trained.

Devised theatre, with historical roots in Commedia dell'Arte and varyingly American and European communal, anti-capitalist, anti-bureaucratic, pro-equality politics throughout the twentieth century, is a wide range of practices rather than an aesthetic, and therefore the form defies definition and structure (Schirle, 2005; Heddon & Milling, 2015; Wessendorf, 2018; Bechtel, 2013). Devised theatre refers to a wide plurality of practices as opposed to a single

¹¹ Forced Entertainment was founded in 1984 in Sheffield, England. Seeking to explore current issues, they are known for an eclectic mix of forms, including durational performance, live art, and digital media. Key productions include *Speak Bitterness* (1994), *Showtime* (1996), and *Quizoola!* (1996).

¹² Società Raffaello Sanzio was founded in 1981 in Cesena, Italy. Rather than being influenced by theatrical forms, they draw inspiration from rock music, poetry, comics, television and film. Key productions include *Gilgamesh* (1990), *Oresteia, an Organic Play?* (1995), and *Tragedia Endogonidia* (2002-2004).

¹³ Rimini Protokoll was founded in 2000 in Berlin, Germany. They are famous for working with experts outside of the realm of theatre to create stage-works, interventions, performative installations and audio plays aimed at creating new perspectives on reality. Key productions include *Cargo Sofia-X* (2006), *Call Cutta in a Box* (2008), and *The 100% Series* (2008-2020).

methodology (D'Cruz, 2018, p. 161; Govan et al., 2007, p. 7). Therefore, it is difficult to attribute specific characteristics to this methodology.

Although devised theatre was practiced throughout the second half of the twentieth century in various countries, including the United States, Germany, and the United Kingdom; it was not until British devised theatre practitioner and Professor of Visual Culture and Contemporary Performance at the University of Derby, Alison Oddey (1994), published her book *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*, that this methodology became widely known among English-speaking theatre artists and scholars. It is often cited by performance studies scholars for its working definition of devised theatre, which she offers as:

... a process of making theatre that enables a group of performers to be physically creative in the sharing and shaping of an original product that directly emanates from assembling, editing and reshaping individuals' contradictory experiences of the world ... A devised theatrical performance originates with the group while making the performance, rather than starting from a play text that someone else has written to be interpreted. (p. 1)

She notes that any definition of devised theatre must include process, collaboration, a plurality of vision, and, naturally, the creation of an artistic product. She argues that devised theatre is a response to the playwright-director relationship and to text-based theatre, and that it challenges the prevailing hierarchy of a dramatic theatre rehearsal room (p. 4). Devised, then, offers artists opportunities to express themselves without text, which in turn encourages the development of a performance language that includes non-verbal forms (such as visual art and creative technologies), other forms of performance (such as music and dance), and a commitment to multiple perspectives, subjectivities, and multimodalities (Perry, 2015, pp. 17-18).

In *Devising Performance: A Critical History*, British devised theatre scholars Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling (2015) greatly expanded upon devised theatre scholarship by

positioning the methodology within a larger historical context. For them, devised theatre is highly political, and they offer this detailed definition:

[Devised theatre is a] social expression of non-hierarchical possibilities; a model of cooperative and non-hierarchical collaboration; an ensemble; a collective; a practical expression of political and ideological commitment; a means of taking control of work and operating autonomously; a de-commodification of art; a commitment to total community; a commitment to total art; the negating of the gap between art and life; the erasure of the gap between spectator and performer; a distrust of words; the embodiment of death of the author; a means to reflect contemporary social reality; a means to incite social change; an escape from theatrical conventions; a challenge for theatre makers; a challenge for spectators; an expressive, creative language; innovative; risky; inventive; spontaneous; experimental; non-literary. (pp. 4-5)

This iconoclastic view of devised is echoed by a number of scholars (Bogart & Landau, 2004; Wessendorf, 2018; D'Cruz, 2018) because the work that is produced often falls into the genre of “post-drama,” a contemporary style of Western theatre identified by Hans-Thies Lehmann that resists the narrative of traditional dramatic theatre, emphasizes metonym over metaphor, and positions the visual, spatial, temporal, musical, and media aspects of performance over the invocation of a pre-existing, authoritative text (Lehmann, 2006). For dramaturg and performance studies scholar Katherine Profeta (2015), the separation of performance from text was inevitable, arguing that “any ironclad opposition between words and motion as forms of theatrical expression cannot hold. Arguably it never could, but especially not now, in light of contemporary performance developments” (p. 28). Further, she believes that this shift away from text has gendered implications. She sees the longstanding Western association of performance with text as patriarchal, especially when seen next to “the physically expressive, often silent, and feminized body of the dancer/choreographer” (p. 22).

Lehmann too believes that postdramatic theatre is highly political. He sees political discourse in contemporary society as flawed and corrupted (Jürs-Munby, 2013, p. 18), so the role of theatre therein must be the deconstruction of political discourse:

There is one thing theatre can do: artistically deconstruct the space of political discourse as such – in as much as the latter erects the thesis, opinion, order, law and organically conceived wholeness of the political body – and to show its latently authoritarian constitution. This happens through the dismantling of discursive certainties of the political, the unmasking of rhetoric, the opening of the field of a non-thetical presentation. (Lehmann, 2006, p. 177)

For Lehmann, then, an important function of postdramatic theatre is to deconstruct the space of political discourse and to show its latently authoritarian constitution.

In principle, devised theatre embraces a plurality of voice by having many artists create material simultaneously, in contrast to the singular voices of playwrights of Western theatre. Due to its nature, it is open to a variety of postdramatic expressive methods that many scholars feel are ideally suited to address contemporary political discourse. It is also, again, potentially open to a variety of non-Western artistic tools of creative expression. For example, in the summer of 2022, I attended The Double Edge Theatre's *The Hidden Territories of the Bacchae* in Ashfield, Massachusetts, a devised show inspired by Euripides' *Bacchae*. It featured a diverse cast of devisers/performers who effectively incorporated elements of American, Western European, Chinese, Russian, and Native American song and dance into the performance, at one point simultaneously.

I have observed the efficacy of the open-ended collaborative nature of devising in my own work. I mentioned in Chapter 1 that in 2019 Kat and I worked with six non-binary undergraduate students at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa to create *Corpus Interruptus*, an exploration of gender in contemporary Hawai'i. As with the students we would be working with, the undergrads were from diverse backgrounds and brought their various knowledge sets into the rehearsal room. For example, several of the students discussed the concept of *māhū*, which in Hawaiian culture refers to the third gender or "in-the-middle," indicating someone who embodies both *kāne* (male) and *wahine* (female) spirit (Kuwahara, 2014). This discussion

eventually evolved into a scene where a performer danced to a recording of the performers' voices sharing their thoughts on the role of mǎhū in contemporary society. Kat and I only had a cursory understanding of mǎhū from our studies, but because several of the performers did, they were able to bring in something from their own culture and examine where they agreed and disagreed through an intersection of text and movement.

For all of these reasons, I believe that devised theatre is an ideal praxis to allow students to assert individual and relational agency by collectively creating art on their own terms, art that has the potential to resist Western dominating storytelling traditions.

2.6 Educational Applications of Devised Theatre

With these frameworks in place, I will now discuss how current research investigates the efficacy of devised theatre within a theatre education environment. Markus Wessendorf, Chair of the Department of Theatre and Dance at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, sees the methodology of devised theatre in line with Rancière's assumption of an equality of intelligences among practitioners because, Wessendorf posits, devised theatre education refutes the unequal traditional classroom student-teacher relationship and instead places the focus on student discourse and collaboration in an environment where there are often no right answers (thus fulfilling Hope's call for a classroom with low consequences for failure) (Wessendorf, 2018, pp. 2-3). He references Laura Cull's scholarship on Gilles Deleuze in noting that devised theatre features a multitude of avenues toward organization and creativity which can do very well without a leader or director (p. 3; as cited in Cull, 2009). Glen D'Cruz (2018) agrees, arguing that devised theatre gives artists the agency to make things up as they go. "... if you find the codes and conventions of dramatic theatre restricting, you can blow them off. And, up to a point,

you can invent your own rules and develop your own aesthetic practices and theories” (p. 151). He believes that its flexibility of form makes it ideal for educational contexts because it allows for the framework and artistic objectives of the devising learning process to be constructed by the students themselves (p. 160).

Claxton (2008) notes that collaborative learning environments, such as devised theatre classrooms, offer a contrast to traditional educational models, which inhibit learning by forcing the students to rely too heavily on the teacher and not enough on each other. In such traditional classrooms, he argues, the teacher’s success at creating and maintaining a calm, orderly, pleasant, and purposeful environment “deprives students of opportunities to develop the social and cognitive dispositions to do this optimising for themselves” (p. 8). Thus, he explains, students become more, not less, dependent on the teacher. Lehtonen (2012) notes that with devised theatre, the teacher acts as a joint researcher with the students rather than a superior, and together they investigate contemporary society through improvisation, writing, and reflecting on their collaborative learning (pp. 106-107). She argues that the collaborative nature of devised theatre allows students to feel agency over their creative offerings in ways that go beyond meeting the academic expectations of the teacher. Smith (2014) too emphasizes the role of relational agency in the lasting impact of the skills provided by theatre education outside of the rehearsal room, arguing that the culture of a collaborative theatre project should be founded on reciprocal relationships which celebrate different skills and abilities, including those beyond the art itself. These relationships, she explains, “encourage individuals to recognize what they can offer and to engage independently beyond the role of passive beneficiary in an applied theatre project which actively makes connections with the world outside itself” (p. 186).

The educational benefits of devised theatre are also documented outside of rehearsal rooms. In their study, “Discovering Emotional Honesty through Devised Theatre,” Peter Hayes, Peter Cantillon, and Max Hafler (2014) discuss their experiences incorporating devised theatre exercises into the curriculum of a group of medical students with no prior theatre experience as a way of exploring the profession of medicine and their own development as doctors. They found that the exercises helped the students communicate better with patients as well as one another:

We found that a devised theatre approach helped students to explore personal perspectives on the profession of medicine, healing and their development as doctors. It then allowed them to perform their insights before an audience of their peers ... By participating, the students developed an emotional honesty with themselves and with each other (p. 84).

They emphasize that the students remarked upon the way devised theatre forces its participants to rely on teamwork. They conclude that devised theatre “represents an invaluable learning opportunity for students that has significant impact, yet is relatively straightforward to initiate” (p. 87).

I can verify from my own experiences what these scholars argue: devised theatre education speaks to Freire’s call for an egalitarian classroom by focusing on a student-led curriculum emphasizing collaboration and self-critique rather than a one-way knowledge transfer from teacher to student. The flexibility of devising makes it a uniquely receptive methodology to allow students to shape their own learning and create work on their own terms. In fact, as I will argue, a successful devised theatre classroom can potentially do very well without an active leader at all, provided that clear expectations and parameters are established. But first, for the purposes of exploring the data gathered for this dissertation, I must discuss how student agency can be meaningfully assessed within a devised theatre classroom.

2.7 Measuring Agency in a Devised Theatre Classroom

Having established connections between agency and lifelong learning, as well as the educational efficacy of the arts and the unique potential for devised theatre therein, the question now is *how* to assess whether a sense of agency has been cultivated in a devised theatre classroom. In discussing some of the challenges she found in conducting her study, Rainio (2010) notes:

The problem then is how to define the unit of analysis for the study in such a case – without falling back on a traditional psychological study of solitary and detached individuals, but avoiding also the problem of holism or ‘gigantism’ that can conceal the varying individual perspectives and often leads to the problem of managing the research object. (p. 60)

She explains that, although the contradictions in our understanding of agency make its assessment challenging, a pluralistic approach makes such assessments possible. From a dialectical perspective, she offers that things in the world are in the process of “becoming,” which means that when a scientific analysis is employed, a living movement is frozen in time, and thus that moment’s dynamics are easily lost (pp. 93-94). This is a particularly important point in a devised theatre classroom, where the collaborative learning environment can be especially fluid. Rainio notes the cruciality of understanding the distributed, relational nature of agency in making these assessments (p. 7). Therefore, my methods for measuring student agency must be aimed at looking at the students’ engagement both broadly and minutely as well as involving significant qualitative analysis to offer meaningful context.

On the minute level, Rainio (2008) offers three ways of understanding the development of individual agency in social practices: a) through transforming the object of activity and through self-change, b) through responsible and intentional membership, and c) through resistance and transformation of the dominant power relations (p. 115). To this last point, she argues that acts of everyday resistance (or instances of resistant agency) in classrooms have a

transformative potential because they can affect fixed organizational contexts and social practices. This is an issue, she explains, because traditional Western classrooms typically interpret resistance and reluctance as behavioral problems rather than assertions of agency (pp. 119-120). Kumpulainen et al. (2010) support this observation, noting that studies show that cheating on a test can be seen as a manifestation of student agency, that by cheating, students are testing the educational system itself (p. 25). As I will argue later in this dissertation, my data corroborate these assertions.

Rainio often describes student agency in terms of “initiative.” In referencing Galina Zuckerman (1999), Rainio defines initiative as “a special nonimitative way of interacting with an adult and as an ability to set goals for his or her own learning,” which involves activity on the part of the subject (Rainio, 2008, p. 122). Rainio frames initiative in contrast to two other possible levels of student engagement: “passive” and “responsive.” An example of responsive behavior would be answering a question or leaving the room when asked. She found four main types of initiatives from the data: constructing, supporting, deconstructing, and resisting (Rainio, 2008, p. 122-124). In one of the only studies aimed at researching the role of agency in theatre education employing a devised methodology, “Evaluating Students’ Agency and Development of Ownership in a Collaborative Playmaking Project,” Anna Lehtonen applies Rainio’s methodology of evaluating the agency of young people in a group creative environment to track a group of 13-14-year-olds’ sense of agency in the process of creating a piece of devised theatre on the topic of climate change. According to Lehtonen’s (2016) categorization, agency broadly manifests in two key categories: positive and negative. “Active agency can be classified as either positive: making initiatives or supporting collective creation or negative: resisting or deconstructive” (p. 563). For her study, she modified these two broad categories of agency into

three categories of *instances* of agency: 1) constructive, 2) resisting, and 3) passive. Constructive agency contributes to the task at hand in the form of a verbal contribution, a physical act, or creating content; resisting agency is complaining or critical behavior; and passive agency consists of actions focusing on something else other than working, such as having unrelated conversations with classmates (Lehtonen, 2015, pp. 1892-1893). These are the categories I employed in my qualitative labeling of agency in our devised theatre classrooms, as I will discuss in section 6.2.2.

Lehtonen goes on to argue that in theatre education, it is possible to turn negative resisting agency into a positive force, because in so doing students begin to take ownership over their own learning processes. Because Lehtonen's research is so closely based on Rainio's, this argument is unsurprising because it speaks to Rainio's (2010) third contradiction of Western concepts of agency, that agentive individuals need to both obey and revise the laws of society (pp. 16-17). Further, to account for the contextual importance of evaluating relational agency, Lehtonen (2015) conducted extensive ethnographic discussions with the teachers and the students (p. 1888). She makes the case that theatre is particularly well suited to capitalize on Rainio's concept of the benefits of resistance. "In drama, resistance and risk can be thought of as engaging and providing opportunities for growth and development" (p. 1887). However, like Rainio (2010), she notes that it is only possible for teachers to encourage students' individual and relational agency if they relinquish control and instead distribute that power throughout the class (p. 1887). The devised theatre facilitator, then, must adhere to Freire's (2014) call for both the teacher and the students to be simultaneously teachers and pupils (p. 72). Lehtonen (2015) concludes that the results of her devised theatre study support the findings of previous studies related to other areas of theatre education, that:

... the creative processes of drama projects are challenging but offer fruitful episodes for social learning, supporting students' active agency and development of the ownership. It resembled results of studies of Rainio, when pointing out the importance of seeing students' resistance as a developmental stage towards engagement and ownership. (pp. 1896-1897).

On a broad level, Adam Tapal, Ela Oren, Reuven Dar, and Baruch Eitam (2017) provide a useful tool to assess a student's general sense of agency, their "Sense of Agency Scale," to measure perceived control over one's mind, body, and the immediate environment. They explain that there are a number of existing scales that assess aspects of agency, such as measurements of "Self-Efficacy Locus of Control" and "Sense of Control" (p. 2). They note that each of these scales is usually used to assess agency within the context of specific actions, while their Sense of Agency Scale, in contrast, addresses an individual's understanding of their own capacity for agency within their life. It accomplishes this by asking questions aimed at assessing whether participants feel that they are the author of their own actions and whether the things they do are subject only to their free will (p. 3). Kirby et al. (2010) have also developed a useful scale measuring students' disposition to engage in lifelong learning, which poses statements aimed at assessing students' attitudes toward their own learning based on their identified characteristics of lifelong learners, which I outlined previously in this chapter. Some of these statements also touch on elements of student agency, such as whether a student prefers to have others plan their learning (p. 298). I will go into more detail regarding how I borrowed statements from these two scales to build my surveys, and, more widely, how I implemented these broad and minute approaches to measuring student agency in my research project, in section 3.6.

2.8 Indigenous Learning Methodologies

When I was preparing this research project, I did not have access to the demographic information of the classes we would be working with (and, as I will discuss in Chapter 4, the most specific information I gathered therein was broad and anecdotal from the classroom teacher). For example, a number of the students we ended up working with are of Filipino descent. Had I known that ahead of time I would have made an effort to consider how Filipino culture and learning praxes might inform our devised theatre methodology. We did know that based on the school's demographic data, it was likely that the majority of the participants would descend from various Asian and Pacific Island nations. However, it was still likely that we would also have a number of Native Hawaiian students, so due to this fact, and because the studies were conducted in Hawai'i, I felt that it was important to incorporate Indigenous learning methodologies into our devised theatre praxis. I will now discuss relevant scholarship to this point, as well as how we attempted to incorporate key points of that scholarship into our work.

One valid argument *against* employing a devised theatre methodology in contemporary Hawai'i is that the form comes from a Eurocentric theatre tradition, and as such, most professional devised theatre companies are made up of a majority of White practitioners.¹⁴ Certainly, despite the endurance (and since the 1970s a growing resurgence) of traditional Hawaiian performance forms, theatre in Hawai'i has been dominated by Western forms throughout the second half of the twentieth century and into the 21st. But this is the very reason that artist scholars like Tammy Haili'ōpua Baker (2019) and Kiki Rivera (2019) contend, and several Hawaiian artists have argued to me personally, that the Hawaiian community would be

¹⁴ Examples of devising theatre companies celebrated by critics, practitioners and scholars that are comprised entirely, or almost entirely, of white artists include Forced Entertainment, Frantic Assembly, Goat Island, Elevator Repair Service and The Wooster Group.

better served by learning their own performance forms, rather than from another Western one. There are, however, many celebrated BIPOC devised theatre artists. Much of Brazilian artist Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed methodology is utilized within devised rehearsal rooms, such as NYU Professor George Emilio Sanchez's EMERGENYC project, which trains students to use their bodies as political protest performance art on the streets of New York City. In Hawai'i, T-Shirt Theatre Company has been teaching young Hawaiians how to devise theatre for twenty years. In 2020, the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa staged a postdramatic piece entitled *I'm Lot Lane (a solo effort)*, created by Kanaka Maoli artist Keola Simpson, which drew much of its inspiration from devised theatre methodologies. Tori Haring-Smith (2003), the former president of Washington and Jefferson College, notes that because much of the postdramatic pieces formed by devised methodologies resist simplicity and coherence, "it is particularly attractive to playwrights who feel that their worldview is not shared by the popular media and conventional representations of human life" (p. 52). As I have discussed, devised theatre is a methodology, not a genre of theatre, and because of its emphasis on collaboration and the opportunities it affords for storytelling forms that do not invoke pre-existing authoritative text, I believe that it has the potential to be an effective teaching tool for students in a Hawaiian classroom. Nonetheless, because of its association with White practitioners both in professional and educational settings, devised theatre's potential to resonate with students from Asian and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander populations might rightly be considered dubious, and, again, consideration must be given towards a pedagogy that is conscious of the cultural barriers between ourselves and the students.

Dacia Dressen-Hammouda (2008), the Associate Professor in English at the Université Clermont Auvergne, highlights that a major hurdle in becoming a lifelong learner is the necessity

of mastering genre-related cues, which she argues students require to receive the validation they need to feel knowledgeable in their chosen field. She offers that “a student’s emerging genre mastery is a complex process which involves learning not only relevant discursal forms, but also a wide range of specialist knowledge frames” (p. 233). She argues that knowing how to reproduce written academic norms is less about cultivating writing skills and more about identity, and that students often struggle in classrooms because they must learn the beliefs and practices of the experts that shape their disciplines. Successful students, then, use their disciplinary knowledge to align their work, and by extension themselves, with the socially shaped identities of their communities. This mastery of genre-related cues is important in forming a sense of identity more broadly, then, because this is “the process by which students become recognized as members of a new disciplinary community” (p. 234). She argues that an individual’s habits not only inform how others will perceive them, but those perceptions will then affect the individual’s own patterns as well. “As they are exposed to these patterns and norms, they assimilate them as largely unconscious structures in their sensorimotor system and later perform them using their bodies: talking, doing and behaving” (p. 235). Gloria Ladson-Billings and William F. Tate IV (1995) concur, warning of the dangers when students are only rewarded for conforming to perceived “White norms,” which extends to elements of dress, speech patterns, and various conceptions of knowledge (p. 59). Dressen-Hammouda is effectively arguing, then, that access to these genre-related cues is important for both lifelong learning and its consequential implications for senses of agency and identity. I would like to believe that some of the barriers she describes in accessing the cues required for the mastery of devised theatre are minimized by the nature of this methodology’s requirements of open communication and peer collaboration. However, language is encoded with culture, and, again,

as a White-identifying male coming from a tradition of Western knowledge dissemination, it is impossible for my teaching not to bring with it a colonial tradition that has devastated some of the population that I would be working with. This is why open, ongoing communication with the classroom teacher would be necessary to carry out this research project.

In his dissertation, *An Alternative Expert Knowledge Transfer Model: A Case Study of an Indigenous Storytelling Approach*, Roderick Jay Spaulding (2010) outlines that Indigenous approaches to teaching and learning are based on broad, holistic thinking that is not always as prevalent in Western culture. “The difference between the transfer of knowledge in modern Western education and that of indigenous education,” he explains, “is that in Western education information has been separated from the stories and presented as data, description, theory, and formula” (pp. 24-25).¹⁵ He emphasizes Tewa author Gregory A. Cajete’s ten Indigenous education characteristics: 1) Learning is based on one’s own nature. 2) A wound provides for constant renewal of creativity. 3) Empathy and affection through mirroring. 4) Respect for each person as his or her own teacher. 5) Learning that is connected to one’s individual life process. 6) Collaboration between teacher and learner through mystical interpretation and reflection. 7) Learning through stories told many times from different perspectives. 8) Finding personal meaning through direct experience. 9) Valuing life’s hardships and deep personal connection. 10) Learning through reflection and shared experience in the community (pp. 27-28, as cited in Cajete, 1994, pp. 213-214). While implementing all of these considerations proved difficult, as I will discuss in more detail, being aware of these distinctions between Indigenous and Western

¹⁵ Spaulding’s assessment is a bit of an overgeneralization as Western education is littered with examples and reforms that seek this very context. Examples include the Waldorf Schools, the work of Maria Montessori, the educational experiments of the Bolsheviks in the 1920s, and the aforementioned scholarship of Jacques Rancière. Nonetheless, his point stands that these are exceptions in Western education in contrast to Indigenous education methodologies, which by and large are inextricably tied to the stories of their communities.

knowledge systems proved valuable in discussing with the classroom teacher some of the communication challenges we faced throughout the studies. Having discussed considerations around broad Indigenous knowledge systems, I will now talk about theatre-pedagogical theory specific to the Hawaiian Islands.

In Puakailima Davis' (2015) doctoral dissertation, she argues for the benefits of the incorporation of mo'olelo (storytelling) and hana keaka (Hawaiian theatre) in the classroom. She believes that theatre is a way for Hawaiians to understand their lives and sense of the world, and to refine skills such as communication, reading comprehension, vocabulary development, problem-solving, and critical thinking (pp. 76-78). She goes as far as to say that theatre is central to the preservation of Hawaiian culture and for the development of knowledge needed for the twenty-first century (p. 42). Kaliko Baker agrees, contending that theatre is an effective tool for transmitting the histories and modeling the language of the Kānaka Maoli (C. M. Baker, 2018, p. 227). It would seem, then, that the educational benefits of theatre are seen as important and effective not just by Western theatre and education scholars but Hawaiian scholars as well.

In "Ka 'Ikena a ka Hawai'i: Toward a Kanaka 'Ōiwi Critical Race Theory," Erin Kahunawaika'ala Wright and Brandi Jean Nālani Balutski, building off the research of Ladson-Billings and Tate's analysis of Critical Race Theory, developed a Kanaka 'Ōiwi critical race theory, or "'ŌiwiCrit" as they have dubbed it. They have identified five themes for a successful ŌiwiCrit pedagogical praxis:

- 1) The consequences of colonialism and occupation are pervasive and unique to Hawai'i in their exploitation of 'āina and appropriation of identity, particularly in the areas of local identity and settler colonialism, tourism, and de/militarization.
- 2) Aloha 'āina (love for the land and nation) is fundamental to the expression and analysis of educational journeys for Kanaka 'Ōiwi.
- 3) It is important to recognize and honor hūnā (sacred, hidden) of mo'olelo. Unlike western notions of research, not everything is available for the right price, and sometimes what is shared may only be understood by a few.

4) Mo‘okū‘auhau (connections to people, places, and spaces) can be used to describe and understand the diverse pathways and relationships that individuals have with respect to different contexts.

5) Kuleana (right, responsibility, privilege, concern, authority) is the culmination of Kanaka ‘Ōiwi mo‘olelo about their educational journeys and the ways in which they enact agency. (Wright & Balutski, 2016, pp. 93-94)

So, then, in planning our pedagogical process Kat and I made certain to emphasize the role of storytelling: that the stories the students would be offering would be met in a collaborative environment and built upon as a group, and because of that, they would not share any more of themselves than they were able to. This also ties into Wright and Balutski’s emphasis on the role of hūnā in their creative offerings, that is, to not offer more of themselves than they and/or their community would feel appropriate to share. To this end, we also planned to bring in local artists to provide a different artistic perspective in the classroom. Also, per Wright and Balutski, we planned to draw upon local news stories as inspiration to encourage the students to engage with issues of their community; this was also important for Freire’s (2014) and Ngo’s (2017) calls to empower students by helping them understand how their lives are influenced by broad social, political, and historical forces. Additionally, while we knew the role of feedback would be critical for our devised methodology, we also knew that, per Spaulding, this became doubly important because reflecting and discussing a shared experience would be a vital component of our process.

But no matter what safeguards we provided, we knew that as White-identifying individuals from the continental United States, cultural barriers would always exist in the classroom. Further, given the brief amount of time we had to work with the students, we knew that we did not have an adequate amount of time to honor, empathize and contextualize their creative work with the attention and detail required for a learning experience that has been meaningfully influenced by Indigenous learning methodologies; and indeed, as I will outline in

section 7.2.6, because of these time constraints we largely failed in our efforts. Again, these failings were somewhat mitigated by regularly checking in with the classroom teacher to ensure that our lessons were resonating with the students, that our cultural barriers were as little a detriment to the process as possible, and that our students would drive the creative processes on their own terms. Further, not all individuals engage with agency in the same way. For populations that have endured oppression, historical assertions of agency have often been met with punishment and criminalization. This means that some of the students in our studies would face more risk in asserting agency than others. Additionally, in some contexts, the concept of agency has been used as a tool of colonization. Hawaiian Studies scholar John Osorio (2002) offers the example of the Kingdom of Hawai‘i’s House of Representatives in 1851, where, with influence from an increasing number of foreign-born politicians, Kānaka Maoli were misled about the role of their agency in being able to legislate themselves.

They were not made helpless spectators by the haole [foreigners] and their vigorous pursuit of opportunity, but the commerce driven legislative agendas increasingly forced the kānaka to mediate the needs and demands of their own constituency with the apparent needs and demands of the Western-styled nation that they were also trying to serve. It was not apparent to them that this could not be done. (p. 67)

Osorio argues that the agency promised by these foreign-born politicians was transitory and illusory. The concept of agency, then, could very well be considered by the Hawaiian students in my studies as not just a Western construction but a potentially deceitful one. After all, who am I, a foreigner, to grant them agency in the first place? I lack a deeper understanding of Hawaiian conceptions of agency to meaningfully take this concept into account in designing my research project, but it is helpful to remember that resistance to the idea of promoting student agency in classrooms is not just a notion held by educational scholars but may also have cultural implications in O‘ahu.

2.9 Dramaturgy

As I am emphasizing the role of dramaturgy in our methodology, I must take some space to define the word and explain its role within a devised theatre context, but I cannot do so straightforwardly. Dramaturg Milan Zvada (2014) explains that, unlike other theatrical responsibilities such as acting or directing, dramaturgical work does not always yield tangible results (p. 203). Kate Bredeson (2014) argues that the terms “dramaturgy” and “dramaturg” remain diverse and unresolved (p. 50). Cathy Turner and Synne Behrndt (2016), whose comprehensive book *Dramaturgy and Performance* I will be heavily referencing, note that although there are many examples of brief, clear explanations of dramaturgy, these are insufficient because in contemporary practice the term has become flexible, fluid, and encompassing, and in actuality, any succinct definition of dramaturgy would be reductive (p. 21).

2.9.1 Defining Dramaturgy

Reductive or not, I require a working definition of dramaturgy for my research. In his seminal work *Ghost Light: An Introductory Handbook for Dramaturgy*, Michael M. Chemers (2010) offers that dramaturgy is “a term that refers to both the aesthetic architecture of a piece of dramatic literature (its structure, themes, goals, and conventions) and the practical philosophy of theater practice employed to create a full performance” (p. 3). He explains that dramaturgs analyze the script (if the play has a script), research what is needed to assist the other creatives in better understanding the play, and apply that knowledge in a way that makes sense to an audience. Mark Bly (1995), the former Chair of the Dramaturgy and Playwriting Program at Yale University, defines a dramaturg as someone who questions (pp. 53-54). Anne Cattaneo

(2021), the Dramaturg at Lincoln Center Theater, has described the dramaturg as someone who keeps the whole in mind (p. 13). Graça P. Corrêa (2014) offers that “dramaturgy may be seen as what animates the text; it is the spirit of the text. Dramaturgy is also a political practice” (p. 308). Karin McCully, a dramaturg and instructor of mine at Trinity College Dublin, once told me that there is an idea that no play can be completely new, that it must relate to another play, which itself is related to another play, and so on; and understanding that connection is dramaturgy. Profeta (2015) says that a dramaturg is a “researcher, editor, questioner, catalyst, historian, archivist, literary manager, outside eye, inside eye, advocate for the audience, advocate for anything but the audience, witness, midwife, gadfly, friend, and even amateur shrink” (p. 14). Turner and Behrndt (2016) believe that dramaturgy can be understood as composition, architecture, analysis, playwriting, research, producing, interpreting, critique, and engagement with the context (p. 21). Further, they explain that the dramaturg represents the audience within a rehearsal process and that the dramaturg’s job is to identify any potential gaps between what the creatives have intended and what is likely to be received by audiences (p. 160). Matthew Spangler agrees, calling the dramaturg “the mind’s eye of the audience” (“Dramaturgy in Dialogue,” 2016). Turner and Behrndt (2016) go on to explain that part of the difficulty in defining the role of a dramaturg is that it exists between many different tasks:

The dramaturg is an advisor, facilitator and sounding-board, someone who contributes with different and diverse perspectives and further attempts to enhance and deepen the conceptual and practical approach in many different ways. Sometimes a co-creator, but more often an artistic advisor, the dramaturg offers feedback and reflection on the work. It is paradoxical that the dramaturg should be one of the most invisible, but at the same time most controversial figures in the theatre. (pp. 170-171)

Profeta (2015) argues that the role of dramaturgy is still evolving and, as such, a clear definition is not currently possible (p. 13), but if it can be defined at all, it “can only be as a quality of motion, which oscillates, claiming an indeterminate zone between theory and practice,

inside and outside, word and movement, question and answer” (p. xvii). With these various explanations laid out, I will now offer my own succinct working definition of dramaturgy, borrowing from the definitions of Chemers (trying to make the play make sense to an audience), Cattaneo (keeping the whole in mind), Profeta (the outside eye, inside eye, and advocate for the audience), Turner and Behrndt (identify any potential gaps between what the creatives have intended and what is likely to be received by audiences), and Spangler (the mind’s eye of the audience). Thus, **my definition of dramaturgy is the practice of keeping the creatives of a play focused on the intentions of the performance.** Turner and Behrndt are right: this definition is reductive, as the terms “keeping focused,” “intentions,” and even “performance” are open to wide interpretation. Nonetheless, for my purposes, I require a brief definition for my teenage participants to assist them in considering the big picture of a play, and I have found this one to be useful.

2.9.2 Production and New Play Dramaturgy

There is a lot to discuss regarding the traditional role of a dramaturg, beginning with its German origins literally referring to architecting action, evolving into a role that still largely oscillates between holding intellectual authority in the German tradition and literary management in the British tradition (Stegemann, 2015, p. 45). However, for brevity, I will only discuss the two most well-known categories of dramaturgy in the United States today: the Production Dramaturg and the New Play Dramaturg. I will discuss these roles as they have been widely understood throughout recent decades in American culture, largely through the lens of dramatic theatre, before moving on to the role of dramaturgy in a devised theatre rehearsal room.

A Production Dramaturg works with a creative team to help bring an existing show to life in a staged production. Chemers (2010) offers that a production dramaturg:

... is a member of the artistic team of a production who is a specialist in the transformation of a dramatic script into a meaningful living performance. This is somewhat different from the role of a director, who provides the leadership and vision necessary to the function of the company, although directors and dramaturgs look at plays and theater practice similarly. (p. 5)

Turner and Behrndt (2016) assert that this dramaturg attempts to place the work within a larger artistic and historical context and explains why the show is important in the place and time of its performance (p. 154). This dramaturg typically engages in thorough research to provide insight into the background behind the authorship of the play and to keep the creatives focused on the perceived intentions of the playwright(s) within the context of the present production.

A New Play Dramaturg, on the other hand, typically works with just one creative, the playwright;¹⁶ and the script, rather than being set, is a work in progress. Chemers (2010) proposes that a New Play Dramaturg typically engages in three key responsibilities: 1) Analysis, where the dramaturg attempts to fully understand what the playwright is trying to accomplish; 2) Diagnosis, where the dramaturg determines whether the action of the play succeeds in conveying the playwright's ideas; and 3) Evaluation, where the dramaturg assesses from the perspective of both a producer and audiences whether this play is worthy of performance right now (p. 128). Through these responsibilities, the New Play Dramaturg strives to provide a playwright, and possibly an invested production entity, crucial insight and context to allow the script to succeed in its author's intentions.

¹⁶ New Play Dramaturgs often work with multiple playwrights or collectives; again, for the moment I am focusing on how the United States has typically understood these roles through the lens of dramatic theatre before moving on to discussing this role in a devised theatre context.

The collaborative role of the New Play Dramaturg is a tricky one. In a famous 1998 lawsuit, dramaturg Lynn Thomson sued the Jonathan Larson estate for a co-author credit on the wildly successful musical *Rent*, claiming that, as dramaturg, she had, in fact, written a substantial amount of the script (“Both Sides,” 1997). Chemers (2010) emphasizes that the dramaturg’s job is to assist the playwright, not to do the playwright’s job for them, and that delineation can be difficult to gauge (p. 132). Perhaps some of the confusion around the term dramaturgy, particularly its distinction from playwriting, originates with a Eurocentric idea that plays are authored by one person instead of a community. The concept of a play created solely by a single author originates in Ancient Greece, and, despite clear evidence to the contrary, the idea of writing being credited to a single author, or a single small group of authors, largely pervades American culture today.¹⁷ By contrast, Kanaka Maoli playwright Tammy Haili’ōpua Baker (2019), in discussing her writing process, explains that the Hawaiian playwright is widely perceived as just one part of larger communal authorship.

Through the practice of *hilina’i* [belief, trust] the playwright is guided through the entire process of play making knowing that the development will unfold in that manner in which it is meant to be. In the beginning of *Ka Hālau Hanakeaka*’s development process, stories tend to select themselves, appearing before the artistic staff ... through visions and dreams. (p. 45)

It is perhaps this traditional bias toward a single playwright, and by extension, a single dramaturg for that playwright, or for that playwright’s script, that makes the role of a dramaturg in a collective storytelling methodology, like devising, so elusive.

¹⁷ Playwriting is, of course, always the product of a community, starting with research and culminating with the collaborative workshopping process. Morality plays, Commedia dell’Arte, Epic Theatre and many American and European theatre collectives of the 1960s and 1970s are all examples of Western theatre that overtly embraced collective playwriting. My point is that despite all of this, the idea of a single author of a play continues in much of Europe and the United States today.

2.9.3 Dramaturgy in Devised Theatre

If a dramaturg is tasked with keeping the creatives of a play focused on the intentions of the performance, how do they employ their craft in an active devised rehearsal room, where the performance is being created collaboratively, often with vague intentions? Turner and Behrndt (2016) note that because the performance text is written not before but as a consequence of the process, “the dramaturgy of the play text is, therefore, something rather different from the dramaturgy of the play in performance, which is always situated in space and time” (p. 7). Chemers (2010) explains that in devised theatre, instead of the rehearsal being directed by the text, the “text” emerges from the rehearsal, that dramaturgy itself is the frame, and the performance script is a consequence of it (p. 134). Profeta (2015) discusses the dramaturgy of a form that is more oriented around movement than text and is tied to the understanding of multidisciplinary perception, which she believes arises inevitably “when a singular dramatic text released its stranglehold on meaning” (pp. 10-11). Jessica Kaplow Applebaum (2014) emphasizes that a critical difference between a production dramaturg of drama and a dramaturg in devised theatre is that in the devising process the dramaturg not only has the potential to influence the artistic direction of a play but can profoundly shape its content (p. 198).

I have argued that the devising process lends itself to creating theatre outside of the tradition of Western drama because of its collaborative nature. Haring-Smith explains that much of dramaturgy with postdramatic forms involves identifying patterns:

They must point to the gaps in the text not as holes to be filled in, but as sites of meaning that escape simple representation through language or image. They become less the source of answers and more the source of questions ... Just as the director must learn to embrace multiplicity in non-realism, so, too, the dramaturg must embrace confusion. (Haring-Smith, 2003, pp. 50-52)

Lehmann and Patrick Primavesi (2014) echo this sentiment in arguing that contemporary theatre requires a dramaturgy that is more ready to pose questions than to give answers and is “constantly reflecting its relation to political contexts without patronizing the audience or insisting on a particular interpretation” (p. 171). Melanie J. Slabaugh (2017) points out that this pattern tracking is actually part of any dramaturgical process; it simply takes on new relevance outside of drama. “Through these patterns, the structure of the newly-devised piece will emerge, if the dramaturg is willing and able to recognize it when it does” (pp. 36-37).

Chemers (2010) identifies five key responsibilities for a dramaturg of a devised play, which ultimately aren’t very different from those of the dramaturg of dramatic theatre: 1) Look for patterns, 2) ask questions, 3) watch in place of the future audience (all three of which are points discussed previously), 4) record the journey and 5) facilitate the process of exploration (pp. 135-136). To Chemers’ fourth responsibility, recording the journey, the importance of the role of the video camera in the devised rehearsal room to capture “happy accidents” is well documented (Graham & Hoggett, 2009, p. 35; Oddey, 1994, pp. 21-22; Heddon & Milling, 2015, p. 202); I will discuss this in more detail in section 3.6.4. Chemers (2010) argues that supervising and tracking these recordings are the dramaturg’s most crucial tasks, noting that the dramaturg’s records invaluablely provide a framework for the group to remember previous explorations and not waste time revisiting areas they have already explored (p. 135).

Hitherto I have discussed the role of a *dedicated* dramaturg in the devised rehearsal process, that is, an individual whose sole job is to dramaturgically track and shape the performance text as it emerges while the other devisers focus on their respective (and collaborative) responsibilities. However, in many rehearsal rooms, including our devised theatre classroom, the responsibility of dramaturgy is shared by multiple practitioners, and this can mean

sharing a wide range of responsibilities, depending on the needs of the production. Profeta (2015) notes that this is the case for the professional devising troupe Elevator Repair Service,¹⁸ where company members bring in research, ask questions, and propose structural principles (p. 12). In analyzing the work of Anne Bogart's SITI Company,¹⁹ Teresa Stankiewicz (2014) observes that there are instances of the stage manager, sound designer, director, playwright, actors, and even the video camera, each acting as dramaturg. She believes that it is unimportant who plays the role of dramaturg as long as the dramaturgy is accomplished (pp. 193-195). I believe that when working with young people, it is not important for them to necessarily know what a dramaturg does, simply that the facilitators are purposeful in guiding them toward engaging in dramaturgy. This also speaks to Chemers' fifth responsibility of the dramaturg in devised theatre: to facilitate the process of exploration.

Despite the difficulty in defining dramaturgy, practitioners and academics seem to agree that in whatever form it takes, dramaturgy is necessary to the devising process. Chemers (2010) offers that "it is utterly inconceivable to devise a piece of theater without some explicit dedication to some kind of dramaturgical approach; without it, the company would go off the deep end and never return (and this does happen)" (p. 134). Stankiewicz (2014) notes that devised theatre can take years to create, which raises the stakes for the success of a particular show. This is where dramaturgy can assist, she notes, explaining that dramaturgical documentation and analysis of the devising process may help avoid failure on the part of the artists (p. 195). Turner and Behrndt (2016) argue that dramaturgy has always been integral to

¹⁸ Elevator Repair Service was founded in 1991 in New York City. They are known for working with a wide variety of forms, including improvisation, found texts and full works of literature. Key productions include *Language Instruction* (1994), *Total Fictional Lie* (1998), and *Gatz* (2006).

¹⁹ The Saratoga International Theater Institute (SITI) was founded in 1992 by American director Anne Bogart and Japanese director Tadashi Suzuki and is known for incorporating Bogart's Viewpoints methodology (see Chapter 4 for more information) and Suzuki's method of actor training. Key productions include *Dionysus* (1992), *Going, Going, Gone* (1995) and *Hotel Cassiopeia* (2006).

most devising processes, whether or not the artists are aware of it, observing that devising companies have always found ways of discussing the content, structure, and direction of their work. They even go as far as to define devised theatre itself in terms of dramaturgy by offering, “devising implies that the dramaturgy of the work is not defined before the work commences” (pp. 173-174).

It is important to note, however, that this discussion of dramaturgy in a devised rehearsal room has focused on product-oriented theatre. Our methodology, however, is process-oriented, and process-oriented theatre dramaturgy is seldom given substantial consideration. The most relevant example of this is Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed, which is arguably the single most influential devised theatre methodology within educational environments. It challenges practitioners of any background to create theatre that engages with the current events of their community. While Boal’s forms of Image Theatre, Invisible Theatre, and Forum Theatre all involve games that draw upon participants’ lives (Boal, 2002), these expressions are always tied back into addressing larger social issues. For this reason, Boal’s methodology, largely inspired by Marxism, has enjoyed far more celebration than the individuals who practice it. His exercises were crafted with the expression of the performers in mind, and the potential for the conversations around that expression to impact their communities; he was not concerned with creating art that could withstand critical scrutiny. The aim of his Forum Theatre, for example, is “to stimulate debate (in the form of action, not just words), to show alternatives, to enable people to become the protagonists of their own lives” (Boal, 1985, p. xxiv). In fact, the lack of academic scholarship critically assessing devised theatre within education from an artistic product standpoint, to me, betrays an assumption on the part of scholars, and the practitioners themselves, that young people lack the ability to craft stories that can withstand critical scrutiny.

This speaks to a larger societal perception largely born out of aestheticism,²⁰ an art movement in the late nineteenth century that prioritized the aesthetic value of art over its socio-political functions; that is, art can simply be art without having any larger effect on those who consume it (art for art's sake). From this perspective, work that fulfills a primarily educational function cannot also be art. For these reasons, devised theatre education is usually not concerned with critical dramaturgy; rather, artists and teachers such as those who practice Boal's methodology subscribe to the belief that any resulting material is successful. I argue that, per Claxton and Gibbons, if we want young people to continue learning and creating after a class ends, devised theatre in a classroom should work towards the goal of creating a play that can be received well by its community, and that requires dramaturgy.

Dramaturgy has an important role in purely process-oriented theatre, particularly within an educational environment. Profeta (2015) discusses the necessity of research in dramaturgy generally, and notes that dispersing research responsibilities is a great way to begin collaborative dramaturgy (p. 70). Flemish dramaturg Marianne Van Kerkhoven (1994), for example, defines dramaturgy for post-drama as employing a process-oriented method of working where "the meaning, the intentions, the form and the substance of the play arise during the working process" instead of from a more centralized source (p. 18; as cited in Profeta, 2015, p. 92). Per Turner and Behrndt, dramaturgy has always been integral to most devising processes, so any process-oriented devised methodology would do well to make its practitioners aware of this fact to help them shape and improve their artistry.

²⁰ Though now largely tied to the aestheticism movement, the concept of "art for art's sake" has deep roots, going at least as far back to Plato and Aristotle, who argued the opposite perspective, that art should be judged solely on its effect on those who consume it.

2.10 Conclusion

A growing amount of research is examining the role of student agency within classroom environments and, to a lesser extent, the profound impact of theatre education in cultivating student agency. However, to date, Lehtonen's is one of the only studies aimed at researching the role of agency in devised theatre education. It is my hope that my research will support her findings: that the devised theatre process offers unique opportunities for collaborative project-based learning, that it allows students to have agency over their creative process, and that different instances of agency, including resistance, can be beneficial within a learning environment.

Further, I hope that by using multiple data gathering techniques I can go further than Lehtonen to assess whether a devising methodology that emphasizes student agency over their creative processes by employing multiple tools, including dramaturgy, can positively affect students' *overall* sense of agency. I also hope the fact that one of my case studies was conducted online and the other one in person will offer a unique context for assessing the role of student agency in an evolving twenty-first century classroom. Finally, given the unique demographics of O'ahu, it is my hope that my research will indicate that devised theatre education can be effective for Asian and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students (to my knowledge, there is no research to date that has investigated these latter points). In the next chapter, I will outline the particulars of how I intend to carry out my research.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Having established a need for my research project, I will now discuss its methodology. This project followed an instrumental, exploratory, multiple-case study approach. Albert J. Mills, Gabrielle Durepos, and Elden Wiebe (2009) define an instrumental case study as “the study of a case (e.g., person, specific group, occupation, department, organization) to provide insight into a particular issue, redraw generalizations, or build theory” (p. 473). This case study was exploratory, which means it investigates distinct phenomena characterized by a lack of detailed preliminary research, formulated hypotheses that can be tested, and a specific research environment that limits the choice of methodology. Mills et al. explain that an exploratory case study investigates a relatively new field in which the research questions have either not been clearly identified and formulated, or the data required for theoretical formulations have not yet been obtained (p. 372). Exploratory studies are often applied as a preliminary step toward subsequent explanatory research studies. Robert Yin (2009) discusses the value of using a case study approach when the boundaries between what is observed and the context for those observations may not be clearly evident (p. 2). He notes that “the case study's unique strength is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence – documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations” (p. 12). This is a multiple case study conducted during the spring and autumn of 2021. It is also an ethnographic research project. Per Margaret D. LeCompte and Jean J. Schensul (1999), the characteristics that mark a study as ethnographic include that it is carried out in a natural setting, that it depends on personal interaction with the participants, that it uses

multiple data sources (including both quantitative and qualitative data), and that it interprets results through an appropriate cultural lens (p. 9).

3.2 Research Objectives

The objective of this research was to evaluate whether a devised theatre educational methodology aimed at allowing students as much agency as possible over their creative processes would positively affect their outlooks on learning and foster an increased overall sense of agency. For this research project, I employed a two-case study methodology, one online and one in-person, to examine how two groups of O‘ahu public high school students displayed agency (instances of individual and relational agency as well as overall senses of agency) within a devised theatre classroom.

3.3 Role of the Researcher

Within the classroom, Kat and I took on a number of different roles at the same time, including those of researcher, rehearsal co-facilitator, theatre educator, and artistic consultant. In a devised rehearsal room, all participants, including facilitators, must take on a number of different roles simultaneously, and the role of researcher was simply another role that layered on top of others. This role of researcher included keeping an eye out for instances of individual agency and considering group dynamics regarding how the students exhibited relational agency. For the most part, this role was not at the forefront of our minds in the rehearsal room as our focus was chiefly on providing the students with the tools they needed to work on their creative output. Rather, we trusted that our field notes and video recordings would allow for meaningful analysis later in the process.

3.4 Recruitment of Participants

To serve as my first case study, in February of 2020, with the encouragement of Dr. Tammy Haili'ōpua Baker, my mentor and the head of the Hawaiian Theatre Program at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, I recruited six local Kānaka Maoli teenagers to facilitate an original piece of devised theatre to be performed that August at the National Asian American Theater Festival and Conference in Honolulu. That project was canceled due to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. One year later, in the spring of 2021, thanks to the help of Rhonda Black, Professor of Special Education at the University of Hawai'i, and Daryl Agena, the Assistant Principal of Waipahu High School, we were connected to Thelma Madriaga's theatre class, who were in their third semester of remote learning. Thelma, as we would learn, is an amazing teacher. However, after a year of online instruction, she was, understandably, feeling a little burnt out, and because she had had a positive experience several years prior working with Honolulu Theater for Youth to create devised theatre, she was excited to have us join her class. This was important: we did not know this community, and they did not know us; we had never been to this high school, and there were the aforementioned cultural barriers to consider; we only wanted to go where we were welcomed.

As much as I would like to be vague about the location of the research project to further protect the identities of the students, in Hawai'i it is impossible to talk about a research project like this one without discussing the 'āina (land) on which it is being conducted. The high school is located in the O'ahu neighborhood of Waipahu. Waipahu, which in 'Ōlelo Hawai'i means "bursting, or gushing, water," was once full of lush lo'i kalo (wetland taro fields) and served as the island's ancient capital and the favored residence of O'ahu's Ali'i (chiefs) (Nedbalek, 1984, p. 2). Under American influence and then occupation, the town was transformed into a series of

sugar plantations largely owned by the O‘ahu Sugar Company. American military presence has also played a big factor in Waipahu’s history: during World War II, the entire neighborhood resembled one giant military base, with 120-millimeter barreled anti-aircraft guns dominating Waipahu High School grounds (p. 33). When the Waipahu Sugar Mill closed in 1995, the neighborhood population’s average income fell dramatically. An economic revitalization campaign by the city of Honolulu largely oriented around the construction of two planned rail stations has been called a reflection of the neighborhood’s intersection of robust history and potential future prosperity, but those construction projects are progressing extremely slowly (Honore, 2022). According to the 2020 U.S. census, Waipahu’s poverty rate is currently 10.6%, compared to Honolulu County’s average of 7.9% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Concern for the health of Waipahu residents has spurred initiatives such as The Waipahu Health Action Research Training (HART) project (Thompson, 2017). This is to say, Waipahu is a diverse community with a proud and important history, and is currently underserved. The demographics of the school itself as of 2019, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, is that of a 2,777-student population, 67% identify as Asian, 22.5% as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 3% as Hispanic, 1% as White and 5% as mixed race. 50% are eligible for a free or reduced-price lunch (“Search for Public Schools,” n.d.). Given that my research project aimed to empower students that might not empathize with a form of storytelling born out of a privileged White Eurocentric patriarchal tradition, this particular theatre class seemed to be an appropriate group of participants for these two case studies.

3.5 Logistics of Time and Place

This research project consisted of two case studies: one conducted in spring and the other one in autumn of 2021. Both case studies were held during the students' usual theatre class time, which occurred three times per week. Two of those weekly sessions were approximately eighty minutes long, and it was during these sessions that we held our rehearsals. Due to COVID restrictions, Study 1 rehearsals were held remotely over the Google Meet platform. For Study 2, restrictions in O'ahu had relaxed, and we met in person at their high school. We followed all health protocols stipulated by the high schools, including wearing masks, providing proof of our vaccinations, and social distancing as much as possible. The Study 1 theatre class roster consisted of twenty-seven students, and the Study 2 class had thirty-two. Given the time required at the start and end of rehearsals to settle in and cope with technical issues in Study 1 and COVID restrictions in Study 2, we, in effect, had one hour of productive rehearsal time per rehearsal. For Study 1, the school allotted us a total of fifteen rehearsals with the students; for Study 2, we had twenty-one.

3.6 Methods of Data Collection

Per Rainio's (2010) note that any form of analysis runs the risk of overlooking the dynamics of a process (pp. 93-94), my data collection was divided into four different parts aimed at looking at the students' engagement both broadly and minutely. Broadly, the students filled out survey forms at the beginning and end of the two case studies, and then at the end of both studies, I conducted open-ended group interviews. Minutely, I took field notes during and after the rehearsals and video-recorded the processes. I also performed qualitative and quantitative

analyses of those recordings utilizing descriptive coding techniques outlined by the scholarship of Professor Emeritus Johnny Saldaña at Arizona State University.

3.6.1 Pre- and Post-Study Survey Forms

The surveys administered at the beginning and end of the studies were aimed at assessing the study's impact on the participants' general outlooks on creativity, theatre, community, sense of agency, and learning in general. The questions in relation to their sense of agency were taken from the Sense of Agency Scale developed by Tapal et al. (2017); questions related to learning were taken from the Lifelong Learning Scale developed by Kirby et al. (2010); questions regarding community engagement were suggested by Baker to be specific to the Kānaka Maoli community (see Appendix F for the survey statements).

3.6.2 End-of-Process Open-Ended Group Interviews

I had originally intended to perform semi-structured group interviews at the beginning and end of each study, but after observing the students in their class and speaking with their teacher, I decided that due to my being an unknown entity at the start of Study 1, and given the culture of their learning environment, I would meet resistance with a pre-study interview. For this reason, I only conducted post-study interviews. Further, after discussing Kānaka Maoli cultural considerations with Baker, I decided to adopt an open-ended format to allow for a fluid discussion of the process (see Appendix G for loose interview questions). Schensul et al. (1999) outline that in-depth, open-ended interviewing is the most technically challenging and, at the same time, the most innovative and exciting form of ethnographic interviewing (p. 121). They note that such interviews should be relatively unstructured to allow for an open exchange

between the researcher and participants in the study, “that it does not presuppose any specific responses or conclusions, and is open to moving in unforeseen directions and ideas for further exploration” (pp. 145-146).

3.6.3 Field Notes

According to Mills et al. (2009), field notes comprise the data gathered in fieldwork. “Taking down field notes is the act of recording one’s research data as well as the beginning of communicating one’s research findings with others” (pp. 397-398). Due to my active role in the rehearsal process, it was impossible for me to take notes in real time, but after each of the rehearsals, Kat and I would discuss our observations, sometimes after reviewing video recordings of the rehearsals, and I recorded these conversations using a voice recorder app on my phone. Depending on scheduling, we were also sometimes joined in our discussions by Thelma and our Design Consultant Rachel Sorensen. These observations focused on our aims for the day’s session, how we believed our teachings were received, instances of individual and relational agency conveyed by the students, any difficulties we observed in their process, and what we noticed about how they addressed those challenges. Per Saldaña (2021), we asked ourselves questions pertaining to what surprised us, what intrigued us, and what disturbed us (pp. 33). Kat and I then recorded additional field notes later in the process, after having had enough time to process and contextualize the events of a particular rehearsal, to provide what ethnomusicologist Gregory F. Barz (2008) calls a second, reflective voice (which he describes as conveying a memory associated with a particular field experience) (p. 207).

3.6.4 Video Recordings

The devised rehearsal room is a dynamic place of physical expression and spontaneity, and it is extremely common for devised theatre groups to video-record rehearsals to capture unexpected moments. As professional devising ensemble Frantic Assembly note, “the video camera is not just for capturing and documenting what you know is there. It is also for capturing all the possibilities that emerge by accident. It is there to show you what you don't yet know (Graham & Hoggett, 2009, p. 35). In her dissertation on creating devised theatre with youth participants, Abigail Shabtay (2020) explains how the use of video recordings opened up the potential for more detailed analysis because she was able to re-watch the process repeatedly and pay attention to details that she otherwise might have missed (p. 62). Therefore, I video-recorded all of our rehearsals for artistic analysis as well as research analysis, using Google Meet’s record function for Study 1, and my and Kat’s Android phones for Study 2. In terms of case study analysis, this was an ideal data collection method because, as mentioned previously, as a co-facilitator, I was usually too busy during rehearsals to actively take notes. The students were aware that all rehearsals would be filmed; this was outlined during our first meeting and was clearly explained in the consent and assent forms (see Appendix C).

One common critique of the use of video recordings in data gathering is the “camera effect,” where the presence of a video camera can affect the engagement of research subjects, causing them to behave in ways that they might not otherwise. Associate Professor of Education at the University of Oslo, Marte Blikstad-Balas (2017), contends that this issue has been somewhat exaggerated since “most, if not all, research methods will have some effect on the situations they are attempting to portray” (p. 513). I took several measures to limit the influence of the camera on the participants’ behavior. For Study 1, the students that logged in early would

hear an announcement from Google Meet that they were being recorded; other than that, there was no observable technological difference between our sessions and their other classes. For Study 2, our phones were on small tripods in the far corners of the room and typically seemed forgotten when the students were preoccupied with rehearsal activities. Further, we often screened highlights from rehearsals back to them at later rehearsals, so they had a sense of what the cameras were doing; they seemed to appreciate reliving some of their favorite moments through video documentation. This is not to say that the cameras did not play a role: approximately once or twice during every Study 2 rehearsal a student would wave at the camera or, in several instances, pick up a phone and use it to take selfies. However, in a culture involving constant photography and video recording for social media, the presence of the cameras did not seem to make the students particularly self-conscious.

3.7 Data Analysis

3.7.1 Qualitative Analysis

In order to thoughtfully analyze the data collected from the interviews and video recordings in this research project, I used an inductive coding process using MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis software program that allows for the organization of multiple types of data (e.g., text, audio, video, and still images) and includes features that assist in the analysis of interview data, which makes it well suited for my particular data sets. Saldaña (2021) defines a code as “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 5). He refers to inductive coding as a “learn as you go” approach, where useful codes are created based on the research data, as opposed to predetermined coding, and explains that most qualitative statistical analysis

follows an inductive coding approach. I utilized Descriptive Coding, which, according to Saldaña, summarizes in a word or short phrase the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data. He emphasizes that these codes should be identifications rather than abbreviations (p. 134). Saldaña warns that Descriptive Coding is not ideally suited for individual case studies or small-group interview transcripts because the noun-based codes of this method may not offer much insight into participants' minds, and he instead recommends other coding methods such as In Vivo, Values, or Emotion coding. However, due to the reluctance of the students to speak openly and robustly during the group interviews at the end of both studies, these transcripts were limited in their scope, and as I wanted to compare this data against the data from other gathering methods, I felt that Descriptive Coding was ideal for all of my qualitative data analysis. In analyzing the video recordings, I referred to Professor of Communication at Santa Clara University Laura L. Ellingson's list of non-verbal communication elements: kinesics, proxemics, vocalics, chronemics, and territoriality (Ellingson, 2017).

I then employed second-cycle coding, which involved analyzing my first-cycle coding to draw patterns and themes and applying the new coding labels that emerged. Lydia DeSantis and Doris Noel Ugarriza (2000), professors at the University of Miami, explain that in qualitative analysis a theme "brings meaning and identity to a recurrent [patterned] experience and its variant manifestations. As such, a theme captures and unifies the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole" (p. 362). Saldaña (2021) defines a pattern as "repetitive, regular, or consistent occurrences of action/data that appear more than twice" (p. 8). Referencing the research of J. Amos Hatch (2002), Saldaña goes on to say that patterns are not just stable regularities but can also be varying forms that can be characterized as similarities, differences, frequencies, sequences, and correspondence (Saldaña, 2021, p. 10).

Additionally, several of my coding labels were predetermined. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, in Lehtonen's case study, she modified Rainio's categories of instances of agency into three types: 1) constructive, 2) resisting, and 3) passive; and I used these same labels in categorizing the students' individual and relational instances of agency, a process that I will describe in more detail in section 6.2.2.

3.7.2 Quantitative Analysis

Due to the nature of my pre- and post-study surveys, I also conducted quantitative analyses on my data. Schensul et al. (1999) explain that "the first step in quantitative survey data analysis requires the production of frequencies for each of the variables in the study" (p. 195). In this instance, the frequencies refer to the numeric changes in response between the pre- and post-study surveys. To determine the significance of the frequencies observed, I applied the Wilcoxon signed-rank test using SPSS because the paired sample t-test was not applicable as the condition of the normal distribution, as indicated by the Shapiro-Wilk test. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test was also appropriate because my data is ordinal. Further, I modeled my analytical coding after Lehtonen's study and applied graphic analyses to that coding to track further patterns. Following the model of Schensul et al., I felt that at this point my initial research questions could be examined in relation to the data.

3.8 Limitations and Bias

In terms of the limitations of this research project, Yin (2009) points out that a common concern about case study research is the inability to generalize from one or two case studies' findings (p. 20). He explains that a typical problem is that a single case study may be conducted too

abstractly, lacking sufficiently clear measures or data (p. 55). Regarding the post-study interviews, Schensul et al. caution that ethnographic interviews should be conducted face-to-face with the participants, noting that respondents often make additional comments in person. These additional comments, they explain, “constitute ethnographic data that add to understanding the respondent’s life and may also add to overall data in the study” (Schensul et al., 1999, p. 190). However, face-to-face interviews were not possible during Study 1 due to the virtual study environment.

In terms of analysis, Saldaña (2021) warns that coding is an imprecise process that is primarily based on interpretation and that patterns in data are “rarely 100% complete and non-contradicted” (p. 10). Further, devised theatre typically requires a large amount of time to develop due to the fact that material in the rehearsal room is always being written and performed simultaneously, and all creative decisions must be made collaboratively. For example, Chicago-based devised theatre troupe Goat Island prided themselves on taking at least two years to create each of their pieces (Bottoms & Goulish, 2007, p. 182). As previously mentioned, we only had fifteen rehearsals with the students during Study 1 and twenty-one during Study 2, which is a very short period of time to create a full-length devised theatre piece. Additionally, with twenty-seven and thirty-two students to work with, respectively, Kat and I were unable to give as much individual attention to the students as we would have liked. By comparison, Lehtonen’s study followed the journeys of fourteen students over forty-eight rehearsals. For these reasons, the creative processes that each case study tracked were not as thorough and robust as we would have liked them to be.

In terms of data gathering, the sample size for this study is relatively small and biased. My ability to connect with Waipahu High School was a product of my relationships within the

University of Hawai‘i, and therefore this school’s selection was colored by my own privilege and positionality. Further, the presence of the students in Waipahu High School’s theatre class is the result of the social, political, and historical forces that put them there; and for our students, those backgrounds are complex, diverse, and often challenging. However, not every high school has a theatre class, so the students also experienced a certain privilege in being able to partake in our methodology in the first place. This is all to say it is entirely possible that my observations and conclusions from these studies may be only true for these specific participants. That said, this is an exploratory study, and the small sample size also allowed me to cover specific topics from the group interviews in detail. However, the surveys were voluntary, meaning that I would only receive data from students who chose to participate; thus, sampling bias plays a factor in my assessment of the students’ outlooks on their sense of agency and learning. In addition, based on recommendations from the classroom teacher, we only provided the students with ten out of a possible fifty questions in their survey, which limits the scope of their responses. Nonetheless, by cross-referencing our analyses of the different forms of data gathered against interviews with the classroom theatre teacher, I believe that I will present as complete a picture as possible of the rehearsal processes, which will provide insight into my theory that a devised theatre educational methodology aimed at allowing students as much agency as possible over their creative processes might improve their outlooks on learning and foster an increased positive sense of agency. Again, assessing whether the studies will have a direct effect on the students’ likelihood to continue to engage in the arts is, unfortunately, impossible to answer with certainty within the scope of this research, so instead, I will discuss how my data overlaps with patterns consistent with characteristics and habits of lifelong learning.

Further, as I mentioned in Chapter 2, individuals do not all engage with agency in the same way, and as it is likely that several or more of the students that I will be working with come from a population that has endured oppression and colonization, agency may present as a complicated phenomenon. Some of these students may not believe that being agentic in our rehearsal rooms is a viable option. This speaks to Rainio's (2010) second necessary resource for an individual to enact agency, that they believe that agency is possible (pp. 9-10). It could be that some of the students will face obstacles toward being agentic that I cannot observe; therefore, assessing all of their outlooks on, and instances of, agency by the same standards could produce misleading data.

Schensul et al. (1999) note that the most serious source of bias comes from interviewers themselves. (p. 144). Saldaña (2001) explains that "The filters that cover a researcher's lens might consist of a set of personal values, attitudes, and beliefs about the world, formed by his or her unique personal biography, learned experiences, and individual thinking patterns" (p. 11). In terms of my personal biases as a researcher, they are complex. For example, I believe that even though devised theatre practitioners in the United States are overwhelmingly White, their methodologies can be effective in BIPOC communities. However, this belief is informed by the facts that I personally love devised theatre and, of course, that I am White. During my time at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, I have worked with organizations and activists that not only seek to address bias and discrimination in the classroom but also work with teachers to decolonize curriculum; issues of race and diversity have been a focus of my work and pedagogy for some time. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, I speak like a privileged White New Yorker, and I commonly employ theatre terminology that may prevent my research participants (without them being aware of it) from feeling validated as I attempt to teach and facilitate devised theatre.

Further, my concepts of agency and egalitarianism are informed by a European and American tradition that might not fully resonate with an O‘ahu population.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

In designing my research project with youth participants, I considered several key ethical concerns. First and foremost, it was important to ensure that the benefits of the study outweighed the risks. Before conducting my case studies, I obtained approval from the University of Hawai‘i Institutional Review Board to perform research on underage human subjects (IRB, see Appendix A). This was a relatively simple process for Study 1 as it was held entirely online, but approval for Study 2 required additional training and considerations as it was held in-person while the COVID-19 pandemic was still widespread. Having received said approval, I began to consider what Craig Howes (2011), Professor of English at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, asserts, that IRB approval can lead some researchers to believe that anything is fine as long as they don’t violate the stated protocols (p. 100). Further, as Saldaña (2001) points out, maintaining a sense of scholarly integrity by complying with rigorous ethics is the only way for research analysis to provide any conclusive significance (p. 21).

At the beginning of each study, I took measures to ensure that the participants did not feel pressure to participate or provide certain responses, recognizing that in their current societal position as minors, pressure is present in any teacher-student educational dynamic. I was as transparent as possible about how the data would be collected and analyzed, and I had them read and sign assent forms that provided the same information as the consent forms given to their parents. Kat and I checked in with Thelma throughout the process to ensure that our

methodology was in line with their normal classwork expectations (it was as a result of one of these exchanges that I disregarded my plan to employ pre-study surveys).

Another major consideration was confidentiality. Because each case study involved the students performing in a public theatrical production, there were limits to confidentiality. Nonetheless, I took measures to protect the identities of the students as much as possible, using pseudonyms in the data, encrypting all rehearsal video and audio recordings, and then destroying those recordings within one year of each study's completion. Further considerations had to be made for the autumn study due to COVID-19 protocols; Kat and I modified our methodology significantly to maintain social distancing as much as possible, given the confined classroom spaces we had to work with.

There is one more major consideration in devised theatre education, which is the exit strategy. If practitioners provide participants tools and a platform to express their stories, particularly young people who do not enjoy much representation in the media, what happens when the project ends? Ongoing engagement with the arts is, after all, a major goal of the project. The facilitation of a temporary emotional bond resulting from the collaboration of individuals as young artists, and the subsequent disbanding of that bond, can be particularly dangerous in Indigenous communities, like that of the Kānaka Maoli, where expressions of identity can often stir legacies of cultural trauma. Devised theatre scholars Monica Prendergast and Juliana Saxton (2009) emphasize that one of the least-addressed areas of applied theatre is the exit strategy. In exiting from an applied theatre process, they note facilitators “are ethically bound to create – preferably in collaboration with participants – an action plan that aims to continue the process following their departure” (p. 196). In her article “‘See You Later, Facilitator:’ Transitioning Out of the Role of Lead Devisor,” Aubrey Helene Neumann (2019)

argues for greater transparency for the young participants as early as possible in the process. She cautions that “participants must be made aware of existing policies so that they may better understand the facilitator’s need to balance between care and justice” (p. 7). For these reasons, I gave deep consideration to the potential of creative longevity for the participants of this study. Because my research project took place in a high school, working with a longstanding theatre teacher, the negative effects of our departure would not be felt as acutely as if Kat and I were the sole facilitators. Further, one potential solution to the exit strategy issue is to encourage the teacher and students to create another devised play next year with some of the same participants, who could potentially then act as assistant facilitators. By allowing the students as much agency over the artistic process as possible, in a subsequent iteration these participants could have additional agency still, and potentially they could take over the process entirely without requiring my involvement at all. By creating an ongoing, lasting process of creating devised theatre within an educational environment and potentially in the community, the project need not end at all.

3.10 Conclusion

The objective of this research was to evaluate whether a devised theatre educational methodology aimed at allowing students as much agency as possible over their creative processes would improve their outlooks on learning and foster an increased overall sense of agency. To carry this out, I followed an instrumental, exploratory, multiple-case study approach which involved gathering and analyzing data in four distinct categories: pre- and post-study surveys, open-ended group interviews, field notes, and video-recordings of the rehearsal process. It was my hope that by gathering these different kinds of data, I would be able to analyze the studies both quantitatively and qualitatively, thus presenting as complete a picture as possible of

the rehearsal processes. With my research methodology established, in the next two chapters I will comprehensively explain how each study progressed against the backdrop of the extraordinary learning circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic before offering my findings from those studies in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 4

STUDY 1: *METANOIA*

Teacher: Are you there?

Student: Um, yeah, I'm here Miss, but my mom told me that I had to do something, so I'll be back.

Teacher: Okay. I don't get why parents take this as an opportunity to have kids do chores just because they're home.

(An excerpt from a scene depicting an online classroom, in *Metanoia*)

4.1 Introduction

After having explained the theoretical framework that underpins the role of student agency within education and why I believe a devised theatre educational methodology aimed at allowing students as much agency as possible over their creative processes might improve their outlooks on learning and foster an increased positive sense of agency, I will now try to comprehensively describe the application of this methodology in the first of two studies, to provide context to the qualitative and quantitative data that I will offer in Chapter 6, which will, in turn, inform my conclusions and recommendations in Chapter 7.

4.2. The Participant-Driven Dramaturgy Methodology

Before I discuss Study 1 in detail, I must briefly outline our methodology, which, broadly, consists of five key components that are commonly found in many devising methodologies: team building, skill building, content creation, narrowing focus, and the performance and exit. Team building consists of introducing the participants to the concept of collaborative theatre making, establishing group expectations and rules of conduct, playing collective games, brainstorming

ideas together, forming groups, and learning about the specific roles they will play within those groups. Our skill building component includes basic performance skills, a rudimentary introduction to improvisation, and Viewpoints training (Bogart & Landau, 2004; I will explain this methodology in more detail in section 4.4.1). Content creation involves a number of methods such as creative writing, creating questions to guide artistic output, engaging with local news headlines, conceptualizing a Viewpoints concept known as Question/Anchor/Structure (which I will explain in more detail in section 4.4.2), and listening to creative feedback. The narrowing focus component fixates on refining the existing work with the aim of creating a cohesive final show through group strategies, reviewing material, rehearsing for performance, and, unique to our methodology, participant-driven dramaturgy (which I will explain in more detail in section 4.4.3). Additionally, as both studies required creating digital theatre, this component also involves recording and editing the participants' work. The final component is the performance itself as well as everyone's exit from the process, which involves receiving audience feedback, contextualizing the experience through a group conversation, and discussing how participants can continue the process on their own. As with everything in devised theatre, these components are interdependent and defy a linear order; nonetheless, Figure 4.1 provides a visual representation in the form of a flowchart.

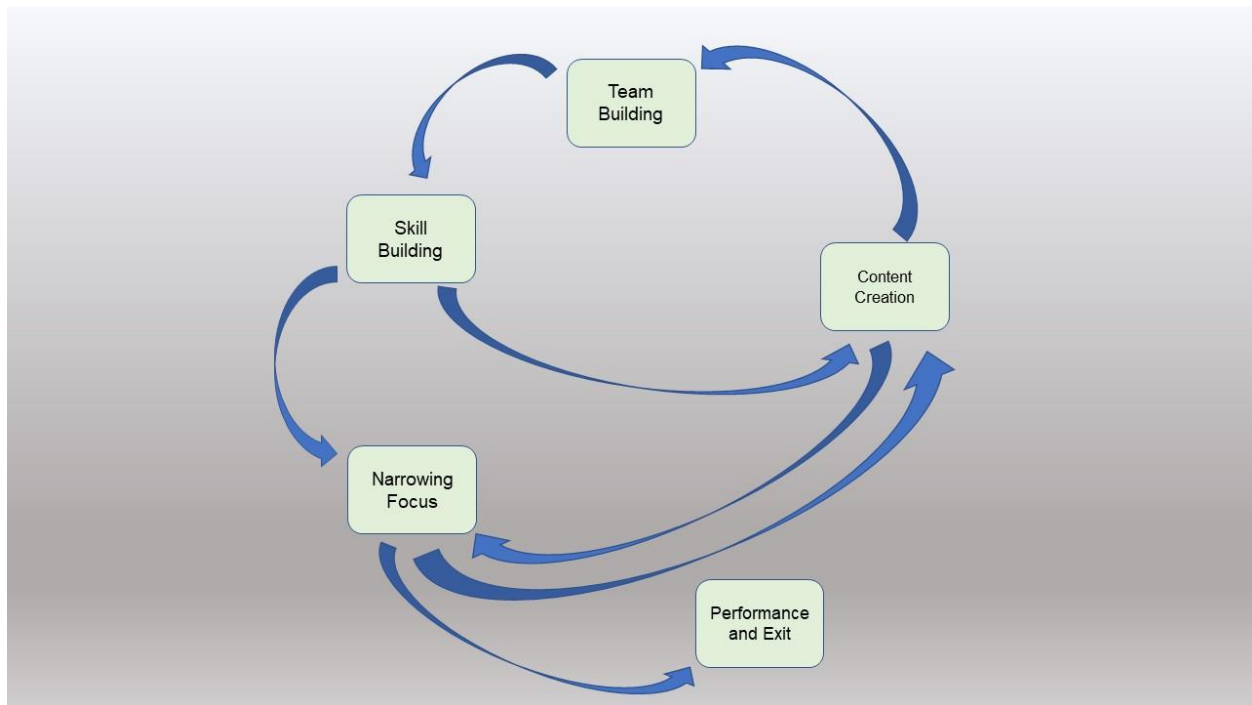


Figure 4.1: Participant-Driven Dramaturgy Methodology Flowchart

As the flowchart conveys, team building is necessary to build skills and create content, but these elements also foster and reinforce that teambuilding. Content creation and narrowing focus have a reciprocal relationship, but that then informs team building and skill building, which in turn affects how the participants narrow their focus on their material. I believe that the way dramaturgy is employed within this component is of particular significance in fostering student agency, which I will discuss in detail in Chapter 7. This then all finally leads to the performance itself. I will now discuss how this methodology was implemented in Study 1.

4.3 Before the Study

In 2010 Waipahu High School shifted its academic structure from a traditional one to an academy system that allows students to focus on different disciplines like Health and Sciences, Natural Resources, Industrial and Engineering Technology, and Arts and Communication. Project-based learning is a big part of the pedagogical framework of these academies, so it was

easy for us to come in and do our work. However, it should be noted that in 2018 the Academy of Arts and Communication dropped the fine arts as a viable study pathway in favor of what they saw as more employable disciplines, like Audio Engineering and Multimedia, so at present, theatre is not strongly emphasized in their curriculum. Devised theatre typically takes much longer to create than dramatic theatre because, among other reasons, the script has not yet been written, so we requested a rehearsal period of eleven weeks, meeting up three times a week for a total of fifty hours over thirty rehearsals. Instead, we were given roughly fifteen hours over as many rehearsals. Further, after mastering the technical parameters of Zoom after a year of online teaching and other digital projects, we were dismayed to learn that the school would only let us use Google Meet to rehearse, which, due to a number of technical issues, is not, in my opinion, an ideal digital medium to make theatre.

The demographics of Thelma's class (per Thelma's informal approximation) were 60% Asian, 35% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 5% White. We did not gather data about gender because a number of the students do not identify as belonging to the male/female binary, and Thelma felt that probing for more information would have been inappropriate. Thelma herself is of Filipino descent, as were a number of the students; having this common ground clearly helped their communication, as was evident when they occasionally made jokes together about Filipino culture. When we had conceived of this project as working with teenagers from all over O'ahu, it had been our intention to have a Kānaka Maoli guidance counselor with us to help talk through any challenging dynamics or content that might emerge in the rehearsal room which might be specific to a culture of which Kat and I are not a part. However, working within a school environment meant that this class had their own culture for dealing with such issues, including their own guidance counselors, so we had to trust that the teacher had a rapport with

the students that would provide an avenue for them to address any challenges presented in the process.

We first met with Thelma over Google Meet to discuss the project and the culture of her classroom. After a warm and encouraging exchange of ideas, she invited us to join the class during their last session the week before spring break to introduce ourselves to the students. They were a group of twenty-seven students of mixed grade levels, some with no theatre experience and some who had taken theatre classes with Thelma before. It was immediately clear to us that she had a close rapport with them, so despite the remote learning and time obstacles, we knew that we were in good hands. We discussed the process as a whole. I explained that in addition to creating an original piece of digital devised theatre to be performed for their community, this was also a research study aimed at examining the role of student agency in a devised theatre classroom and that if they and their parents chose, they would be subjects in that study. I explained that they would be answering surveys, that there would be a group interview at the end of the process, and that we would be recording the Google Meet rehearsals to monitor their instances of agency throughout the process, with the aim of making recommendations toward an ongoing devised theatre education model. We distributed information packets with our research presentation (see Appendix B) as well as parental consent forms and student assent forms, which we asked the students to have signed and returned after spring break (see Appendix C).²¹ I informed the students that either they or their parents could opt them out of the study at any time. I also provided my contact information and that of my academic advisors in case the students or their parents had further questions outside of class.

²¹ All of this information was in English. I spoke to Thelma about the fact that the students came from a wide variety of backgrounds and they or their families might require the packets and forms to be in a different language or languages, but she was unconcerned as she had not encountered issues with communicating with these families in English.

4.4 Rehearsals

4.4.1 Rehearsals 1-2: A Crash Course in Devising Over Google Meet

We started the process by playing theatre games tailored for a virtual environment that emphasized collaborating with one offer at a time, like “One Word at a Time Story”²² and “Categories.”²³ After the students took the intake surveys, we talked through our rehearsal room contract (see Appendix D), largely inspired by Joan Schirle’s article “Potholes in the Road to Devising,” which emphasizes supporting one another, keeping the material that emerges in the rehearsal room private, and treating everyone in the room with respect (Schirle, 2005). In consideration of the sensitivity around creative expression for our Indigenous students, we added a rule asking the students to be cautious with what they offer artistically: “Don’t ever feel obligated to share anything you don’t want to. Your work and your experiences are your own. Listen to your instincts and take care of yourself!”²⁴

We screened videos to provide examples of devised theatre from professional groups, such as Frantic Assembly and Tanztheater Wuppertal, as well as local examples from the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa student-formed devised group ǿ / Peligro!, and finally our own devised work. Unfortunately, due to technical difficulties, the videos did not play very well, so we provided the links so that the students could view them on their own. This was our first indication of the enormous technological challenges we would face in this remote learning environment: many of the students had internet connectivity issues, quite a lot of them rarely

²² In “One Word at a Time Story,” students go around saying one word at a time, continuing the sentence from the word offered by the previous students, until sentences, and finally an entire story, are slowly formed. It is a collaborative exercise requiring listening skills, and the disjointed final products are usually quite funny.

²³ In “Categories” a broad category is chosen (e.g., kinds of cereal) and participants go around naming things that fall into that category. It is a game that requires listening and offers an opportunity for participants to learn about each other’s interests.

²⁴ Although this rule was inspired by sensitivities in working with Indigenous students, we believe that this is a good rule for any devised theatre rehearsal room, and we have incorporated it into our methodology for all populations moving forward.

turned their cameras on throughout class, and many had distracting obligations; one student even attended rehearsal *while working at her part-time job*. Additionally, my computer had difficulty interfacing with Google Meet, and I had to run quite a few of the rehearsals from my phone. Also, because we were not employed by the school, we did not have access to their Google Classroom resources, which meant that providing detailed homework assignments and accessing their materials was complicated, and as a result, we had to go through the teacher as an intermediary. However, one advantage to the digital medium is that it was very easy to record the rehearsals for the purposes of capturing spontaneous moments of creativity as well as for my research purposes.

We began the creative aspect of the process by posing a question. Gibbons (2002) advises that questions posed to students to guide learning should be about an important issue worth knowing and should provoke student interest (p. 59). We wanted the question to be urgent enough to engage the students but broad enough to allow them to choose their own paths, so, after consulting Thelma, we asked, “What do adults all over the world need to know right now?” This question, of course, reflects my biases as a Western theatre practitioner as well as my personal tastes toward theatre that addresses real-life concerns over fantastical, imaginative stories. However, after reviewing their last theatre project, a series of confessional monologues called *Marauder Monologues*, it became clear that putting their personal stories on the stage was nothing new for them. We used a Jamboard, a function of Google Meet that serves as a digital whiteboard, which allowed the students to anonymously post anything that came to mind, as can be seen in Figure 4.2. A few posts that stood out to me include “Smiles don’t always mean you’re happy,” “Everyone evolves in their own way, sometimes alone time is what people need,”

and “We’re really trying our best, putting us down or expecting more from us that’s past our limit is mentally exhausting.”



Figure 4.2: A collaborative brainstorm answering the question, “What do adults all over the world need to know right now?”

We asked the students to share some of these thoughts visually and to suggest music that would encapsulate some of those feelings. Their visual offerings can be seen in Figure 4.3.

Kat developed a version of the Viewpoints applicable to an online classroom that emphasizes non-verbal communication, listening and building, and using camera angles and proximity to convey storytelling, as can be seen in Figure 4.4. At the start of our second rehearsal, we ran our students through basic Viewpoints exercises. They seemed enthusiastic and willing to try new things – the more experienced students to a greater degree than their less experienced peers. I believe the novelty of us having recently taken over the class helped motivate them.

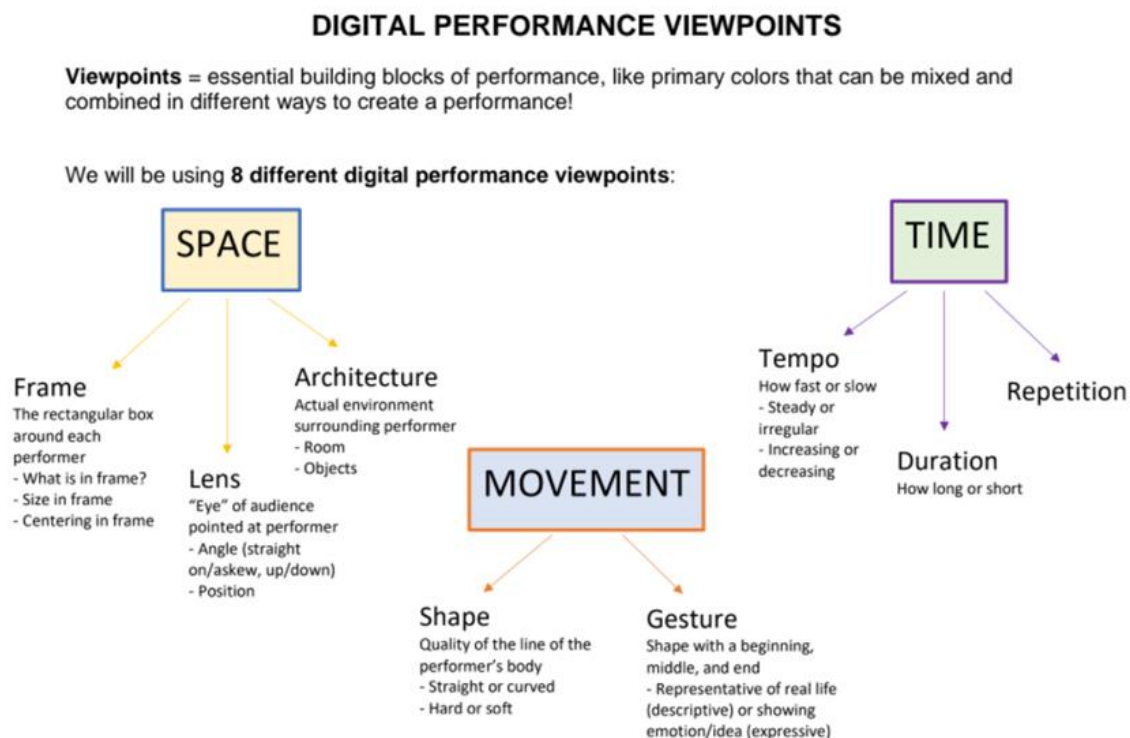


Figure 4.4: An adaptation of Anne Bogart and Tina Landau's *Viewpoints* methodology for a remote learning environment by Kat Rothman.

In this same rehearsal we introduced what Moisés Kaufman and Barbara Pitts McAdams of Tectonic Theatre Company call "moments," which are individual, self-contained theatrical units born out of the playful spontaneity of group collaboration that are then developed and sequenced together to eventually become a play (Kaufman & McAdams, 2018). We noticed that "connection" was a recurring theme on the students' Jamboard, so we prompted them with four varieties of connection to inspire short pieces that they were supposed to create in smaller

groups. This went poorly. There were technical difficulties preventing them from getting into breakout rooms, and once they did, they came back with nothing. Thelma informed us that nobody knew what was happening and they were all too embarrassed to ask for help. After we explained everything again, they were able to complete the exercise and made some very good choices incorporating some of the Viewpoints skills they had just learned. However, it was still chaotic: no one volunteered to perform, many students in the groups did not turn their cameras on, and one group was unable to perform at all. It was clear that we had overwhelmed them with too much information too quickly.

At this point we introduced the concept of providing feedback on each other's creative work. Wessendorf explains that critique holds a special place in devised theatre because it is a necessary and overt part of the creation process and should be carried out in a way that is as resistant to hierarchies as the devising process itself. He notes that the Chicago-based devised theatre troupe Goat Island relies on a process in which "artistic experimentation and the reflection about this implementation are configured in such a way that the critical evaluation of the generated material results from the artistic impulse as its direct extension, staying within the same form of expression," meaning that feedback in a devised rehearsal room must be considered as a constructive artistic contribution rather than a criticism (Wessendorf, 2018, p. 5). Liz Lerman, a choreographer who authored the Critical Response Process (Lerman, 2003), explained at a workshop I attended that this critique, in essence, is organizing a shared experience. She warns that critical responses can be full of judgment, and it is the job of the facilitator to manage that judgment for the room. Feedback is critical in any theatre process, but due to the collaborative nature of devising as well as the agency we allowed the students over their creative processes, emphasizing peer critique rather than just teacher assessment served an

especially important role in our methodology. Our feedback process was also important for research purposes because, within a digital theatre environment, critique is one of the clearest examples of constructive agency (per Lehtonen's [2015] research) since the students are volunteering to offer their thoughts on the topic at hand. Our feedback process involved the concepts of "cake" and "discovery," terminology created by Kat to emphasize little moments of deliciousness that were noticed (cake) and anything that was discovered about the content or methodology through that performance (discovery). Offering constructive feedback toward performance is an artform that must be cultivated, so jumping right into this with little preparation, with the additional barrier of interfacing over a chat function, proved to be extremely challenging, and our students' feedback had to be coaxed out of them. Nonetheless, even in their first in-class performances they offered substantive observations of each other's work. To protect the identity of the participants, I will refer to the students of Study 1 by letters of the English alphabet and the students of Study 2 by letters of the Greek alphabet:

I love the use of camera angles and how you shook the camera and moved your fist towards the camera to symbolize punching. – B

I like how in the beginning she was somewhat calm then she went crazy with how she punched the camera and started shaking her cam. - I

It felt very chill and comforting in a way. - F

These first two rehearsals were difficult. We attempted to teach them far too much too quickly, and we lost them. Further, Thelma gave us feedback that we were using language that the students had trouble understanding. In so doing, we fell into the pitfall Dressen-Hammouda (2008) warned of, using genre-related cues to which the students could not relate. Upon reflection, we felt that if we had been in the room, we could have picked up on a lot more cues and adjusted our communication and pacing accordingly, but this was a big challenge in a remote

learning environment. Nonetheless, we all felt that the students were overall engaged: they seemed excited to have us there and were curious.

4.4.2 Rehearsals 3-6: Skill Instruction and Early Content Creation

We slowed things down and reviewed the Viewpoints skills. We screened clips of COVID-era digital theatre from Show One Productions, Kumu Kahua Theater, and other recent examples; the students responded very positively to the local Hawaiian theatre clips. Inspired by Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed methodology (Boal, 1985) as well as Freire's (2014) and Ngo's (2017) calls to empower students by helping them understand how their lives are influenced by broad social, political, and historical forces, we asked the students to create scenes based on current local news headlines regarding COVID, homelessness, and tourism. We asked them to suggest characters who might be related to those headlines; we worked out basic physicalities for each one of those characters and then had everyone interact in a non-verbal scene, focusing a lot on power dynamics. They had a lot of fun making fun of tourists and commenting on recognizable local details in the news articles. It should be noted that, per Baker (2020), tourism and identifiable characters from the community are key characteristics of local Hawaiian theatre (p. 236).

This time the students were a lot more confident with their performances and feedback. This was also the first time we saw resisting individual agency: when I modeled the physicality of a single mother as weak, O pushed back by typing into the chat:

Be more assertive! vulnerable single mothers are a very harmful stereotype :D - O²⁵

²⁵ I will discuss my qualitative labeling process in detail in Chapter 6, but per Saldaña, categorizing different forms of agency is a subjective process. One could make the argument that this assertion is an example of constructive agency because the student is actively engaging in the process, but based on the context of the comment being offered outside of the designated feedback time and interrupting a different activity, I labeled it as resisting.

After some successes and failures on our part in teaching them new Viewpoints skills that focused on shape and gesture, we felt that we had a firm enough foundation to pose our next big question: when they eventually perform their show, whatever that ends up being, how would they want to make their audience feel? We told them to bear in mind that the audience would be teachers, fellow students, and alumni from their school, along with any friends and family that they wanted to invite. Their responses can be seen in Figure 4.5.

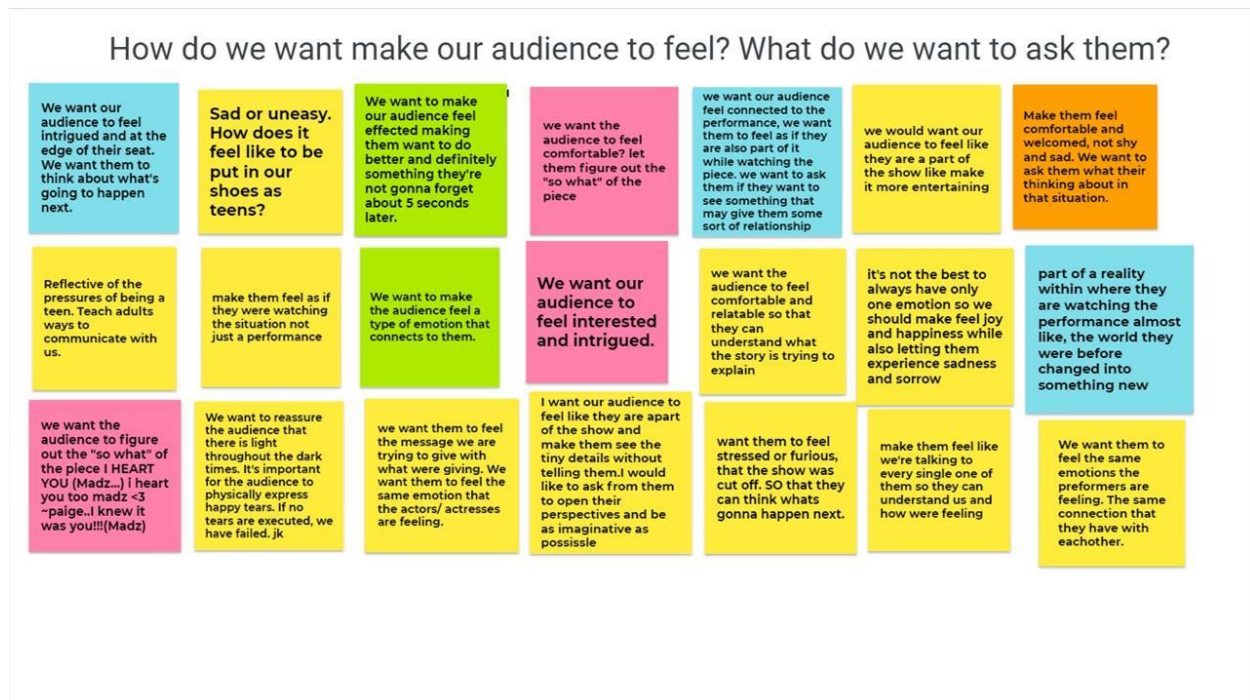


Figure 4.5: Students respond to the question, "How do we want to make our audience feel?"

I put their responses into a word cloud. At this point I would have liked them to identify key themes that they saw repeated throughout, but with our time constraints I did this for them, and those themes were:

- Empathy and Connection
- Real and Relatable
- See and Hear Us
- There Has Been a Lot of Darkness in the Last Year

- There Is Also Light and a Path Forward

After a discussion, the students agreed that these themes overall represented how they wanted their audience to feel watching the play. I then used those themes to run a series of creative writing exercises. As I have mentioned previously, in our process we encourage the students to express themselves non-verbally before engaging in text; however, in my experience, creative writing exercises allow space for individual introspection, which in turn provides good fodder to create collaboratively, so Rehearsal 5 felt like an appropriate time to allow them to express their ideas textually. I ran them through some basic exercises, such as discussing the worst gift they had ever received and describing their earliest memories. After some hesitancy, we had our most animated chat yet, sharing each other's stories. Sheila Preston (2016) emphasizes the role of reciprocity in a devised rehearsal room, suggesting that the facilitator must share some of themselves if they wish participants to do the same (p. 67), so I shared some of my personal stories as well, heeding Preston and Neumann's caution against sharing too much.

Vygotsky (2004) argues that the development of the students' literary creativity that comes with creative writing within an educational environment takes root when students are encouraged to write on topics that are intrinsically understandable, when their emotions are engaged, and, most of all, when they are encouraged to express their interior world in words (p. 46). Therefore, I asked the students to pick one moment over the last year no one else knew about, a moment that was just theirs. Also, because it was important to them that not everything is dark and depressing, I asked them to write about their COVID "light in the dark," that is, to think about what they would have told themselves one year ago to get them through a year of isolation. There were really nice offerings in the chat about how things will get better if you keep

your head down and keep smiling (a selection of their works can be seen in Appendix E). Here are two pieces of advice the students offered to themselves:

Everything gets better in time, trust me ... trust yourself. -Y

Everything may be confusing now but it will all work itself out eventually. - B

The students' writings were posted anonymously into a Google Doc, and they were all asked to anonymously write comments and questions that came to mind when reading each other's offerings. This example of artistic collaboration spanning the entire class was, for me, the first time I saw a true web of relations and interdependencies that embedded their joint actions, which Burkitt considers a requirement of relational agency (Burkitt, 2016, p. 323).

One of the most challenging aspects of teaching devised theatre within a high school curriculum is accounting for the large class sizes. Typically, devised groups are relatively small; for example, our cast size for *Corpus Interruptus* was six (see section 1.6). We broke them into four groups of six or seven students each and appointed the seniors as the group leaders to be held accountable for the work getting done. This was a little complicated because a number of the seniors were working on another project (more on that below) and, therefore, absent from early rehearsals. We introduced them to a Viewpoints methodology called "Question/Anchor/Structure." In it, a question is identified, an anchor tethering that question is considered, and then a structure for conveying the idea is established. Bogart and Landau explain that "the question (or theme) motivates the entire process. This central driving force should be big enough, interesting enough, and relevant enough to be attractive and contagious to many people" (Bogart & Landau, 2004, p. 154). This is why our process had students anonymously posing questions derived from their own work; it led to inquiries such as:

- If someone accepts their darkness, does that make them immune to it?

- Do scenery and your environment affect one's mental sense?
- Does anyone care?

The anchors and structures they chose were wonderfully varied, exploring these ideas through the medium of podcasts, news reports, a birthday party, and an online classroom gone horribly wrong.

4.4.3 Rehearsals 7-10: Re-Enter the Seniors

Halfway through the process, a number of the older students, most with more theatre experience than the younger students, who had been occupied with another project, fully joined the process. This caused some chaos: the groups became disorganized, confused, and stressed out, and they missed homework assignments. In devised theatre there is often a crisis moment (or moments) where the artists will either fall apart and no longer buy into the process, or come together as collaborators by pulling the threads of what they have learned and applying it to move towards a vision, even as that vision is still being crafted. Sara Jane Bailes (2011), a Senior Lecturer in Performance Studies at the University of Sussex, refers to failure in a devised rehearsal room as an asset, noting that “failure is necessary to the comprehension of human activity” (p. 23). Lehtonen (2015) remarks that the crises in her study were turning points, where the students tested their ownership and asserted influence on the process (p. 1893). This was our first crisis moment in Study 1. The students asserted agency over the process by finding ways to begin to organize themselves, as demonstrated by this quote:

Hey those in group 1 ([H] and [R]) sorry to call u out but could you please catch up [U] and [A] on what your group is suppose to be doing since they havent been here for previous classes. - S

This was perhaps also one of the first moments that the students realized how heavily

they would need to rely on *one another* to finish this project, fulfilling Edwards' (2005) mandate that relational agency involves the capacity to offer support and to ask for support from others (p. 168).

We had then arrived at a big question for our process: would the performance be pre-recorded or streamed live? I believe that the inherent danger of live performance, the fact that things can and will go wrong, is critical for the efficacy of theatrical experience, and with pre-recorded materials, there is a possibility that audiences will compare the work to well-edited pieces of film or online videos. However, with the aforementioned connectivity issues, a live stream was not going to be possible, and our show would have to be pre-recorded. It was my hope that the frantic energy involved in this process would be reflected in the performances and thus provide those elements of danger and uncertainty.

During Rehearsals 9 and 10, the students began to create scenes that would potentially be part of the final show, and, fortunately, the students were getting a lot more comfortable working with their cameras. Here are some of the question/anchor/structures that formed their scenes:

- Question: Is physical touch important in a relationship?
Anchor: Long distance relationship
Structure: FaceTime
- Question: Are there times you feel you need to fake emotions for the sake of others?
Anchor: Past family trauma
Structure: Podcast
- Question: How has COVID negatively impacted people?
Anchor: People who have been affected
Structure: Game show

Our limited time together meant that once they were comfortable enough to start creating their own scenes, we only had three sessions to generate that material, so we emphasized that rehearsals outside of class were mandatory.

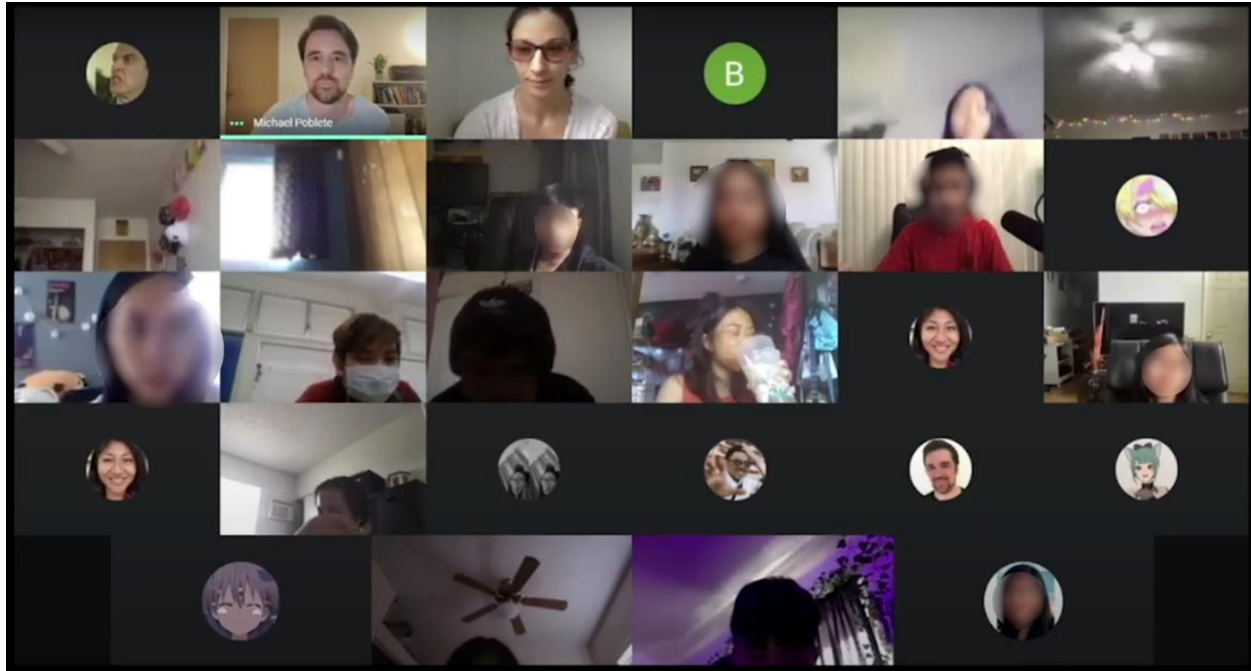


Figure 4.6: Our Google Meet rehearsal room.

4.4.4 Rehearsals 11-12: Dramaturgy and Moving into Production

We had come to a critical point where we had planned for the students to assert more agency over their creative process by engaging in their own dramaturgy and then refining and recording their scenes on their own schedule. We put together a Google Slides document containing embedded videos from rehearsal footage of all of the scenes they had created so far; we then asked each group to cut one-quarter of the scenes and put what remained into a show order that made sense to them. Finally, each group had to propose a show question that they believed the collective work of the class was asking. We, unfortunately, did not have time to properly explain the elusive concept of dramaturgy as an artform, but we did emphasize the responsibilities of a dramaturg for a devised play according to Chemers (2010): to look for patterns, to ask questions, to consider the experience of the future audience and to keep exploring (pp. 135-136). Each group gave us their report, and we were happy to see that two of the groups had given a lot of thought to the audience experience:

We chose this order because we wanted not all the sad stuff in one go ... And we ordered it in a way where they can experience the highs and lows of it. And we just wanted something that's light hearted and funny. - F

We kind of tried to make the order so like the writing, it kind of had a little nice flow to it, so it's not just like, you know, one person talking about being super happy and the next is just like, "oh, we're sad." ... And then our like, overall, like question that we think, you know, this show is asking is kind of like, "What is life like during a pandemic?" – B

I analyzed each of their proposed performance scripts and color-coded them to get a sense of each scene's general mood, the final result of which can be seen in Figure 4.8. Again, with more time, we would have had the students analyze and identify themes in their own works (and we did just that in Study 2). The broad tonal categories that I was able to identify were:

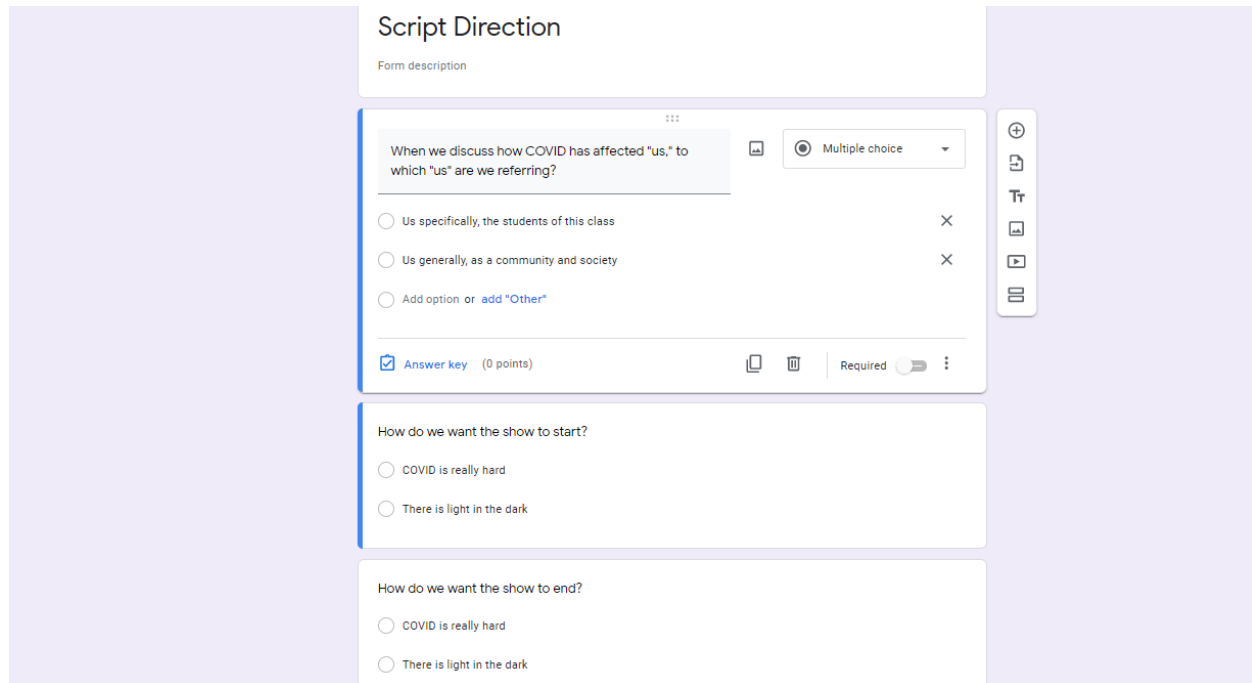
- Failed Connections
- Loneliness
- Life Is Absurd
- This Is How Things Are
- It Gets Better

The students were talking a lot about missed connections and loneliness, being unable to meet up with friends, relationships falling apart, miscommunications, and isolation. We discussed the trajectory of this show, whether to start negatively or more hopefully and how they wanted it to end. A few of the students advocated for not having too many sad pieces in the show, as exemplified in this chat exchange:

J: we dont want too many sad pieces

S: yes what you just said because no one wants to watch one depressing video

After the discussion, we used a Google Forms poll to allow the students to vote for their choice of direction for the show, as can be seen in Figure 4.7.



The screenshot shows a Google Forms interface titled "Script Direction". The form is set to "Multiple choice" and is marked as "Required". The first question is "When we discuss how COVID has affected 'us,' to which 'us' are we referring?". It has three radio button options: "Us specifically, the students of this class", "Us generally, as a community and society", and "Add option or add 'Other'". The second question is "How do we want the show to start?" with two radio button options: "COVID is really hard" and "There is light in the dark". The third question is "How do we want the show to end?" with the same two radio button options. The form includes a sidebar with icons for adding questions, sections, and other elements.

Figure 4.7: A Google Forms poll to allow the students to vote for an arc for the show order, as well as clarify the overall show question.

We ended up with an order that starts with failed connections and loneliness, moves into plain talk about how things are with some humor about the absurdity of life, and finishes with the idea that things will get better. At this point, I would have liked to have given them an additional homework assignment to revise their proposed order based on the day's conversation and then have a class discussion to arrive at a finalized show order, but unfortunately, we did not have the time for that to happen (but we did in Study 2, as I will explain in the next chapter). Instead, I compiled a show order on my own from the individual groups' proposed orders and based it on their discourse and voting results, which can be seen in Figure 4.8.

Intro				
CW 13	Lonely			
Video 11	Failed connection		Sad	
Video 3 (1)	Life is Absurd		Funny	
CW 12	Powerful	Lonely		
Video 6	Failed connection	Funny	Sad	
Video 10	Life is Absurd		Funny	
CW 9	Gets better			
Video 3 (2)	Life is Absurd		Funny	
CW 6	New Connection			
Video 13	Failed connection		Sad	
CW 11	New connect			
Video 4	How it is	Life is Absurd	Sad	Funny
CW 19	Gets better			
Video 8	How it is	Life is Absurd	Sad	
CW 8	Powerful			
Video 3 (3)	Life is Absurd		Funny	
CW 7	Gets better			
Video 5	Failed connection	Gets better	Sad	
Video 1	How it is		Gets better	
Outro				

Figure 4.8: The show order as chosen by the students, along with my color-coded analysis of the scenes' emergent themes.

Regarding the show question, all of the groups had posed different iterations of a question about how COVID is affecting all of us. We clarified who is the “us,” that is, whether they wanted to discuss society in general or their own particular experiences (as can be seen in the Google Forms poll in Figure 4.7); they voted for the former to discuss the impact of COVID on the Waipahu neighborhood of O‘ahu broadly. After a brief discussion, the show question we settled on was, “How is COVID affecting us, as a community, mentally and emotionally?” Throughout the rest of the process, all creative decisions were filtered through this question.

Given the successes of our dramaturgy rehearsal, Kat and I were surprised that the students did not submit their required videos for Rehearsal 12. Given the short amount of time we had left and all of the work that remained, this was our second crisis moment of Study 1. We

scolded them, and there definitely was some resisting agency as the students pushed back. Here is an example of an exchange from the chat:

U: life is goin on

B: my group just struggled with time to film and getting everyone into the meets

J: my group was just having conflicting schedules and we always missed one person in a rehearsal

Q: i have one but the audio is weird

S: we got stuff goin on </3

U: at least we're all self aware

S: i miss play prod before online school </3

When I reminded them that they had put a lot of work into a recent digital theatre project, a puppet show, in the biggest display of resisting individual agency throughout Study 1, S succinctly responded that in contrast to this process:

Puppet show was fun. - S

The students offered a lot of excuses, but they seemed to understand that they needed to step up to get everything done, and we encouraged them to create action plans to do just that. It should be noted that, like many great teachers, Thelma does not severely penalize students for missing homework materials, thus fulfilling Hope's (2010) characteristic of a productive, creative environment where consequences for failure are low (p. 45). This is to say, the motivation for them to complete the assignments was for the pride they would feel putting forward good creative work to their community, not fear of being penalized academically. Much like our first crisis moment, the students once again realized that they had to rely on one another to finish the project, and Thelma agreed with us that from this point onward it felt increasingly like they were more comfortable in the rehearsal room and that they were exhibiting a lot of constructive individual and relational agency by taking more ownership over their creative process. For example, although we had explained the logistics of how we would be streaming the performance for audiences, they began asking us for more details now that the gravity of the

show was beginning to sink in. Upon reflection, I think it was particularly difficult for the students to feel like this was a real show and that what they were doing had weight over a digital medium; it just doesn't feel the same way as getting up in front of a group of people and rehearsing in person.

With only a little time left, it became clear that the path forward was for the groups to meet up outside of class and film their scenes. We asked them to assign roles within their groups: director, stage manager, costume designer, and technical director. While the collaborative nature of devised theatre necessitates a blurring of roles, which allows students to be flexible and work in areas that interest them, delineated roles and accountability were necessary to finish the project. Kat provided detailed performance feedback over a series of asynchronous videos for the students to watch in their own time, and Rachel, our Design Consultant, recorded an instructional video showing the students how to set up their personal spaces to serve as performance areas and providing tips on lighting, noise reduction, and camera placement. We also made ourselves available for several rehearsal hours outside of class; when the groups attended, they were self-directed, effectively using the much-needed time to work on their pieces, and didn't really ask us for any help, in another clear example of constructive relational agency.

4.4.5 Rehearsals 13-15: Finishing the Show

Due to time constraints, we, unfortunately, had to give up our plans to cultivate a robust revising process and focus instead on finishing what we could. We had the students choose some of their favorite creative writings from earlier in the process to serve as monologues in the show. We brainstormed aesthetics, show title, and music. Through anonymous offers and voting through Google Forms, they settled on *Metanoia* as a title, which means the journey of changing one's

heart, self, mind, or way of living (on a personal level, I absolutely love this title). They chose a few songs for music, including an original piece that one of the students wrote and performed (completely unprompted by us, in another spectacular example of constructive agency). We did a Jamboard exercise soliciting aesthetic choices; there were a lot of offers around the idea of a tree in winter. Based on that, Kat and I were able to use existing video footage available for licensing to create great transitions for our show that leaned into the aesthetic of a growing and changing tree, as can be seen in Figure 4.9.



Figure 4.9: A transition in *Metanoia*

From a storytelling perspective, I was concerned that we needed some kind of introduction and conclusion to ease audiences in and out of the work. I explained to the students that there is a ritual when one enters and exits a theatre: finding a seat, taking in the atmosphere, listening to pre-show music; all of these elements allow audience members to shift from the outside world into a theatrical storytelling space. To ease our audiences in and out of *Metanoia*, we thought it would be a good idea to ask the students to explain what devised theatre is, what

they did in the process, and, more philosophically, where we would go from here as a community in the spring of 2021 to, among other things, subtly convey to our audience the challenges of creating devised theatre over a virtual platform. We would then use that rehearsal footage for the show's bookends. Again, with more time we would have liked to have let them conceive of their own bookends (which they did in Study 2), but with our limited time, that was not possible. To my delight, every student was able to say at least one thing about devised theatre or the rehearsal process. Here are a few quotes:

I think devised theatre is making a script out of, like, scratch, and out of just our plain thoughts. - Q

It's a bunch of people getting together to have a show to make people laugh in dark times. - M

I like how free-flowing it is. During some of our scenes, it's just like improv in a way. Because no matter if you mess up or not, it could still be part of the act, whether you know it or not. - Z

Here are a few quotes from the students regarding where to go from here as a community:

We could reflect on how COVID is impacting all of us as a community and try and get COVID done with, so we can stop masking and stuff. - M

I think that as individuals, we should know from this video that it's okay to not be okay. - Q

Although it seems like we have limits in what we're creating, there's nothing that can stop us from doing anything that we want to do. - P

Our last idea was to have some kind of group scene for the end of the show, so we decided to lead the class in a big "Cheehoo!" (a Hawaiian Creole English cheer of excitement) because we had observed the class exclaim this cheer a number of times throughout the process. The only White student in class expressed her discomfort in participating in an activity that she felt was effectively appropriating Indigenous culture, and we realized that we had made a critical mistake: we are not locals and thus did not understand the context of this cheer well enough to

successfully employ it. We acknowledged our mistake and backed off. Thelma told us later that she wasn't concerned about the exchange: as outsiders, our cultural misunderstandings were inevitable; she felt that because we conceded our ignorance, we had sufficiently addressed the situation. This incident was another sobering reminder of Dressen-Hammouda's caution regarding the cultural barriers present in educational environments and the necessity for us to keep checking in with Thelma to minimize those barriers.

Kat, myself, and our friend Jake Wolf, a tech-savvy Honolulu-based actor and writer, edited the show together following the artistic choices of the students as much as possible; it was completed with a running time of forty-five minutes. The student videos did not all go smoothly: in addition to scheduling issues there were, once again, significant tech problems, and in the end, two of the scenes could not be used because the audio was incomprehensible. Further, the students' efficacy in following and implementing our feedback was questionable, and each individual student's commitment in each scene varied wildly. But it did come together. We walked the students through our editing process, which they seemed to agree with artistically, and at the end of our last rehearsal we reminded them that the materials and resources provided throughout the semester would still be in their drive folder once the school year ended, for them to access whenever they like. The chat for this final rehearsal was one of the most engaged we had had, and there was a lot of friendly banter and some good-natured teasing of myself and Kat (e.g., commenting that Kat and I looked silly because we were both dressed in black, that I am "too tall" in comparison to the students' relatively short heights, and that their iPhones are better than my Android phone). My general sense is that they were proud to have completed the process and created the show.

4.5 *Metanoia*

We received permission from the school administration to post the video on YouTube as a “premiere” event, which allows a video to play automatically at a chosen time and date.

YouTube premieres also have a live chat function which allowed our audience and the students to talk to one another throughout the stream. Further, Thelma set up a Google Meet room for the students to watch it together.

Per my argument in Chapter 2 that devised theatre education would do well to work towards the goal of creating a play that can be received well by its community, I will now discuss the show in terms of artistic merit.

4.5.1 Artistic Assessment

Metanoia captivated me on an artistic level because it addresses some of the pain these students had felt during COVID through honesty and vulnerability, and in so doing, it provided me with new insight into how the pandemic had ravaged young people over the previous year. The show begins as the students had wanted, with darkness, in the form of a heart-wrenching monologue about being isolated for so long that the teen shut out the world and only listened to the voices in their head. It moves into pieces about young people trying to join groups of friends and being coldly rejected. From there, it shifts into comedic commentary with a parody of a Google Meet classroom, followed by a TV show exploring quirks that people had developed during quarantine. The theme then shifts into the idea of emerging from the darkness, with a monologue about graduating and moving on, and then a talk show with confessions from teens about not giving into despair during isolation. Finally, as the students had requested, the show finishes with the theme of everything getting better, featuring the aforementioned original uplifting song and

the story of a teen rejoining the world after a breakup (see section 4.4.3 and Figure 4.8 to see how this all lined up with the thematic trajectory the students had voted upon). Here is an excerpt from the opening monologue:

No one knows, not even me for the most part until now, that for the past couple months I have been out of reality. I kept in my own little world imagining things I'm not sure I should have.

And here are a few lines from the original song:

Even when we meet again
I'll be there to be your friend
I want to see you smile
Even if it takes a while

Because I was so close to the process of creating this show, and because I am not from O'ahu, I received the generous assistance of my friend Sean-Joseph Choo, an actor/playwright/musician of Hawaiian, Okinawan, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Portuguese, English, and Irish descent, to help me analyze *Metanoia*, as well as the show created during Study 2, *Our Legacy*, from a product-oriented artistic standpoint. We agree that aesthetically the show is reminiscent of a lot of early pandemic-era digital theatre, where artists were experimenting with live streaming over platforms like Zoom.²⁶ There were technical missteps; since some moments were hard to hear I added subtitles for clarity, but as Sean pointed out, in some ways these moments added to the mood of capturing a "slice of life" in a style that, at times, felt reminiscent of naturalism (a style of Western theatre that seeks to portray an accurate depiction of life, often by emphasizing messy and awkward interactions). I found these technical issues to be particularly supportive of the storytelling in large group scenes, where the chatter of many people can leave as much to be underheard as overheard.

²⁶ Examples of early pandemic-era Zoom theatre include Juggerknot Theatre's *Long Distance Affair* (May, 2020), Patrick Nims and Zoom Theatre's production of Anna Ziegler's *Actually* (June, 2020), and Creation Theatre's production of Charlotte Keatley's *Alice: A Virtual Themepark* (August, 2020).

There are some very funny scenes in this show. For me, the scene parodying an online classroom is particularly effective as well as devastating as I considered the subtext regarding how ineffective the students seemed to find learning over an online medium. The challenges the scene references include the ease of distraction, overbearing parents, and technical difficulties. Various pop-culture references throughout, such as the students' obsessing over musical groups like One Direction and BTS, emphasize to me devised theatre's capability of exploring current topics. Some of the humor throughout was undermined by poor timing: it was clear that while most of the scenes had been rehearsed, they could have been rehearsed more, and that a lack of precision did hurt some of the jokes from landing.

Sean and I were both particularly moved by the monologues in *Metanoia*; it was here that we saw the most vulnerability in their writing. Per Sean, "[in the monologues] the students' voices were the clearest, unhindered by weak facades [and] attempts at parody or melodrama. The moments of them speaking from the heart were very effective" (S. J. Choo, personal communication, August 16, 2022). Here is an example:

Between April to August of 2020, I didn't have many friends to talk to because we kind of lost touch and we weren't as close as I thought we were. It felt very lonely to be texting people and either they won't respond to me or they would take forever to respond. I didn't get to do much of anything except stay home, watch Netflix, and text people who I thought were my friends.

Sean had additional, culturally specific thoughts about *Metanoia* that he combined in his feedback to *Our Legacy* that I will share in section 5.3.1.

Overall, for me, the show was successful because the students accomplished their goal of exploring how COVID was affecting their community. At face value, the focus seemed to be on their immediate school community rather than Waipahu and O'ahu more broadly, but interactions with family members and teachers revealed the struggles of dealing with authority

figures and social expectations at a time when compliance was often impossible. Their takes were eclectic, employing tools of humor and dramatic poignancy and, again, per their chosen trajectory, moved from sadder, darker material into a more hopeful emergence into the light. It is telling to me that the show's penultimate scene depicts a young person moving from the isolation of their bedroom into a crowded coffee shop, a scenario that did not exist in Hawai'i in May of 2021. Perhaps most importantly, I have never seen anything like *Metanoia* before.

4.5.2 Audience, Teacher, and Student Feedback

Our audience of teachers, students, family, and friends left overwhelmingly positive feedback in the YouTube chat, during our talkback, and in a survey that Thelma sent out with the invitation to the play. There were some negative comments about audio issues, but otherwise they praised the students for putting on an original and engaging show that offered a firsthand look at how challenging the 2020-2021 school year had been. When asked how captivated they were by the performances; the average response was 4.27 out of 5, which I think is remarkable for an audience unaccustomed to digital theatre. Here are some quotes from the audience survey:

It brought me so much joy to see all of you doing this in spite of the sad times of the pandemic just made me so happy.

Some of what you all presented felt uncomfortable to me at first. However, upon introspection I realized how hard dealing with COVID has been for students, even more so than I realized.

You managed to create something that engages and really speaks to the truth of our shared and personal experiences from this past year.

I believe that the warm responses from our audience may have provided the kind of community validation that Claxton (2008) describes as necessary to encourage lifelong learning (p. 7). Perhaps the most telling validation that the process served the students came from

Thelma:

I was floored. And all of my teachers from our school, they were floored ... And the students, they were so excited ... You should have seen how, particularly my freshmen that haven't had the experience of being in a live stage performance, they lit up like I'd never seen them ... so just giving them that sense of pride, that was worth it ... And boy did I feel a sense of pride ... My girlfriend, she had come over to my house so we could have a watch party, she's in the Department of Education as well ... She was like, oh my gosh, Thelma, I've been to all of your musical stuff, and this is completely different, this is so cool.

As for the students themselves, they expressed a lot of joy and gratitude the night of the show and the days after, but most of all, they emphasized how much they loved working in their groups. It was palpable to me that they were starved for social interaction, and to have a real project to work on together on their own terms was impactful. Many of them expressed that they would like to keep making theatre and that they found the devised theatre methodology particularly enjoyable, as I will explain in more detail in Chapter 6. Here are two quotes from the students during the talkback:

At the end, it's like, memories, you know, it's like, we're all gonna put this in like a photo album ... I just feel like I benefited a lot throughout this experience ... when I was introduced to drama in general, especially with devised - D

I cannot express how much I love the group, because, oh my God, like, I'm gonna cry, but I'm gonna miss them. - P

After the screening, we met with the students one more time to discuss their experiences, take the exit survey, have an end-of-process open-ended group interview (again, the results of both I will discuss in Chapter 6), and have a little time to banter and say our goodbyes.

4.6 Conclusion

It was my intention with this chapter to comprehensively describe the rehearsal process of Study 1 to provide context for the qualitative and quantitative data that I will offer in Chapter 6. That said, my immediate conclusion, based on anecdotal observations, is that the process worked.

Working with the prompt, “What do adults all over the world need to know right now?” and the basic performance and devised theatre skills we taught them, the students created original scenes of theatre that they then analyzed to create a show question, and then used that question to create a cohesive show as a group, which they wrote, performed, directed, designed and filmed entirely on their own. Further, the show was received very positively by audiences. This was all accomplished over Google Meet with minimal guidance from us. The consensus from Kat, Rachel, Thelma, and I is that the students got a lot out of the process at a time when they badly needed to feel a human connection, that they seemed to take great ownership of both their artistic output and the process itself, and that they exhibited a great amount of agency throughout. I will explain in Chapter 7 how the data offered in Chapter 6 supports these conclusions. That said, while many aspects of the students’ educational journeys were self-directed, I would not say that they truly achieved Gibbons’ mandate of taking over designing and executing their own learning activities, given the short period of time that we had to work with. However, I will make the argument in the next chapter that this did occur in Study 2, where we employed this same process, at the same school, with many of the same students, over a longer timeframe, and in person.

CHAPTER 5

STUDY 2: *OUR LEGACY: WHEN MOMENTS BECOME MEMORIES*

Mother: (Seeing a rainbow flag in a park) Oh my God, son. Do you know what colors mean?

Son: No.

Mother: Homosexuals. Do you know what homosexuals are?

Son: No.

Mother: They're sinners. Do you know as sinners are?

Son: The tasty things?

Mother: No, honey, no, those are cinnamon rolls.

(An excerpt from a scene depicting a bigoted mother attempting to indoctrinate her son in *Our Legacy: When Moments Become Memories*)

5.1 Introduction

After having comprehensively described the rehearsal process of Study 1, I will now do the same for Study 2, which took place in the autumn of 2021, in person, once again with Thelma's theatre class at Waipahu High School. Study 2 was conducted much in the same way, except that because the students were now learning in person they met in their regular classroom and wore masks to comply with COVID-19 protocols. In theory they were socially distancing, but the limited space provided made this a challenge. This class consisted of thirty-two students, again of mixed grade levels, thirteen of whom had taken theatre classes with Thelma previously, nine of whom had been with us for Study 1 (A, B, G, K, Q, S, U, V, and X); so, there was a good deal of familiarity and trust among the students, Thelma, and ourselves, that was not there at the start of Study 1. The ethnic demographics were essentially the same as the class in Study 1 (approximately 60% Asian, 35% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 5% White), and instead of having fifteen rehearsals, we now had twenty-one.

5.2 Rehearsals

In some ways our rehearsal process for Study 2 was very similar to Study 1, in some ways it was different. For the purposes of brevity, in providing my comprehensive overview of this study I will largely focus on its distinctions from Study 1 and skip over most of its similarities, particularly because with a longer rehearsal timeline and more robust documentation of an in-person process, Study 2 yielded significantly more data than Study 1.

5.2.1 Rehearsals 1-4: The Joy of In-Person Learning

Much like Study 1, we began our first in-person rehearsal by introducing ourselves, explaining the scope of the upcoming rehearsal process and the parameters of the case study, and distributing information packets with the parental consent forms and student assent forms, which we asked them and their parents to digitally sign and return if they consented to participate (see Appendix C). We immediately noticed that a major challenge of COVID-era in-person learning is that with everyone wearing masks it wasn't always clear who was speaking, nor were we able to quickly distinguish thirty-two students without facial recognition. This was mitigated by the fact that from the beginning Thelma was more involved in facilitating than in Study 1; she seemed more comfortable with us and our process after having spent a semester with us and now having met us in person. This more egalitarian dynamic between us three instructors was important because, as Keeffe et al. (2013) point out, within artistic educational environments it is beneficial for teachers, perhaps with different experience levels, to bounce off of one another (p. 116).

The in-person classroom meant that we could give more robust attention to performance skills, so because we were once again meeting with them twice a week, we established Tuesdays

as project work days oriented around discussion and brainstorming, and Thursdays as days to focus on skill building and performance. We once again began by posing the question, “What does the world need to know right now?” and let them post their responses to a Jamboard, an example of which can be seen in Figure 5.1.



Figure 5.1: A collaborative brainstorm answering the question, “What does the world need to know right now?”

While their artistic direction in the previous study was singularly focused on the hardships of quarantine, the themes that we agreed upon as a class were more eclectic, consisting of Self-Care, Rights/Equity, COVID Fatigue, Being Heard, and Love/Relationships.

Moving into performance skills, we went down to the school cafeteria, which, thankfully, has a stage because it doubles as a space for school performances and assemblies. In general, having the two different spaces, the classroom for work and the cafeteria for performance, worked very well; the students seemed to be able to focus better during some of the clerical exercises with the promise of fun to come once we changed spaces. We warmed up by playing a game involving the students screaming dramatically at one another based on the outcomes of

coordinated eye contact. The students were far more engaged in the warmup exercises in Study 2 than in Study 1 when half of them didn't turn on their cameras.

As our first real performance exercise we played the "Island Game," where we presented the students with a blender and, in different randomly assigned groups, they performed the various imaginative ways they would use the blender to survive on a deserted island. We were very impressed that with almost no prompting, their choices were bold and wildly creative. In contrast to Study 1, where we had to coax the students into participating, this class jumped into the collaborative activity quickly and enthusiastically. We also immediately observed that, once again, the students were most engaged with watching and commenting on each other's work. Even on this first day, leaders began to emerge within these groups who would continue to lead throughout the semester: repeat students like B and X, experienced students like $\omicron$ and ω , but also students new to theatre like θ and τ .²⁷

Over the following rehearsals we taught them the basic skills of improvisation, believing that its instantaneous storytelling and performative attributes could be helpful if the execution of their scenes proved to be as frantic as we observed in Study 1. Additionally, improv is a form that forces students to act without over-thinking, per Claxton's (2008) recommendation for developing positive learning dispositions (p. 5). Also, improv is just fun. Once again, we were struck by their willingness to try new things. Basic skill instruction that had confused them in a remote learning environment seemed to be clearer and more appealing in person, such as developing projection, power stances, and the basic principles of Viewpoints. There was, of course, a lot of side talk, but as soon a student stepped up to present, everyone would stop

²⁷ Again, I am referring to the students of Study 1 by letters of the English alphabet and the students of Study 2 by letters of the Greek alphabet, except for the repeat students, who are indicated by the same English alphabet characters used in Study 1.

talking, pay attention and applaud after every presentation – again, completely unprompted by us. It was clear that they were very happy to finally be back in school with their friends after a hiatus of a year and a half, and play, by and large, came easily. Also, we noticed a trend that continued throughout the process: the older students spread out further than the younger students to be with each other and have side conversations away from us, the instructors.

We once again went through the rehearsal contracts and screened videos to demonstrate what devised theatre can look like, and again, they responded very strongly to the local Hawaiian pieces. However, even when we screened the Western pieces, students that we had not heard from before, like v, offered their interpretations of what they believed was happening, such as this analysis of Frantic Assembly's *Lovesong*:

It was an older couple reminiscing about the experiences they had, and then they went through a dream sequence when they became their younger self. - v

Creative writing went well, about the same as last time, which is unsurprising as it is a form that is better suited to remote learning than live performance. As in Study 1, we had them look through each other's anonymous writings and write comments and questions in response that they would later use to create their first scenes. We also once again asked them to post their thoughts regarding how they wanted their eventual audience to feel to the Jamboard, as can be seen in Figure 5.2.



Figure 5.2: Students respond to the question, “How do we want to make our audience feel?”

Stand-out comments from this exercise include:

- Audiences should go through all of the things that we went through
- Have them feel how we are feeling
- Are they living their life the way they truly want to, or abiding by societal norms?
- Did it relate to your experience?
- We want to ask them a question or phrase that the entire production was based around

Again, these responses were more eclectic and robust than in Study 1, when they were singularly focused on the negative effects of the pandemic. I was very pleased to see the last bullet point as it directly tied into the participant-driven dramaturgy model of choosing an overall question for the show to ask.

5.2.2 Rehearsals 5-11: Skill Instruction and Early Content Creation

The enthusiasm around performance continued when we had them work on basic obstacle movement pieces; we did not need to solicit them to volunteer as we had to in Study 1. The combination of learning in person and the nine repeat students and ourselves having learned from Study 1 ensured that at this point there was no confusion regarding expectations. In employing the feedback process, we borrowed a technique from a class taught by Wessendorf: we asked the students to close their eyes and offer words of cake and discovery, which worked surprisingly well (perhaps because of the anonymity); around $\frac{1}{3}$ of the class jumped in with observations.

Another advantage we had in Study 2 was that, in addition to meeting them twice a week, we were able to utilize the time they met on Mondays for a shorter class period. We were not with them on these days, but we did give them assignments to carry out discussions and clerical tasks under Thelma's supervision. On one of these Mondays, we asked Thelma to divide the students into their permanent groups. Instead of evenly distributing the students across grade levels and appointing seniors as group leaders as she did last time, she had them choose their own groups and organize their leadership however they saw fit. This resulted in five groups who named themselves SlapprK, Extra Spicy, Orang Chimken, the Dinosaurs, and the Jokers. SlapprK had a disproportionate amount of more experienced students, and the Jokers were made up almost entirely of students who had never taken part in theatre before. Thelma was happy with the results, believing that the more experienced students would inspire those with less experience. I believe that this did happen to a degree, but it also presented challenges to the less experienced groups that were not always easy to overcome.

From there we introduced "question and structure," having simplified this methodology from "question/anchor/structure" in Study 1. Although the relevance and urgency of this concept

still did not always seem clear to the students, they were definitely more engaged with this skill instruction than they were in Study 1. As Thelma noted:

The question/structure thing felt more understandable to them. It was fine in the spring, but we just weren't in person ... It was really that they got to sit and talk to each other, and then see the examples of each other being modeled, and then the feedback that other people immediately gave.

Once we finally let them work in their permanent groups, they became very engaged.

They began tracking their concepts for scenes on a bulletin board, as can be seen in Figure 5.3.

Here are a few examples:

- Question: How does someone with a dark mindset come back to the light?
Structure: In our mind
- Question: What does it feel like to have our hearts open up to something new and wonderful?
Structure: A carnival
- Question: How do other people's opinions of us affect how we see ourselves?
Structure: At school

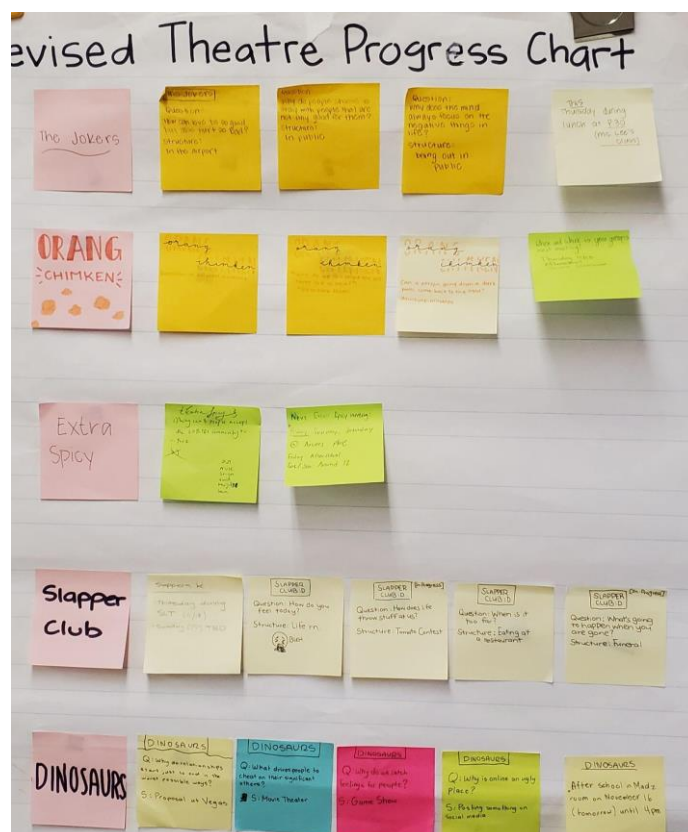


Figure 5.3: The bulletin board used to track the students' concepts for scenes.

Leadership roles quickly emerged: B and U began to run their respective groups just as they had in Study 1. V and X, who were with us in Study 1, ran their group, along with an experienced student new to our process, o. Orang Chimken was led by Q, who was also with us in Study 1, along with two less experienced students who stepped up, τ and θ . In fact, only one of the nine repeat students, K, did *not* end up taking some kind of leadership role over Study 2. The Jokers, the group with only one experienced student who was not with us in Study 1, ξ , immediately faced difficulties, and together they exhibited significantly less agency than the other groups.

In Rehearsal 9, while warming up to begin creating scenes that might actually end up in the show, we saw some of the most brazen resisting relational agency throughout the entire process: three of the repeat students, A, S, and U, came in late and ignored the rest of the class to

mess around with each other and ignored Kat when she asked them to join the rest of the class (the fact that this was a notable example of resistance speaks to how well behaved the students were overall). Despite this, their group, SlapprK, did well in performing their scene, which depicted a tomato throwing contest as an allegory of the pointless competing high school students must endure to succeed. The other groups also did well overall: Orang Chimken, for example, nicely applied Viewpoints skills and played with power dynamics through physicality.

As the feedback process continued, we began to notice an unexpected negative characteristic in comparison to Study 1: in a remote learning environment the students were able to comment on each other's performances in real time in a collaborative rapid-fire manner over the chat, in a way that did not disturb the performance. In person the students had to wait until each performance was over to comment, at which point they spoke one at a time in a manner that seemed intimidating to those who were not comfortable speaking in public; many were also preoccupied with their own upcoming pieces, which caused them to be distracted, and sometimes to be *distracting* with side chatter, during other students' performances.

Even though this study was done in person, due to ongoing uncertainty around COVID restrictions, a live final performance was not possible, so as with Study 1 the students were tasked with recording their individual scenes that would then be edited together into a pre-recorded, full-length digital show. We once again had the students select group roles tailored to the digital final product (Director, Video Editor, Stage Manager, Costume Designer, Props Manager, and Script Manager), but we introduced this element earlier in the process to allow more time to plan and film their scenes and provided them with learning resources to allow them to research their individual roles on their own. They began having "interdepartmental meetings" during their Monday classes to meet with their corresponding peers in the other groups, e.g., all

of the costume designers across the groups met together, the directors all met together, etc. This turned out to be very productive as it allowed the students to exchange ideas across the class and to keep the overall production of the show in mind. Thelma noted:

They use that forum to bitch and moan and complain ... So τ, he wasn't one of my theatre kids ... But when he would hear the other groups, 'Oh, we did this,' it gave him an opportunity to share his own wisdom and give his own advice from outside of the experience.

In the next rehearsals the students explored ambitious and abstract concepts, such as having actors embody different aspects of depression and anxiety; Thelma commented that at this point in the process there was a significant increase in the quality of the work, presumably from a product-oriented standpoint. We tried a new approach to the feedback process, where we paired off the groups to critique each other without supervision, with ourselves talking one-on-one with the odd group out. They responded to this format really well with visibly high levels of constructive agency, indicating that they enjoyed learning from each other's ideas and having the accountability to explain their ideas to their peers in another group. It was during these exchanges that I saw the normally quiet A's highest engagement over both studies. Perhaps receiving feedback from one another without our supervision allowed it to be received, as Wessendorf suggests, as a constructive artistic contribution rather than a criticism (Wessendorf, 2018, p. 5). Additionally, it emphasized peer critique over teacher assessment. It also provided a further ability to evaluate and make adjustments to their work in the moment, one of Hope's (2010) characteristics of productive creative environments (p. 45). It certainly proved to be a strong example of relational agency because, like the students in the study of Keeffe et al. (2013), they commented on and assisted each other with creating scenes and "benefited from constructive dialogue and occasional advice on how to incorporate new ideas and techniques" (p. 114). Here are some examples of unsupervised student feedback picked up by my cameras:

I feel like you guys could utilize the levels because, let me tell you guys, τ 's really tall, and it was really hard to differentiate if you guys were actually friends or if you guys were like family members ... So using levels will help differentiate each individual character, and how each friend in that friend group helps θ to feel better from what v and τ did. - ω

I also really loved your piece. Something big for me is facial expressions, and I know you can't do like the bottom half of your face with the mask, but even with your eyes and your eyebrows, that could add a lot more detail to your piece. - Q

I think it's good, but I think your question was unfinished, and I think it left people with more questions and answers. So, we got the part of the question, "why are we still with someone that is bad for us." But then it just kind of ended with crying, and I guess her friends comforting her? – U

We then had a big conversation about the fact that we were halfway through the process and needed to start thinking about the overall show. We assigned them homework dealing with big picture questions about what kind of show they wanted to make, what sort of pieces they were thinking about thematically, and what they thought about their roles within the groups.



Figure 5.4: Our cafeteria rehearsal room

5.2.3 Rehearsals 12-13: Dramaturgy

With more time in Study 2, we broke the dramaturgy exercise into two parts, with Rehearsal 12 focused on putting the existing pieces in order and arriving at a show question, and Rehearsal 13 focused on arriving at a show aesthetic structure and order. Thelma had each group pitch the question they had come up with that they believed best represented the show thus far. This time their questions were eclectic, including:

- What would we consider a mentally healthy person?
- How does the reality of romance affect teenagers?
- How have pandemics affected the way people think now?
- What are the ways negative influences can affect our lives?

In Study 2, we had a little bit of time to discuss the nature of dramaturgy as an artform, again emphasizing Chemers' (2010) responsibilities of looking for patterns, asking questions, and to always consider the audience experience (p. 135-136); they seemed to understand the basic concept remarkably well for a group of relative novices. We then mixed up the five groups into three larger groups so that each might arrive at a proposed show question. Like the interdepartmental meetings, this was very successful as it allowed the students to share ideas with the broader class and break out of their usual roles within their regular groups. We saw a lot of constructive relational agency within these three mega groups; Thelma felt that around 90% of the students were very engaged. When the groups returned, we had a spirited debate involving defining the notions of fulfillment and mental health. Here are some excerpts:

I think your life is much more fulfilled when you also have negative things coming at you; when you fail, that's your road to success. - U

Our [scenes] are negative. Why would you want to have that mental health? Why would you want a lack of love? I like the question; just don't use the word "fulfillment." - B

I also think that the themes kind of correlate with a question on how our mental health affects the way that we see the world. Because based upon our mental health, our goals in life can be also interpreted as different, and everyone's perspective is different. – o

An offer was made to portray life through a teen's eyes. I was concerned that this might be too broad to be of real help in guiding creative decisions for the rest of the process, so I tried to incorporate the other main concepts offered by the students (neurodivergence and fulfillment) to make it more specific. Thelma jumped in and offered a succinct compromise with the question, "what is life through a teen's eyes?" The students responded positively and voted for that to be the show question. Thelma later told me that she regretted making this suggestion because, like me, she felt that it was too broad. Further, because it served as a simple compromise from the teacher, the students were able to end the conversation by choosing something that made everyone happy, which prevented the opportunity for them to debate further and find their own compromise. I would urge any teaching artist engaging in the participant-driven dramaturgy process to honor the suggestions in the room but also to encourage the students to keep those elements complex because they will often take the simplest route to conflict resolution if it is presented as an option. That said, the students felt strongly about this question, and as I will explain later in this chapter, they were successful in its implementation in the dramaturgy process. In fact, when I tried to complicate the question one student pushed back, in an overt instance of asserting constructive agency by resisting me:²⁸

We want to give all of us room to interpret life in a different way. - U

This is all to say that the first part of the dramaturgical discussion had gone very well. In many devised theatre classrooms this would be the part of the process where the instructor would

²⁸ The difference between constructive agency through resistance and resisting agency is that in the former the student is constructively contributing to the task at hand by asserting their creative choice over that of the instructor, as opposed to the latter, where the student rejects the premise of the task in the first place.

assert a strong hand to make sure that an actual show comes together from the random artistic offerings put forward thus far or even have chosen an artistic direction for the show at the beginning of the semester to ensure that the devising process remained focused (Lehtonen, 2015, p. 1887). It has been my hypothesis, however, that by giving the students the tools to make their own decisions, they will produce a cohesive show on their own, and I believe Rehearsal 12 was a great example of that.

For Rehearsal 13, we focused on choosing a conceptual and aesthetic structure for the show as well as an order for their scenes. In Study 1, this was accomplished by having the students complete a Jamboard activity to solicit ideas for an aesthetic and a Google Forms poll and ensuing discussion to choose an artistic direction and order for the show, and we, the facilitators, then solidified that show order and edited the show ourselves using their aesthetic offerings to guide us. Having more time in Study 2, we wanted to have the students pitch, debate, and settle on a show aesthetic structure and order entirely on their own. We had each group look over the five filmed scenes they had at this point and label them into categories, which were similar to those in Study 1, but also broader, consisting of: Funny, Life is Absurd, We've Got Each other, How Life Is, Loneliness, and It Gets Better, as can be seen in Figure 5.5.²⁹ We then asked them to put the scenes in whatever order felt right to them and present their choices. Here is an example of B presenting the Dinosaurs' proposed show order:

As the sequence of the story goes, the friendships and relationships start to get worse. So, we start off with Bathroom Friendship because, of course, we are all happy. ... And then it goes on to the Wedding Heartbreak, where it's like, "I'm so happy for my friend. Oh, but I love this person that they're getting married too." And then the next one would be the Movie Theatre, because then, it's like, "Oh, no, the person I love cheated on me!" And then it goes on the Body Shaming. ... You know, to get worse. And then the Senior Year in Two Minutes, because it's a sad one at the end, she's all alone. – B

²⁹ Several of the labels were modified from the *Metanoia* scene labels, and some labels the students came up with themselves, such as "We've got each other."

To then contextualize their proposed show orders, we once again broke them into three mega groups (which were different from the mega groups in the precious rehearsal), each of which employed different strategies to arrive at an aesthetic structure. For example, one group talked about what they love and hate about high school, whereas another completely stalled and only continued after I intervened and suggested that they think in terms of images. Part of the reason that Study 1 was so challenging was that we could not enter their breakout rooms to check their progress; this rehearsal is a good example of why executing a methodology like ours is easier in person. The groups came back with three ideas for a show aesthetic structure:

- A eulogy at a funeral gives an opportunity to talk about favorite moments and the idea of saying goodbye to one's teen years.
- A clock symbolizing the role of time, which can pass slowly or quickly.
- A yearbook, where every club photo is a different scene.

When the groups articulated their rationales for their chosen aesthetic structures, they identified thematic patterns as a class. There was a lot of focus on the journey of high school and life going from being a little simpler to getting more complicated. There were differing interpretations of the roles of love and intimacy, with some views more optimistic than others. All of the groups, in one way or another, talked about coming of age, which tied nicely into the show question. Thelma, Kat, and I all agreed that it was an impressively respectful and involved exchange of ideas. They overwhelmingly voted for the yearbook structure. I was concerned that the seniors might be dominating the conversation as younger students might not identify with a concept tied to graduating, but the younger students too vocalized their agreement.

With an aesthetic structure of the show in place and no more time in class, we left it up to the students (the Script Managers and Video Editors specifically) to work in their

interdepartmental meetings during their following Monday class to finalize a show order, to choose bookends to ease our audiences in and out of the show, and to further refine the specifics around the yearbook structure. They were successful, and a few of the students even met after class on their own to discuss and finalize some of the aesthetic details. The students ended up further refining the show order as the process went on and the nature of the pieces evolved; their final chosen show order can be seen in Figure 5.5.

SlapprK B (Game Show)	Funny		Bittersweet
Orang Chimken B (How other people see us)	Life is absurd	We've got each other	Bittersweet
Dinosaurs C (Social Media)	How Life Is	Lonely	Pessimistic
Dinosaurs A (Movie theater)	Life is absurd		Pessimistic
Extra Spicy B (Bathroom)	Funny		Optimistic
Dinosaurs B (Carnival)	Funny		Optimistic
Extra Spicy C (Sleepover/at school)	Funny		Bittersweet
Orang Chimken A (A song)	How Life Is		Optimistic
SlapprK A (Hallway Rejection)	Lonely		Pessimistic
Orang Chimken C (Mindset)	Lonely		Pessimistic
Extra Spicy A (LGBTQ encounter)	Funny	It gets better	Bittersweet
SlapprK C (Senior Year)	How Life Is		Bittersweet

Figure 5.5: The show order as chosen by the students, along with the students' analysis of the scenes' emergent themes.

Overall, we were impressed: the students seemed to understand our discussion of Chemers' concept of the role of dramaturgy in devised theatre. They vocalized and exhibited a high amount of individual and relational agency, and despite having a lot of differing perspectives, they chose a show question and structure that made the class happy. Further, a number of the students seemed relieved to have more creative guidance as they continued to create and refine their scenes. Thelma seemed to enjoy the project-learning aspect of this discussion process, offering that just the process we employed over these two rehearsals in setting up a framework for the students to make big collective decisions on their own could be employed over an entire semester as an academy-wide learning project. Here are some student quotes from our show structure discussion:

I think that's how it is when it comes to art. That's why I love it so much; it can personally touch you or be far away from you; not everyone is going to be able to relate to you, no matter what the piece may be. Like a lot of our things are, like, revolving around angst, because a lot of us are mentally ill and definitely need therapy, but not everybody is going to be like, "oh, same bro." - V

As a dancer, singer, and also now an actor, something that I've learned and the whole performance field over time is that it matters how much effort you put into this and how much the piece can personally connect to you. The audience does see that honesty within that, and they will know whether you're half-assing it or whether you're putting your whole soul and pride into it. Don't come into the classroom simply just to be better than everybody else because that's not going to happen, and that's not going to work. Everybody still has things to learn: Ms. Madriaga, Mike, Kat; despite them being our role models in this room, outside in the world, they still have many things to learn. Whatever we decide on, just go with it. - o

When we think back to these past couple weeks, we noticed that each moment that we created, we've played *ourselves*. It's really important to emphasize that we as teenagers want to show adults, and the next generation, and the next generation, what is life to us? — ω

This last quote indicates to me that the students were potentially considering the longevity of a digital performance. In contrast to Study 1, where Kat and I decided the bookends and compiled the show order for the students, this time the students made these decisions for themselves, without Kat's and my supervision. While we do not have a recording of that Monday meeting, from the few Mondays that we did attend it appeared to us that Thelma rarely inserted herself into the interdepartmental conversations, allowing the students to guide themselves. Thus, I believe that in Study 2 the students successfully exercised full agency over their dramaturgy.

5.2.4 Rehearsals 14-16: Moving into Production

In Rehearsal 14 we hit our first crisis moment of Study 2. The Jokers, who as our least experienced group had been struggling the most, made an unexpectedly bold artistic choice and performed a scene oriented around a funeral for a trans individual that explored the question, "What are the ways that people can stand up for the people that they love?" Two funeral

attendees were openly bigoted against the trans community while two others defended the deceased's identity, and in the course of the debate a transphobic slur was used, which elicited a strong reaction from the class. I considered the scholarship of Smith (2014) to guide me, who notes that "unacceptable cultural attitudes can often be challenged indirectly, but powerfully, by modeling different social norms which become embodied by the group" and that "the sense of safety provided within the project is important in creating a climate where all participants feel open to increasing levels of supported risk and agency" (p. 182). I personally felt that the slur was used appropriately within the context of the moment, but not everyone agreed, so once the performance ended, I asked the class whether they believed that the scene had overall felt respectful. I was met with mixed reactions. σ offered, "You used a slur; it's usually frowned upon to use the word. I think you can use a different word." ξ, the leader of the Jokers, retorted that they themselves are trans and apologized, seemingly mortified that their work had been received so poorly. We discussed the idea that as artists we always want to explore big ideas, but we also need to bear in mind how certain words might be received by audiences and that responsible research and context are necessary when employing slurs. Despite praise and encouragement from Thelma, Kat, and myself for the group's bravery, ξ was crying at the end of class, devastated that they might have hurt the feelings of other students. Unfortunately, this incident, along with other perceived group failures and dysfunctions, proved too much for the Jokers, and they soon disbanded, with the individual members scattering to join the other four groups. Despite this negative outcome, it is worth noting that the students exhibited quite a lot of constructive agency during the discussion, offering their candid opinions which often pushed back against my own. It is, of course, very common in a devised rehearsal room for controversial material to emerge; I was proud of the students for being able to have this discussion in a

productive and respectful manner. Further, I was impressed that another member of the Jokers, η , also outed themselves as gender-queer and stayed with ξ through the end of class and into the next period. Even in a crisis moment the students overall remained very supportive of one another.

The crisis moment continued into the next rehearsal as, much like in Study 1, several of the groups failed to submit their first video assignments. Each group provided a stage manager's report; once again the main theme was the difficulty of scheduling, so we talked about shifting priorities, and we gave the students online resources to help. Like Study 1 and Lehtonen's study, the students exhibited relational agency by embracing how heavily they needed one another and began to meet outside of class to get the work done.

We viewed the videos that had been submitted and discussed challenges in filming. Unfortunately, there was insufficient time to teach the students proper filming techniques, but we provided general information on basic camera work, such as the role of cinematography in focusing audience attention, what they want to have in a frame, and camera angles. The students debated camera choices, with some advocating for shooting everything in the cafeteria with a static camera, others wishing to use Extra Spicy's following shot technique,³⁰ and some even discussing a Google Meet-style cinematography with everyone in individual on-screen windows (a clear mark of the lasting impact of remote learning on the students' sense of aesthetics). We were excited that they were able to articulate a vision for how they wanted to use the camera for their scenes. Here are some examples:

So, for our camera use, we're thinking that it would be more of a Zoom call-esque type of thing. It's going to be one person in each box ... Each person is going to have their own scene almost where they're speaking towards the camera. - τ

We're talking about using more intimate camera angles, following camera angles, closer, in front of our face. So, we'll follow her as she's walking through and see what's to the side of her. - X

³⁰ The "following shot" is a tracking shot in which the camera continuously follows the subject's action.

We're thinking about a still shot for everyone. Because looking at all of our scenes, we all have that intimate moment ... We're talking about all on stage with a backdrop. We want to emphasize a journey because we're talking about life through a teenager's eyes.
- ω

Per Kuftinec's (2001) analysis that theatre education requires collaboration, listening, and mediation of differing viewpoints (p. 46), in our next rehearsal we had a discussion about time management, coping with challenges, and conflict resolution. Our students' views on this last point were, to us, quite sophisticated; each group had a different but equally valid way to handle such challenges:

I think one of the best ways to hear each other out and avoid conflict is to let someone speak first, wait for them to finish, and then if you have an idea or if you have something to add on, definitely jump in, so everyone takes a turn speaking. - V

There's not always going to be a time where everyone agrees on what's going on. And I think it's just a matter of realizing you're not going to always be able to do it 100% the way you want. Maybe this time, you're gonna have to compromise a little bit. But next time, maybe give that person who didn't have their say last time, give them a turn? - θ

I just think like, especially as the directors of your group, it is very important to listen to everyone else's ideas, take pieces of everyone's ideas, put it together, and you'll work a lot better than if you try and do it on your own. – U

Thelma agreed that the conversation was important:

I'm seeing the class conflict resolution skills get better. When they struggle and fight together, they learn. For example, Extra Spicy had a big blowout; it was a miscommunication over text ... But they were able to push through it.

5.2.5 Rehearsals 17-21: Finalizing the Show

After the students reviewed Kat's video feedback on their scenes (a necessary tool in the remote learning environment that we utilized again in person to save time), we taught them more performance skills focused on Laban Movement Analysis and more Viewpoints. As I mentioned in section 5.2.1, in comparison to Study 1, we were impressed early in the rehearsal process with

their enthusiasm in embracing performance skill instruction. However, what we saw at this late stage of the process was on another level; there was an earnestness and clarity in their engagement, and it felt as though the benefits of the skill instruction to their current scenes were clear (i.e., they appeared to see how the direct application of what we were teaching them would benefit their work *now*). When we sent the groups to work independently, they exhibited a lot of constructive relational agency by working efficiently without any instructor supervision, looking instead to the group leaders to guide them. They debated a title for the show as well as music; they ultimately, once again using a Google Forms poll, voted to call the show *Our Legacy: When Moments Become Memories*.³¹

Rehearsal 19 was dedicated to recording scenes; we gave the four groups time to film on the stage in the cafeteria, completely unsupervised. It was clear that there was a lot of stress in trying to get everything done, but within the groups the students communicated well, and they also offered a lot of help to each other across groups. They were prepared: they knew what camera shots they wanted, and they kept track of their timing. I believe that in this rehearsal the students recognized one another as resources and demonstrated distributed intelligence in line with Edwards' (2005) definition of relational agency (p. 175).

Just as in Study 1, this productive rehearsal was followed by the second crisis moment of the process, where once again the groups did not submit many of their required videos. However, also like last time, this crisis moment seemed to push the students to fully appreciate that their material would be presented to an audience of their community, and this seemed to once again result in the students asserting quite a lot of individual and relational agency over the process.

³¹ This title is quite clever because throughout rehearsals we often utilized Tectonic Theatre Company's term "moments" in referring to their scenes (Kaufman & McAdams, 2018), so "When Moments Become Memories" is a double entendre referencing not only the sentimentality of their current high school experiences but also the show itself as a tool in archiving that sentimentality.

For example, ω, who had been taking on more responsibility within her group, stepped up to a leadership position for the entire class, taking it upon herself to track all of the groups to ensure that all of the materials were received. Further, she organized a meeting outside of class time to discuss editing decisions. She offered this report from that meeting:

We talked, we agreed, disagreed, and we all became like one big happy family. And we didn't just talk about the show; we talked about other personal stuff. It brought us much more closer together when we got to actually talk to each other. So that gave us the skills to really collaborate. – ω

To me, this action the students took to have an independent meeting to finalize the creative elements of the process speaks to Rainio's (2010) third requirement to enact agency, that the individuals must have the social resources to be able to do so (p. 8-10). From this point forward the students were entirely in charge of finishing the project; Kat, Thelma, and I had no idea what the final show would look like. We simply trusted them to get it done, and they did not disappoint us, or themselves.



Figure 5.6: The beginning of *Our Legacy: When Moments Become Memories*, employing the structure of a yearbook.

5.3 *Our Legacy: When Moments Become Memories*

As it turned out we were able to have an in-person audience for the screening of the show: approximately 175 students, teachers, and staff joined us in the school cafeteria. Thelma ensured that the students continued to assert agency over the process by letting them run the event: σ hosted, and ω and A were completely in charge of tech; when things went wrong, Thelma did not step in and help; any problems were the students' alone to solve. We also provided another YouTube premiere the following evening so that friends and family could join virtually; we had approximately 40 viewers that night, but the link circulated, and as of this writing (September 2022) it has been viewed over 300 times. As I did with *Metanoia*, I will now discuss this show in terms of artistic merit.

5.3.1 Artistic Assessment

Our Legacy: When Moments Become Memories is a very different show than *Metanoia*. While the latter narrowly focuses on the hardships of isolation that came from the COVID-19 quarantine, *Our Legacy* is an eclectic show in terms of content, theme, and aesthetic. It overall follows the journey the students had decided upon, a journey of teens transitioning from lives of simplicity into the more complicated challenges of adulthood.

The show begins with a satirical “warning,” a series of inside jokes addressed to specific groups within the high school community. It then moves into the students’ concept of bookends: an elderly woman looking back at her Waipahu High School 2021 yearbook. From there the pieces explore topics such as peer pressure, cyberbullying, romantic cheating, bathroom

etiquette, homophobic bigotry, and the fleeting passage of time. Though full of poignant dramatic moments, the show is also very funny. The spirit of teasing during the warning at the start is playful, welcoming, and endearing. The first full scene of the show, a game show piece brutally satirizing the American education system by forcing students to compete against each other for the “prize” of crippling college debt, was shot in a mockumentary style that effectively provides a contrast of public versus private thoughts. In a later scene featuring a mother attempting to indoctrinate her son with homophobic sentiments (an excerpt of which starts this chapter), there are wonderful miscommunications, such as when the boy confuses the word “sinner” for “cinnamon roll.”

Despite our conversations about aesthetic consistency across the different scenes, the pieces looked quite different: some had static camera shots while others had following shots; one piece is nine minutes long while another lasts forty seconds; some pieces were literal, exploring topics such as daily life in school, while others went in a much more abstract direction. This speaks to what is most striking about *Our Legacy* in comparison to *Metanoia*, the purposeful use of digital storytelling techniques, and aesthetically the show is indeed reminiscent of mid-pandemic era digital theatre where artists were being bolder with graphic design and editing pre-recorded footage, in comparison to the Zoom theatre of the early pandemic.³² The opening warning features a rapid-fire series of photoshopped images, many featuring the heads of teachers superimposed on various animals, items, and food (including Kat’s head on a cat and my face on a bowl of spaghetti), all over a distorted narrator’s voice. The game show scene features a lot of sound effects, cutaways, a vignetting overlay, distorted transitions, and fast

³² Examples of mid-pandemic era digital theatre leaning into graphic design and/or pre-recorded editing include Kumu Kahua’s production of Lee Cataluna’s *Aloha Attire* (November, 2020), The University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa’s production of Keola Simpson’s *I’m Lot Lane* (December, 2020), and Hawai‘i Pacific University’s production of Finnegan Kruckemeyer’s *Where Words Once Were* (April, 2021).

motion rewinding. A scene featuring an awkward bathroom exchange displays title cards to convey the passage of time. Every scene ends with a “page turning” transition to be reminiscent of a yearbook. Perhaps the most impressive use of editing was in a scene featuring a series of personal monologues juxtaposed against the song “Cell Block Tango” from the musical *Chicago*. In it, the students edited themselves singing over one another with impressive speed and precision, even color-coordinating subtitles to match the different characters. This scene also featured perhaps the most vulnerable moments of the show through its heartfelt confessions. Here is an excerpt:

I always feel that I have to find someone. I replay it over and over in my head. Now every time I'd meet someone, “You're not my type,” they said. “You're like a sister to me,” they said. “Stop talking to me, you creep!” My friends told me they cared, but I didn't believe it. Nobody actually really cared for me. I'd accepted that no matter what I tried or what I did, I could never find someone who loved me. I had to love myself.

Once again, Sean-Joseph Choo was kind enough to offer his critique. He has frequently commented to me that he believes that much of contemporary Hawaiian storytelling leans deeply into nostalgia, and he believes that the bookends of *Our Legacy* (an elderly woman looking back at her high school yearbook while her granddaughter looks on) speak to this trend. He also found this device highly effective at providing a coherent throughline to the varied scenes. Further, he sees throughlines from Hawai'i's history of comedy and performance to *Metanoia* and *Our Legacy*:

I cannot help but think of my own family's sense of humor, as well as historically the teasing and integration of different peoples on the plantation that created local culture, as well as the comedians that came out of all that (Rap Reiplinger,³³ Booga Booga,³⁴ Frank

³³ Rap Reiplinger rose to prominence as a prolific Hawaiian comedian in the early 1980s; his cultural influence is considered part of the second Hawaiian Renaissance.

³⁴ Booga Booga was one of the most popular Hawaiian comedy groups in the 1970s and 1980s, famous for their special brand of “Kanakan Comedy.” The original members of the Booga Booga comedy group were Rap Reiplinger, Ed Kaahea, and James Grant Benton.

Delima,³⁵ Andy Bumatai,³⁶ Kauai Hill AKA Bu La‘ia,³⁷ Da Braddahs,³⁸ Tumua Tuinei,³⁹ etc.). I wondered if the rich history of comedy, specifically sketch comedy, has some direct connection with the struggle and hilarity that came from different cultures trying to communicate and sometimes succeed and sometimes fail, and whether these moments and styles of vignettes/slice of life stem from the lived experiences of the ancestors here. (S. J. Choo, personal communication, August 16, 2022)

Sean’s identification of the influence of legendary Hawaiian comedians on our students’ work is a further sign to me that the students had quite a lot of agency over their creative processes, not only because Kat and I did not introduce these artists to them, but also because we didn’t even identify those throughlines in their work. In some ways Sean and I disagreed in our critical responses to *Our Legacy*. As I will explain in more detail in Chapter 7, I believe that the extra layer of digital expression and editing may have made it more difficult for the students to be honest and open in their performances (this preference for vulnerability, of course, speaks to my own artistic biases). As opposed to *Metanoia*, where the frantic nature of the brief rehearsal timeline and the nature of the remote learning environment resulted in pieces that largely felt like objective captures of everyday life, the stories of *Our Legacy* heavily leaned into elements of graphic design and were clearly influenced by aspects of social media, which to me meant that some of the more vulnerable moments in the rehearsal room shifted into more ironic and emotionally detached tones once they were translated into video. The result, to me, was less affecting than the brutal honesty of *Metanoia*. Sean, however, found *Our Legacy* more effective

³⁵ Frank Delima is an influential Hawaiian comedian. He is known for invoking his diverse ethnic background in his act as a microcosm for the diversity of Hawai‘i (he of is Portuguese, Hawaiian, Irish, Chinese, English, Spanish, and Scottish descent).

³⁶ Andy Bumatai is a Hawaiian actor, stand-up comedian, television host, and producer. He has created a number of TV specials for Hawai‘i’s KGMB-TV, most notably *High School Daze* and *All in the Ohana*.

³⁷ Kauai Hillis, AKA Bu La‘ia, is a Hawaiian comedian known for his use of Pidgin and for wearing a large wig and blacking out one of his front teeth while performing. He starred in a cable television show in the early 1990s and attained fame when he ran for governor of Hawai‘i in 1994.

³⁸ Active since 2002, Hawaiian comedians James Roche and Tony Silva are famous for their live performances as well as their ongoing television show as the duo Da Braddahs.

³⁹ A newcomer to the Hawaiian comedy scene, Tumua Tuinei is a former University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa football player, who is inspiring a new generation of Hawaiians.

and moving than its predecessor, noting, “I could see an evolution of thought and cohesion from the Spring into Autumn. Kudos to the kids for that.”

Despite any misgivings I may have about elements of the storytelling in *Our Legacy*, I believe that the show is ultimately successful because the students accomplished their goal of conveying life through a teenager’s eyes, as they saw it, and like *Metanoia*, the show is wildly original. The scope of the show is broad, touching on a wide range of issues typically faced by teenagers, as was evident in the audience responses, which I will discuss shortly. It struck me that the show had some thematic overlaps with its predecessor, particularly in a scene where a student is rejected from a lunch table in the school cafeteria, which is very reminiscent of the theme of rejection echoed throughout *Metanoia*. This indicates to me that the students were potentially still carrying some of the hurt from quarantine with them into their in-person classrooms, or perhaps those feelings of rejection are universal to young people regardless of where and how they learn. But this show is also far more playful, pointed in its criticism of educational systems, and sentimental in its outlook on the high school experience. As I have stated, I felt that the show question the students chose was overly broad, but they did a remarkable job of encompassing a full high school experience with an eclecticism that I believe reflects the diversity of the students themselves.

5.3.2 Audience, Teacher, and Student Feedback

The show was received well, perhaps, in part, because everyone was starved for a live communal event in December of 2021, but there was real warmth during the in-person screening at Waipahu High School. As an audience member, there were moments when I was confused; however, the rest of our audience seemed to have no difficulty following the narratives. It

became clear to me from observing these reactions that their peers resonated with the digital storytelling tools that we had not taught our Gen Z students, which often drew upon the aesthetics of TikTok, Instagram, and Twitch. Once again, our audience of teachers, students, family, and friends of both the live and online streams left overwhelmingly positive feedback in the YouTube chat, during our talkback, and in a survey that Thelma sent out with the invitation to the play. There were some negative comments about technical issues and clarity of storytelling, but the feedback was once again overwhelmingly positive, and this time, when asked how captivated they were by the performances, the average response was 4.44 out of 5, a little higher than the response to *Metanoia*. Here are some quotes from the audience survey:

I liked that it was funny and entertaining but at the same time it was covering issues that go on in school.

The LGBTQ performance feels more connected because I am part of the LGBTQ community and sometimes i feel judged.

It's very rare to see p break out of his shell and passionately show his true colors. I'm so proud of the person he's found himself to be, and I can't wait to see this journey. Thank you!

As with Study 1, I believe that the positive feedback may have provided important community validation to encourage further self-directed learning (Claxton, 2008, p. 11). Further, by having a goal of performance for their community, the need to work together was, hopefully, evident outside the parameters of Waipahu High School, which Edwards (2007) considers a requirement for successful relational agency (pp. 8-9). Thelma once again praised the process, noting its effects on specific students:

I don't know if you saw any movement or changes in [τ], but as his teacher, oh, my gosh, profound changes. And also with people like [υ]. I never knew [υ], I'd never seen him before. I think he took my class because someone told him that he looks like a model ... And just watching him interacting with SlapprK and interacting in his department meetings, he learned to have a voice. I mean, not just like regular teenage talk, but he

sounded like the beginnings of a budding professional because the people that he was surrounded with; it's hard to go off topic when everyone else is so project-oriented.

After the live screening, we met with the students to celebrate, take the exit survey, and have the end-of-process open-ended group interview (again, the results of both I will discuss in Chapter 6). We were able to give the students leis and awards, take photos, and say our goodbyes, a lovely contrast with the more abrupt end to the remote process of Study 1.



Figure 5.7: Kat, myself, and the students of Waipahu High School's Autumn 2021 theatre class (all masked) after the live screening.

The students once again expressed a lot of pride and delight in the execution of the show and, as in Study 1, emphasized how much they loved working in their groups. Also, like Study 1, many of them expressed that they would like to keep making devised theatre, as I will explain in more detail in section 6.3.4. They expressed many of their technical accomplishments as an extension of their larger learning curriculum in the different areas of the academy because they were employing many of the film, editing, and graphic design skills that they were learning in

their other classes. This can be seen in this chat exchange from the students during our digital talk-back after the online screening of the show:

ω: the amount of creativity and student voices that's been put into the show ... i love it!

S: I agree amen

ω: amen! perfect blend from the arts & comm pathways!

S: YEAHHH^^^

K: ^^ YUP

S: ultimate crossover

ω: aka multimedia, audio engineering, & graphic design!

5.4 Conclusion

As in Chapter 4, it was my intention to comprehensively describe the rehearsal process of Study 2 to provide context for the qualitative and quantitative data that I will offer in the next chapter, which will, in turn, inform my findings and conclusions in Chapter 7. My immediate conclusion, however, is that the process worked even better in person. As with Study 1, from working with the prompt, “What does the world need to know right now?” and learning basic performance and devised theatre skills, the students created original scenes of theatre that they analyzed to create a show question and then used that question to create a cohesive show as a group, which they wrote, performed, directed, designed and filmed entirely on their own, and which was, according to the audience survey, received even better than the show at the end of Study 1. Further, with more time, more experience from the instructors and repeat students, and more robust interactions in person, the students were able to assert even more agency over the process by taking over the editing responsibilities and organizing meetings outside of class, performing outside research to bring new skills and techniques into their artistic offerings as well as running production and technical components of the live screening, which to me at least partially satisfies Gibbons’ mandate of self-directed learning that the students must successfully take over

designing and executing their own learning activities. Finally, the content of *Our Legacy* itself was much broader and more ambitious in scope than *Metanoia*, covering a range of topics that went far beyond the isolation felt during COVID quarantine.

It is, of course, possible that my assessments of Studies 1 and 2 suffer from confirmation bias, that is, the tendency to acquire or process new information in a way that confirms one's preconceptions and avoids contradiction with a prior belief (Del Vicario et al., 2017 p. 1); or, to put it another way, Kat and I wanted the students to respond well to our methodology, so we observed that they did just that. However, Thelma agreed with our assessments, and she had no motivation for our methodology to work better than any other theatre pedagogy. Overall, Kat and I were genuinely surprised by the students' enthusiasm for the work in both studies; as I will discuss in more detail, we believe the unique circumstances of the pandemic may have played a role. Nonetheless, the students did appear to assert quite a lot of agency over their own learning and enjoyed doing so. To assess how this transpired in more detail, I will offer empirical analyses of the data from both studies in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

After having comprehensively discussed the application of our devised theatre methodology in both studies, I will now offer qualitative and quantitative analyses of my findings.

6.2 Research Methods

The goal of this research project was to assess the Waipahu High School theatre students' sense of agency and outlooks on learning before, during, and after engaging with our methodology, which was aimed at allowing students as much agency as possible over their creative processes. As I discussed, Study 1 took place from March to May 2021 over Google Meet, with a sample group consisting of twenty-seven students ($N = 27$). Study 2 took place from September to December 2021, in person, with a sample group of thirty-two students ($N = 32$), nine of whom were from the same sample group as Study 1. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, my data collection was divided into four parts: pre- and post-study surveys, end-of-process open-ended group interviews, field notes, and video recordings. I will now go into further detail regarding the content of the pre- and post-study surveys, my methodology for qualitatively labeling instances of agency, and how I assessed the students' productivity.

6.2.1 Pre- and Post-Study Surveys

To assess whether the students' views on learning, creativity, theatre, and their sense of overall agency shifted at all as a result of the process, I administered a survey at the beginning and end

of both studies consisting of ten statements that borrow prompts from the Sense of Agency Scale of Tapal et al., which was chosen to measure any changes in the sense of agency of the subjects because it complexly measures the consciously perceived control over the mind, the body, and the immediate environment (Tapal et al., 2017). The Sense of Agency Scale measures the sense of positive and negative agency within one questionnaire, with two different scales that appear as combined in the questionnaire design, and that is what the statements on my survey did as well. I also borrowed several questions from the Scale to Measure Lifelong Learning of Kirby et al. (Kirby et al., 2010), as well as a few statements aimed directly at evaluating the subjects' likelihood to continue to engage with theatre practices. The Sense of Agency Scale of Tapal et al. consists of 36 statements, and the Scale to Measure Lifelong Learning of Kirby et al. consists of 14. I was advised by Thelma that responding to 50 statements would be far too much for this group of students, particularly in a remote learning environment. Therefore, I settled on ten statements, two focused on addressing positive and negative senses of agency, five focused on learning outlooks, two focused on creativity and theatre, and one on a sense of community, which I was advised by Baker as being particularly important for an O'ahu population. Here then are the ten statements:

- I consider myself to be a creative person.
- I enjoy theatre.
- I consider myself to be a valuable part of my community.
- I feel uncomfortable when I don't know what is going to happen next.
- I feel like I am good at learning on my own outside of school.
- I love learning for its own sake.
- I try to relate learning in school to practical issues.

- I like to learn by doing.
- I think learning from my peers is as valuable as learning from my educators.
- In general, I am in full control of what I do.

The students were asked to indicate how much they agreed with each statement on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 indicating that they strongly disagree and 10 indicating that they strongly agree. Because this study involves two matched sample groups and the data is ordinal in nature, a non-parametric analysis was required, so the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was applied to assess statistical significance. Additionally, the exit survey posed five statements aimed at assessing their thoughts on the process itself:

- I felt like I was able to express myself throughout the rehearsal process.
- I was just an instrument in the hands of Mike and Kat in the rehearsal process without any real control.
- I am the author of my creative material that appeared in the final performance.
- I did not learn any new skills from this process.
- I would like to make devised theatre again.

As with the other ten statements, the students were asked to rate how much they agreed on a scale from 1 to 10, again with 1 indicating that they strongly disagree and 10 indicating that they strongly agree.

6.2.2 Qualitative Labeling of Agency in the Rehearsal Room

As I mentioned in sections 2.7 and 3.7.1, Lehtonen modified Rainio's categories of agency into three types, which I borrowed for my studies: 1) constructive, meaning the students were actively contributing to the task at hand; 2) resisting, the students were actively defiant against the

classroom activity; and 3) passive, which are student actions unrelated to the class lesson. (Lehtonen, 2015, pp. 1892-1893). In Study 1 individual instances of agency were clear: over Google Meet the students primarily communicated over the chat function, one at a time. I therefore counted any instance of communication from any student as an instance of agency, except for a few rare instances, such as when Thelma would periodically tell the students to type “here” in the chat to acknowledge that they were still engaged. Rainio (2010) notes that it is important to consider assertions of agency as an interdependent balance between individual and relational, noting that it is crucial for people to understand themselves as *agentive* as individuals before they can benefit from relational agency (p. 60). Therefore, in both studies I needed to track instances of both individual and relational agency. However, the remote nature of Study 1 meant that I could only track relational agency broadly through field notes.

As discussed in section 3.7.1, I employed Descriptive Coding for my qualitative analysis. Because I am borrowing Lehtonen’s (2015) terminology, my coding labels related to agency were predetermined, but the methodology for arriving at those labels was not. For example, when a student responded to a performance with, “i like how everyone interacted with each other,” that was clearly an instance of constructive agency as it furthered the activity or discussion, whereas another student offering, “omg the half time show for the Superbowl was not it :/” was clearly unrelated to the topic at hand and is, therefore, an instance of passive agency. But what about when a student did not respond to the teacher, and another student gleefully guessed, “he is in the bathroom lol”? This technically addresses the teacher’s concern, but it is also clearly not in the spirit of constructive engagement, so would this be considered an instance of passive or constructive agency? I labeled such instances as best I could based on the context of each moment. Unfortunately, much of what Rainio would describe as “initiative” happened in

the breakout rooms, which we were unable to observe or record, so the data only covers what occurred in the main Google Meet rehearsal room.

The in-person nature of Study 2 meant that assessing agency was more eclectic as the students could assert themselves in a multitude of different ways ranging from overt to subtle, and they would do so simultaneously, rather than speaking one at a time over the Google Meet chat. This meant that I tracked the students' instances of individual and relational agency by analyzing their actions in the rehearsal video recordings. Examples of constructive agency included volunteering to perform, responding to questions, or providing feedback on other students' work. Passive agency involved actions that were not aimed at engaging with the class activity, such as checking their phones, talking out of turn, or physically doing something unrelated to the class activity, such as dancing together or playing a hand game. Here again it was often difficult to tell if conversations among the students were related to the class activity or not, so looking back at the rehearsal footage I had to once again make guesses based on context. For example, when U ran away from her group in Rehearsal 16 to enthusiastically work on her laptop, was it to research something related to the group's creative process, or was she doing something completely unrelated? The group appeared excited when she rejoined them, so I took U's enthusiasm to mean that it was an instance of constructive agency, but it was impossible for me to know for certain.

I also analyzed the rehearsal footage, interviews, and various student creative offerings for thematic patterns by employing descriptive coding to summarize what the students were doing or saying in a word or short phrase, and then I employed second-cycle coding to refine those labels. An example from the Study 1 end-of-process open-ended group interview can be seen in Figure 6.1.

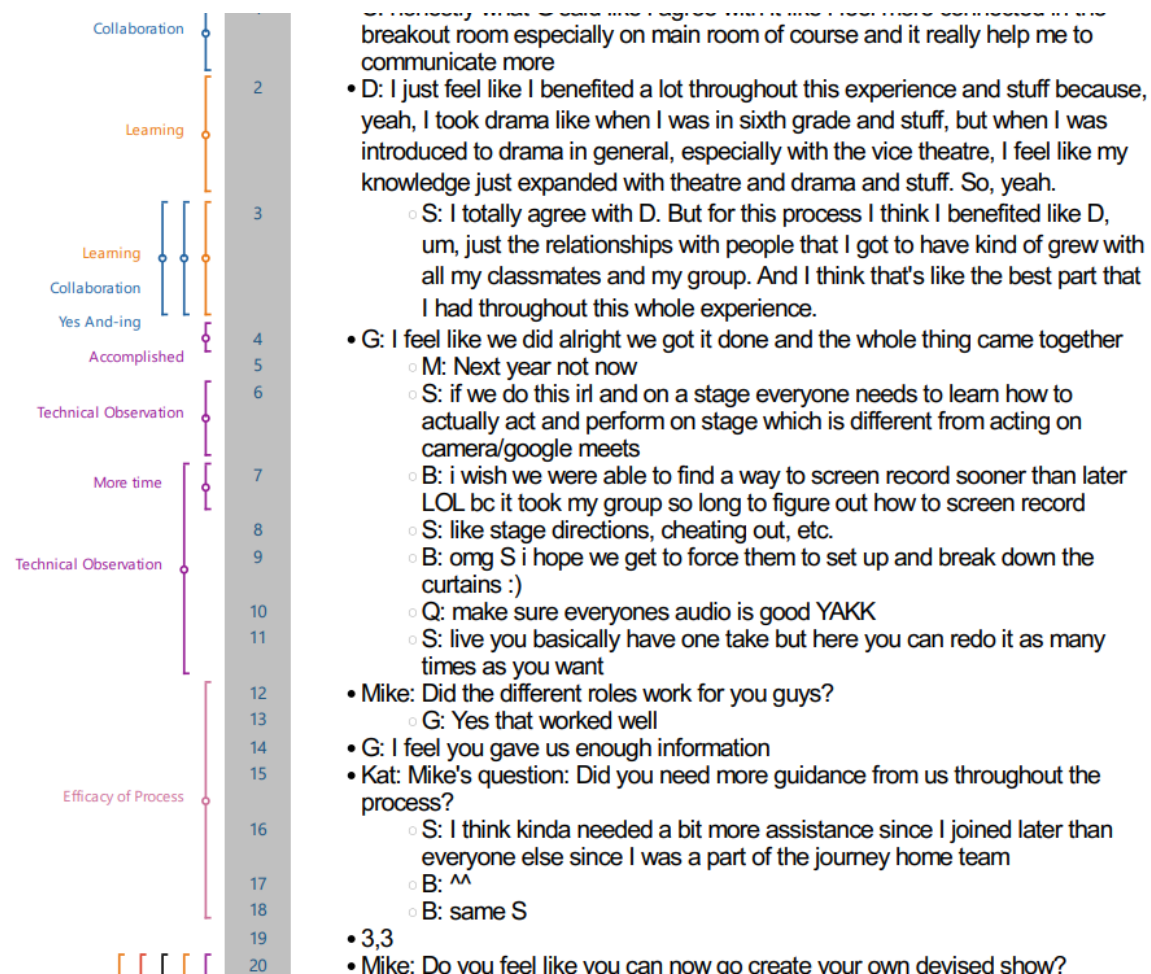


Figure 6.1: A coded excerpt from the Study 1 End of Process Open-Ended Group Interview

6.2.3 Assessing Productivity

Evaluating these forms of agency in terms of productivity proved challenging. As I mentioned previously, a lot of the content creation work for Study 1 was accomplished in Google Meet breakout rooms that we were unable to observe or record, and the same work done in Study 2 was unsupervised and, therefore, difficult to assess from the video recordings. Therefore, to get some sense of individual productivity, I evaluated the two final shows themselves for student engagement. For Study 1 it was impossible to observe “behind the scenes” contributions, so I had to make this evaluation based on the duration of their individual on-screen performances in

relation to their individual groups. In other words, they were evaluated on what they appeared to contribute to *Metanoia* within their groups to avoid assessing their participation based on the length of their scenes. For Study 2, I was able to observe a lot of behind-the-scenes dynamics, particularly the roles of directing and filming, in addition to gaining insight into their costume design, makeup, and editing based on their class reports; so, I factored these observations, along with their screen time, in assessing the students' ultimate engagement in *Our Legacy*.

6.3 Findings

6.3.1 Agency in the Rehearsal Room

In assessing student agency in the Google Meet rehearsal room for Study 1, I noticed that there were very few instances of resisting agency (8 instances out of 2067 of agency) when compared to Lehtonen's findings (Figure 6.2), and even in those instances the resistance was fairly mild; for example, when I scolded the students for failing to submit their homework, a student responded, "life is goin on."

For Study 1, I identified a new category of agency, "technical," referring to students discussing technological issues they were facing, such as slow Wi-Fi, camera malfunctions, or other pragmatic concerns, such as needing to assist a parent with a chore or to use the bathroom. Figure 6.3, then, demonstrates the instances of constructive, passive, resisting, and technical agency over the Study 1 rehearsal process.

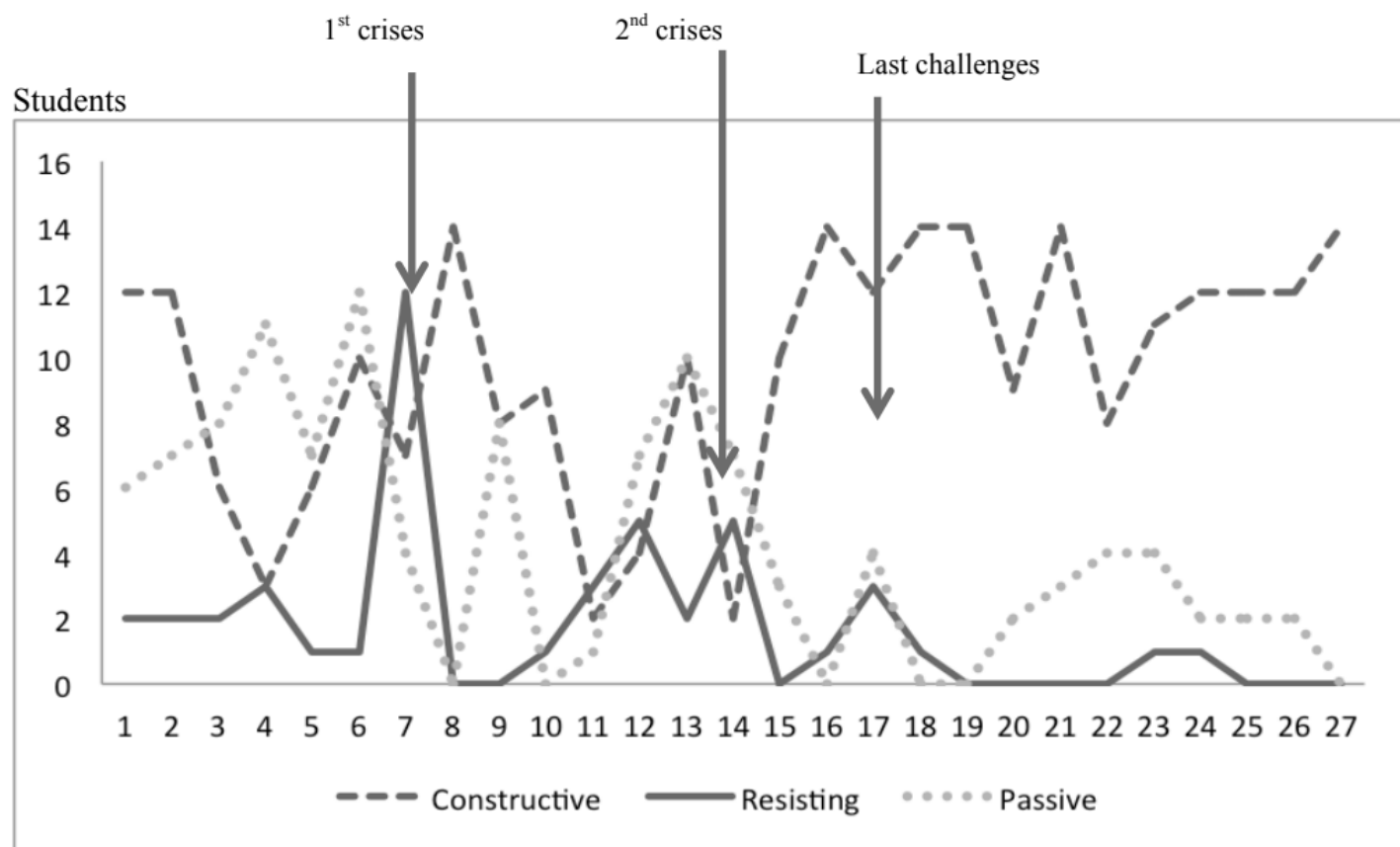


Figure 6.2: Anna Lehtonen's findings from her study, "Evaluating Students' Agency and Development of Ownership in a Collaborative Playmaking Project" (Lehtonen, 2015, p. 1892).

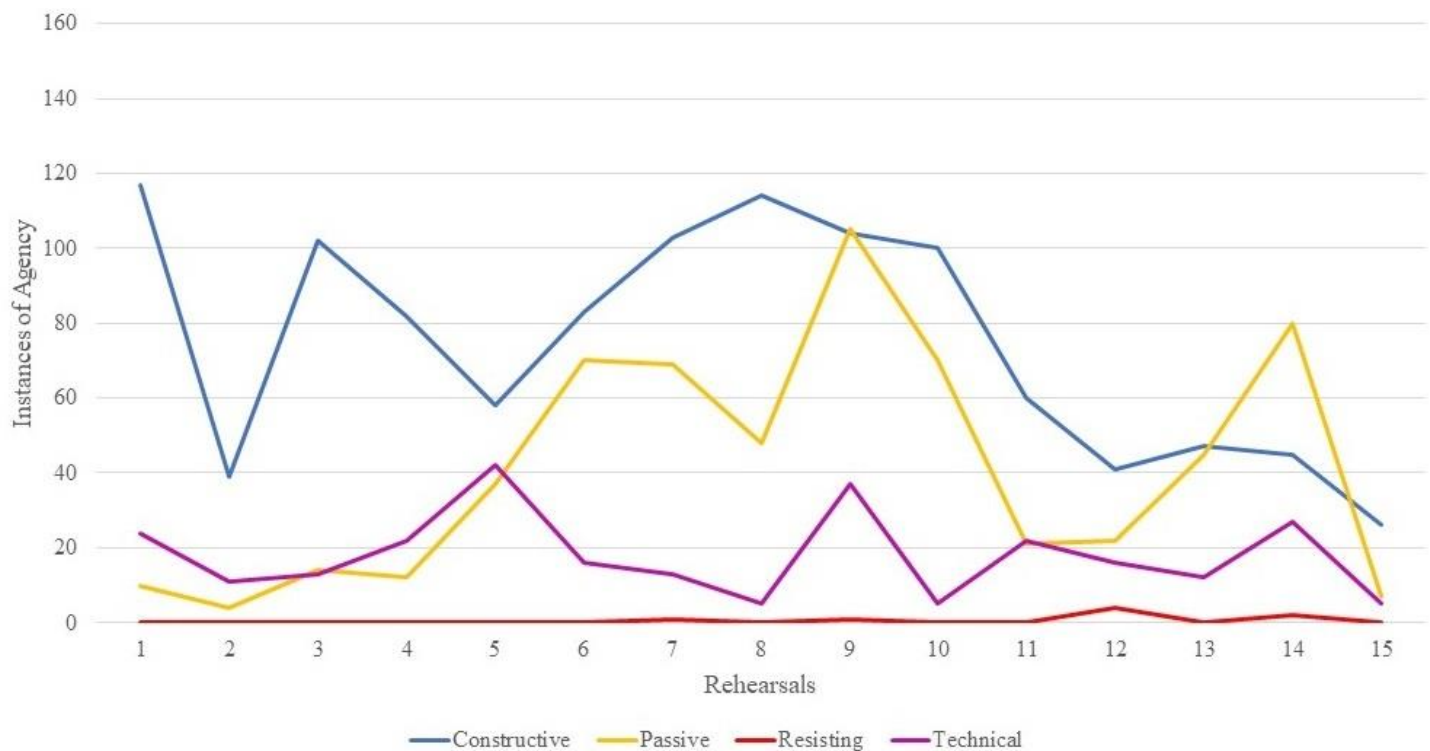


Figure 6.3: Study 1 Constructive vs. Passive vs. Resisting vs. Technical, Agency

I noticed that the trendlines for passive and technical instances line up neatly, with significant deviations only occurring during Rehearsals 6, 11, and 13. Further, I observed the instances of passive and technical agency from the same students to be largely aligned, meaning that most (though not all) of the students that regularly complained about technical issues also exhibited high amounts of passive agency. This suggests to me that technical agency might have presented itself as a form of passive agency in our virtual rehearsal room. I believe that it may have been easier for the students to discuss technical difficulties than to openly engage in unrelated activities, or even overtly resist the process. I observed the students' passive and technical agency to be so aligned that I found it helpful to track this data by plotting constructive agency against both passive and technical agency together, which then made it easier for me to identify when the students were constructively engaging with the devised activities, and when they were not, as can be seen in Figure 6.4.

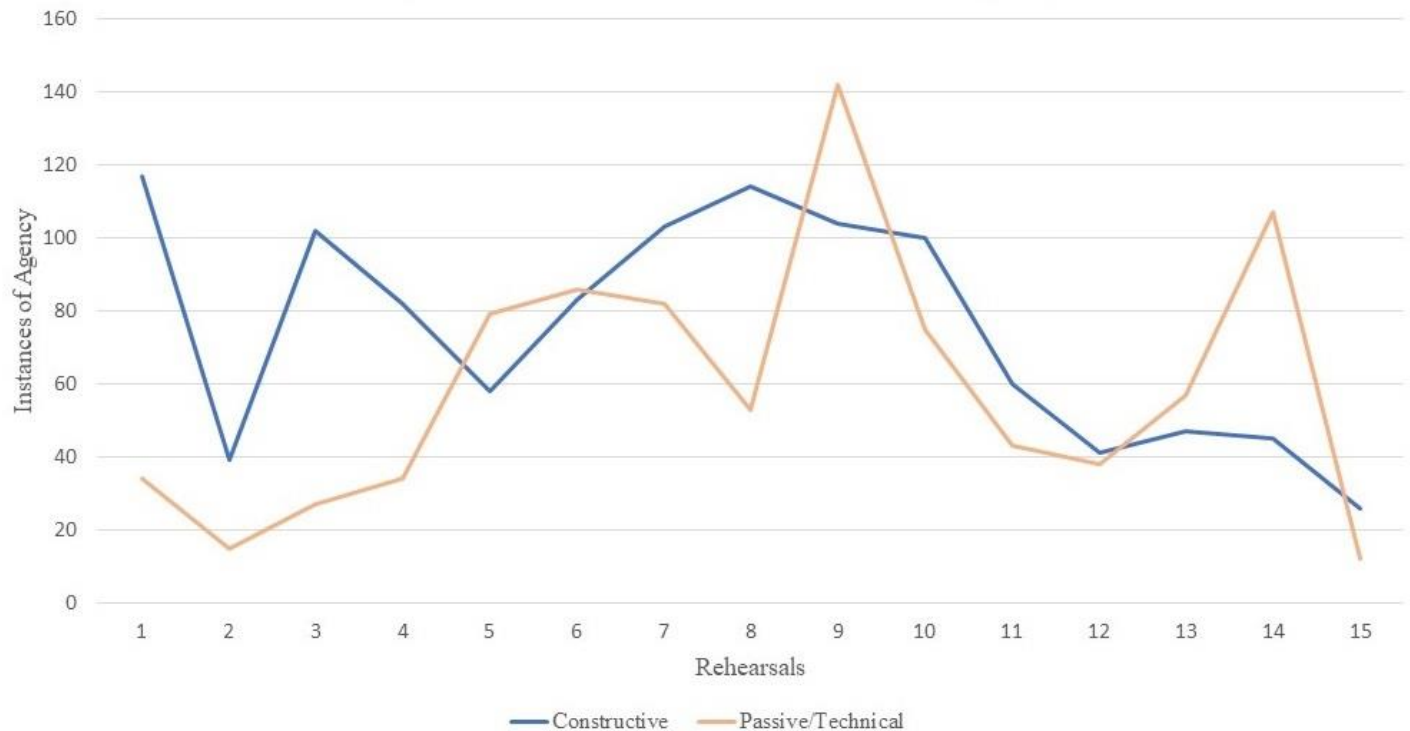


Figure 6.4: Study 1 Constructive vs. Passive/Technical, Agency

I observed that on more rehearsal days than not, the students asserted themselves constructively more than they asserted themselves with passivity, resistance, or technical concerns; that is, what they said verbally or typed into the chat was usually actively engaging in the classroom instruction or activity. The days that saw more passive and technical agency than constructive were the days focused on creative writing; the one day that a number of the older students, who had been working on a different project, joined us and were forced to quickly catch up; and the two days toward the end of the process when we were pushing the students to finish recording their scenes for the show. These were not unproductive days: the creative writing day, for example, was one of the most celebrated. There seems, to me, to be a certain correlation between passive and technical agency and general playfulness.

In Study 2, once again, instances of resisting agency were few (65 instances out of 2572 instances of agency) but noticeably more than in Study 1. Most of these instances involved the students showing up late to class without an excuse (which was not much of an issue in Study 1),

but there were also instances such as refusing to participate in an activity or pushing back against a suggested strategy for creating moments for the show. Figure 6.5 demonstrates the instances of constructive, passive, and resisting agency over the Study 2 rehearsal process.

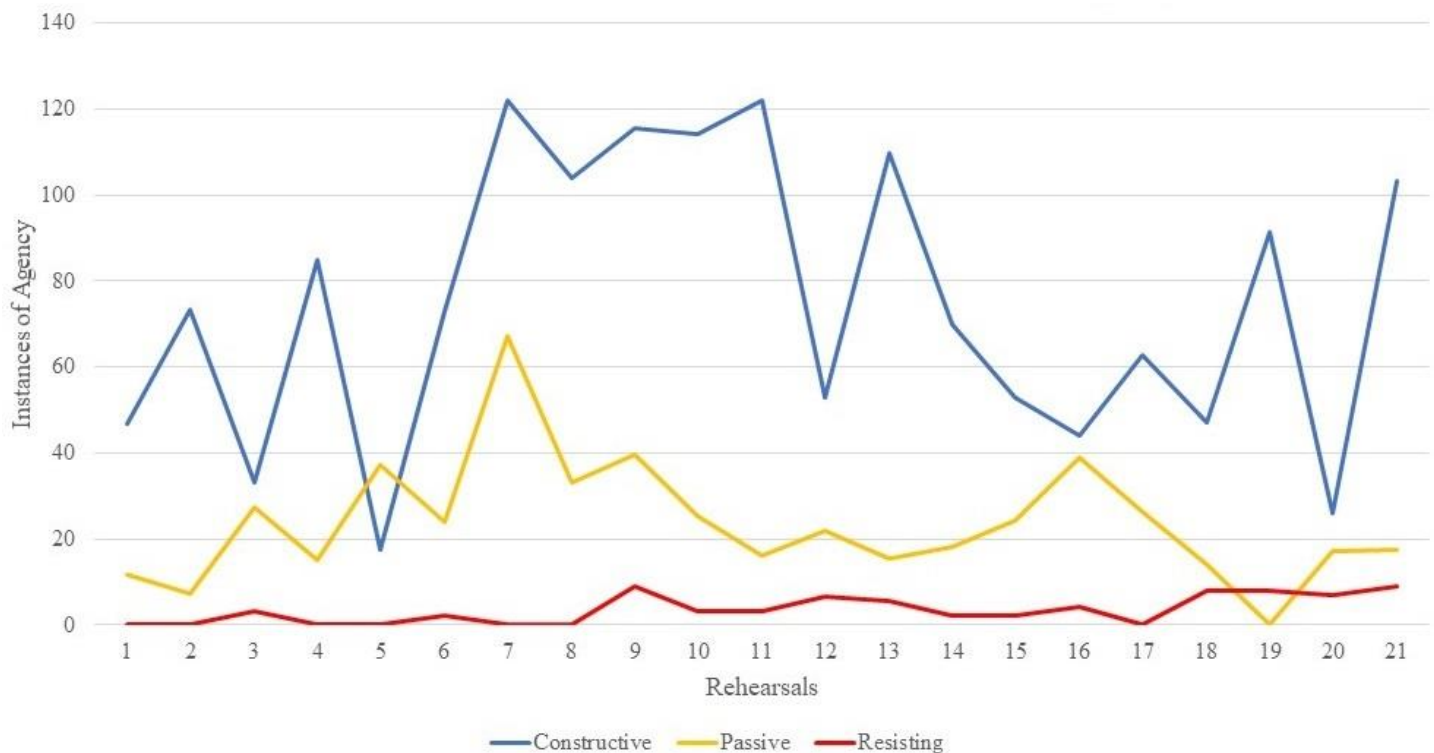


Figure 6.5: Study 2 Constructive vs. Passive vs. Resisting, Individual Agency

I found this chart to be incomplete because, as opposed to Study 1, where agency was mostly measured by individual instances of contributing to the Google Meet chat, in-person instances of relational agency were far more prevalent. More often than not, the students would assert constructive agency by working collectively, for example, by creating scenes, actively participating in warm-up or improv exercises, or working in groups to provide each other with creative feedback; in the same way they would display passive agency collectively by engaging in side conversations that would quickly spread to the entire class, or just by getting off task when they were supposed to be working in their groups. Reviewing the rehearsal footage, I then assessed the relational agency for the entire class by duration, that is, how long they appeared to

be engaging in an activity in a manner that could be considered to be constructive, passive, or resisting. In moments where some students displayed agency while others did not, I did my best to distribute the time allocations accordingly, such as allocating half or one third of the duration of the display of agency based on what percentage of the class was engaging. Figure 6.6 demonstrates the duration of constructive, passive, and resisting relational agency as a percentage in relation to the overall duration of each rehearsal throughout Study 2.

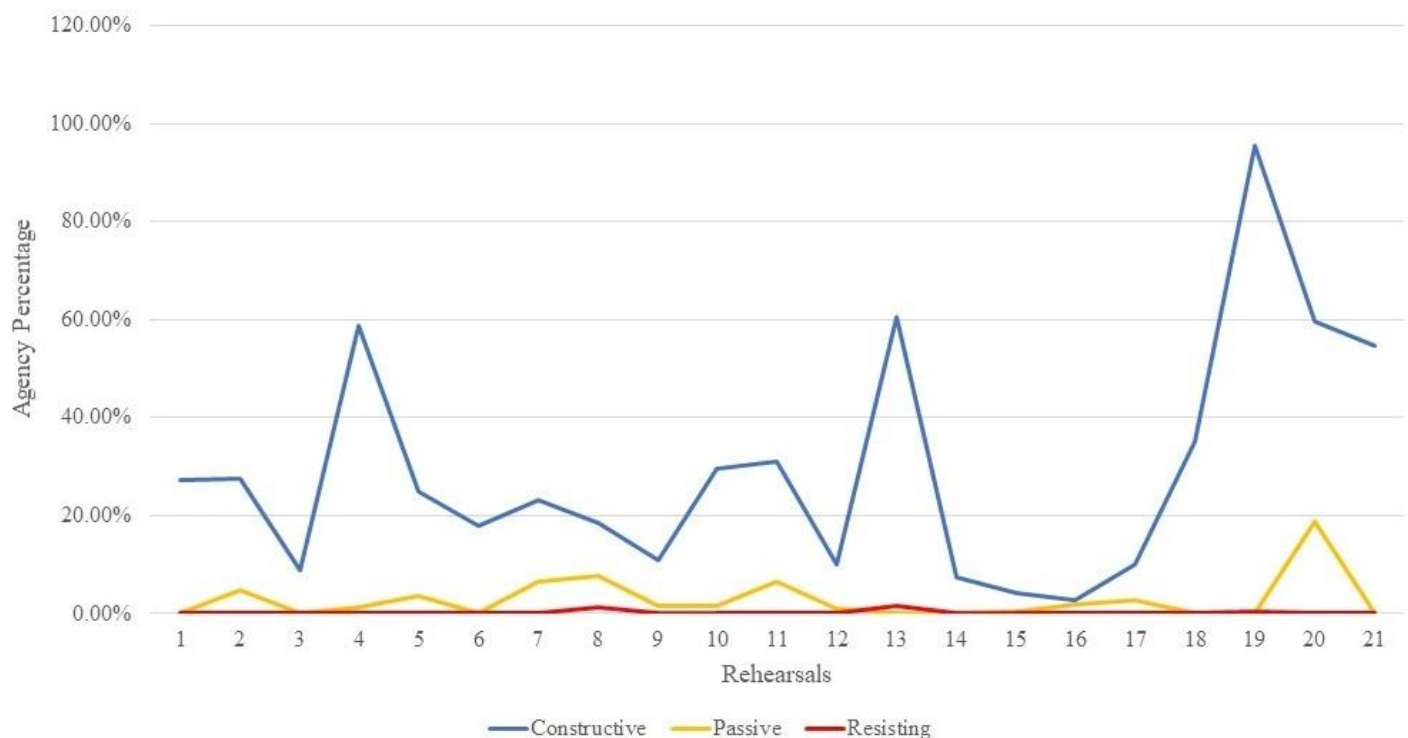


Figure 6.6: Study 2 Constructive vs. Passive vs. Resisting, Relational Agency

Figures 6.5 and 6.6 follow very similar trajectories, but the relational agency graph is a little less erratic and, in my opinion, provides a better sense of the class dynamics throughout the rehearsal process. The days that saw the most constructive agency were, unsurprisingly, heavily focused on performance, while the days with the lowest agency were oriented around clerical tasks such as defining rules for the rehearsal room, discussing issues with recording scenes, and explaining homework assignments. Rehearsal 19, which had a very high percentage of constructive agency, was dedicated to having the students direct, perform, and record their

scenes, unsupervised, for the final show. The gap between constructive and passive agency was higher in Study 2 than in Study 1, indicating that our remote learning environment fostered a greater amount of passive agency than our in-person environment. Again, in comparison to Lehtonen's data, I found that in both studies, rather than actively resisting the process, our students were far more likely to exhibit passive agency, such as checking their phones or discussing an unrelated topic. It is worth noting that comparatively, I also overall saw a lot more constructive agency in my data than in Lehtonen's study, which I believe speaks to the enthusiasm many of our students felt for the processes.

6.3.2 Agency and Productivity

The data for Study 1, indicating how individual student agency corresponded to productivity by measuring the students' involvement in the final show, can be seen in Figure 6.7. Here the students are indicated by letters of the alphabet on the X axis, their different instances of agency in the rehearsal room are represented by the different colored vertical bars, and the green line indicates their engagement in the final show.

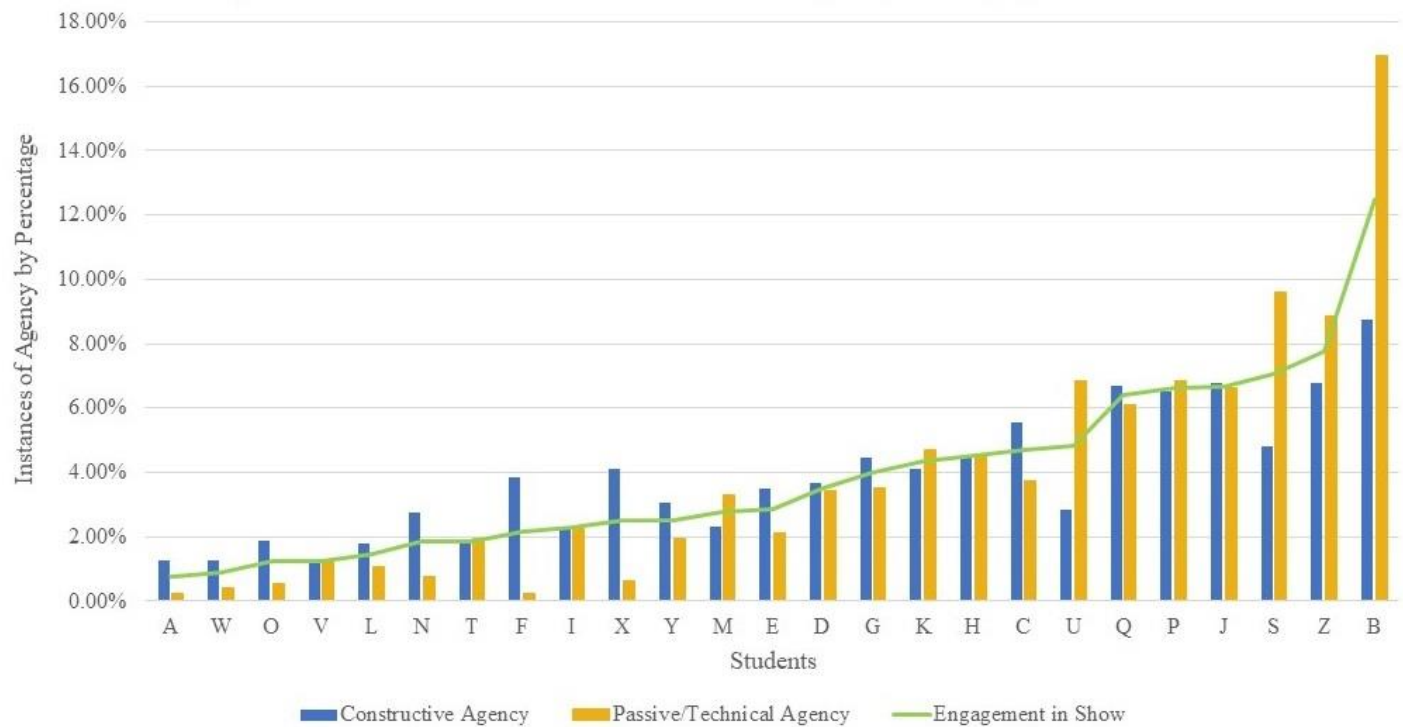


Figure 6.7: Study 1 Constructive and Passive/Technical, Agency vs. Engagement in Show

The data for Study 2 can be seen in Figure 6.8, where the students are indicated by letters of the Greek alphabet on the X axis (except for the repeat students, who are indicated by the same English alphabet characters used in Study 1), and their instances of agency in the rehearsal room and engagement in the final show are tracked on the Y axis.

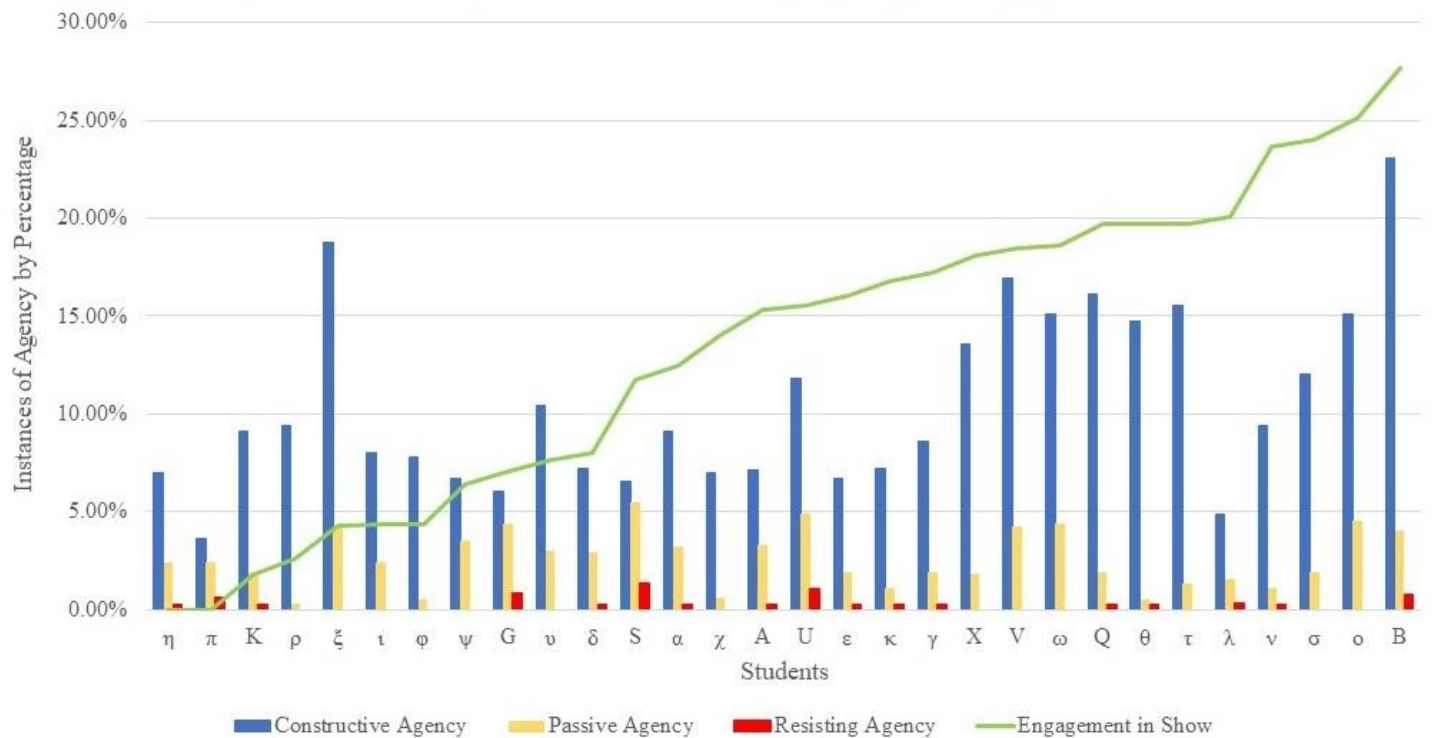


Figure 6.8: Study 2 Constructive, Passive and Resisting, Agency vs. Engagement in Show

Conventional wisdom might dictate that the students that were exhibiting the most constructive agency throughout the rehearsal process should also be highly engaged in the final performance, and the students exhibiting high amounts of passive, technical, and/or resisting agency would contribute less, but I cannot find any discernible correlation between constructive or passive/technical/resisting agency and the students' engagement in the final show for either study. However, there does appear to be a correlation between constructive *and* passive/technical/resisting agency, and the students' engagement in each of the final productions. Looking at all instances of agency, regardless of what kind, Figure 6.9 shows the data for Study 1. The blue line represents all instances of agency in the rehearsal room for each student, the green line represents those students' engagement in the final show, and the dotted green line represents the linear slope of the students' overall show engagement, that is, the progression of engagement in the final project over the whole class.

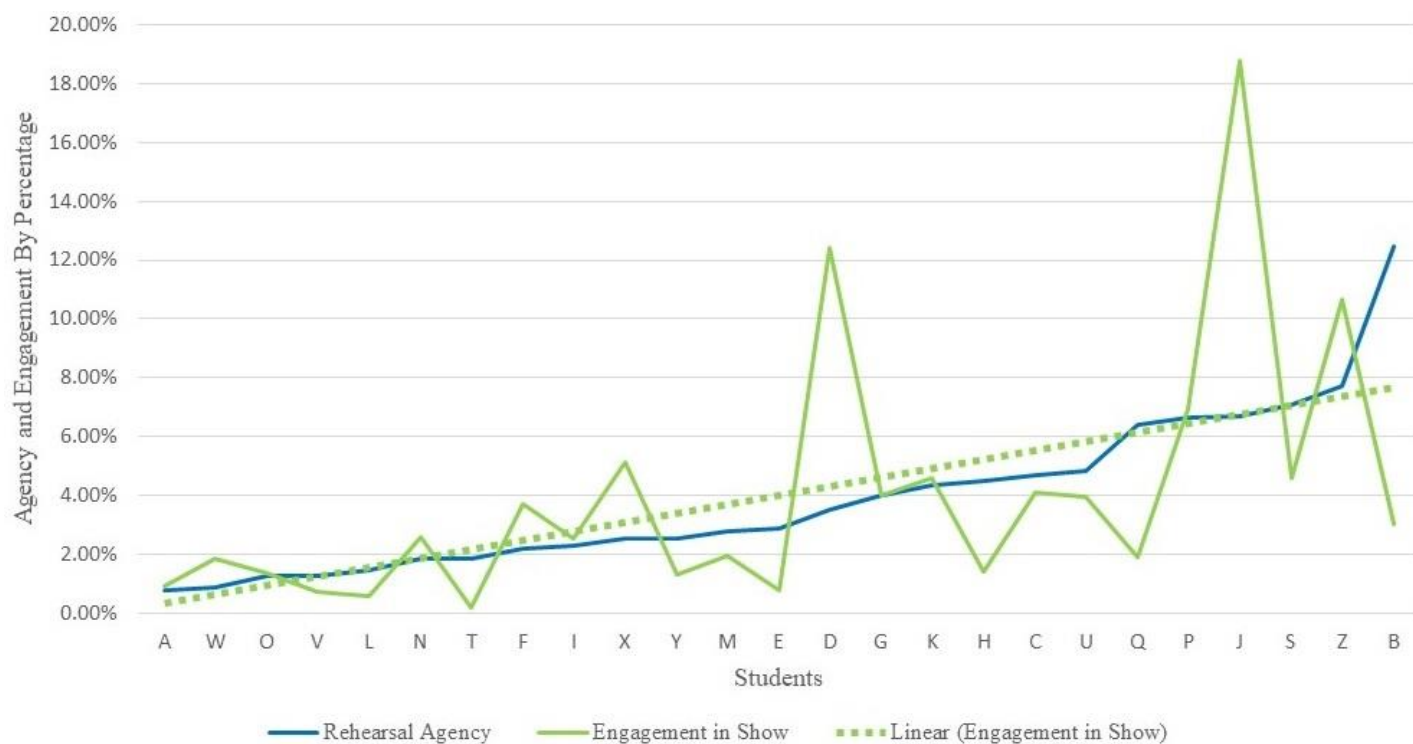


Figure 6.9: Study 1 Total Agency vs. Engagement in Show

Figure 6.10 shows the same data for Study 2.

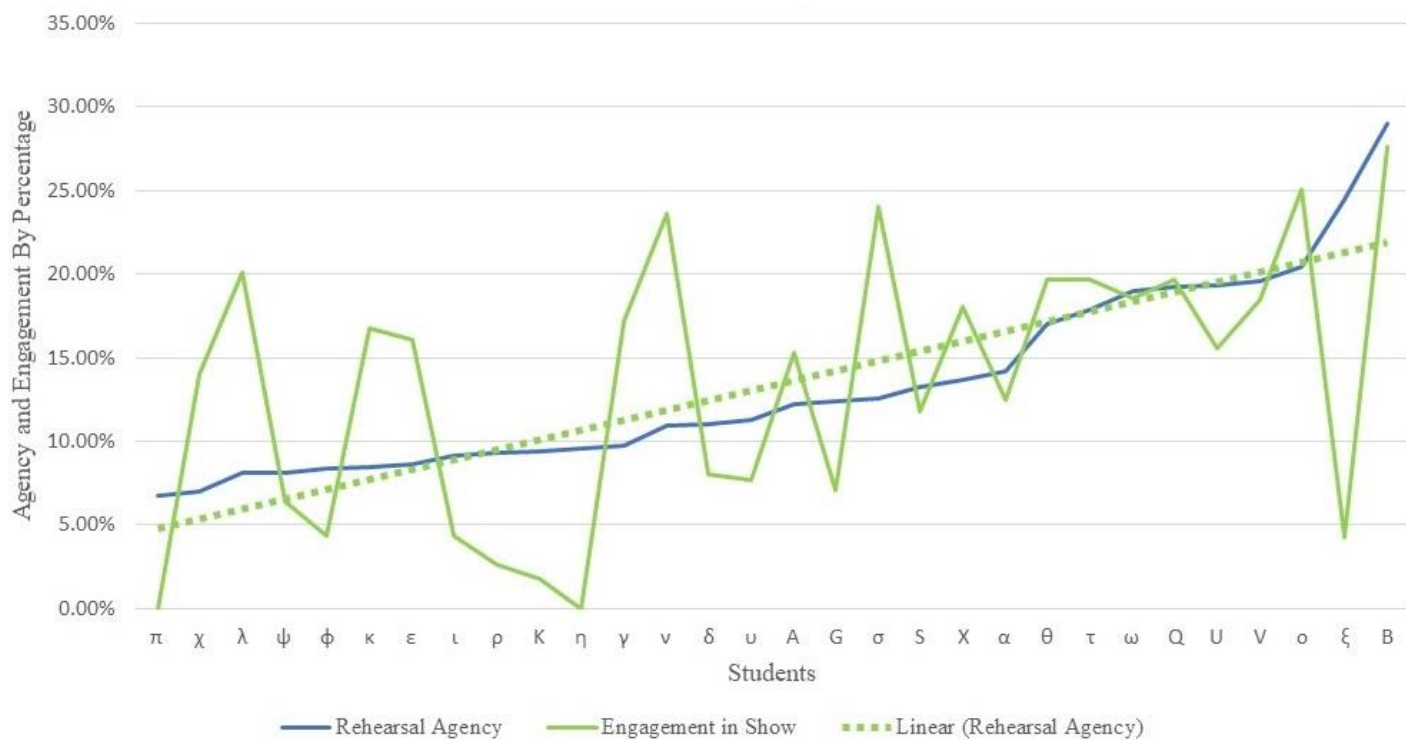


Figure 6.10: Study 2 Total Agency vs. Engagement in Show

In both studies, the linear slope of overall student engagement in the final show correlates with their instances of agency throughout the rehearsal process. Because a nonparametric measure of rank correlation seemed appropriate for these data sets, I used Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation to determine that the correlation coefficient for Study 1 is strong and for Study 2 is moderate ($r_{s1} = .654$, $r_{s2} = .518$). **This suggests that, in our remote and in-person devised theatre learning environments aimed at allowing students as much agency as possible over their creative processes, it didn't matter how the students engaged throughout the rehearsal process, they could have been contributing to our activities or they could have been talking about what they had for lunch, so long as they stayed engaged with *something* in the rehearsal room, they appeared to work hard on the final project.**

It is worth noting that the green line of Engagement in the Show was far more erratic in Study 2 than in Study 1, which is to say, in Study 1 the overall class linear slope of instances of agency being directly correlated with show participation was consistent with most of the students, whereas in Study 2 there were a number of outliers who displayed a lot of agency in the rehearsal room but weren't very involved in the final show, and vice versa. Some of this had to do with the fact that in Study 2, one group, the Jokers, disbanded late in the process, and it was difficult for students like η and ξ , who had been very involved in the rehearsal process, to make meaningful contributions to their new groups shortly before filming their scenes. However, I also hypothesize that the in-person process is more multifaceted, allowing students to excel in different areas. λ , for example, was one of our most consistently disengaged students throughout the rehearsal process but greatly enjoyed the technical aspects of filming the scenes and became very involved in creating the final production, whereas ρ , who contributed a fair amount during

the rehearsal process, was all but absent from the final show for reasons that remain a mystery to me.

I also wanted to know if the students' instances of agency increased throughout the rehearsal process, presumably as they became more comfortable with the devising methodology. Observing the linear slope of the students' tracked overall agency, as can be seen in Figure 6.11 for Study 1 and Figure 6.12 for Study 2, the answer seems to be yes, there was a small overall increase in instances of agency throughout both rehearsal processes, with the slope of increasing agency 0.58 for Study 1 and 0.1 for Study 2.

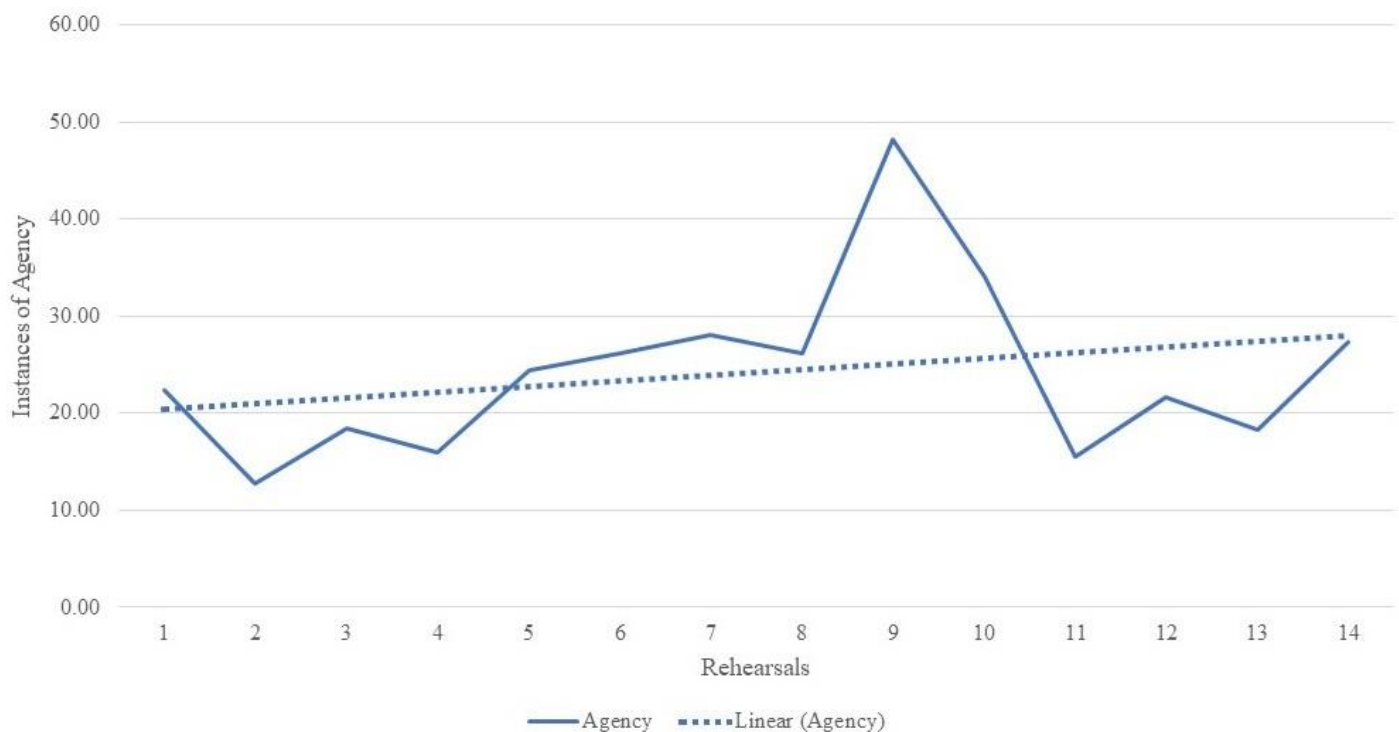


Figure 6.11: Study 1 Instances of Agency Throughout the Rehearsal Process

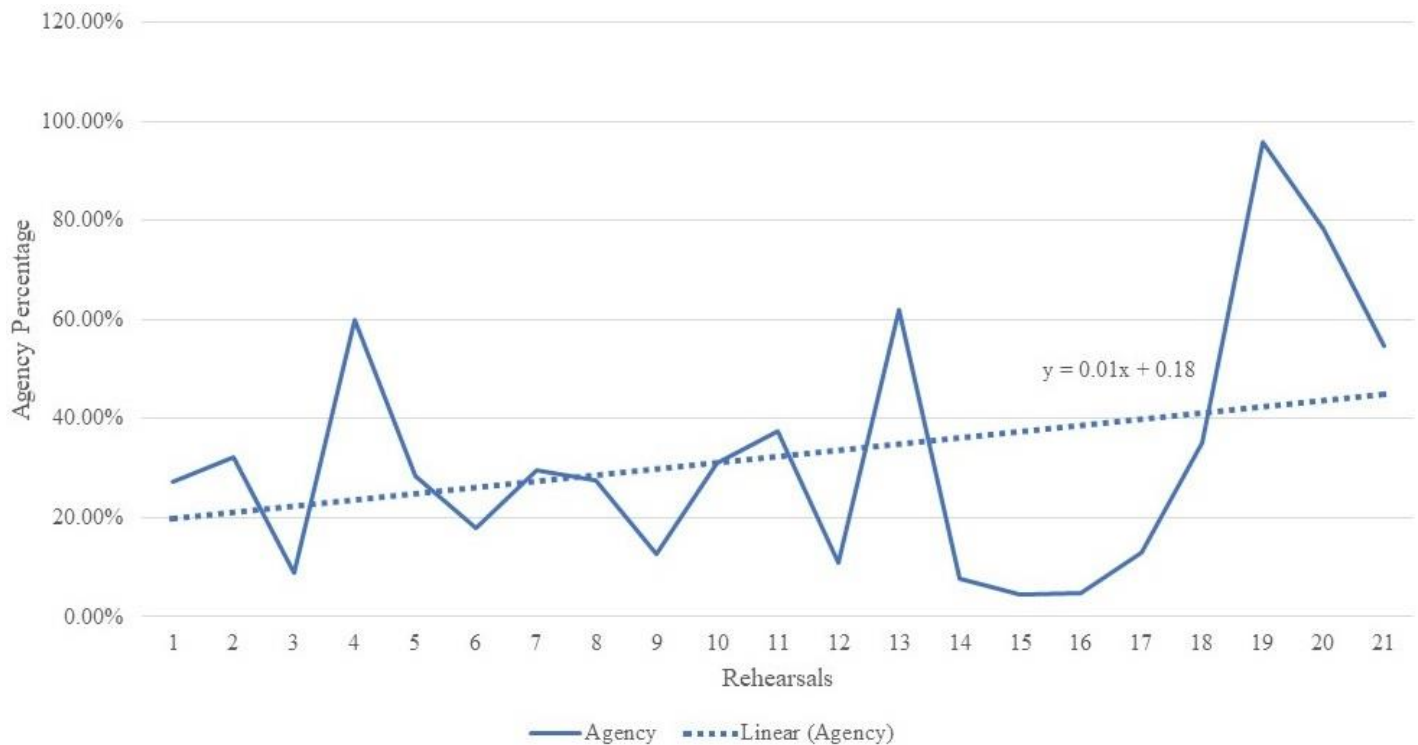


Figure 6.12: Study 2 Agency Percentage Throughout the Rehearsal Process

Taking a closer look at what rehearsal activities solicited the most and least instances of agency, I organized the Study 1 rehearsals into six categories: 1) Warm Up; 2) Clerical tasks; 3) Skill Instruction; 3) Skill Application/Discussion; 5) Content Creation; and 6) Performance Discussion. For Study 2, I added one additional category that accounted for unsupervised group discussions that did not pertain to content creation. The results for Study 1 can be seen in Figure 6.13, and the results for Study 2 can be seen in Figure 6.14.

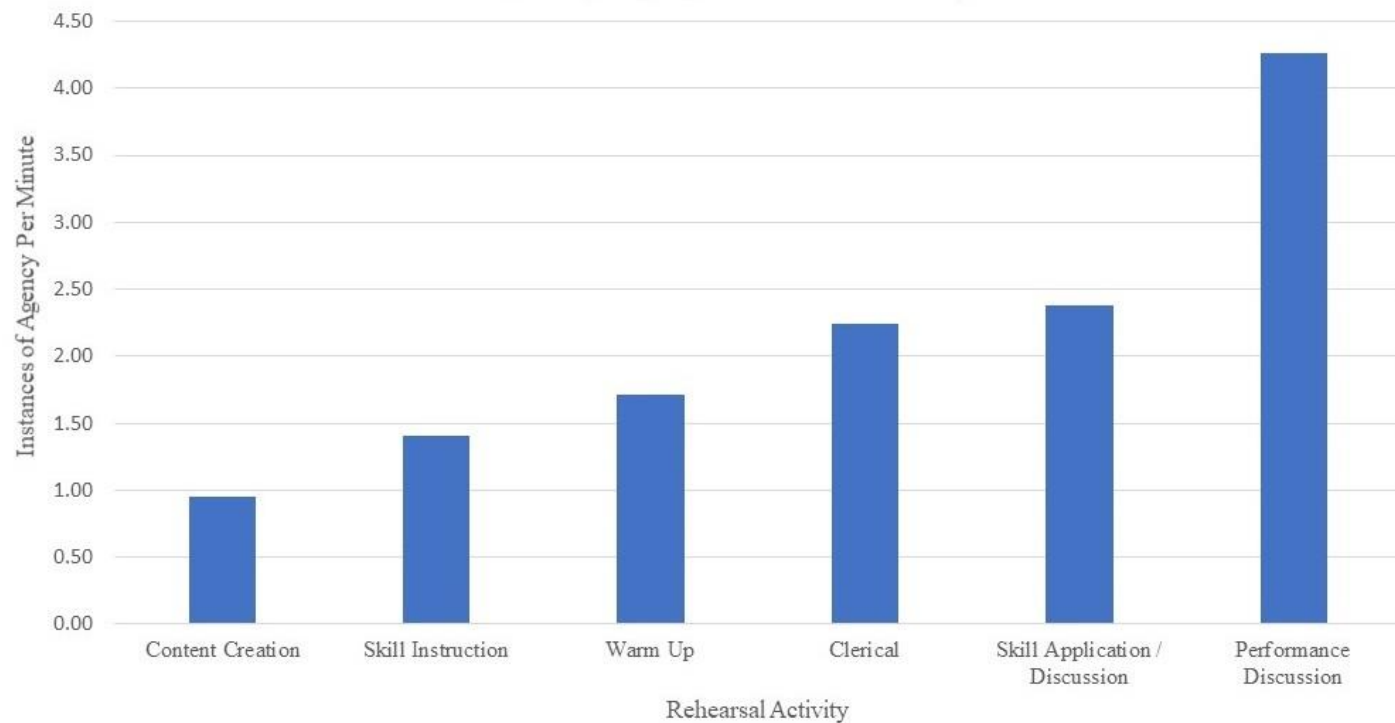


Figure 6.13: Study 1 Agency by Rehearsal Activity

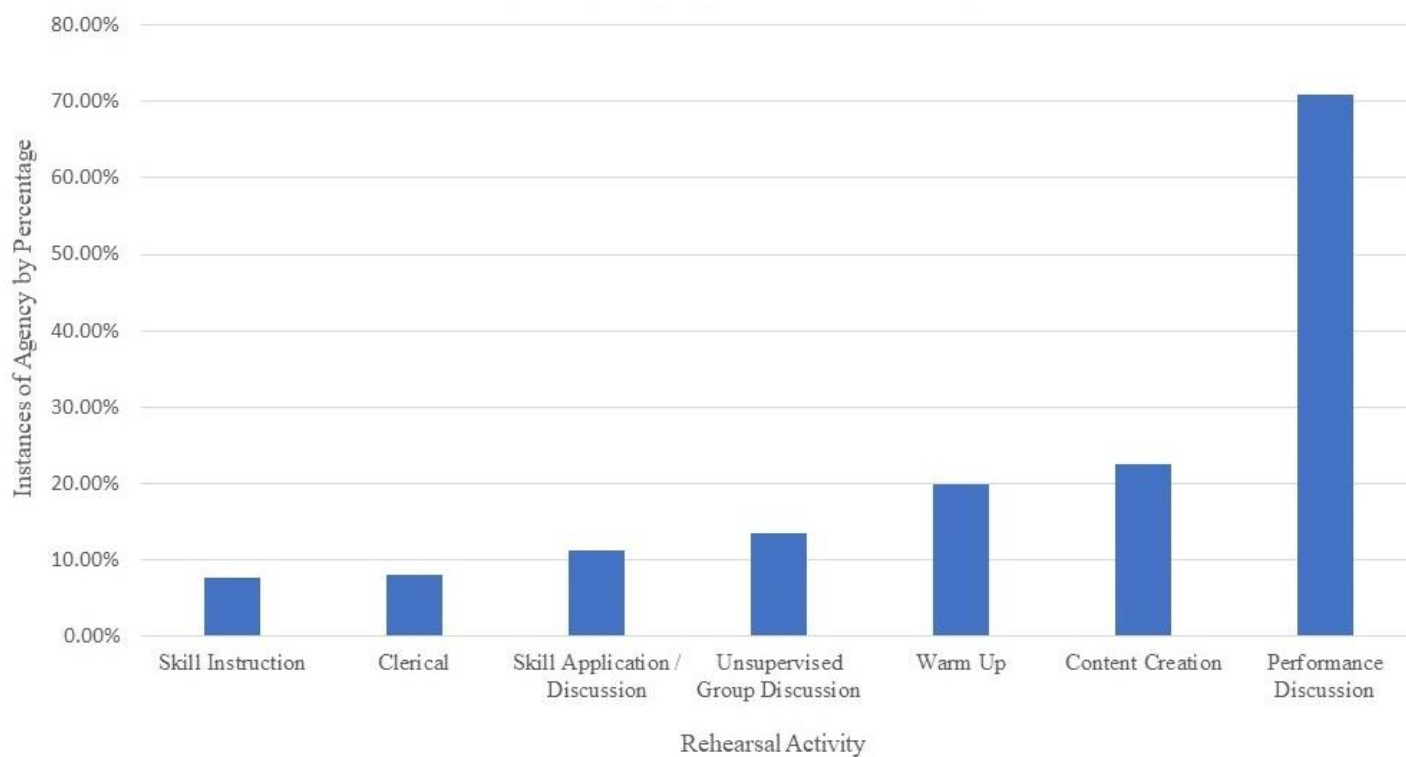


Figure 6.14: Study 2 Agency by Rehearsal Activity

In both studies the category that received the highest average instances of agency is Performance Discussion, that is, the students exhibited the most agency when reacting and commenting on each other's work. According to my data, the category with the lowest overall agency in Study 1 was content creation, but this is misleading because, as mentioned previously, this component was largely unobserved due to our inability to enter the breakout rooms, so we simply lack that data. Because the students seemed very engaged during the few instances that we were able to access those breakout rooms, we believe that the content creation component of the process may have, in fact, solicited some of the highest agency in the process. The fact that content creation was the category that received the second highest average instances of agency in Study 2 supports this theory. If we are correct, then the category with the lowest overall agency over both studies is skill instruction, where the students were, on occasion, disengaged or bored while we attempted to teach them new skills.

6.3.3 Survey Responses

Regarding the surveys administered at the beginning and end of the studies to assess the processes' impact on the participants' outlooks on creativity, theatre, community, sense of agency, and learning in general, Figure 6.15 conveys the resulting numeric difference in Study 1 between their answers from the first and second survey.

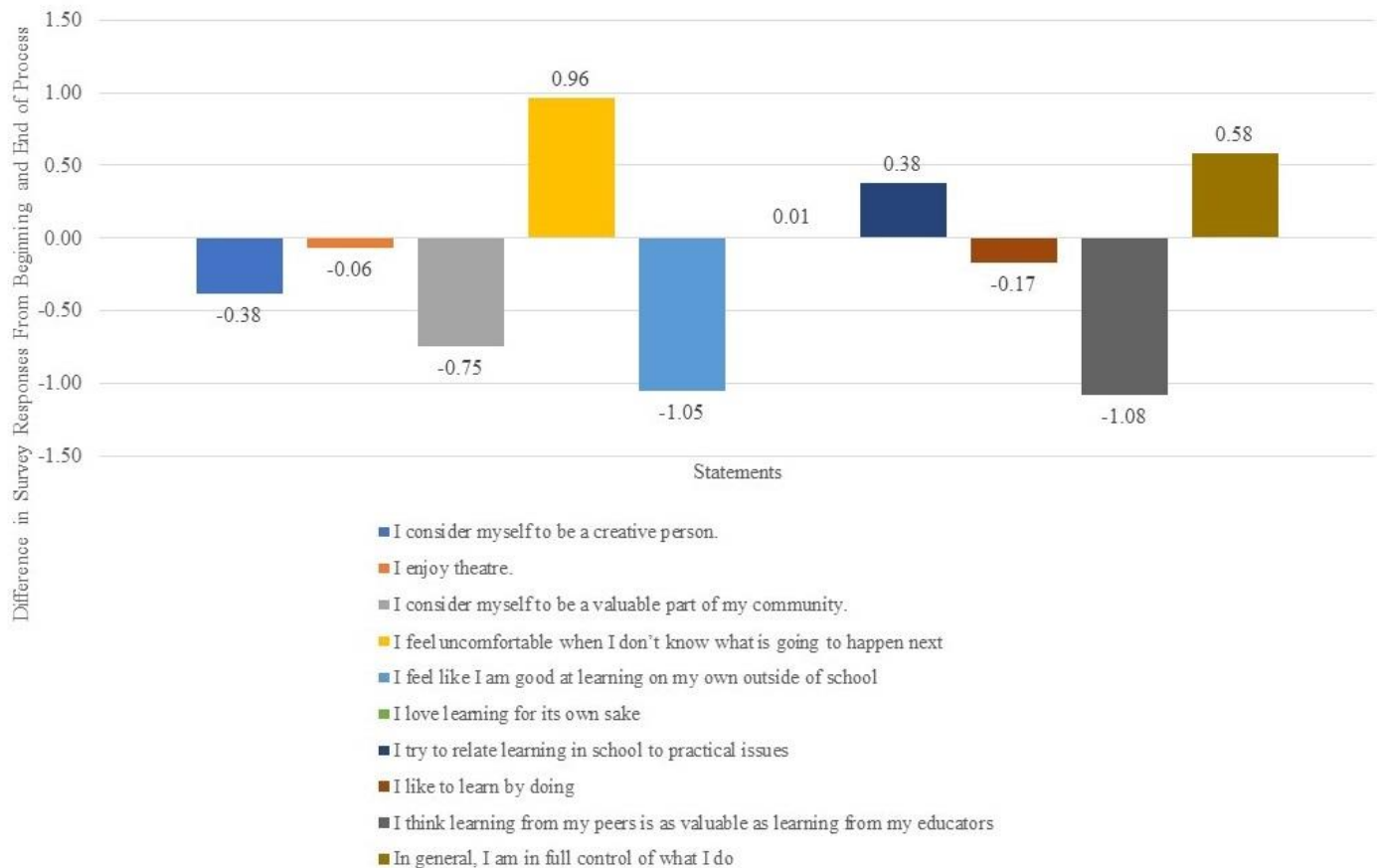


Figure 6.15: Study 1 Survey All Respondent Differential

I found the data perplexing; in a number of categories the students' outlooks on learning and creativity appeared to go down. However, it occurred to me that two students dropped out of the process while four others joined during it. Further, not all of the students answered the survey: I received nineteen responses to the intake survey at the beginning of the study and twenty-three responses to the exit survey. This is all to say that the same students were not necessarily being polled with each of the surveys. The surveys were anonymous, but I was able to identify eight matching IP addresses from their submitted responses, meaning that these were the same students who took both surveys. Running those numbers (N=8), Figure 6.16 conveys these results, which were much closer to what I had anticipated:

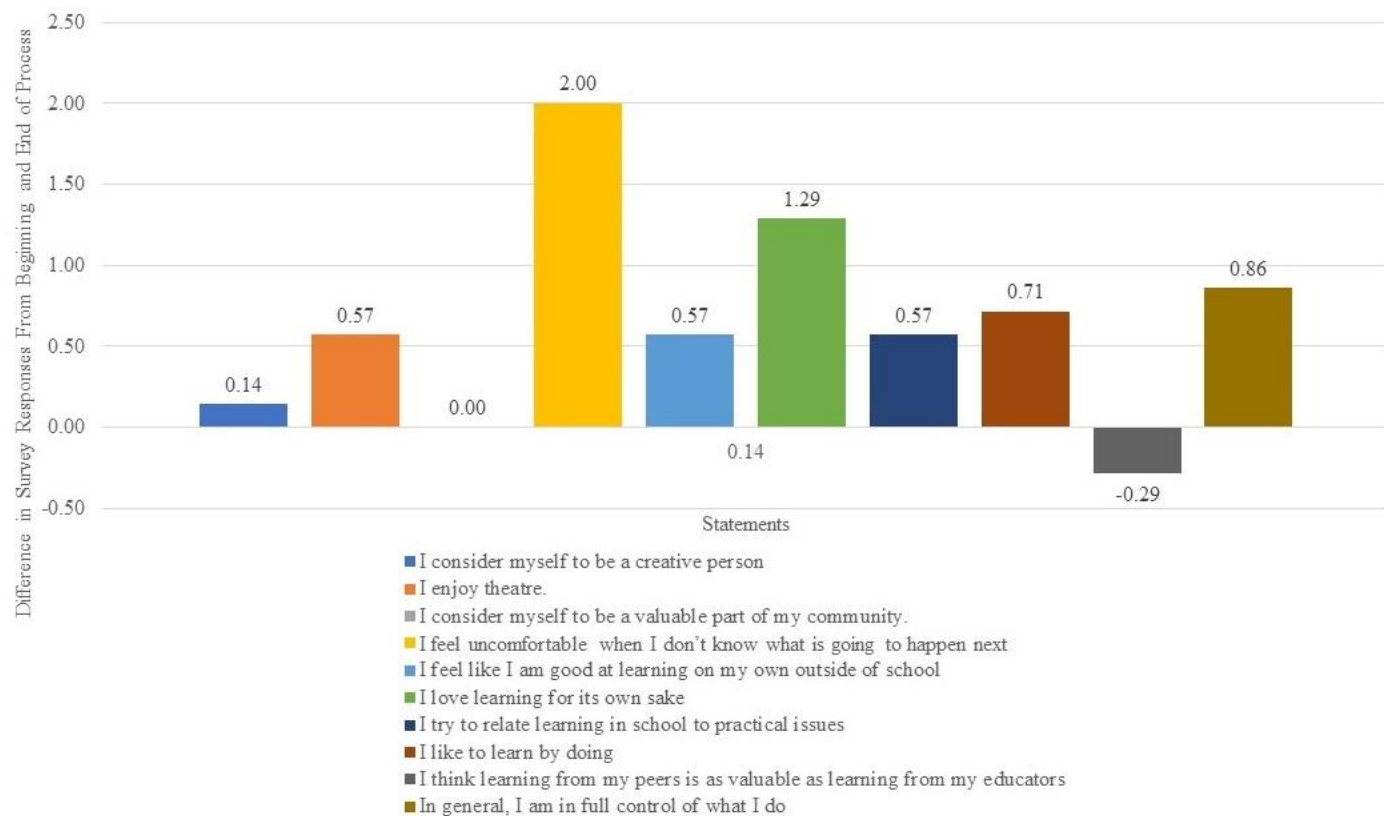


Figure 6.16: Study 1 Survey Same Respondent Differential

For Study 2 I had the students respond to the same ten statements, with some slight rephrasing for one statement, which I will explain shortly. This time I collected the students' names with their responses and had 22 matched pairs as a sample set ($N = 22$).⁴⁰ Figure 6.17 illustrates the results:

⁴⁰ Similarly, to Study 1, two students dropped out of the process while one joined late. There were also a number of students who were absent during the administration of the intake and outgoing surveys, respectively. There were also several students who simply chose not to take the surveys.

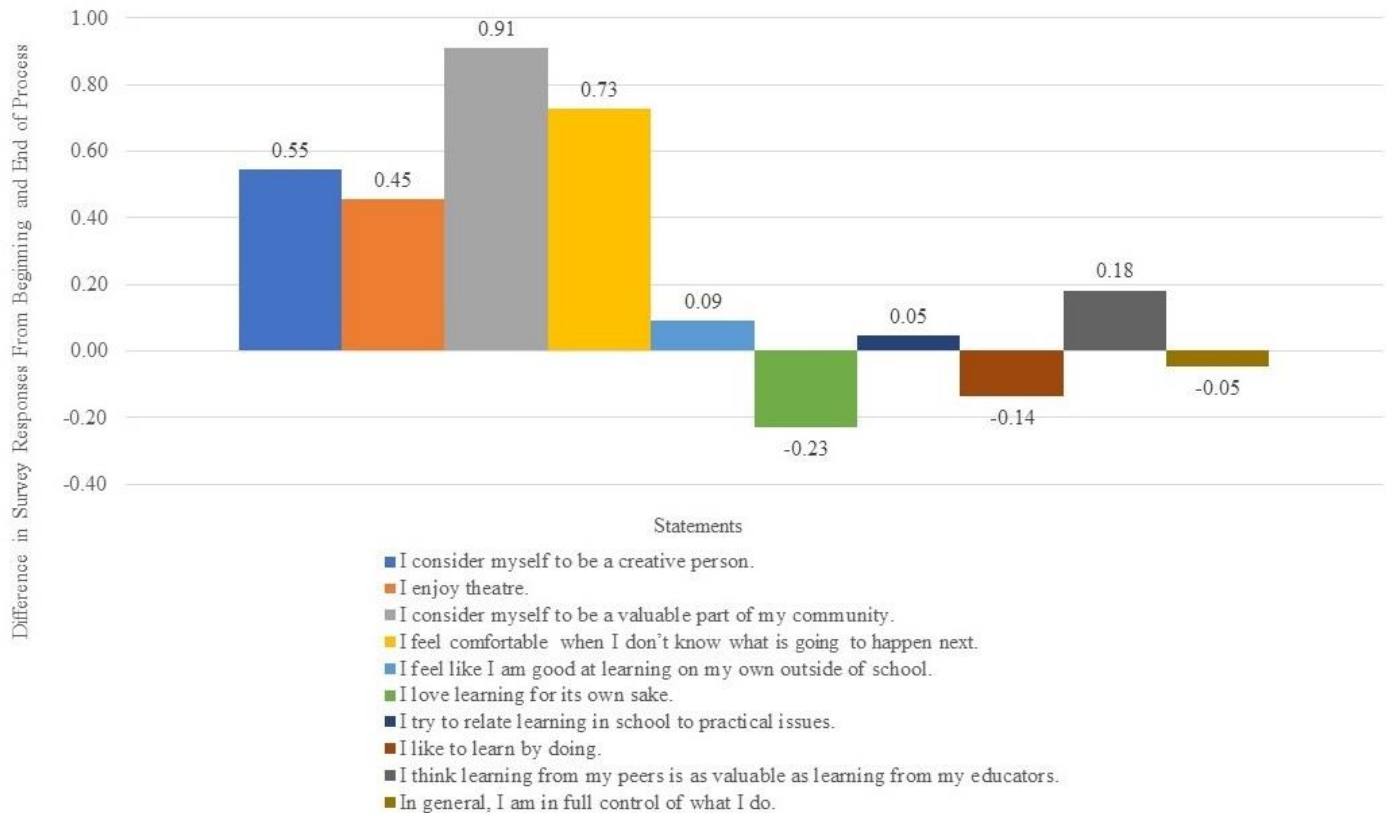


Figure 6.17: Study 2 Survey Same Respondent Differential

6.3.3.1 Sense of Agency

In Study 1 there was an increase in how much the students agreed with the two Sense of Agency statements, “I feel uncomfortable when I don’t know what is going to happen next” and “In general, I am in full control of what I do.” Applying the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, I found no statistical significance from the shifts in the eight match paired students’ senses of agency ($Z_{1A} = .112$ and $Z_{2A} = .197$ respectively; $p > .05$). This is not surprising as this kind of test works better with larger sample sets. However, when I tripled the data from the original sample set ($N = 8$) to better reflect the true sample size of the class ($N = 24$), I found statistical significance in the students’ shifts in response to these two statements ($Z_{1B} = .007$ and $Z_{2B} = .023$). Regarding the first statement, Thelma hypothesized that the double-negative phrasing might have been

confusing for the students and that they actually feel *comfortable* when they don't know what is going to happen next. For Study 2, the statement was changed to, "I feel comfortable when I don't know what is going to happen next," and once again statistical significance was found in the shift in the student's agreement ($Z_3 = .049$). "In general, I am in full control of what I do" actually saw a statistically insignificant decrease in Study 2. However, I noticed that one student's agreement with this statement dropped five points; when I removed his data because my sample set is so small, the rest of the class did have a small statistically insignificant increase in agreement with this statement. Further, when I isolated the responses from the fourteen students in the class who had never taken a theatre class before ($N = 14$) and doubled their data to be consistent with the sample size of the other tests ($N = 28$), a statistically significant positive shift can be identified ($Z_4 = .033$), implying that the process may have a higher positive impact on the sense of agency of the students with less theatre experience than for the more experienced students.

6.3.3.2 Outlooks on Learning

In Study 1, after once again tripling the data of the eight paired students to better represent the sample set ($N = 24$), I found statistical significance in the students' shifts in response to four of the learning statements: "I love learning for its own sake," "I feel like I am good at learning on my own outside of school," "I try to relate learning in school to practical issues" and "I like to learn by doing" ($Z_{5A} = .022$, $Z_{6A} = .022$, $Z_{7A} = .014$, $Z_8 = .014$). In Study 2 there was no statistically significant increase in any of these statements, and I saw a slight decrease in response to the statements "I love learning for its own sake" and "I like to learn by doing." My hypothesis is that because Study 2's intake survey was conducted in September of 2021, three

weeks into their first in-person semester in over a year, their outlooks on being in school, and by extension, learning, may have been unusually high in comparison to the end of the semester when the novelty of being back in school may have worn off. The fact that the students' intake survey responses to the learning statements were all more positive in Study 2 than in Study 1 supports this theory. However, when I looked at just the five students that exhibited the highest amount of passive, and resisting, individual agency throughout Study 2 and doubled their data, I saw a statistically significant positive increase in agreement with the statements "I love learning for its own sake," "I feel like I am good at learning on my own outside of school," and "I try to relate learning in school to practical issues" ($Z_{5B} = .023$, $Z_{6B} = .026$, $Z_{7B} = .046$). This could mean that the students who were most likely to assert themselves by going off task had their outlooks on learning shift the most from this process.

I also wanted to see if there is a correlation between the shifts in the students' outlooks on learning and the shifts in their outlooks on their sense of agency. Figure 6.18 compares the shift in the students' responses to the statements related to their sense of agency from the beginning of the study to the end against the shift in those same students' responses to the statements related to learning in Study 2 (again, because the Study 1 surveys were anonymous, I was unable to track the responses of individual students).



Figure 6.18: Study 2 Shifts in Sense of Agency vs. Shifts in Outlooks on Learning

I used Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation to determine that the correlation between these two data sets is weak ($r_s = .163$), meaning that the data does not indicate that a relationship exists between how the students' views on their sense of agency changed and how their views on learning changed throughout Study 2. However, when I compared the shift in the students' views on learning against those same students' *instances* of agency throughout the rehearsal process, the correlation was moderate ($r_s = .353$), indicating that for some of the students who exhibited a high amount of agency in the rehearsal room, regardless of what kind of agency, they may have had their views on learning in general shift more positively than some of the students who did not assert themselves as much.

6.3.3.3 Outlooks on Creativity and Theatre

In both studies there was a noticeable increase in agreement with the statements “I consider myself to be a creative person” and “I enjoy theatre” and, as I will discuss shortly, the students indicated in the five additional end-of-process survey responses as well as the group interviews that there is enthusiasm to continue making theatre, devised theatre in particular. However, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicated that these positive shifts in these two survey responses were statistically insignificant for these sample sets.

6.3.3.4 Sense of Community

In Study 1 the students’ agreement with the statement, “I consider myself to be a valuable part of my community” stayed exactly the same, but in Study 2, a statistically significant increase was observed ($Z_8 = .040$). This could mean that when our methodology was implemented in person, with a final show screened in front of a live audience, it had a bigger impact on the students’ sense of value within their own community than when the same process was executed in a remote setting.

6.3.3.5 Online vs. In-Person Learning

Finally, it is worth noting that the average shifts in responses to all of the statements were more significant in the first study than in the second, implying that the process may have had a greater impact on students that had endured over a year of quarantine than those working in an in-person learning environment.

6.3.4 End-of-Process Reflections

As mentioned previously, the five statements at the end of the survey administered at the end of each study were aimed at assessing what the students thought of the devising process itself. I received data from twenty-three of the students at the end of the Study 1 ($N = 23$); their responses can be seen in Figure 6.19. I also received data from twenty-six students at the end of Study 2 ($N = 26$). The statements were the same as in Study 1, except for “I was just an instrument in the hands of Mike and Kat in the rehearsal process without any real control;” the teacher advised us that the wording might have been confusing, so this statement was changed to “I didn’t have any real control in the rehearsal process, I just did whatever Kat and Mike said.” That data can be seen in Figure 6.20.

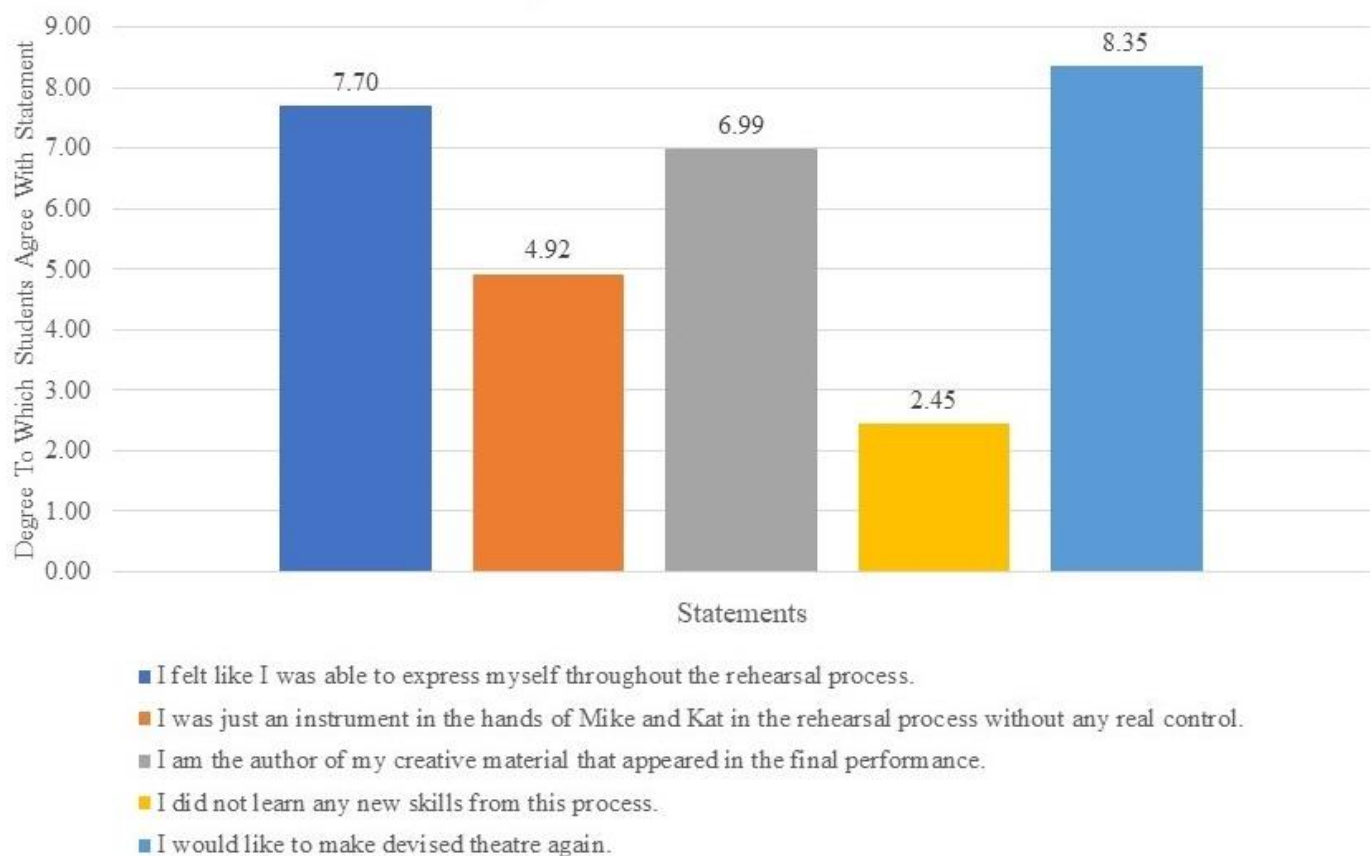


Figure 6.19: Study 1 End of Process Data

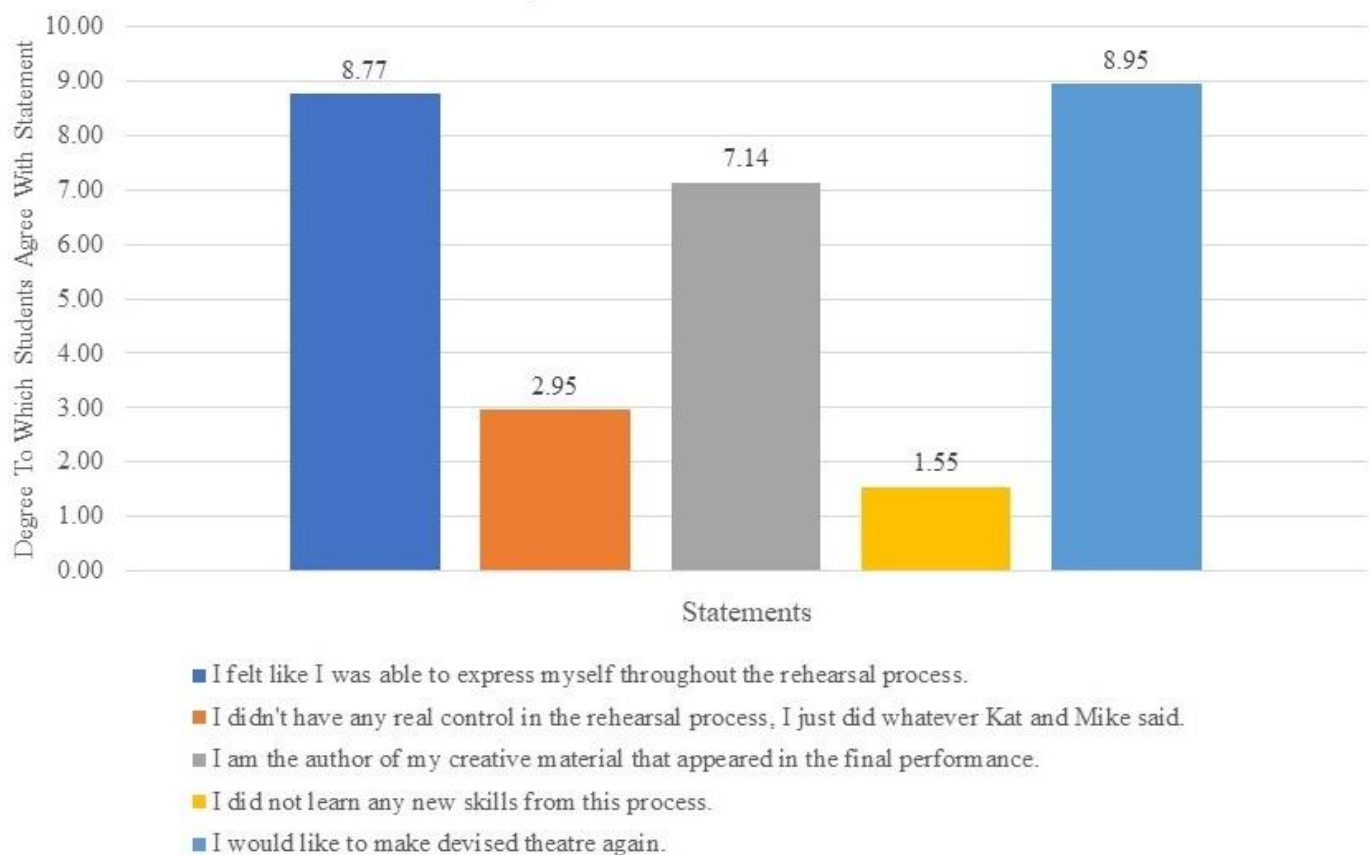


Figure 6.20: Study 2 End of Process Data

In both studies the students seemed to indicate that they felt that they were able to express themselves in the process, that they authored the work that appeared in the final show, that they learned new skills and that they would like to continue making devised theatre, with the responses to Study 2 stronger than Study 1. Because the two samples are different, but from the same school population, and because the dependent variable is not normally distributed, I applied the Mann-Whitney U test and found that the two statements that saw a statistically significant positive shift moving from Study 1 to Study 2 are “I felt like I was able to express myself throughout the rehearsal process” and “I didn’t have any real control in the rehearsal process, I just did whatever Kat and Mike said” ($U_1 = .009$, $U_2 = .016$). The shift in agreement with the latter statement suggests that Thelma was right about the wording of the initial statement being

confusing and that in both studies a majority of the students did, in fact, feel that they were able to assert control throughout the rehearsal processes.

6.3.5 Repeat Students

I wanted to evaluate whether the nine students who were part of both studies demonstrated any specific trends in relation to their outlooks on their sense of agency, learning, the arts, their sense of community, and the process as a whole. Unfortunately, the Study 1 surveys were anonymous, and only five out of the nine students took both of the Study 2 surveys, so my survey data on these students is extremely limited and not particularly illuminating. However, I was able to track those students' instances of agency throughout both studies in relation to the rest of the class, and the data suggests that the repeat students indeed exhibited more agency within the parameters of Study 2 than in Study 1 after having already gone through the process once before.

Figure 6.21 shows all individual instances of agency throughout the entire class in Study 1; the slope is $y = 0.58x$, meaning that is the rate at which the students demonstrated more instances of agency over the rehearsal process. Figure 6.22 shows all instances of agency throughout the entire class in Study 2: here the slope is negative, $y = -0.19x$, meaning that the students actually demonstrated fewer individual instances of agency over the course this rehearsal process. This can largely be explained by the fact that early in Study 2 there were a number of rehearsals dedicated to improv skills, which solicited a high frequency of individual instances of agency (e.g., stepping into the circle to “complete an image” over and over again). This is part of the reason that Kat and myself found the relational agency percentage graph (Figure 6.11, which saw an overall increase in relational agency over the process) to be a more accurate representation of overall class dynamics throughout the process. However, when

evaluating individual instances of agency, the data in Figure 6.22 is helpful. The relative change between these two slopes ($C = \frac{x_2 - x_1}{x_1}$) is -132.75%, which is to say that the rate at which the entire class exhibited individual instances of agency in Study 2 was 132.75% less than in Study 1. This is consistent with the survey data indicating that the positive impact of the process on the students' sense of agency was more profoundly felt by the students during Study 1, when they were in quarantine, than in Study 2 when rehearsals were in person.

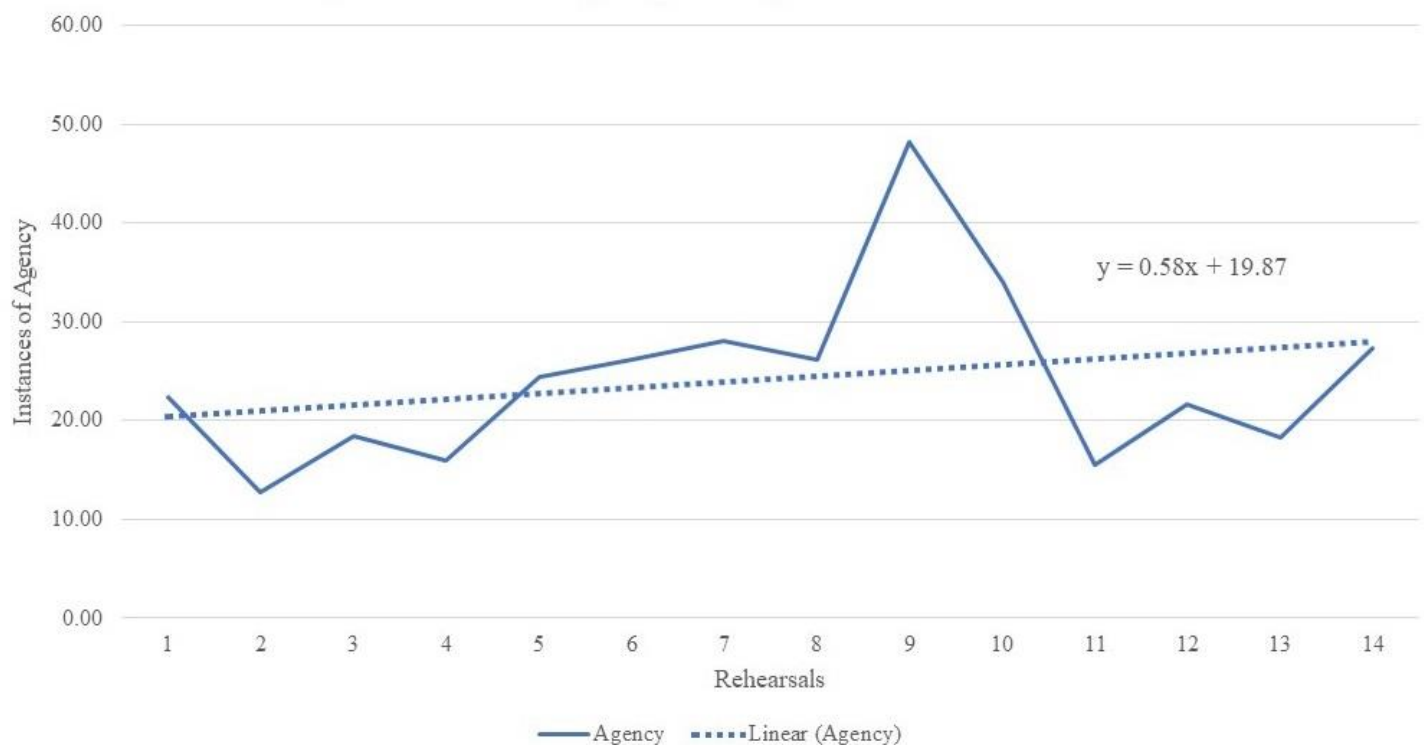


Figure 6.21: Study 1 Instances of Agency Throughout the Rehearsal Process

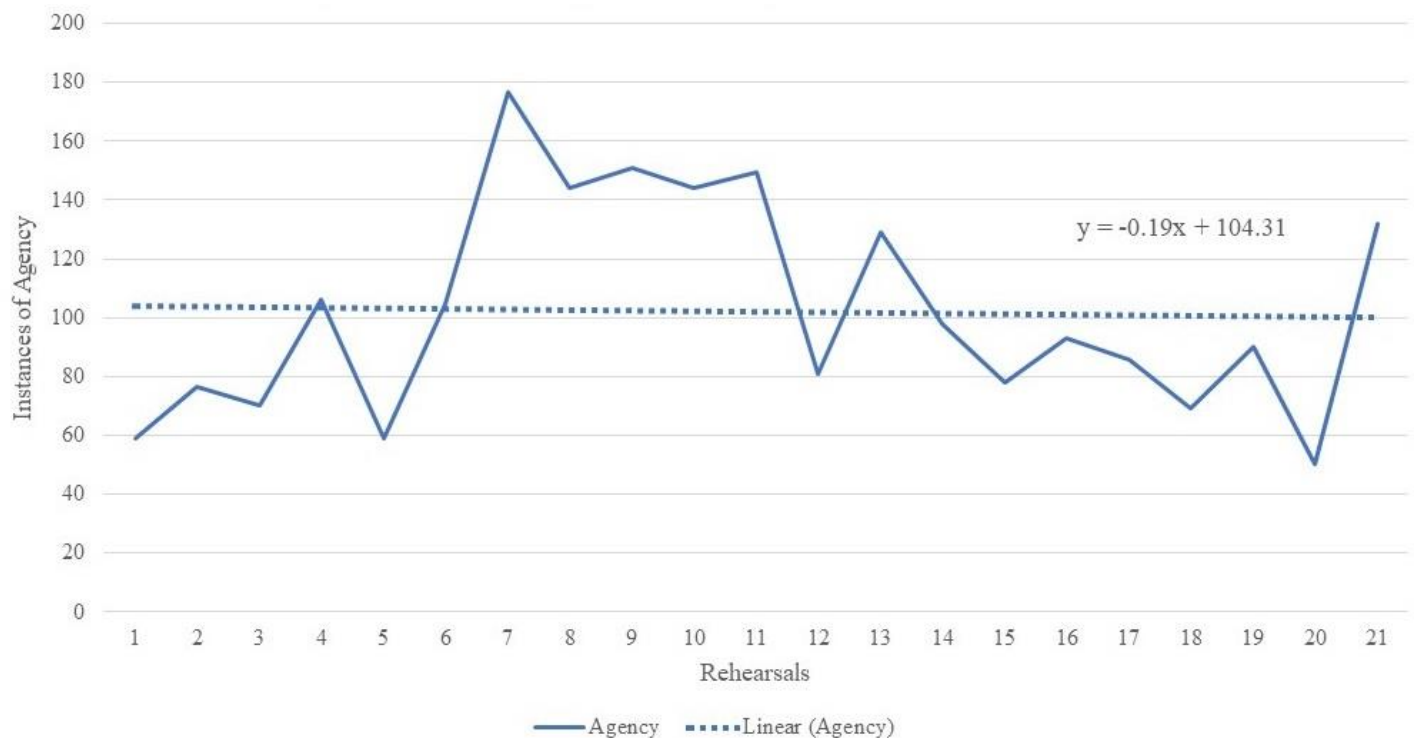


Figure 6.22: Study 2 Instances of Agency Throughout the Rehearsal Process

Figure 6.23 shows the repeat students' instances of agency throughout Study 1; the slope is $y = 2.23x$. Notably, this is significantly higher than $y = 0.58x$, the rate of instances of agency for the entire class; it seems that the students that decided to take another semester of theatre were, unsurprisingly, the most engaged in the class. Figure 6.24 shows the instances of agency for these same students over Study 2; the slope here is $y = 0.14x$, once again a significantly higher rate than the class average of $y = -0.19x$. The relative change between these two slopes is -93.75%, which is to say that the rate at which these nine students exhibited individual instances of agency was 93.75% lower in Study 2 than Study 1.

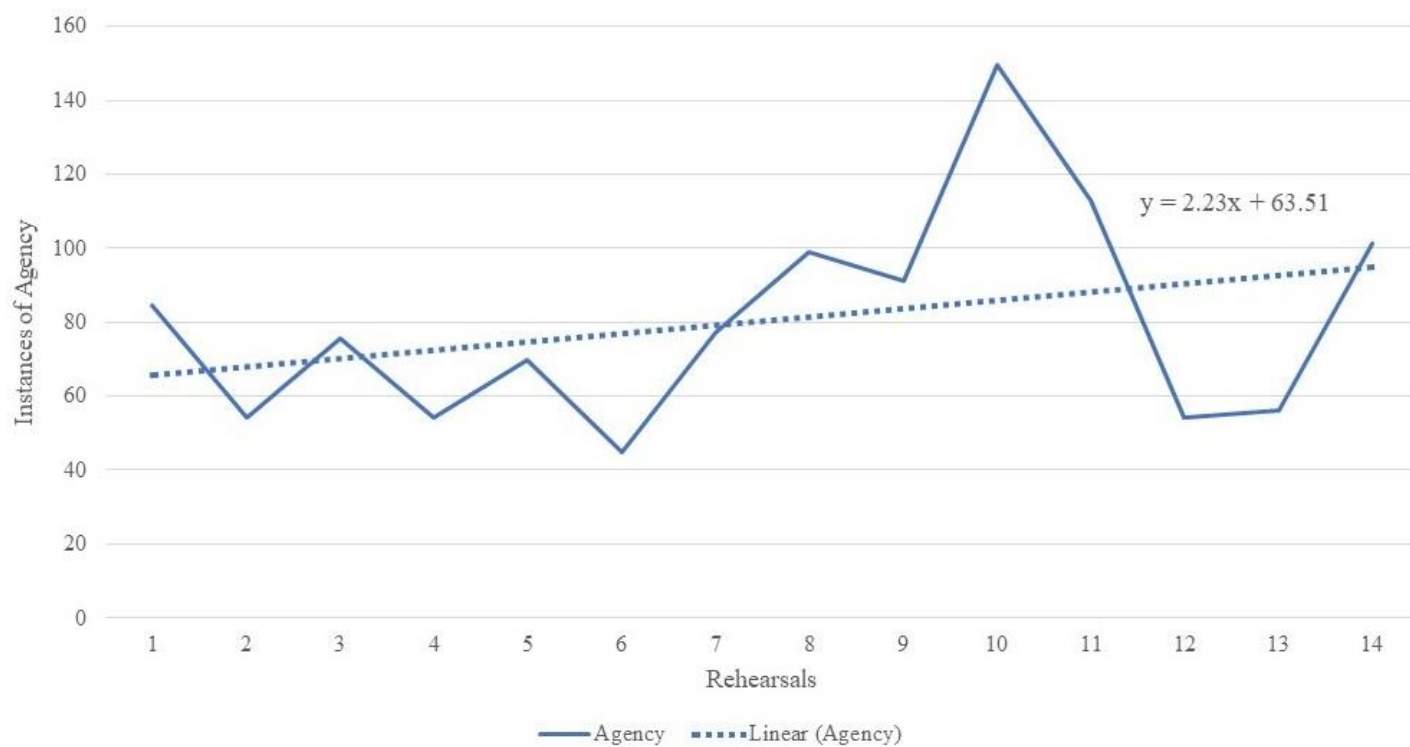


Figure 6.23: Study 1 Repeat Students' Instances of Agency Throughout the Rehearsal Process

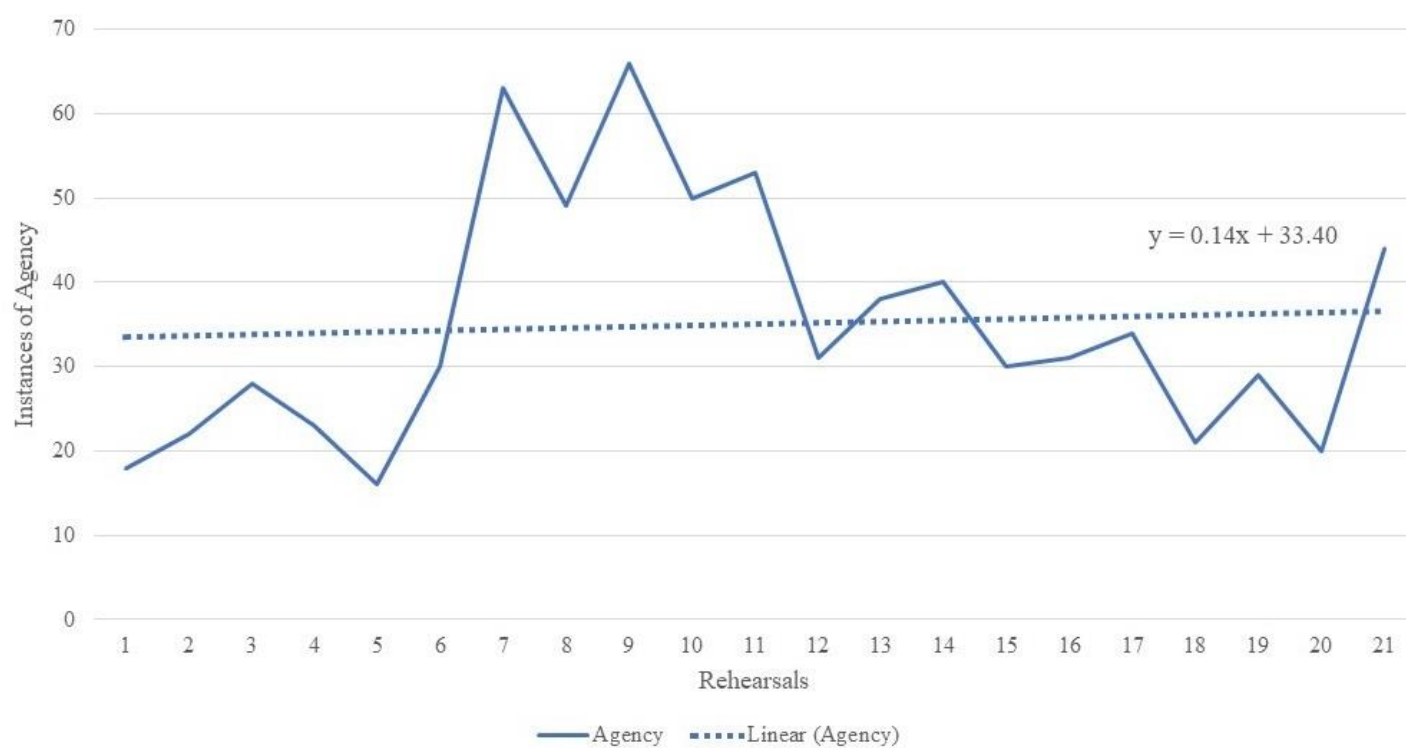


Figure 6.24: Study 2 Repeat Students' Instances of Agency Throughout the Rehearsal Process

The shift from Study 1 to Study 2 in the rate at which all the students exhibited instances of agency over the rehearsal process was smaller for the repeat students (-93.75%) than for the entire classes (-132.75%), as can be seen in Figure 6.25.

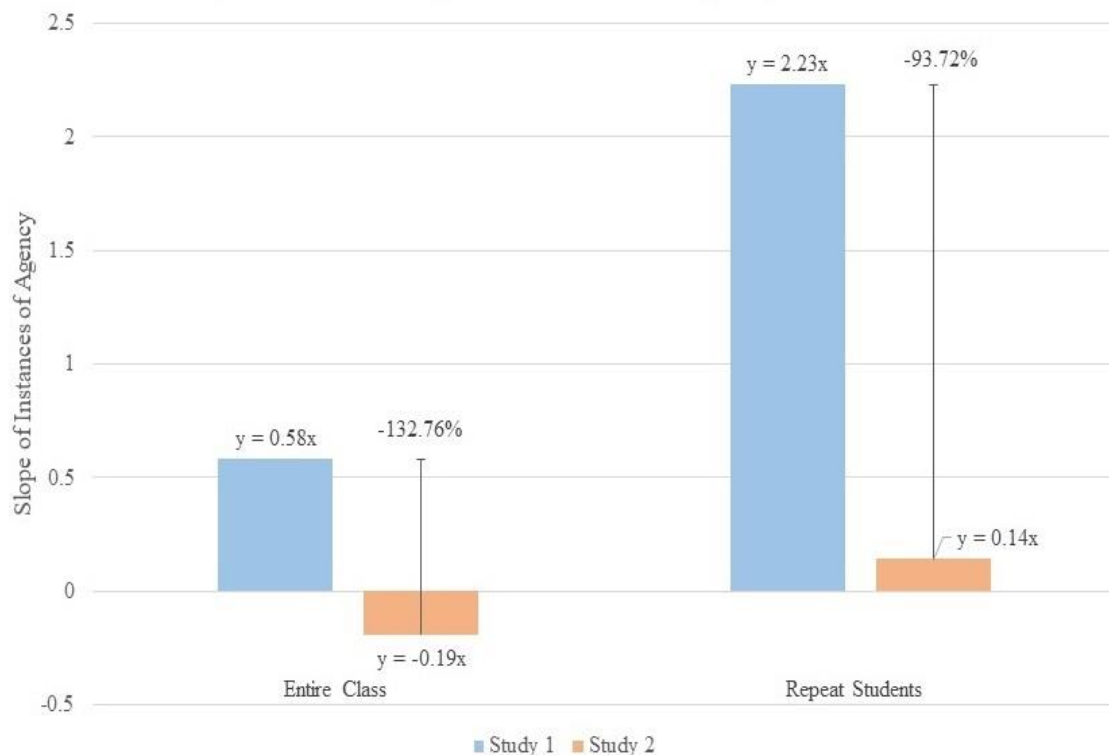


Figure 6.25: Repeat Students Slope of Instances of Agency Differential

Which is to say, while the repeat students were overall more engaged than their peers in both studies, the *rate* at which they exhibited more agency over the devised rehearsal process theoretically should have gone down from Study 1 to Study 2 proportionally to the rest of the class; instead, the decrease between the two rates of agency was less severe for these nine students, suggesting that, relative to the unique circumstances of each study, **the repeat students exhibited more agency in Study 2 than in Study 1, after having already gone through the process once before.** This trend is supported by the fact that eight of the nine repeat students took on leadership roles in Study 2. In fact, the only student group in Study 2 that did not have any repeat students, the Jokers, ended up disbanding.

6.3.6 Instances of Agency and the Students' Overall Sense of Agency

This begs the question of whether there is a correlation between instances of agency in the rehearsal rooms and the students' responses to the sense of agency survey statements. Figure 6.26 compares the total instances of agency of each student as a percentage of all instances of agency over Study 2, against those same students' average agreement with the two sense of agency survey questions.



Figure 6.26: Study 2 Instances of Agency vs. Sense of Overall Agency

I again used Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation and determined that the correlation between these two data sets is weak ($r_s = .200$). I found this surprising, but then I considered that perhaps some of the students experienced positive shifts in their views on their own sense of agency without that necessarily translating into increased classroom engagement. Conversely,

some students may not have had their outlooks on their sense of agency shift at all (perhaps because they held positive views toward their sense of agency at the beginning of the study), but the students nonetheless exhibited more instances of agency throughout the process as they became more comfortable with it. In other words, some of the students may have had their outlooks on their sense of agency shift even if their classroom behavior did not change, and some students may have experienced increased confidence in the rehearsal room even if that didn't strongly affect their overall outlooks on their own sense of agency. Further research with larger sample sets would do well to study this dynamic in more detail.

6.3.7 Student Interviews

The feedback from the students from the end-of-process open-ended group interviews was overwhelmingly positive, indicating that the vast majority of them had fun throughout the process and gained important skills. Here are some excerpts:

I just feel like I benefited a lot throughout this experience and stuff because, yeah, I took drama like when I was in sixth grade and stuff, but when I was introduced to drama in general, especially with devised theatre, I feel like my knowledge just expanded with theatre and drama and stuff. – D

I gained a lot more confidence in myself from all the information that was given to me and my fellow classmates ... Confidence has helped me not be afraid of what other people will think and not to overthink all the things I do. – α

I gained confidence in going up in front of everyone. For example, we would need to go up and act in front of everyone, I could never do that [before]. – ε

It increased my confidence and vulnerability. It's helped me have more genuine interactions, and get out of my comfort zone. I also have gained good relationships and friends who have helped me with my journey ... The lessons also tie into just making us more confident, and better interacting individuals. – υ

I gained outside-the-box thinking and not caring about what you do and just do it. I gained enjoyment - even though I was down, drama would always find a way to push you

back up. – v

At times they expressed that they would have preferred additional clarity or guidance during the process, as in this chat exchange at the end of Study 1:

S: I think kinda needed a bit more assistance since I joined later than everyone else since I was a part of the journey home team

B: ^^

B: same [S]

However, during the few moments when negative feedback was given, the students frequently lamented not having had more time to work on the material:

I wish we were able to find a way to screen record sooner than later LOL bc it took my group so long to figure out how to screen record. – B

I think if we had more time it would have been better to do a live show, in person. – G

As I mentioned in Chapters 4 and 5, a consistent theme from the students' feedback after both studies was how much they enjoyed the social aspect of working together in groups with their friends and how that collaboration often drove them toward success:

I liked rehearsing with my group. It was really fun, we were very cooperative. – σ

For this process I think I benefited like [D], um, just the relationships with people that I got to have kind of grew with all my classmates and my group. And I think that's like the best part that I had throughout this whole experience. – S

As we progressed further into the semester, I noticed that our communication got a lot better. – τ

It's like, in certain circumstances, you can't follow those standards. I mean, I could if I was able to do it, but I just don't. But since everyone else can, I can try. – ξ

At the end of both studies, a small but significant amount of the students expressed that they felt that they now had the skills and knowledge to create a devised theatre show, as demonstrated in this chat exchange at the end of Study 1:

G: I think with enough people we can create our own devised show

S: yeah with help from others

A: ^

D: ^

Q: ^

C: ^

At the end of Study 2 the students had a number of different thoughts about the experience of creating the show over Google Meet versus in person. They all agreed that the in-person learning experience was superior:

In comparison to the spring, like, in-person we were able to make so much more connections and make new friends. Whereas like, in, we're virtual, it's kind of hard to do that. Because we're doing it through a screen. It was more like, "Okay, guys, we need to do it. Okay, do it." There's no extra conversations, there is no fun funny moments like you have this time ... And like, you know, just like that little added energy, the positivity, like, it just felt so much better to have it in person. – B

For me, it's different because in the spring it was kind of just like over. Like there was no goodbye, you had the show, and we left, and that was it. And now it's just like, amazing to see everyone come together. – Q

A lot of things [were similar in both Studies]. But I think now that we've worked together in person, it was a lot more collaborative. – U

That said, several students indicated that they preferred the digital stream of the show over the live in-person screening, including θ , who appreciated the live audience comments during the YouTube Premiere of *Our Legacy*:

I think the thing that was cool about having it in front of [a virtual] audience rather than just our class was that we got to see all the comments and stuff. And I think that was interesting, in a sense, because when we did our last showing, everyone was kind of sitting there in person, but we didn't really get to hear input on it. So being able to get all those live comments was super cool, and just interact with people. I had friends like we're talking ... through like another app, and we're just talking through the entire thing making commentary, stuff like that. – θ

Thelma found the in-person learning experience more effective than learning remotely because it allowed for more robust interaction with the students. However, she did note that wearing masks presented unique challenges in the learning process:

As adults, we feel like we have to explain, and then re-explain and then clarify ... And sometimes behind the masks in their head they're going, "Oh, yeah, I totally understand." But we can't really affirm using their body language, so then we'll explain one more time, and in a student's mind it's, "Oh, my gosh ... shut up already."

Perhaps the efficacy of the process from the students' perspective is best summarized by o, a senior with previous theatre experience:

It was a bit scary at first, especially for people who didn't really know what was going on, who are new to drama, and people who are not really good at socializing. But as more activities went by and the more we started having fun with it, I was like, how chill the energy was. We felt like we could be able to breathe and just express ourselves really in the way – it was like art ... Like you guys expected very much of us because you have that much faith in us ... Overall, it was a great learning experience and great for personal growth, and not just with being an actor, but also like learning how to be a better person.
– o

My general sense from these interviews is that the students felt they got a lot out of both studies, but they perhaps were more pleased with the devising process itself at the end of Study 1 and happier with the overall experience of making a show with friends at the end of Study 2.

6.3.9 Teacher Feedback

In exit interviews Thelma confirmed these findings, indicating that she believes the students felt ownership over their work and a deep sense of pride, which made our methodology an effective learning process that teaches skills important across all academic disciplines. She argued that a devised theatre methodology offers a unique opportunity for students to assert agency over their own learning:

Devised gives them the ownership, gives them the accountability, gives them the creative controls, versus life where I'm like, here, memorize all of this ... It's very leader-driven. I mean, high school, there's usually student directors, but in the devised theatre strategy the students have complete creative control, and the instructors give them the borders where to play. We give them the structure to adhere to, and then how they color in the lines is up to them.

Regarding the effects of the process on specific students, Thelma noted:

[ε, who had no theatre experience at all] was kind of blown away over the course; it really opened her up. She told me that this class made her more confident. And I told her, “You gave me the perception that you were already a confident sixteen-year-old.” She goes, “No, I wasn’t.”

[o] has ADHD. I’ve had her for the third year, both of the first two times were in the capacity of her English teacher. She never thrived in those classes as well as she thrived in this class. If I were to take the standards that I had to assess her from my English class and translate it into this class, she would have hit all the marks. That’s writing for a specific purpose, reading skills, communicating in both written and oral forms, and demonstrating logic and organization.

[G], I knew her when she was a sophomore; always a background person, never volunteered, never did anything. And then [during Study 1] she was kind of forced to start stepping up. And now, this year she took ownership of her department.

You should have seen them, [A] and [ω]. [ω] is a TA of mine, so throughout my TA period, she had headphones on [while working on the show]. And [A]; during recess, during lunch, during media, or his audio engineering class, that’s all he was doing.

[α], told me, “You know, Miss, I’m trying it; I’m stepping outside my comfort zone. Because you guys make it okay. You’re not gonna laugh at me for doing it.” So, the simple fact that a teenager is already feeling uncomfortable in their own skin, and to do something silly, like hitting an imaginary volleyball and have her committed to it, is incredible. Together we have created this devised theatre workshop space for them to feel okay to take those risks.

To me, this last quote speaks to Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development, that is, the ability of a pedagogical praxis to bridge the gap between a young person’s willingness to act and their capacity to act independently (Vygotsky, 1978; Rainio, 2010; Edwards, 2004). Perhaps this is why Thelma thought so highly of our methodology as a whole:

I definitely want to work with devised theatre again, and not just because of the students but because I learned. I learned! ... I think that, above all, this is the best project-based learning that I could ever ask my students to do.

6.4 Conclusion

My aim was to evaluate whether a devised theatre educational methodology aimed at providing students as much agency as possible over their creative processes would improve their outlooks on learning and foster an increased overall sense of agency, even over the additional hurdles intrinsic to remote and socially-distanced learning environments. After evaluating the students' survey responses within the context of their and their teacher's interview feedback, it seems that there was a small but significant positive increase in many of the students' sense of agency in both studies, as there was in their outlooks on theatre generally. The first study saw a significant increase in the students' outlooks on learning, and while the second study did not see that increase for everyone, it did for those who acted out the most, and it is likely that the same impact was felt by most of the students but offset by the extraordinary circumstances of being back in school after a long hiatus. Finally, the surveys indicated that the methodology yielded an increased sense of value within the students' community in the second study, but not the first, during quarantine. Further, these same surveys indicate that in both studies, the students felt that they were able to express themselves throughout the process, that they felt ownership over the work that was created, that they learned new skills, and, perhaps as a result of these factors, they would overall like to continue making devised theatre. It also seems that many of the positive impacts of the process were felt more profoundly during quarantine, likely because they desperately needed an outlet for creativity and socializing, and yet their overall enthusiasm for the process seemed to be deeper in person, where they felt they could be more playful and forge deeper connections with their classmates.

Regarding the specific dynamics of the rehearsal room, the students asserted themselves throughout each of the processes in a number of different ways. When working remotely, the students were far more likely to go off-topic and often appeared to use the technical challenges

of online learning as a way to assert themselves. My findings are consistent with Lehtonen's research regarding the positive effect of resisting agency, but unlike Lehtonen's research mine also emphasizes the value of passive and technical agency, which is to say, doing something unrelated to the task at hand might also be a form of resisting, challenging, and asserting agency over the devising process.

Further, the data indicate that the students responded most positively to the aspects of the methodology that were self-directed; in both studies they were most engaged when watching and responding to each other's performances. This is especially important within an educational environment: most devising exercises and methodologies are oriented around small groups of devisers, so devising with thirty-two students, as we did in Study 2, can be challenging. Time and time again I observed that it was the act of watching each other executing a performance and being able to learn from each other's feedback where many of the instances of agency occurred. Further, as noted by the engagement of the repeat students, my data suggests that participating in this devised theatre methodology multiple times could have an even greater impact on the students' likelihood to display agency and take ownership of their learning processes.

In the next and final chapter, I will discuss the implications of these findings in terms of how young people assert agency in a devised theatre classroom, the impact of these studies on the students' overall sense of agency and their outlooks on learning, the efficacy of the dramaturgical focus, implications for this methodology in a remote vs. in-person learning environment, and our methodology's potential resonance with an Asian and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander community. Finally, I will offer my recommendations for an effective devised theatre education model.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Introduction

In this dissertation, I have discussed the pivotal role of agency within learning environments and the efficacy of theatre education in fostering that agency in young people. I then argued that a devised methodology aimed at allowing students as much agency as possible over their creative processes could be particularly effective; to test my hypothesis, I employed two case studies at Waipahu High School on O‘ahu. In this Chapter, I will discuss how my comprehensive observations from these studies in Chapters 4 and 5, and my analyses in Chapter 6, address my primary research question, which asks how young people assert agency in a devised theatre classroom, as well as my sub-questions regarding the impact of the methodology on the students’ overall sense of agency, the connection of the instances of agency to outlooks on learning, the efficacy of the dramaturgical focus, the difference between an online and in-person setting, and the resonance of this American- and European-derived methodology with an Asian and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander community.

7.2 Answering the Research Questions

7.2.1 How Do Young People Assert Agency in a Devised Theatre Classroom?

The students of these two studies asserted agency within our devised theatre classroom in a multitude of ways. Like Lehtonen and Rainio, I found that instances of resisting agency provided the students with opportunities to assert agency over their learning processes, as the students who resisted were almost all leaders in their groups. However, my studies also had far fewer instances of resisting agency than Lehtonen’s (section 6.3.1). There are so many differences between my

studies and hers that it is impossible to isolate a single variable; maybe the novelty of working with their friends on a collaborative project against the backdrop of a global pandemic made the students more enthusiastic about the work, or perhaps the close rapport between Thelma and her students meant that they would never overtly resist her classroom. It is also possible that there is a cultural element to being in Hawai'i: I have found that the young people here, at least compared to my home of New York City, seem to be quite respectful to elders and authority figures. Or perhaps it is as simple as Keeffe et al. (2013) expressed in discussing the collaborative art project in their classroom: "Because they're interested ... and engaged ... we don't ever have any behavioural issues in the class" (p. 112).

Both Lehtonen and Rainio discuss the role of passivity in their studies as a rejection of the opportunity to define the rules and nature of the class activity (Rainio, 2008, pp. 123-124; Lehtonen, 2015, p. 1889). This aligns with my experience as a New York City public school student, where I was usually reprimanded if I took actions that did not constructively contribute to the task at hand, and indeed much of the education training I have received has reinforced this perception. The data indicate, however, that in my studies, the role of passive agency played a similar position to that of resisting agency in Lehtonen's and Rainio's studies (section 6.3.2). The form of agency exhibited by the students of Waipahu High School seemed to be less important than the fact that they were exhibiting any agency at all. I hypothesize that doing *something*, even taking an action unrelated to the task at hand, is also a form of engagement. Passive agency might also be considered a form of resistance. For example, having an unrelated conversation might be a more polite form of resisting than vocally challenging the process, and, as such, passive agency might allow for some of the same development towards engagement and further assertions of agency that Rainio and Lehtonen observe. Indeed, most of the students that

took actions that brought them off-task ended up contributing a lot to their final projects. These notions regarding the potential positive benefits of passive agency are in line with peripatetic learning theory.

Peripatetic learning refers to a pedagogical form oriented around discussion, reflection, and deep learning while “wandering.” It originated in the fourth century BCE by Aristotle, who conducted lessons by walking and conversing with his students (Klein, 2012, p. 498; Murphy & Mannion, 2021, p. 1). In contemporary education, this “wandering” is metaphorical (although it can also involve a literal walking component) and refers to a mind that exhibits intellectual mobility (a lack of confinement), allowing “a wide-ranging conversation with itself, one that spans topics that seemingly are unrelated to each other but which are somehow connected by the invisible strands of thought that comprise our complex mental processes” (Greenberg, n.d.). The broad goal of peripatetic learning is to permit the student’s attention to wander to allow them to synthesize different concepts that might not connect otherwise. I believe that by permitting student passive agency to engage in unrelated activities, we allowed their minds to wander in class (both remotely and in person), providing them with space to tie together disparate concepts for themselves. I also hypothesize that a certain amount of passive agency is necessary for good teamwork, as it can promote bonding, and the students’ interview feedback suggests that they valued the instances of passive agency that contributed to their socializing. An example of this is o’s appreciation of the “chill” atmosphere that she believes allowed the class to breathe and express themselves (see section 6.3.7).

In Study 1, I also identified a new category of agency exclusive to a remote learning environment, “technical,” referring to when the students discussed technological obstacles they were facing (section 6.3.1). The students seemed to jump on any opportunity to talk about their

connections cutting out, the Google Meet feed lagging, or any number of other computer issues. Because the data of technical agency aligned so closely with that of passive agency, I do not believe that these assertions of technical issues were solely by chance: although there were clearly engaged students that were sincerely experiencing connectivity issues and commiserating over those shared issues, the students who were most likely to discuss their technological challenges were also usually the ones regularly asserting passive agency by engaging in side discussions unrelated to the day's lesson. I observed that in an online classroom there is pressure on students to "prove" that they are present and engaged, so articulating technological challenges serves as such proof as well as an excuse to justify why they might not be more participatory. Technical agency also took the form of asserting power over us as instructors: for example, my microphone sometimes made my voice sound distorted, and the students never failed to discuss my funny "underwater voice." I argue that technical agency might also be considered a form of passive agency and, as such, holds the same potential for engagement and agency that I have argued apply to passive agency more broadly. As I argued in section 6.3.1, there seems to be a certain correlation between passive and technical agency and general playfulness. Further research would do well to address how the role of passive and technical agency might address Rainio's (2010) third contradiction of Western conceptions of agency, namely that agentive individuals need to both obey and revise the laws of society (pp. 16-17).

Regarding what specific aspects of our devised theatre methodology cultivate the most and least agency, in both studies the students exhibited the most agency when watching and commenting upon each other's performances, and they presented the least agency during skill instruction (section 6.3.2). Unsurprisingly, they were the most engaged when they were task-oriented, that is, when they were asked to actively do something as opposed to when we lectured

to them. I have argued that the fact that the students were largely unfamiliar with devised theatre was a positive attribute as it allowed them to create without comparing their work to that of professionals, but that also means that there was much about the devised methodology to teach them. The data indicates that, while explaining the devised skills was important, they learned most effectively simply by *doing*. This may seem obvious out of context, but for me, this observation supports my suspicions that the students really did learn effectively when I relinquished control and let them assert agency over their creative processes.

The students also exhibited relational agency in a variety of different ways throughout both studies: by choosing for themselves when to ask for assistance from each other and from us, the instructors, in creating and filming their moments (Keeffe et al., 2013); by forming webs of relations and interdependencies that embedded their joint actions (Burkitt, 2016); and by exhibiting mutual responsibility by recognizing one another as resources (Edwards, 2005). Perhaps the clearest indication of their successful implementation of relational agency was the consistent theme of the students' feedback after both studies that they enjoyed the social aspect of working together in groups with their friends very much and that collaboration often drove them toward success (section 6.3.7). I believe that the patterns of individual and relational agency throughout both studies go a long way to reconcile Rainio's (2010) second contradiction of Western concepts of agency, that people are meant to experience agency as autonomous individuals while at the same time being the product of societal interactions (pp. 16-17).

Speaking of Rainio, I argue that our rehearsal processes satisfied Rainio's three necessary requirements to enact agency (pp. 8-10). By providing the students with performance skills and additional resources to allow them to research their specific group roles on their own, I believe that we provided them with resources that allowed them to understand the choices available to

them. Further, the survey and interview data indicate that many of the students did indeed feel in a position to be agentive. Finally, the high emphasis on work that was both interdependent and independent offered the students the social resources to interact with each other in a way that enabled individual and relational agency, the best example of which was the independent editing meeting the students held at the end of Study 2 (section 5.2.5).

Additionally, the “repeat students” who took part in *both* studies exhibited comparatively *more* instances of agency in Study 2 than in Study 1 after having already gone through the process once before (section 6.3.5). This manifested in a number of different ways, most notably with nearly all of them taking on leadership roles in Study 2. Because all of these students had taken classes with Thelma prior to Study 1, they all had previous theatre experience, so this increase in instances of agency could mean that these students responded positively to devised theatre specifically. Of course, this could, once again, be the result of learning in an in-person environment rather than a remote one, or just be a result of the students feeling more confident after having already gone through the process already, or they may have felt more comfortable asserting themselves because they trusted Kat and myself more after having worked with us for a semester; additional research would do well to isolate this variable to speak to the potential uniqueness of devised theatre education. One way or another, these increased instances of agency with the repeat students speak well to the resonance of our methodology with these young people.

7.2.2 Did This Particular Devised Methodology Meaningfully Affect the Students' Overall Sense of Agency?

After contextualizing the survey data over both studies, the responses seem to indicate that most of the students experienced an increased positive sense of agency as well as increased confidence in facing unexpected challenges (section 6.3.3.1). The students also indicated that they felt that they were able to express themselves in the processes, that they authored the work that appeared in the final productions, that they learned new skills, and that they would like to continue making devised theatre (section 6.3.4).

To my surprise, I could not find evidence of a correlation between instances of agency in the rehearsal rooms and the students' responses to the sense of agency survey statements (section 6.3.6). Again, it is possible that some of the students may have had their outlooks on their agency shift without changing their classroom behavior and vice versa. However, I am convinced that a proportional relationship between the students' instances of agency and the students' overall sense of agency does exist; Thelma and I both felt that the individuals that exhibited increased agency throughout the studies seemed to also exhibit an overall increase in general confidence. Clearly, such observations are anecdotal, but this speaks to the need for this dynamic to be investigated in further research. In fact, this proportional relationship is perceived as so intuitive that much of current scholarship does not even seem to meaningfully differentiate between an individual's sense of agency and their instances of agency, because these researchers seem to assume, as I do, that for individuals to feel a positive sense of agency they must be able to assert that agency (Biesta & Tedder, 2006; Schlosser, 2011; Hon et al., 2013; Howard et al., 2016; Reddy, 2020).

Finally, the data suggest that the processes may have had a higher positive impact on the sense of agency of the students with less theatre experience than their more experienced peers (section 6.3.3.1). This is consistent with the research of Vygotsky (2004), Kondoyianni et al. (2013), and Wright (2011), who argue that theatre education has unique pedagogical properties and, as such, the process would be particularly impactful for those who have never experienced its benefits before.

7.2.3 Can These Instances of Agency Be at All Connected to Outlooks on Learning?

The data imply that the students felt that they learned a lot from our devised theatre methodology. In the post-study group interviews, various homework assignments, and remarks from rehearsals, the students expressed, often unprompted, that they learned useful skills from the rehearsal processes. I touched on some of these expressions from the students in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, but there are really quite a few examples of quotes like these:

I learned skills and I also gained a little bit of confidence. - χ

I gained think[ing] outside the box and not caring about what you do and just do it. - ν

Collaboration is key. That is what this experience taught me. - ψ

The survey data, taken in context, also implies that the processes had a positive effect on most of the students' general views on learning (section 6.3.3.2). Unlike the data on their sense of agency, however, the positive responses to those statements were more significant in the first study than in the second, implying that the methodology may have had a greater impact on the learning outlooks of students that had endured over a year of quarantine than those working in an in-person learning environment. Further, at the end of both studies a small but significant number

of the students expressed that they felt that they now had the skills and knowledge to create a devised theatre show on their own.

Thelma too indicated that she believes the students felt ownership over their work and a deep sense of pride, which, she contends, makes it an effective learning process that teaches skills important across all academic disciplines. She explained that devised theatre is ideally suited for the Design Thinking model, developed by Stanford University, that Waipahu High School has implemented:

The whole devised theatre thing, throwing them into the groups, making them accountable for the group work, it's giving them more skills than we will ever find on our compendium or curriculum maps. And for that, I'm so grateful for this process. Because they're learning real skills, we call them soft skills in the education world: having to be cooperative, having to use efficient communication techniques, problem-solving, team building ... and conflict resolution.

Several of the students' sophisticated articulations of the role of conflict resolution in their group dynamics, to me, support some of Thelma's assertions (section 5.2.5).

Finally, the data indicate that there is a correlation between a positive shift in outlooks on learning and instances of agency in the rehearsal room (section 6.3.3.2). This indicates that the students that engaged in the process the most also had their outlooks on learning shift the most, which, in turn, supports my contention that our methodology may have had a positive impact on the students' general outlooks on learning.

7.2.4 Might the Participant-Driven Dramaturgy Model Be a Particularly Effective Methodology for Cultivating Student Agency?

One component that makes our devising methodology unique is the purposeful role of dramaturgy, that is, pushing the students to see patterns and connecting themes in their work by working out a "show question" through which all creative choices are then filtered. As I

discussed in section 5.2.3, while many theatre education methodologies begin rehearsals by allowing students to decide a basic theme for their show to guide their creative process, I am unaware of any that allow the students significant time to create content that interests them before analyzing that content to then decide on their show question, as ours does. Even in devised theatre methodologies that are open-ended enough to allow for significant student creative agency, a moment usually arrives in the rehearsal process when the instructor steps in and asserts strong artistic guidance to ensure the show is completed, perhaps within the expectations of the educational institution. However, the participant-driven dramaturgy methodology assumes that by allowing students as much agency as possible over their creative processes, they will create a complete show on their own with minimal instructor guidance.

As far as I know, mine are also the only case studies that are aimed at assessing students' sense of agency (as opposed to only assessing instances of individual agency or patterns of relational agency) in a devised rehearsal room, so without a control group, it is impossible to empirically assess the efficacy of the impact of dramaturgy in our methodology. That said, after enabling the students to use the tool of dramaturgy to assert further agency over their work, we did record positive shifts in the students' instances and sense of agency, which could be an indicator that this component did yield positive results. The fact that the rehearsals focused on dramaturgy solicited some of the strongest engagement from the students further supports this hypothesis. For example, Thelma noted that the exercise in Study 2 that pushed the students to debate picking a show question (section 5.2.3) required critical thought, communication, and a high general proficiency in common core standards:

I thought today was fantastic. As the English educator in the room, that was critical thought. As I sat back and heard them respectfully, and at times disrespectfully, banter, debate, and collaborate, I saw them building on each other's ideas, disagreeing respectfully, asserting their own specific opinions and perspectives. From an English

teacher standpoint, that's very high-level proficiency for common core standards. And I did think that it gave them more of a lens of a director and a script writer because they weren't looking at the tasks in terms of being an actor, but instead from a bigger picture perspective.

It is difficult to say to what degree the students used the show questions to influence their creative content because allowing students as much agency as possible over the show meant that we were not part of many of their creative conversations. Nonetheless, there were several clear instances where this did occur. The most overt example was in Study 2 when discussing the bookends of *Our Legacy*; their original concept was for Thelma to open the yearbook at the beginning of the show and then close it at the end, but the students then changed their vision based on the show question, "what is life like through a teenager's eyes?":

So, for the bookends, thinking back to everyone's idea, you know, we thought about having Ms. Madriaga do it, but then we went back to the show question, and it's about life through a teenager's eyes. So, we're gonna ask one of these seniors to pretend like they're like 85 years old or whatever, you know, they're retired, they have grandkids, whatever. And they're looking back at their high school life at the end. – ω

At the end of the Study 2 process, the students appeared to Kat, Thelma, and myself to be completely self-motivated in taking full control over the filming and editing process, as evidenced by the meetings they organized for themselves outside of class time to make final artistic decisions, and we all believe that dramaturgy was an important tool in their getting there. Wanting to explore a topic and being able to do so in an effective and satisfying way are not the same thing; I argue that giving the participants sufficient time to understand the realities of working in their groups and delivering a performance through trial and error *before* allowing them to choose their own show question through which to filter their creative choices is a critical tool in a devised theatre education methodology aimed at allowing students as much agency as possible over their creative processes. This sense of ownership, in turn, can then promote feelings of agency more generally (Rainio, 2010; Kumpulainen et al., 2010; Lehtonen, 2015).

The partial success of this endeavor in Study 1 speaks to the fact that this component can be employed in degrees, and its complete success in Study 2 indicates to me that in addition to being an effective educational strategy, it is also a viable one.

7.2.5 How Does This Methodology Differ in an Online vs. In-Person Environment?

It is impossible to separate the remote nature of Study 1 and the in-person, socially distanced nature of Study 2 from the unprecedented circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic that created these learning environments. The clear joy and relief the students experienced from working with friends after over a year of isolation might not be present in remote learning environments moving forward, and hopefully, the novelty of being back in school after a long absence is not something we, as a society, will repeat any time soon. That said, I observed a number of differences between Study 1 and Study 2 that could be attributed to the distinction between remote and in-person learning environments.

It is hardly surprising that, overall, Thelma and the students expressed that the in-person learning experience was superior to the remote one. The challenges of online learning have been well documented; for example, health and technology journalist Julia Sklar explains that “Zoom fatigue” results from video conferencing when our brains are blocked from picking up on many of the non-verbal cues that they usually receive during face-to-face interactions and must instead intensely focus on the meaning of words. This problem becomes exasperated by several people appearing in a video conferencing gallery view, which

... challenges the brain’s central vision, forcing it to decode so many people at once that no one comes through meaningfully, not even the speaker ... The brain becomes overwhelmed by unfamiliar excess stimuli while being hyper-focused on searching for non-verbal cues that it can’t find (Sklar, 2020).

This idea is backed up by the fact that, proportionally, there was a lot more passive agency in Study 1 than in Study 2, indicating that the students may have been more likely to go off-task in a remote learning environment than in an in-person one. As another example, the warm-up games went very differently online than in person. During Study 2, the students seemed to enjoy this playful beginning class time immensely, such as when early in the process γ and α threw themselves onto the cafeteria floor at the climax of a mock pie eating contest. In Study 1, however, half the students typically didn't have their cameras on during warm-ups, and their engagement varied, with technical difficulties often being cited as cause for passivity.

The feedback process was also considerably different between the two studies. In Study 1 the students were able to comment on each other's performances and to each other as audience members in real time over the Google Meet chat function in a way that did not disturb the performance. The students that had just performed were then able to be present during the giving of feedback and go back to the chat record later to analyze any specific remarks. By contrast, in Study 2 the students were often distracted in preparation for their own upcoming in-person performances. Far fewer students spoke up in front of the class to offer critiques, perhaps because the Google Meet chat function may have allowed a less intimidating way for some of the shyer students to engage with the rest of the class. That said, the students who did engage in person provided a lot more details than the typical one-line feedback provided online. Additionally, the strategy of pairing off the groups to provide one another with feedback was highly effective in person and provided a further emphasis on peer critique over teacher assessment. Breaking students into small groups to engage in unsupervised discussions is not universally praised by educators as an effective strategy, but it certainly worked for us, and if I were to engage in a virtual devised rehearsal process again, I would definitely utilize the

breakout room function to see if this would also be an effective strategy online. All of that said, we found the implementation of our asynchronous video feedback in Study 1 to be an effective time-saving tool, and we ended up utilizing it again in Study 2 even though we were in-person, so there are certainly lessons to be learned about offering feedback in an online classroom.

The in-person process was also more multifaceted, which allowed the students to excel in a number of different areas. Online, the students that engaged the most in class also seemed to contribute heavily to the final show. In Study 2 that correlation still held true for the class, but for many of the individual students, that relationship was a lot more erratic. For example, in section 6.3.2 I highlighted λ , who did not seem to enjoy the rehearsal process very much but was enthusiastic about the video recording process. I should note that her role as a camera operator was not an option in Study 1 as all of the videos were recorded via Google Meet. Also, as I touched on in section 4.4.2, I think it was more challenging for the students to really get into the spirit of creating a show over a digital medium in comparison to an in-person rehearsal room, where the multifaceted nature of physically interacting and performing in front of a group of people reinforces the gravity of creating a full show for an audience.

The in-person learning environment also has implications for the role of agency. Smith (2014) offers:

... agency starts in small gestures and choices, which begin a process of breaking down internalized otherness and the limitations of self-perception. What starts as a culture embodied by the facilitators pervades the rest of the group. However, for this to occur it relies on the facilitator to actively prompt and encourage it. (p. 180)

Like Freire, she notes that self-depreciation is another characteristic of the oppressed, and because of that, students may feel inadequate. For me, the capacity as a facilitator to prompt and encourage a culture of breaking down “otherness” through collaborative creation was far more limited online than in-person, where we were able to more robustly assess which students needed

encouragement and had more tools at our disposal to provide that encouragement. To that end, our ability as instructors to engage with the students in Study 1 was limited by our inability to enter their breakout rooms, an issue that we did not have in person. This is, of course, not an issue for most online classrooms as teachers generally have full permissions in such situations, but this does again speak to the barriers between students and teachers that can be present due to technical constraints.

My overall assessment is that the students seemed happier with the Study 2 experience than that of Study 1, particularly because in Study 2 they were able to work together so closely. This indicates to me that, in line with overwhelming research, learning remotely is more challenging for students than in person. However, the positive increases in their sense of agency were more profound in Study 1, which suggests to me that *effective* remote learning methodologies that emphasize collaboration, creativity, and self-directed learning may then be very successful as well as appreciated by the students. In fact, New Zealand scholar Judit Klein (2012) sees great promise in the role of modern technology in peripatetic learning, which she argues allows students increased mobility and more tools for collaboration (p. 500).

7.2.6 Given That Devised Theatre Has Largely Been Associated with White Artists, Can This Be an Effective Methodology for Asian and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Students?

As I explained in Chapter 2, because devised theatre comes from a White Eurocentric tradition, most professional devised companies are made up of a majority of White practitioners, and as such, its resonance with an Asian and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander population cannot be presumed. Further, as White-identifying instructors from the continental United States, the

challenges we faced as facilitators in understanding and crossing the cultural barriers in these two classrooms were considerable. Our most important asset, then, was Thelma. She has taught at Waipahu High School for over ten years, so the students knew her from both in-person instruction and her reputation throughout their entire high school experiences, and, from my vantage point, they adore her. Therefore, having her there to interject or clarify some of my and Kat's language was important. For example, as I mentioned in Chapter 4, she is of Filipino ancestry, as are a number of the students, and she occasionally brought up Filipino cultural elements in group discussions that visibly resonated with the room. During Study 1, when a group performed a family scene during which an auntie greets her nephew by asking if he has a girlfriend in school, Thelma confirmed that this is exactly how a Filipino family exchange would sound. During an exit interview she indicated that the language I used during Study 1 did impact the rehearsal room:

I think it's just a terminology thing. Because you're White, the language that you use among your White peers would center around certain kinds of words. I'm not White, but I get it. But for the students, they haven't had exposure to that kind of language unless they watch *Friends*. Because, Mike, you seriously sound like a character on *Friends*.

She stressed that my background teaching at the university level might have been the biggest contributor to any cultural disconnect. This is a problem because, as Dressen-Hammouda (2008) cautions, students often struggle in academic and creative environments because they are also struggling to learn the beliefs and practices of their disciplines and of the instructors who teach those disciplines (p. 234). However, Thelma also emphasized that she did not feel that this barrier was particularly impactful and that between the three of us instructors, the students more or less followed our lessons and felt overall supported. After Study 2 she indicated that because we were in-person and because we knew the students better, our communication with them had improved:

This year was much better essentially because [often] you guys were not lecturing, but instead talking with the kids ... so that really helps. And I did notice that you used, I don't want to say differentiated language, but sometimes you were trying to level down that comprehension level, and that was effective.

In section 2.8 I outlined our plans to incorporate Indigenous knowledge frameworks into our methodology; I believe that those efforts largely failed. We did draw upon local news stories to encourage them to engage with the issues of their community; we emphasized the role of hūnā (what is sacred or hidden) in their creative offerings, that is, to not offer more of themselves than they and/or their community would feel appropriate to share; we also brought in a local Sāmoan artist toward the end of Study 2 to help solidify some of our improv teachings. However, I believe that time is a critical resource for a successful ŌiwiCrit methodology, and adequately emphasizing the roles of kuleana, mo'okū'auhau, aloha 'āina, and the hūnā of mo'olelo⁴¹ requires robust discussion (Wright & Balutski, 2016). Time is required to tell stories told many times from different perspectives, to connect the pedagogy to the students' individual life processes, and to reflect and link what is taught to a shared experience in the community. Time is needed to bring in more local artists and educators to provide pluralistic views of their options to tell stories and to contextualize the culture of our methodology. Lacking the time to embrace these elements, in many ways the exchange of knowledge followed the traditional Western model of a one-way transfer from teacher to student, separated from the land and communities in which that knowledge is grounded (Spaulding, 2010). Facilitating the creation of a complete show over the number of rehearsals we had in each study simply did not allow for that time, and as such, we failed in our aim to sufficiently honor Kānaka Maoli knowledge frameworks. For this reason, as well as others that I will mention in section 7.3.3, I recommend as much time as

⁴¹ See section 2.8 for translations.

possible when employing a devised theatre education methodology when working within Indigenous communities.

That said, to specifically address the issue that devised theatre comes from a White Eurocentric tradition, there is no doubt that elements of the process must have seemed foreign and irrelevant to the students. For example, as I mentioned in Chapters 4 and 5, at the beginning of both studies when we screened examples of devised and digital theatre, the students responded much more strongly to the work of local Hawaiian artists than to that of various American and European practitioners. However, that is not to say that the work of White devising groups did not also resonate with them; for example, a performance by the White German choreographer Pina Bausch too solicited strong reactions and conversations around the function of gender roles in contemporary society. I asked Thelma if she felt that a methodology modeled after a Hawaiian theatre tradition like Hana Keaka or Pidgin Theatre, a Chinese form like Jingju, or a Filipino form like Duplo, would have been more relevant and effective with the students. She had this to say:

I think my kids, if you say those theatre forms, they'll be like, "What? I don't know." ... And maybe the Asian kids will be like, "Oh, I know what that is." Because it's something that their parents know of or have taken them to. So, I want to say that devised theatre is – I can only speak for my demographic of students, my Gen Z kids in my district school – they're more familiar with this kind of skit work or improvisation work, not Hawaiian/Polynesian styles.

Thelma believes that although the devised methodology itself, and the most prominent artists who practice it, are of different cultures than her students, the storytelling that they are most exposed to is Western, and as a result our methodology was in many ways familiar and did indeed resonate with them. This is not to say that theatre methodologies entrenched in the students' own culture might not serve them better; as Freire (2014) notes, "the oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption" (p. 54). But regarding *this* methodology,

it did seem to work well with these particular students. Ultimately, there will always be cultural barriers when an educator teaches outside of their own community. Nonetheless, I personally believe that a constructive exchange of ideas is always achievable, so long as the educators are as cognizant as possible of what the barriers are and see those differences as learning opportunities, because those barriers are always clear to the students.

Further, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, part of the current resistance to promoting student agency in education involves cultural considerations, specifically, that African American communities often prefer to have strong classroom control from instructors (Monroe & Obidah, 2004; Ware, 2006). However, to date, research investigating the role of student agency in Asian American communities is not very robust (Kim, 2009; Museus, 2014; Jaeger et al., 2017), and there is very little exploring the same in Kānaka Maoli (Taira, 2018; Zabala, 2019; Kaui, 2021) and other Oceanic communities (Sharma et al., 2018; Amundsen, 2019; Rātima et al., 2022). While I cannot make broad recommendations based on this research project, the fact that our methodology was successful with these students suggests that further research into culturally conscious learning strategies aimed at fostering student agency in these communities could be beneficial.

7.3 Reflections and Recommendations

Having answered my research questions, I will now offer comprehensive reflections on the efficacy of our methodology and make broad recommendations for a devised theatre pedagogy aimed at promoting agency in high school students.

7.3.1 The Loop of Agency

As previously stated, the students seemed to exhibit the most agency while providing feedback on each other's work and creating scenes. The feedback process then is critical because it directs the students and highlights the necessary skills to successfully revise their work. The role of dramaturgy here is to guide how that feedback is employed based on the show question that the students have decided upon. The students then perform the new content and receive further feedback, which is filtered through the lens of dramaturgy and then again informs skill application and content creation. From my observations in this research project, I believe that the more the students engage in this "loop of agency," the more agency they will exhibit and the more ownership they will feel over their work. Again, from my personal observations and the implications of current research (section 7.2.2), I believe that these instances of agency then translate into an increased sense of agency, particularly when their efforts are then validated by their community in the form of the audience response to the final show. Figure 7.1, then, is a flowchart visually demonstrating the cultivation of agency in the participant-driven dramaturgy methodology:

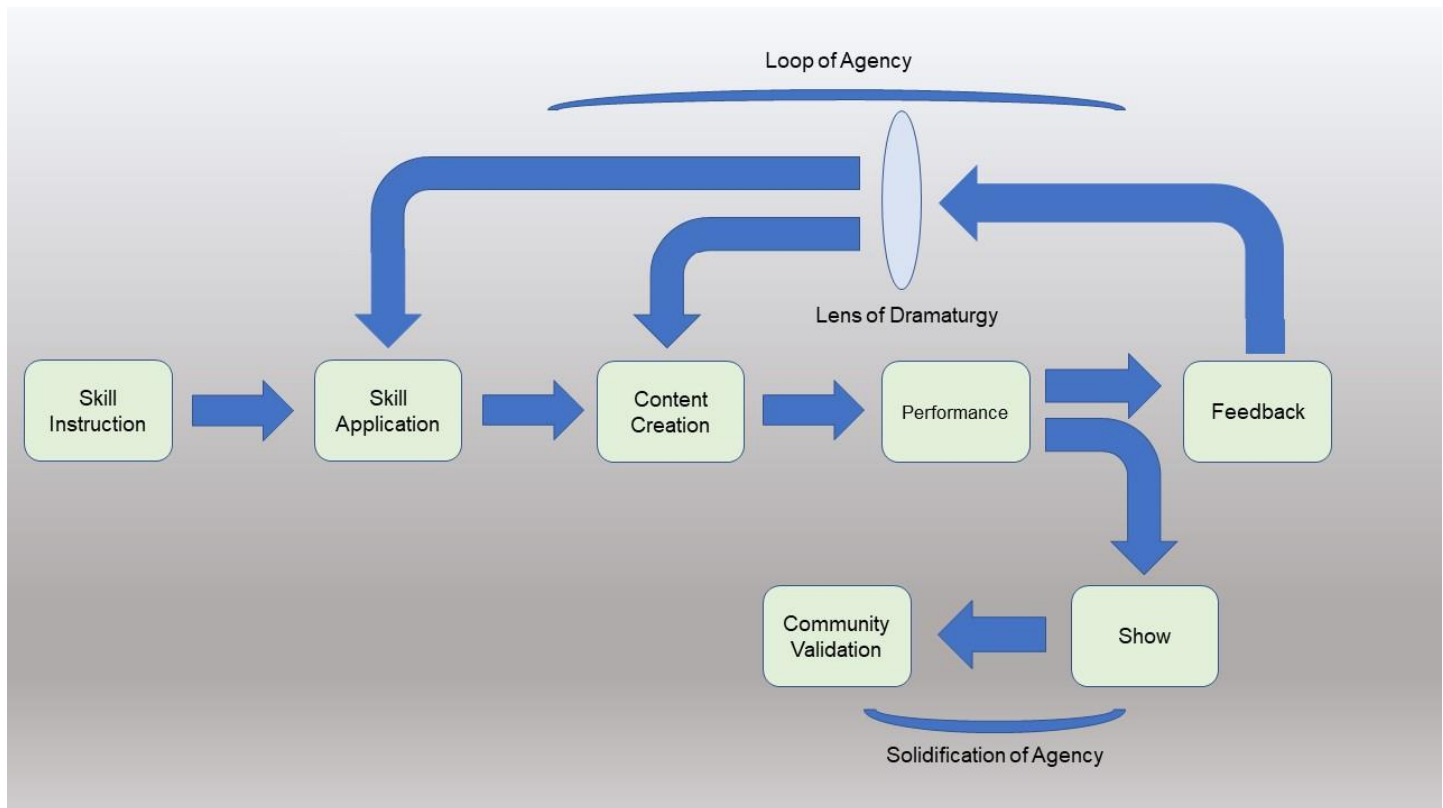


Figure 7.1: Cultivation of Agency Within Participant-Driven Dramaturgy Methodology Flowchart

While the skill instruction component comes largely (but not exclusively) from the instructors, the components of the loop of agency (skill application, content creation, performance, feedback, and the implementation of the lens of dramaturgy) are all areas that should be driven by the students as much as possible for a successful self-directed learning model. To that end, this flowchart aims to demonstrate an *ideal* classroom scenario featuring optimal relational agency and is thus an oversimplification of the methodology because the role of the instructor, as well as the various roles of the individual students, are not explicitly stated. As I develop this methodology further, I hope to provide a more detailed flowchart that may take these elements into account, such as, for example, the familiarity the students feel with theatre skills broadly, with devised theatre specifically, with the instructor, and with one another. All of that said, I have argued throughout this dissertation that this is where the students would be best served by having the instructor relinquish as much control as possible, but as Keefte et al. (2013)

note, self-directed learning can only happen with structured relational agency (p. 116), so that relinquishment must be strategic, and this flowchart is meant to guide that strategizing, to allow the instructor to step in and make adjustments as necessary to try and encourage this loop of agency when they see the stated elements operating inefficiently. For example, if the instructor observes that a group of students are adjusting their creative work based on feedback but do not seem to be applying or refining their performance skills (or learning new performance skills) accordingly, that instructor might ask that group of students what they are hoping to achieve with their latest revision and make suggestions regarding how they can use performance skills to achieve that goal.

7.3.2 Implications for Lifelong Learning

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, assessing whether the studies had a direct effect on the students' abilities to engage in lifelong learning is impossible to answer within the scope of this research project as it would require a longitudinal study that follows up with the students over a sustained period of time. However, there are a number of aspects of the data that are consistent with environments and habits that are theorized to promote lifelong learning.

As I have mentioned, the students' outlooks on learning appeared to shift in a positive direction after both studies. Lifelong learners typically prefer to learn with others rather than working alone, and the students displayed a high amount of relational agency in both studies (section 6.3.1). Such learners also tend to have learning relationships within their communities (Crick et al., 2004, p. 257), and the survey data from the second study indicate a positive shift in the students' sense of their value in their community (section 6.3.3.4). Lifelong learners need to discover why new skills should be learned through their application for their relevance to be

apparent (Claxton, 2008), and we observed that many performance skills, such as some of the spatial movement skills of Viewpoints, were absorbed with much more enthusiasm and precision after the students realized the skills' relevance after struggling with creating their scenes (section 5.2.5). Community validation too is required to foster lifelong learning, as it affirms the learners' efforts and solidifies the learned materials' relevance outside of the classroom (Claxton, 2008; Kirby et al., 2010). I believe this was accomplished by the positive audience responses to both shows. Further, looking back at the five characteristics of lifelong learners according to Kirby et al., namely to set goals, apply appropriate knowledge and skills, engage in self-direction and self-evaluation, locate required information, and adapt learning strategies to different conditions (Kirby et al. 292-293), all of these were, to varying degrees, required actions as part of our devised methodology.

As I explained in Chapter 2, student agency is linked to lifelong learning (Crick et al., 2004; Smith, 2014), which speaks well to a praxis like ours. The fact that the students who engaged in the process twice displayed more instances of agency than their peers (section 6.3.5) implies that engaging in the process multiple times might better encourage dispositions related to lifelong learning. This makes sense because additional projects provide more opportunities to develop skills, evaluate one's work and the work of others, and receive further community validation. Further, we believe that part of the reason that the students were more enthusiastic about participating early in Study 2 is that some of the students already knew us and knew the process from Study 1, and other students were able to see their trust and confidence. It also made a difference that many of the new students had seen *Metanoia* and therefore had some sense of what the final show might look like.

This is all to say that my research indicates that our methodology has quite a lot of

characteristics consistent with environments and habits that promote lifelong learning dispositions. However, for this to translate into participants continuing to learn and engage with the arts after the project ends, there need to be opportunities for them to continue to do so. Smith (2014) argues that for students to benefit from the effects of agency cultivated from theatre projects like mine, there is a need for broader arts funding to provide a wider support network allowing those students' creative work to exist within a context of personal and institutional relationships (p. 184). This, of course, then connects to the circumstances that enabled the students of this research project to be in Thelma's class in the first place. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, their participation is the result of the social, political, and historical forces that put them there; and for our students, those backgrounds are complex, diverse, and often challenging. Not every high school has a theatre class, so the students experienced a certain privilege in their being able to partake in our methodology. Future research would do well to consider these conditions in assessing the role of agency in a devised theatre classroom as well as how a student's capacity to assert agency is tied to their race, gender, physical abilities, and class.

7.3.3 More Time

As I noted in the group interview at the end of Study 2, we asked quite a lot of the students (e.g., they had to work within a group of people that they may not have known or known how to work with; we asked them to write, design, direct, film, *and* edit), and some of them had never participated in theatre before (section 6.3.7). My main recommendation is to allow as much time for the process as possible, preferably over a full academic year. After all, it is not uncommon for high school theatre programs to dedicate a full year to stage a Western dramatic play, often solely focusing on the students' acting performances. To allow students as much agency as

possible over a process that asks them to be directors, playwrights, actors, designers, technical supervisors, and producers takes time, as does responsibly honoring the knowledge frameworks that shape the students' worldviews.

Kat often remarked that the process suffered from insufficient time for robust skill instruction. The Viewpoints methodology, for example, is most effective if it is practiced over and over until the skills become innate. This is also true for more basic skills such as projection, power stances, and so on. This is important because the skill application component of the loop of agency can only be fully engaged if the students feel that they understand the skills well enough to apply them. Further, a comprehensive application of performance skills can likely result in a show that is received well by audiences as well as by the students themselves, which is critical in solidifying the sense of agency cultivated throughout the process. Additionally, this connects to the feedback process and the lens of dramaturgy because if the students don't have a strong knowledge of performance skills, then it can be challenging to implement feedback into their content revisions. Having more time for the process would also be beneficial from a common core pedagogical perspective because this would allow for more assignments that allow for reflection on specific skill sets as well as subsequent application that directly addresses the academic requirements of a specific learning institution.

Time also limited our feedback process in a number of different ways. Feedback is important for the educational component of any devised theatre process because it is a necessary and overt part of the creation process and should be carried out in a way that is as resistant to hierarchies as the devising process itself (Wessendorf, 2018). We had originally intended to implement Lerman's Critical Response Process, which emphasizes an experience-based exchange led by the artist's needs rather than respondents offering judgments (Lerman, 2003),

but the constraints of Study 1 forced us to focus on the simple feedback concepts of “cake” and “discovery” (section 4.4.1). In Study 2 we had more time and maximized it by pairing up the groups of students to provide feedback to one another; the students indicated that they enjoyed learning from each other’s ideas and appreciated the accountability of having to explain their ideas to another group (section 5.2.2). However, our time was still quite limited. If we had more time, we would have asked the students to implement each other’s critiques immediately by running through their scenes again. Not only would doing so have provided the students with more substantial guidance toward their revision processes, but it might have also allowed them to avoid some feelings of negative judgment from their peers by seeing the direct actionability of that feedback.

All of this said, Study 1 was still very effective with only seventeen hours of rehearsal and devising time to create a full show with twenty-seven students. Time is always a limited resource in classrooms, and I believe the data confirms that devised theatre education can go a long way to promoting student agency within relatively short periods of time. It is nonetheless helpful for an instructor to remember that the more time is allotted, the more the students will get out of it.

7.3.4 Our Devised Room as a Learning Environment

I argue that our devised rehearsal room was an effective learning environment for a variety of reasons. The overwhelmingly positive responses from the audiences of teachers, students, family, and friends after both studies, in my opinion, provided the kind of community validation that I have asserted is required for students to go on to engage in the arts outside of the classroom. Additionally, this community response may have addressed the concerns of Keefe et

al. and Cross regarding the relevance of the skills acquired during the devised process for their broader lives (Keeffe et al., 2013, p. 123; Cross, 2019, p. 2). This also supports Edwards' (2007) mandate that, for relational agency to be successful, it needs to be "evident outside the institutional shelters of established systems" (pp. 8-9).

Both of our studies appear to have satisfied most of Hope's characteristics of a creative environment (section 2.4 and Hope, 2010, p. 45). Because we did not have the students choose a show question until halfway through the process, there was a commitment to open-ended work and a pursuit of the unknown. Because the motivations for success were oriented around their desire to create a good show rather than the expectation of academic penalties, there were low consequences for failure. The wide backgrounds of the students allowed for different types of knowledge as well as ways of thinking and working in their creative processes, especially as we often let them work unsupervised. Due to our limited resources, creativity certainly had a higher value than technique, technology, or ideology. Although we were operating within a high school with oversight from the administration, because Thelma was highly trusted, bureaucratic management was kept to a minimum. We certainly endeavored with our feedback process to evaluate how the students' efforts proceeded from moment to moment, although, as I have discussed, this was challenging over a short timeline. Hope also asserts that it is important to have a base knowledge and skill in at least one component of the process; we did have this to an extent with the more experienced students who had participated in dramatic theatre with Thelma previously, but quite a few of the students had no theatre background whatsoever and everyone, including Thelma, was new to the devising process in Study 1, where these skills must be applied collaboratively and fluidly rather than in the delineated roles of dramatic theatre. He also outlines characteristics that we did not meet: we did not have plentiful time and space to support and

drive our creative process. All of this said, I believe that these characteristics of our rehearsal room, at least partially, addressed Rainio's (2010) fourth contradiction of Western defined agency, that even though we are bound to reality, imagination is required to widen our possibilities (pp. 16-17).

As I outlined in section 2.2, Rainio's fifth and most profound contradiction of agency is that children in society, and particularly in classrooms, are meant to assert themselves in an environment that seeks to control them (p. 15), and, again, most devised theatre education processes arrive at a critical point where the instructor retakes control of the creative process to ensure that a show can be completed and adequately performed. I believe that to work toward a classroom where, as Freire (2014) offers, both the teacher and students are simultaneously teachers and students (p. 72) and, as Gibbons (2002) mandates, students take over most of the teaching operations (p. 3), as much agency as possible must be allowed to the students, which means allowing them to fail. As in Lehtonen's research, both of our studies hit crisis points when the rehearsal process shifted from the playfulness of early exercises into needing to create scenes that could potentially be in the show, and then at the end of each process when the students needed to deliver finished videos. As I mentioned in section 4.4.3, because Thelma does not severely penalize students for missing homework materials, their motivations for finishing the projects in these short timelines were a result of their being allowed to fail and of their own subsequent desires to succeed. Per Thelma:

I'm so used to being like, "Here's the bumpers."⁴² Let me make the bumper smaller. You're not getting to where I want." And then when they first started filming moments, you know, as the educator, we want to be like, "Okay, more bumpers." But through this process ... I saw that if I let them just flop, like altogether flop, the feedback that Kat provided on the video and the social pressures from the other higher-level students make them realize it, without the teacher in the room saying. And I think that is more valuable in

⁴² By "bumpers" Thelma is referring to the parameters of the curriculum, i.e. her capacity as an instructor to guide the students' learning.

terms of the learning aspect. And then, of course, when adults in the room validate that they've responded to the feedback that was given to them, then magic happens.

While the students may have received more robust training in individual theatre skills over a longer timeline, they nonetheless may have very well fully understood the necessity of those skills through trial and error, which allowed them to better retain what skills they *were* taught. The example provided in section 7.3.2 of the students' enthusiasm for learning new skills later in the process underscores this point, as does the fact that so many of them expressed that they did learn valuable skills (section 6.3.7). The students in our studies found ways to distill thirty voices into a single piece of art through various conflict resolution strategies, including voting within individual groups, group leaders asserting themselves, and, towards the end of Study 2, the emergence of leaders for the entire class. Potentially, there is also further unseen skill retention: for example, the students may not have had sufficient time to employ Viewpoints skills with deftness, but based on their work, I believe that a larger point was conveyed, that storytelling does not need to be grounded in text and that non-verbal communicative forms are also viable options.

Regarding Gibbons' (2002) consideration that for a successful self-directed learning curriculum students must set their own goals or outcomes, plan their own action learning sequences, organize themselves and the resources they need, complete the work, and determine the level of success they achieved to successfully engage in self-directed learning (p. 23),

Thelma felt that this was achieved for some of the students but not others:

I think the big goal was set by us, that deliverable public performance. I think maybe some of the [more experienced] students might have been able to set their own specific goals like, timeline, you know, when my draft was due ... So, for my advanced students, the answer is yes. [Also, some of] the younger students like [Q], I would also include her in that. For [some of the experienced] students like [X, V, o], I would say no. And they fall in the group with [most of the less experienced students], I don't think they were able

to [set their own learning goals].

Thelma's revelation, "I learned. I learned!" (section 6.3.9) would seem to satisfy Freire's (2014) call for a classroom of egalitarian two-way knowledge transfer, where "the teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach" (p. 80).

7.3.5 Class Size

As I have mentioned previously, most devised exercises and methodologies are oriented around small groups of participants, so devising with a class of thirty or more students can be challenging. By necessity, this involves breaking the class into smaller groups, which can be done in a number of different ways. In Study 1 the groups were randomly assigned with the more experienced students evenly distributed; in Study 2 the students chose their own groups, which resulted in some having significantly more experience than others. Kat and I feel that the first approach may have been more effective as the least experienced group in Study 2 ended up disbanding, whereas Thelma believes the second approach was more useful as it allowed one group to raise the standards for the rest. She had this to say about the impact of SlapprK (a group made up almost entirely of experienced students) on the rest of the class:

I like the group like this, with the [more experienced] students, other than v, at the same level, and the other groups kind of at the same level. I do think it raises the bar for everyone else.

There are arguments for either approach; what matters for a teacher employing this methodology is that they consider what strategy will work best for their students.

Once the groups were created, we noticed in Study 2 that some of the most effective strategies for fostering self-directed learning came from exercises that allowed for collaboration

outside of those groups. The interdepartmental meetings allowed for a robust exchange of ideas and encouraged the different skill sets of our students, like G, for example, who was relatively quiet within her group but took on a leadership role among the Prop Managers. The “mega group” strategy employed during the Study 2 dramaturgy conversations too allowed students to step up, or step back, and make decisions outside of their normal group environments (section 5.2.3). Which is to say, while employing a devised learning methodology within a large class was challenging, it also presented unique opportunities for group work and inter-group work.

7.3.6 The Exit Strategy

In section 3.9, I discussed the importance of the exit strategy, that is, being mindful of how our absence after the end of the project would affect the students. Per Neumann (2019), we were as transparent as possible with the students from the beginning regarding our aims and goals as artists and researchers (p. 7). And again, because this research project took place in a high school, working with a longstanding theatre teacher, the negative effects of our departure did not appear to be felt as acutely as if Kat and I were the sole facilitators; Thelma was there for them after our departure. It was our hope that Thelma and her students might continue creating devised theatre without us, potentially with some of the more experienced students serving as assistant facilitators, as Thelma allows her more experienced students more agency over their learning than newer students. As I mentioned in section 6.3.7, at the end of both studies a small but significant number of the students expressed that they felt they now had the skills and knowledge to create a devised theatre show. Further, Thelma expressed many times that she would like to keep using the devised theatre methodology after our departure.

We kept in contact with Thelma, and several months after the end of Study 2 Kat and I were invited back to serve as judges for their spring showcase, a performance of original spoken word poetry. The students were delighted to see us again and made us feel very welcome; their performances were profound and moving. It was not devised theatre since Thelma had already planned to work with the spoken-word form some time ago, so whether she and the students would continue with the devised model is unclear at the time of this writing. However, we were pleased to have an ongoing relationship with her and the students, and in the future, we hope to continue to work with her class at Waipahu High School if it serves them to do so. In the spirit of transparency, during the course of writing this dissertation, I presented aspects of this research at several conferences, and Thelma screened these presentations for the students who had taken part in the project, which I am told they enjoyed, even if some of the details went over their heads. Once this dissertation is approved by my committee, I intend to share it with Thelma, and I will encourage her to share it with those same students and their families if they are interested in reading it. By remaining in the community and letting the students know that we still care about them, it is our hope that we largely mitigated any distress from the breaking of any emotional bonds between ourselves and the students at the end of the research project.

7.3.7 Digital vs. In-Person Theatre

Finally, I have discussed a number of differences between our experiences facilitating the in-person and digital learning environments, but as both studies culminated with digital performances, it is important to discuss some of the considerations in creating digital theatre rather than a live in-person performance. Quite simply, the digital nature of the shows added an additional layer to our process, and our ability to guide them through that layer was hindered due

to our time constraints. One of the biggest issues was that we didn't have time to teach real camera and editing skills for Study 2. Even our ability to discuss some of the aesthetic differences between the role of cinematography in film as opposed to digital performance was limited. In the 2020s students are remarkably adept at filming and editing, but digital theatre is not social media; there are distinctions that need to be taught to get the most out of the devised theatre experience.

In some ways we found the digital medium to be less flexible than a live performance, where big and small adjustments can be made right up until the performance. We perceived a sense of finality from the students in their recorded scenes, that they felt that once the video had been submitted, the assignment was complete and further revisions were unnecessary. This became particularly problematic when, despite our planning, due to the students' taking over the editing process and extending the deadline to submit a final version of the show, most of the students saw *Our Legacy* in its completed form for the first time during the first public screening, which meant that the process lacked a crucial opportunity for the students to make holistic editing revisions based on group feedback. Further, in a live performance, the students would be acutely aware of the contributions of their peers as well as of the themes and aesthetics of the overall show throughout the process, and they would understand how their moments fit into the rest of the show in a more tangible way than in our process, whereas once we moved past the stage of live in-class performances into recording videos, the students only viewed each other's scenes in sporadic group feedback sessions. B, for example, indicated during the Study 2 group interview that he would have appreciated more time to discuss editing revisions as a class. Thelma too seemed to think that the digital medium of their performances presented unique learning opportunities that we could not take advantage of due to our time constraints:

Next quarter I want to start by reviewing the video again, in its entirety, and doing a pause and play. So, I'll pause, and I'll be like, "Write down on this chart pluses and deltas. What do you like about that? What does it tell? So, what areas of improvement do we need?" ... Hopefully, that experience of that real debriefing will impact the way that they do any kind of showcase for any class. The learning from this project, they can apply it [to the] Stanford format that our school uses, Design Level Thinking, so hopefully, they can use this [devising] model and then apply it to the classes that require them to use that methodology.

As I touched on in Chapter 5, on a personal level, I also wonder if the extra layer of the digital made it harder for the students to be honest and open in their performances. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, one reason I believe that devised theatre offers unique opportunities for expression is that much of the resulting storytelling defies traditional Western dramatic narrative and the White patriarchal frameworks that come with it, and as such, the students might avoid comparing their creative work to polished professional work because they might not have a reference to do so. However, young people have strong ideas about how they want videos to look and sound, so for *Our Legacy* there were reference points, and as a result, I believe that some of the more vulnerable moments in the Study 2 rehearsal room shifted into more ironic and emotionally detached tones once they were translated into video. This, of course, is not inherently a good or bad artistic choice, and the students overall seemed very pleased with the final show, but it had been my hope that the students would feel they had the option to be vulnerable in their work, and I believe we did see that choice being made much more in *Metanoia*, where the students did not engage in the additional artistic layer of editing their own work.

All of this raises larger questions about the role of digital theatre during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴³ Technology has always been intrinsically linked to theatre going back to the ancient Greeks, where machines routinely lifted actors to make them appear more god-like.

⁴³ As I mentioned in Chapter 1, even the term "digital theatre" itself has evolved since the emergence of COVID-19.

Philip Auslander (1999) argues that Western theatre, throughout the second half of the twentieth century, increasingly came to resemble television and other forms of media (p. 158). However, the rise of theatre being presented entirely via digital media has catalyzed contemporary debates over the nature of theatre itself. For example, performance studies and feminist scholar Peggy Phelan (2004) argues that pre-recorded forms of performance cannot truly be called theatre because audiences cannot affect the show (p. 82). I would note that, although our audiences could not affect the pre-recorded performances themselves, they were able to affect their own audience experience by using the YouTube chat function to talk to the students and with one-another. While I will always prefer in-person live performance as an artist, educator, and audience member, I believe that the students received all of the benefits from making digital theatre that I had originally hoped they would receive from live performance back when I conceived of the project in 2019; and further, I believe the skills they developed in creating digital theatre will serve them well as we continue to redefine the nature of theatre in the twenty-first century.

7.4 Conclusions

The results of my research imply that a devised theatre education methodology specifically aimed at allowing students as much agency as possible over their creative processes does have the potential to improve their outlooks on learning and foster an increased overall sense of agency. When I set out to conduct these studies, I was hoping to gather data that would support my hypothesis that a collaborative playwriting strategy, namely devising, aimed at allowing students as much agency as possible over their creative processes, would have clear learning benefits, which would hopefully imply an increased motivation from the students to continue to engage with the arts past adolescence. I expected the data to reflect that the students, overall,

displayed increased instances of agency as well as an increased positive sense of agency over each study because every theatre classroom teacher knows that engaging in theatre exercises provides students with unique ways of asserting control over their creative processes; what has been largely lacking is data to support those anecdotal observations. My conclusion is that my data does indeed support most of these assertions.

7.4.1 Analyses and Suggestions for Further Research

My research corroborates previous studies indicating that resisting agency is as important as constructive agency in a theatre education classroom, but my research goes further to suggest that instances of passive agency also correlate with the students' overall productivity. What does this mean? How can instructors capitalize on the potential benefits of passive agency? Per peripatetic learning theory, I believe that by giving the students space to let their minds wander, they were afforded the opportunity to digest the instructed material and to reflect and contemplate how to apply it. Daniel A. Greenberg, one of the founders of the Sudbury Valley School, notes that a peripatetic mindset involves:

... a mind that debates with itself, free of constraint, free of concern about risk, about taking the “wrong” path when no “right” path has revealed itself clearly ... It is a mind perfectly attuned to the need to accommodate to a constantly changing world, to find adaptations to ever-shifting environments. (Greenberg, n.d.)

I believe that this intellectual mobility also provides space for playfulness, a key requirement for creativity to flourish. To consider this another way, a student engaged with a project they deem worthy of their time in a self-directed learning environment will want to work on that project, and they may be restless in the moments that seem irrelevant to them in working towards that goal. By far, the most frequent way that the students displayed passive agency in-person was by using their phones. When I first arrived in Thelma's classroom, I couldn't

understand why she allowed her students to use their phones whenever they liked, even in the middle of a lesson plan. But the results, to me, speak for themselves. We live in a world, for better or worse, full of distractions where phones are always in our hands – so why should a learning environment be any different? Klein (2012) argues that the perception that the use of phones in a classroom is disruptive comes from a tension between new technologies and existing pedagogies; the solution is then for the classroom to adapt, rather than reject, ubiquitous technological tools (p. 500). Allowing the use of phones serves as a gesture of trust from the instructors and, I believe, if handled well, can provide a tool of empowerment for the students. As an educator, I now know that when students assert themselves in ways that are not directly constructive to the task at hand, it could very well be a sign of needing space to think and/or restlessness, rather than boredom per se. When the students of Thelma's class seemed bored they seemed, by contrast, to be disengaged and distant. Moving forward, I will take passive agency as a cue that there is a necessity for room for reflection and synthesis on the part of the students. This room might take the form of strategic assignments. For example, additional writing activities might allow students to channel their wandering minds into tangible creative planning.

In considering the role of technology in passive agency, perhaps one of the more important observations from my research is the identification of a new category of agency exclusive to a remote learning environment: “technical,” referring to students deviating from classroom tasks by discussing the technological obstacles they are facing. From the data I shared in section 6.3.1, and from my anecdotal observations, these instances of agency seemed very much like the instances of passive agency. I believe that this phenomenon has enormous implications for online teaching pedagogy, and further research is required to investigate this area in different contexts. For example, some of the economic and physical obstacles many

learners face in accessing remote learning may have had a bigger influence on our students than I observed; additional research might clarify this variable. What might a peripatetic teaching approach look like online? Would instances of technical agency decrease if teachers put additional emphasis on allowing students space to reflect and contextualize their learning? Might so doing affect a culture I frequently observed during quarantine, where students felt pressure to prove they were present and engaged during remote learning? This is an area I hope to explore further and clarify in my own future research.

Speaking of the complexities of online classrooms, my data suggest that those positive effects were felt in remote and socially distanced learning environments, which was somewhat of a surprise to me. I do think that part of the success of the virtual rehearsal room relates to a certain desperation on the students' part after a year of isolation. Much has been written since 2020 on the access that remote learning affords; perhaps this is most clear when considering disabled students. MacKenzie et al. (2022), for example, emphasize how much online classrooms have benefitted immunocompromised students or students with mobility or respiratory problems (p. 272). To be sure, remote learning can also create many obstacles for students, such as those who are visually or hearing impaired, or those with autism (p. 273). Further, a class divide means that students from low-income families and those from rural areas often do not have access to the reliable technology required to engage in remote learning environments (Diaz, 2021, pp. 145-146). Nonetheless, having had considerable online pedagogical experience from having taught several asynchronous and hybrid theatre courses at the University of Hawai'i, I have seen how effective virtual theatre classes can be; these experiences provided me with a good sense of how to structure assignments, so expectations were clear and consistent. Since the conclusion of this project, I have begun exploring the possibilities of working with disabled and elderly

communities, for whom regularly attending an in-person rehearsal room may be challenging. All of this said, additional research would do well to continue to investigate the role of agency in online classrooms. For example, a number of teachers have expressed to me a perception that in remote learning there is a high amount of student agency because they can control their physical environments. This is, however, far from universal, as many students have little to no control over the physical and/or emotional circumstances of their home lives. Further, to my knowledge, mine is the *only* research investigating the role of student agency in online devised theatre classrooms, so clearly a lot more investigation is required. Once again, a better understanding of how students assert agency over their own remote learning would have considerable implications for twenty-first century virtual learning methodologies.

I was also surprised by how quickly and enthusiastically the students embraced the devising process. In the first study we were strangers to these students, White people from the continental United States, trying a new, alien form of theatre over a digital medium. There was a learning curve for sure, and the higher enthusiasm for the form at the start of Study 2 emphasizes to me how important it is to be a known entity when working with any community, particularly for groups that have endured historical trauma like much of Waipahu's population. But the students told us in a number of different ways that they largely felt in control of their own creative processes and felt ownership over the work they created, and I think that is why it worked. Also, it was clear that the joy the students experienced in collaborating with one another was critical. Yes, it was at a time when it was needed, but I believe those elements of teamwork would also be received well under non-pandemic circumstances.

The role of dramaturgy was an important one in these studies. The classroom teacher and ourselves all strongly believe that this component contributed to the success of Study 1, and that

it was absolutely critical for the success of Study 2; indeed, we concluded that some of the most important conversations, group decision making and assertions of individual and relational agency came from our discussions around dramaturgy. It is clear to me that students have the capacity to assert agency over their own learning when they are provided with ample tools to do so, and dramaturgy is such a tool, one that allowed our students to robustly discuss the directions of both shows and make their creative choices accordingly; thus, in my opinion, providing some of the best opportunities over both studies to assert agency over their own learning. That said, it is difficult to definitively measure the direct role of dramaturgy in these studies. For example, as I have mentioned, the students overall seemed to hold deep respect and trust for Thelma. Would our dramaturgical conversations have gone as well in a different classroom? I attributed the students' more successful employment of dramaturgy in the second study to the additional time and in-person experience, but perhaps the fact that the repeat students knew and trusted us more in Study 2 was also a contributing factor. My future research would therefore do well to isolate this component to further investigate its efficacy; the use of a control group, for example, would allow for a more robust understanding of dramaturgy in devised theatre education outside of the context of Thelma's classrooms.

I have claimed that these studies were overall successful largely because most of the students indicated in their survey responses that they felt a positive increase in their sense of agency as well as their outlooks on learning. Thelma, like me, believes that the implications of this survey data are correct (section 7.2.3); she told me that our devising methodology allowed the students unique opportunities to assert agency over their learning and creative processes, which she then believes may have improved a number of their general outlooks, particularly after such a difficult year. However, as I noted, not every student took the surveys. Further, I was

surprised that my data did not support my hypothesis that instances of agency in our rehearsal rooms would be directly tied to the shifts in the students' sense of agency, particularly as so many scholars believe this to be the case (section 7.2.2). Further research is necessary to measure this dynamic in classrooms in different locations without the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is also true regarding outlooks on learning; because I originally set out to employ a methodology that would increase the likelihood of young people to continue to engage in the arts, longitudinal studies assessing student engagement over sustained periods of time would provide further insight toward the efficacy of devised theatre education therein.

The participant-driven dramaturgy model would also benefit from further research. As I mentioned, the flowchart I have presented (see Figure 7.1) represents an ideal classroom dynamic where students are able to drive their own learning and creative processes and, I believe, increase their likelihood of asserting various forms of agency as a result. However, the flowchart is incomplete, and I hope that in the future I will be able to provide a more detailed chart that takes into account the familiarity the students feel with theatre skills broadly, with devised theatre specifically, with the instructor, and with one another. Nonetheless, I believe the chart as it is will serve me well as I continue to employ our methodology, and I believe it may also be able to assist aspiring devised theatre educators.

Finally, I cannot say if our methodology has any distinct resonance with a BIPOC community over other theatre pedagogies; however, the fact that it worked so well with these Asian and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students is encouraging. As Thelma argued, because our students are used to realism as a primary storytelling method, they responded well to devising, a Western theatre form (section 7.2.6). But as I mentioned in Chapter 1, these terms are very broad and do not reflect the various distinct cultures that inform our students' backgrounds.

Further research would do well to work with schools having a high or total Hawaiian student population, such as Hawaiian language immersion schools,⁴⁴ to get a better sense of how agency presents itself in devised theatre classrooms for Hawaiian students, specifically. This is, of course, also true for working with various Oceanic and Asian American populations; by focusing on students from more specific cultural backgrounds, the nuances of how those cultural elements might affect student engagement with a devised theatre educational methodology would become much clearer, which could then lead toward more refined culturally conscious learning strategies. In a similar vein, my research did not closely examine the role of class, physical abilities, and gender; each of these components is inextricably linked to agency, and future research would do well to investigate the roles each plays in a devised theatre classroom.

7.4.2 Contributions of the Studies

The contributions of these studies to the field of theatre education are numerous. As I have offered, my data supports the research of Rainio (2010) and Lehtonen (2015) in acknowledging that the tension between the relinquishment of teacher control to promote student agency while also needing to hit academic benchmarks is complicated, but affirming that allowing students agency to take charge of elements of their own learning can indeed be an effective learning methodology. My studies also support their assertions regarding the positive role of resisting agency in that students can begin to take ownership of their learning processes by resisting the class curriculum.

⁴⁴ Hawaiian language immersion schools, also known as Kaiapuni schools, deliver instruction exclusively through ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i (the Hawaiian language) in an effort to contribute toward Hawaiian language revitalization. Examples of Hawaiian language immersion schools on O‘ahu include Ānuenue, Hau‘ula Elementary, and Kahuku High & Intermediate.

Departing from Rainio's and Lehtonen's research, my findings suggest that passive agency can also serve as a tool for students to further assert agency in a less confrontational manner than resisting agency. This has considerable implications for researchers investigating the role of student agency in a peripatetic learning context (McLean, 2021; Timmis & Williams, 2014) and for educators reconsidering the spectrum of student behaviors in the twenty-first century, particularly in light of emerging technologies. To that end, these studies provide a platform with which to investigate the role of agency in online theatre education. As expected, the data indicate that the online medium created a number of barriers between the teacher and the students, as well as between the students themselves, that hindered the learning process. However, the fact that there were also unique benefits, such as the real-time performance feedback over the Google Meet chat function and the implementation of a new form of agency documented in these studies, technical agency, indicate that there is much yet to be documented regarding ongoing scholarship on the learning benefits of online theatre classrooms (Cziboly & Bethlenfalvy, 2020; Eidson, 2018; Lorenza & Carter, 2021).

My studies also contribute to broader investigations of student agency by exploring not only how students assert themselves moment to moment in displays of instances of agency but by assessing how their general sense of agency over their lives are impacted. While considerable research investigates how student agency manifests in a variety of classroom environments with the goal of fostering an increased positive sense of agency (Nieminen & Tuohilampi, 2020; Rappa & Tang, 2017; Williams, 2017), little of it employs strategies to numerically assess that sense of agency, such as the Sense of Agency Scale designed by Tapal et al. (2017). It is my hope that my studies will contribute to more nuanced strategies toward an understanding of how students' sense of agency can shift in various classroom environments.

These studies also offer another tool for students to assert agency in theatre classrooms: dramaturgy. As dramaturgy continues to be defined in devised rehearsal rooms broadly, it is my hope that the devising methodology I outline in this dissertation offers actionable guidance toward the implementation of another vital tool in the assertion of student agency in devised theatre classrooms. Finally, the fact that this methodology was so successful in a mixed-race classroom in O‘ahu suggests that even though devising comes from a specific Eurocentric artistic tradition, it can provide an effective learning strategy in a multitude of different locations. This is important in considering the role of agency in education because, as Rainio (2010) notes, much of how we conceive of agency today is still tied to eighteenth century concepts of autonomy linked to the personhood of adult white men (p. 5).

Taken together, documenting the crucial roles of passive and technical agency in these two studies against the students’ broader sense of agency, the implementation of the additional agentive tool of dramaturgy, and the efficacy of a devised theatre educational methodology over an online medium and within a Hawaiian classroom, it is my hope that this research will contribute toward a more nuanced vocabulary to allow researchers, educators, and practitioners a better understanding of the role of agency in arts classrooms, as well as in a broader array of learning environments.

7.4.3 Implications

As I explained in Chapter 1, my goal with this research project was not to provide decisive answers to my research questions; rather, I aimed to provide additional data to an area that requires more research: the role of agency in a devised theatre classroom, as well as to suggest hitherto unexplored avenues of further investigation. The data analyses were carried out in a

systematic, transparent way that was grounded in existing research. I engaged in a consistent process of re-examining my data and discussing possible interpretations with colleagues, which included my academic advisor, my research group, statistical consultants, and conference audiences.

While the gathered data from this research project is narrow in scope, its implications for the field of education are broad. Education is in many ways a by-product of life, and as global discourse continues to push towards allowing populations around the world increased agency over their lives, so too is there a push in education towards increased student agency, and as such, it has the potential to be a catalyst for broad educational reform. While research into this area continues to expand, little of it focuses on theatre education, and almost none of it explores the possibilities of devised theatre. Much of education scholarship emphasizes the importance of balancing individual and relational agency within learning environments; the interdependent roles of both were clear in our classrooms. Scholars contend that student agency is linked to perceived relevance outside of the classroom; the efforts of our students were celebrated by hundreds of Waipahu residents. Contemporary classrooms seek learning strategies that equalize student positionality and solicit cultural differences as assets; creativity always has the potential to bypass student stratification, and in both studies we saw students of very diverse backgrounds make small and broad artistic decisions both individually and collectively. One of the biggest challenges faced by schools during the COVID-19 pandemic was how to foster collaborative learning over remote learning environments; Study 1 demonstrated that the malleability of devised theatre allows for just that. Devised theatre education is not perfect; it requires trust, efficient teamwork, commitment, and motivation from the students. However, I believe that my research demonstrates that the flexibility and adaptability of devising make it a formidable

learning methodology in an increasingly shifting and unpredictable world, that it is a form that celebrates wide and disparate knowledge bases, and that it has the potential to play an important role in the ongoing discourse on student agency in the twenty-first century classroom.

But going back to why I set out to conduct this research in the first place, does this playwriting approach, the participant-driven dramaturgy methodology of devising, allow for young people to tell stories on their own terms in ways that avoid comparing their work to commercial media? Are these students now any more likely to take the next step and create art on their own outside of school to share with the world? Anecdotally, the students seemed very proud of themselves for their creative work as well as how it was publicly received, and they overall seemed to have a lot of fun doing it. Artistically, neither *Metanoia* nor *Our Legacy* closely resembles any play I have ever seen; to me, the choices they made were bold, original, and utterly theirs. Perhaps most importantly, their survey results and interview responses at the end of each study indicate that the majority of the students felt that they had been able to express themselves, that the work presented was theirs, that they learned new skills, and that they would like to continue making devised theatre (a sentiment that a number of students, as well as Thelma, shared with me informally). These are some of the clearest indications to me that our methodology has merit. I certainly never heard a student say, “it’s not good enough,” as I did far too often from my BIPOC writing students in New York City.

I do sincerely believe that devised theatre education can and should be an important tool in a twenty-first century curriculum seeking to empower students by allowing them agency over their own learning, but more importantly to me, I believe that our methodology served these young people at a time that they badly needed a creative collaborative project. Our time together has influenced me as an artist (I have a lot to learn about expression through editing and graphic

design) as well as an educator (I now try to do a little less explaining to my students and let them try a task, and sometimes fail, before moving into denser lectures on theory). After completing these studies Kat and I formed Corpus Productions, a non-profit organization aiming to continue our work in helping young people tell their stories through devising. We are also now writing a handbook that will make our methodology easily accessible to any middle school or high school teacher seeking to apply a devised theatre approach to their pedagogy (with specific curricula for remote learning environments). Finally, we are looking forward to seeing the Waipahu High School students' latest work at the end of this semester, December 2022. I do not know if they will make devised theatre, spoken word, dramatic theatre, or work of another genre, but Thelma told me that Q knows exactly what she wants to do, and something tells me that, once again, it is going to be wildly original.

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Office of Research Compliance
Human Studies Program

DATE: February 16, 2021
TO: Wessendorf, Markus, Ph.D., University of Hawaii at Manoa, Theatre and Dance
Poblete, Michael, Ph.D., Theatre and Dance, University of Hawaii at Manoa
FROM: Rivera, Victoria, Dir, Ofc of Rsch Compliance, Social&Behav Exempt
PROTOCOL TITLE: Applied Devised Theatre As Expression For Teenagers
FUNDING SOURCE: None
PROTOCOL NUMBER: 2019-00863
Approval Date: February 16, 2021 Expiration Date: January 12, 2070

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

This letter is your record of the Human Studies Program approval of this study as exempt.

On February 16, 2021, the request for IRB approval of changes to your exempt project noted above has been reviewed and approved. The proposed amendments will be added into your current project file. The proposed changes do not alter the exempt status of your project. The authority for the exemption applicable to your study is documented in the Code of Federal Regulations at 45 CFR 46.101(b) 1.

This approval does not expire. However, please notify the Human Studies Program when your study is complete. Upon notification, we will close our files pertaining to your study.

If you have any questions relating to the protection of human research participants, please contact the Human Studies Program by phone at 956-5007 or email uhirb@hawaii.edu. We wish you success in carrying out your research project.

UH Human Studies Program, Office of Research Compliance
Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation, University of Hawai'i, System
2425 Campus Road, Sinclair 10, Honolulu HI 96822
Phone: 808.956.5007 • Email: uhirb@hawaii.edu
<https://www.hawaii.edu/researchcompliance/human-studies>
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Office of Research Compliance
Human Studies Program

DATE: November 01, 2021
TO: Wessendorf, Markus, Ph.D., University
of Hawaii at Manoa, Theatre and Dance
Poblete, Michael, Ph.D., Theatre and
Dance, University of Hawaii at Manoa
FROM: Rivera, Victoria, Dir, Ofc of Rsch
Compliance, Social & Behavioral
PROTOCOL TITLE: Applied Devised Theatre As Expression
For Teenagers
FUNDING SOURCE: None
PROTOCOL NUMBER: 2021-00714
APPROVAL DATE: November 01, 2021

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Under an expedited review procedure, the research project identified above was approved on November 01, 2021 by the University of Hawaii Institutional Review Board (UH IRB). The application qualified for expedited review under 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110, Category 6, 7. Per 45 CFR 46.109, a **Continuing Review is not required, however you may be requested to submit a progress report.**

This memorandum is your record of the IRB approval of this study. Please maintain it with your study records.

The Human Studies Program approval must be maintained for the entire term of your project. Please see guidance at [Final Revisions to the Common Rule](#) on the regulatory requirements for ongoing review and/or monitoring of research approved under an expedited review category.

If, during the course of your project, you intend to make changes to this study, you must obtain approval from the Human Studies Program prior to implementing any changes. You can submit your proposed changes via the UH eProtocol application. If an Unanticipated Problem occurs during the course of the study, you must notify the Human Studies Program within 24 hours of knowledge of the problem. A formal report must be submitted to the Human Studies Program within 10 days. The definition of "Unanticipated Problem" may be found at: [HSP Policies & Guidance Quicklink](#). The report form may be submitted via the eProtocol application.

You are required to maintain complete records pertaining to the use of humans as participants in your research. This includes all information or materials conveyed to and received from participants as well as signed consent forms, data, analyses, and results. These records must be maintained for at least three years following project completion or termination, and they are subject to inspection and review by the Human Studies Program and other authorized agencies.

Study Closure: Please notify this office when your project is complete. Upon notification, we will close our files pertaining to your project. Please contact this office if you have any questions or require assistance. We appreciate your cooperation, and wish you success with your research.

2425 Campus Road, Sinclair 10
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CONTEMPORARY IDENTITIES
DIGITAL DEVISED THEATRE PROJECT
INFORMATION PACKET



Corpus Interruptus, 2019



My name is Mike Poblete, and along with my artistic collaborator Kat Rothman, I am working with teenagers to create an original piece of devised theatre on the topic of contemporary identities in Hawai'i that will be performed June of 2021. This project is open to all teenagers aged 14-18 residing in Hawai'i; due to the socially distant nature participants who identify as having a physical disability are particularly encouraged to apply.



happens at the same time. It often results in some pretty wild stuff.

What is Devised Theatre?

Devised is a process of making theatre where you get a bunch of artists in a room with no script, and go through exercises to create a performance. Rather than starting with a set text and deciding how to bring it to life, devised performers might start with movement, or song, or lighting design or building a set, and it all



What is Digital Theatre?

Digital theatre and performance has been around for decades, but it has exploded since the start of COVID-19, allowing for artists and audiences to share digital time and space at a time where physical intimacy is compromised. This accessibility has allowed for new artists and forms to emerge. Kat and I created a digital production of William Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* in August 2020 that was streamed live from the performers' homes into audiences homes via the Zoom platform. It was celebrated by audiences and critics, but especially by the performers who were happy to work on new theatre.



Why Do It?

Creative writing and drama in education have both been proven to cultivate student creativity and engagement, as well as improve communication skills. Because it is a process of simultaneous creation and performance, it combines the self-directed learning and honing of personal voice of creative writing with the team building and escapism of drama. It's also really fun and rewarding to create and perform an original piece of theatre. Additionally, it looks great on a college application.

Is This Research?

Technically, yes. Kat and I have created a new way of making devised theatre and we would like to share the methodology with artists and academics so more teenagers can make theatre, so when the project is over we'll have a group talk with all of the participants to listen to what worked and what didn't. I will use that feedback to help write my doctoral dissertation on the topic of devised theatre for teenagers. No one's real names will be used in any research materials. There are detailed consent and assent forms for any potential participants with further information on the research side of the project, but for the participants the process will be like any other theatre rehearsal process.



What Is Involved?

We will meet over Zoom for at least three ninety minute workshops and/or rehearsals a week, after school, for the thirteen weeks from March through early June, with a break in May. We will teach theatre and storytelling skills and we will share our experiences. We will work together to make a play about something that we choose and then share our creation with families, teachers and the community.

Draft Calendar, Subject to Change

MARCH			
	MAR 31 - APR 2	Bonding/Team Building	- Introduce, establish production goals and expectations; establish group ground rules and code of conduct; learn about each other and build (early stages of) trust. - Identify key questions as a group. - Discuss goals for audience experience, takeaway. - Introduce devised theatre, its aesthetic
APRIL			
	APR 7 - 9	Generate material	- Focus on nonverbal exercises to start generating material and building nonverbal communication skills, between members and as individuals; build comfort with movement and physical forms of expression and exploration. - identify themes, ideas, characters, etc. the group wants to explore further - establish processes for discussing, giving feedback, etc.
	APR 14 - 16	Generate material	- Create as much material as possible based on inspiration from sources - ** aural/sound/rhythm/tempo focus
	APR 21 - 23	Generate material	- Create as much material as possible based on inspiration from sources - **verbal/written focus
	APR 28 - 30	Build upon material - mini structures in smaller groups	- Start layering, combining material, filling in gaps where new material needs to be generated, toward a larger show structure. Break down into smaller pieces. Also break devisers up into smaller groups to gather more ideas about combining material. - Explore the world of the play; establish its rules, possibilities
MAY			
	MAY 5 - 7	Build upon material - mini structures in smaller groups	- Continue building off of existing material, building complete compositions - Establish an understanding of TRACKS (Bogart/Landau)
	MAY 12 - 14	Bigger structures	- Explore the world of the play; establish its rules, possibilities
	MAY 19 - 21	Break for end of semester responsibilities	
	MAY 26 - 28	Break for end of semester responsibilities	
JUNE			
	JUNE 2 - 4	Bigger structures: show structure in place by end of week	- Build upon progress last week to put together complete show structure. Working as a full group, combine various sections, play around with order, subtracting/adding material, etc.
	JUNE 9 - 11	Working with performance script	- Finalizing small details of the complete show
	JUNE 15 - 18	Dress rehearsals	- Run/clean/fix & add technical elements
	JUNE 21 - 26	Performances, Dates TBD	- Some kind of debrief / cast party / closure for reflecting on the process for all

About Us

Facilitators



Mike Poblete, Producer, Dramaturg and Researcher

Mike is a Theatre Studies Ph.D. Student at the University of Hawai'i, as well as the instructor for THEA 101: Introduction to World Drama and Theatre. His research is focused on applied devised community theatre. As a playwright he has had seven full length plays, and numerous one acts, produced in six countries. He has worked in theatre production for ten years, including four years in a Broadway production office in New York. Together, in April 2019, he, Kat Rothman and six amazing UH undergrads created *Corpus Interruptus*, a devised theatre piece exploring gender and identity in contemporary Hawai'i and the United States. In August 2020 he helped Kat bring William Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* to life over Zoom.

Originally from New York City, He has a Playwriting MFA from Trinity College Dublin, where he worked with Trinity Disability Service. mpoblete@hawaii.edu



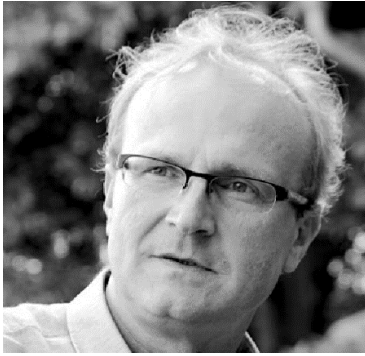
Kat Rothman, Director

Kat has directed over twenty productions in community, professional, and educational theatre settings and has served as a theatre instructor and acting coach for seven years. She is a MFA Directing graduate in the Western Theatre Studies program from the University of Hawai'i, as well as a former instructor for THEA 221: Introduction to Acting. Kat has studied devised theatre in her undergraduate studies and during her time at the University of Hawai'i, researching and becoming involved with PlayBuilders, an O'ahu community-based theatre company. Together in April 2019, she and Mike facilitated *Corpus Interruptus* and in August 2020 she directed William Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* over Zoom. kRothman@hawaii.edu

Faculty Advisors



Dr. Tammy Haili'ōpua Baker is the Associate Professor of Theatre, Hawaiian Theatre and Language, Pacific and Indigenous Theatre, Playwriting and the Hawaiian Theatre Program Director at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Her work centers on the development of an indigenous Hawaiian theatre aesthetic and form, Hawaiian language revitalization, and the empowerment of cultural identity through stage performance. Baker is also a playwright and the artistic director of Ka Hālau Hanakeaka, a Hawaiian medium theatre troupe. In the Department of Theatre and Dance she oversees both the Hawaiian Theatre and the Playwriting MFA programs.



Dr. Markus Wessendorf, the Chair of the Department of Theatre and Dance, is one of the foremost scholars of Devised and Postdramatic Theatre; he holds a Ph.D. in Applied Theater Studies from the University of Giessen, Germany. His publications include a monograph on Richard Foreman's Ontological-Hysteric Theater (*Die Bühne als Szene des Denkens*, Berlin 1998), a co-edited volume on interdisciplinary relationships between theatre and the other arts (*Grenzgänge: Theater und die anderen Künste*, Tübingen, 1998), and the *Brecht Yearbooks* 36, 43 and 44, which he edited.

Information on

Corpus Interruptus

April 6-13, 2019

Earle Ernst Lab Theatre, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Reviews



"It's the queer show you wish you'd seen or been in when you were in college."

– Lurana O'Malley, Chair of the Theatre Department at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

"The most critical new art and performance pieces of our times are ones that move us as a public to action, move us as a society towards evolution, move us as a people towards love. CORPUS INTERRUPTUS moves many in the direction they need to."

- Gloria Bentham, *Hitting the Stage*

[Read the Full *Hitting the Stage* Review](#)

Photos



Videos



[Watch The Trailer](#)

Full Capture



[Watch Part 1](#)

[Watch Part 2](#)

Questions or comments? Call or email us any time!

Mike Poblete
(808) 489 4676
mpoblete@hawaii.edu

Kat Rothman
(419) 345 5944
kaltman@hawaii.edu

**University of Hawai'i****Parent/Guardian Consent for their Child to Participate in a Research Project**

Mike Poblete Principal Investigator

Project Title: Participant-Driven Devised Community Theatre as Expression for Teenagers

Aloha! My name is Mike Poblete. I am requesting your permission for your child to participate in my research project. I am a Ph.D. Student at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM), from the Department of Theatre. The results of this project will contribute to my doctoral dissertation.

What am I being asked to agree to?

If you agree for your child to be in the study, they will take part in a rehearsal process over eleven weeks spanning late March to early May 2021 as part of a class of thirty teenagers who will be creating an original piece of devised theatre. I will interview your child, along with the other participants, in a group setting at the beginning and conclusion of the rehearsal and performance process. The interview questions will be aimed at understanding their feelings regarding the rehearsal and performance process, whether they feel they were able to express themselves artistically, what they think of devised theatre and whether they will want to continue to create art in the future.

Devised is a process of making theatre where different artists in a room, with no script, go through exercises to create a performance. Rather than starting with a set text and deciding how to bring it to life, devised performers might start with movement, or song, or lighting design or building a set, and it all happens at the same time. Considerable research suggests that it is an engaging methodology of expression for teenagers, particularly those that don't enjoy much representation in the performing arts. Further, because this project will be rehearsed and performed online due to COVID-19 social restrictions, we are encouraging teenagers who identify as both disabled and able bodied to participate in this project.

Taking part in this study is your choice.

You can choose to allow your child to take part, or you can choose not to have them take part in this study. If you agree, I also will ask your child to agree to participate in this project. You, or your child also can change your mind at any time. If your child stops being in the study, there will be no penalty or loss to you or them.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of my research project is to explore how participation in the collaborative creation of an original devised theatre piece might impact teenagers' view art and expression. I am asking your permission for your child to participate in this project because they were recommended to me as an eager and enthusiastic learner who might enjoy this experience.

What will happen if I decide to take part in this study?

If you and your child agree for your child to be in the study, they will be part of a class of thirty teens working to create an original piece of theatre. We will meet for at least two ninety minute workshops and/or rehearsals per week, during school time, over Zoom, over seven weeks spanning late March to early May 2021. We will teach your child theatre and storytelling skills, and we will share our experiences. We will work together to make a play about something that we choose together, and then share our creation in an online performance in May of 2021.

The rehearsals, and the group interviews at the end of the study, will be held online over Zoom. Each of the interviews will last for about an hour. The interviews will last for about an hour. Your child, myself, my artistic collaborator Kat Rothman and possibly several other assistant facilitators will be present in the room during rehearsals and the two final group interviews. One example of the kind of question I will ask is, "Will you use anything you've gained from this experience in your future creative work - if so, how?"

I will also ask your child to fill out an individual survey online at the beginning and conclusion of the process to get a sense of your thoughts on creativity and learning in general. One example of the kind of question I will ask is, "Do you consider yourself creative? Have you ever made art? Do you still?"

If you would like to see a copy of all of the questions that I will ask, or would like to hear specifics around the rehearsal process, please contact me via the phone number or email address listed near the end of this consent form.

With your and your child's permission, I will record the rehearsals and group interviews. I am recording the rehearsals to capture spontaneous moments of performance to inform what artistic choices we decide to make as a group. I am recording the interviews so I can later type a written record of what we talked about during the interviews. I will evaluate the information from the interviews.

What are the risks and benefits of taking part in this study?

I believe there is little or no risk to your child in participating in this project. The normal emotional and physical risk found in the course of expression and physical performance in any theatre rehearsal space is reduced due to all participants rehearsing and performing from the comfort of their homes. There is a possibility your child may become uncomfortable or stressed by answering an interview question or questions at the end of the process. If that happens, we will skip the question, take a break, or stop the interview. Your child may also withdraw from the project altogether at any time.

I believe that your child might enjoy learning new skills such as: theatre-making, imagination, creative problem-solving, teamwork, and self-confidence. The results of this project might help myself, other teachers, and researchers learn more about the benefits and shortcomings of devised theatre.

Results of Research:

At the conclusion of the process I will use the data from the group interview to make suggestions regarding teen participation in the collaborative creation of an original devised theatre piece, and how these methodologies may impact on how teenagers view art and expression, which will be written up in the form of my doctoral dissertation. That dissertation will be publicly available.

Privacy and Confidentiality:

Due to the public nature of the performance, the name of your child, and the other participants, will be of public record. However, any information that is obtained in connection with this study appearing in my dissertation will maintain your child's confidence by ensuring that identifiers will be removed from the research records. When I report the results of my research project in my typed paper, I will not use your child's name or any other personal information that would identify your child. Instead, I will use a pseudonym (fake name) for your child. If you would like a copy of my final report, please contact me at the number listed near the end of this consent form.

After removal of identifiers, the research records may be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research. We will not seek further approval from you or your child for these future studies. I will keep all study data secure on a USB key. Only myself, Kat Rothman and The University of Hawai'i Human Studies Program have the right to review research records for this study. The rehearsal and interview recordings will be destroyed one year after the study is complete.

Questions:

If you have any questions about this study, please call me at (808) 489-4676 or email me at mpoblete@hawaii.edu. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Markus Wessendorf, at (808) 956-2600 or reach him by email at wessendo@hawaii.edu. You may contact the UH Human Studies Program at (808) 956-5007 or uhirb@hawaii.edu to discuss problems, concerns and questions; obtain information; or offer input with an informed individual who is unaffiliated with the specific research protocol. Please visit <http://go.hawaii.edu/jRd> for more information on your rights as a research participant.

If you agree to your child's participation in this project, please indicate your permissions with the question prompts below, sign and date the following signature page and return it to myself, Mike Poblete, at mpoblete@hawaii.edu.

Keep a copy of the informed consent for your records and reference. Mahalo!

Initials and Signature(s) for Consent:

Please circle yes or no to each of the following (No research will be conducted without your permission):

 Y N I agree for you to have my child's contact information for a period of one year or as soon as your research is complete.

 Y N I agree to have my child's artwork (such as visual art, monologues, and scenes) and journal entries published in a research report (with the knowledge that my child's name will be removed from all materials).

 Y N I agree to have my child's words quoted in a research report (with the knowledge that my name will be removed from all materials) and possible publications that may result from this study.

 Y N I agree for my child to be tape-recorded during workshops and class dialogue sessions.

 Y N I agree for my child to be video-taped during workshops and class dialogue sessions.

Y N I agree for my child to be photographed during workshops and class dialogue sessions.

Y N I agree for my child to be photographed during performances.

I give permission for my child to join the research project entitled, *Applied Devised Theatre As Expression For Teenagers*. I understand that my child can change his or her mind about being in the study at any time. I understand that I may change my mind about my child being in the study at any time.

I agree to the following on behalf of myself and my child:

1. Representation of health. I understand the nature of this study and represent that my child is in good physical, mental, and emotional health and able to participate in this study. If, at any time, I believe the conditions of my child's participation to be unsafe, I will immediately cease their further participation in this study. I further agree to and represent that in connection with my child's participation in this study: (a) my child will be covered by a private medical and liability insurance policy, and (b) the University of Hawai'i will not be responsible for or required to indemnify or defend me or my child with respect to any illness, personal or bodily injury, death, economic and property damage, severe emotional loss, and any other loss, damage, or injury (collectively the "Injuries/Damages") that I may sustain or suffer in connection with my participation in this study.

2. Assumption of risk. I understand and acknowledge the dangers and risks involved in my child's participation in this study including the Injuries/Damages. These Injuries/Damages may be caused by actions or inactions of my child or others participating in this study and/or the conditions where this study occurs. I acknowledge that there may be other Injuries/Damages not known to me or not readily foreseeable at this time. I fully accept and assume all risks of the Injuries/Damages resulting from my child's participation in this study. I have read and understood all written materials setting forth the requirements for my participation and my child will observe, follow, and comply with all verbal and written instructions.

3. Waiver and release. I hereby waive, release, and discharge any and all claims, demands, actions, rights, and causes of action for any and all Injuries/Damages, known or unknown, related to, arising from, or traceable either directly or indirectly to my child's participation in this study (collectively the "Released Claims").

4. Indemnify, defend, and hold harmless. I accept full responsibility for my child's participation in this study and I agree to indemnify, defend, and hold harmless the University of Hawai'i, and

its past, present and future Board of Regents, officers, employees, agents, and assigns from any and all Released Claims and any and all demands, actions, judgments, injunctions, orders, directives, penalties, assessments, liens, liabilities, losses, damages, costs, and expenses (including attorneys' fees), arising or resulting from or caused by any of my acts or omissions (or by any person for whom I am responsible) during, involving, or related to my child's participation in the this study.

I understand that I am giving up substantial rights, including the right to sue. I am participating in this study freely and voluntarily. I agree that: (a) the laws of the State of Hawai'i shall apply to this Agreement and (b) if any portion of the Agreement is invalid, the remainder of the Agreement shall continue in full force and effect.

Name of Child (Print): _____

Name of Parent/Guardian (Print): _____

Parent/Guardian's Signature: _____

Date: _____

**University of Hawai'i****Parent/Guardian Consent for their Child to Participate in a Research Project**

Mike Poblete Principal Investigator

Project Title: Participant-Driven Devised Community Theatre as Expression for Teenagers

Aloha! My name is Mike Poblete. I am requesting your permission for your child to participate in my research project. I am a Ph.D. Student at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM), from the Department of Theatre. The results of this project will contribute to my doctoral dissertation.

What am I being asked to agree to?

If you agree for your child to be in the study, they will take part in a rehearsal process over twelve weeks spanning late September to early December 2021 as part of a class of thirty teenagers who will be creating an original piece of devised theatre. I will interview your child, along with the other participants, in a group setting at the beginning and conclusion of the rehearsal and performance process. The interview questions will be aimed at understanding their feelings regarding the rehearsal and performance process, whether they feel they were able to express themselves artistically, what they think of devised theatre and whether they will want to continue to create art in the future.

Devised is a process of making theatre where different artists in a room, with no script, go through exercises to create a performance. Rather than starting with a set text and deciding how to bring it to life, devised performers might start with movement, or song, or lighting design or building a set, and it all happens at the same time. Considerable research suggests that it is an engaging methodology of expression for teenagers, particularly those that don't enjoy much representation in the performing arts.

Taking part in this study is your choice.

You can choose to allow your child to take part, or you can choose not to have them take part in this study. If you agree, I also will ask your child to agree to participate in this project. You, or your child also can change your mind at any time. If your child stops being in the study, there will be no penalty or loss to you or them.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of my research project is to explore how participation in the collaborative creation of an original devised theatre piece might impact teenagers' view art and expression. I am asking

your permission for your child to participate in this project because they were recommended to me as an eager and enthusiastic learner who might enjoy this experience.

What will happen if I decide to take part in this study?

If you and your child agree for your child to be in the study, they will be asked to join us during your Drama class at Waipahu High School and work with other teens in creating an original piece of theatre. We will meet for at least two ninety minute workshops and/or rehearsals per week, during school time, over twelve weeks spanning late September to early December 2021. We will teach your child theatre and storytelling skills, and we will share our experiences. We will work together to make a play about something that we choose together, and then share our creation in a digital performance in December of 2021.

The interviews will last for about an hour. Your child, myself, my artistic collaborator Kat Altman and possibly several other assistant facilitators will be present in the room during rehearsals and the two final group interviews. One example of the kind of question I will ask is, “Will you use anything you’ve gained from this experience in your future creative work - if so, how?”

I will also ask your child to fill out an individual survey online at the beginning and conclusion of the process to get a sense of your thoughts on creativity and learning in general. One example of the kind of question I will ask is, “Do you consider yourself creative? Have you ever made art? Do you still?”

If you would like to see a copy of all of the questions that I will ask, or would like to hear specifics around the rehearsal process, please contact me via the phone number or email address listed near the end of this consent form.

With your and your child's permission, I will record the rehearsals and group interview. I am recording the rehearsals to capture spontaneous moments of performance to inform what artistic choices we decide to make as a group. I am recording the interview so I can later type a written record of what we talked about during the interview. I will evaluate the information from the interview.

What are the risks and benefits of taking part in this study?

I believe there is little or no risk to your child in participating in this project other than the normal emotional and physical risk found in the course of expression and physical performance

in any theatre rehearsal space. There is a possibility your child may become uncomfortable or stressed by answering an interview question or questions at the end of the process. If that happens, we will skip the question, take a break, or stop the interview. Your child may also withdraw from the project altogether at any time.

I believe that your child might enjoy learning new skills such as: theatre-making, imagination, creative problem-solving, teamwork, and self-confidence. The results of this project might help myself, other teachers, and researchers learn more about the benefits and shortcomings of devised theatre.

Results of Research:

At the conclusion of the process I will use the data from the group interview to make suggestions regarding teen participation in the collaborative creation of an original devised theatre piece, and how these methodologies may impact on how teenagers view art and expression, which will be written up in the form of my doctoral dissertation. That dissertation will be publicly available.

Privacy and Confidentiality:

Due to the public nature of the performance, the name of your child, and the other participants, will be of public record. However, any information that is obtained in connection with this study appearing in my dissertation will maintain your child's confidence by ensuring that identifiers will be removed from the research records. When I report the results of my research project in my typed paper, I will not use your child's name or any other personal information that would identify your child. Instead, I will use a pseudonym (fake name) for your child. If you would like a copy of my final report, please contact me at the number listed near the end of this consent form.

After removal of identifiers, the research records may be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research. We will not seek further approval from you or your child for these future studies. I will keep all study data, including all audio and video files, secure on a USB key. We will use a hardline connection to upload the media files to a USB key via my laptop, at which point I will encrypt the files so they are password protected. The files will be immediately deleted off of our devices after they are uploaded and no identifying information, such as names, will appear in the file name or description. For extra security the USB keys will be stored in a small Roloway safe. Only myself, Kat Altman and The University of Hawai'i Human Studies Program have the right to review research records for this study. The rehearsal and interview recordings will be destroyed one year after the study is complete.

Questions:

If you have any questions about this study, please call me at (808) 489-4676 or email me at mpoblete@hawaii.edu. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Markus Wessendorf, at (808) 956-2600 or reach him by email at wessendo@hawaii.edu. You may contact the UH Human Studies Program at (808) 956-5007 or uhirb@hawaii.edu to discuss problems, concerns and questions; obtain information; or offer input with an informed individual who is unaffiliated with the specific research protocol. Please visit <http://go.hawaii.edu/jRd> for more information on your rights as a research participant.

If you agree to your child's participation in this project, please indicate your permissions with the question prompts below, sign and date the following signature page and return it to myself, Mike Poblete, at mpoblete@hawaii.edu.

Keep a copy of the informed consent for your records and reference. Mahalo!

Initials and Signature(s) for Consent:

Please circle yes or no to each of the following (No research will be conducted without your permission):

 Y N I agree for you to have my child's contact information for a period of one year or as soon as your research is complete.

 Y N I agree to have my child's artwork (such as visual art, monologues, and scenes) and journal entries published in a research report (with the knowledge that my child's name will be removed from all materials).

 Y N I agree to have my child's words quoted in a research report (with the knowledge that my name will be removed from all materials) and possible publications that may result from this study.

 Y N I agree for my child to be tape-recorded during workshops and class dialogue sessions.

 Y N I agree for my child to be video-taped during workshops and class dialogue sessions.

 Y N I agree for my child to be photographed during workshops and class

dialogue sessions.

 Y N I agree for my child to be photographed during performances.

I give permission for my child to join the research project entitled, *Applied Devised Theatre As Expression For Teenagers*. I understand that my child can change his or her mind about being in the study at any time. I understand that I may change my mind about my child being in the study at any time.

I agree to the following on behalf of myself and my child:

1. Representation of health. I understand the nature of this study and represent that my child is in good physical, mental, and emotional health and able to participate in this study. If, at any time, I believe the conditions of my child's participation to be unsafe, I will immediately cease their further participation in this study.

2. Assumption of risk. I understand and acknowledge the dangers and risks involved in my child's participation in this study including the Injuries/Damages. These Injuries/Damages may be caused by actions or inactions of my child or others participating in this study and/or the conditions where this study occurs. I acknowledge that there may be other Injuries/Damages not known to me or not readily foreseeable at this time. I fully accept and assume all risks of the Injuries/Damages resulting from my child's participation in this study. I have read and understood all written materials setting forth the requirements for my participation and my child will observe, follow, and comply with all verbal and written instructions.

Name of Child (Print): _____

Name of Parent/Guardian (Print): _____

Parent/Guardian's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Period 6 Drama Devised Theatre Contract

Rehearsal Room Rules We Agree to Follow

- REHEARSAL SPACE MUST BE A SAFE SPACE FOR RISK-TAKING. Support people who get up and do. Treat each other with respect and encouragement when someone is performing. We are a team and we - and our work - rise together.
- WHATEVER HAPPENS IN REHEARSAL STAYS IN REHEARSAL. No discussing anyone's material or performances outside of working directly on the project with classmates! People need to feel able to share and try new things within our bubble.
- TRY!!! Don't be outside the work commenting on others. Go for it. Get scared and uncomfortable. That's how art is made.
- But also KNOW YOUR LIMITS. Don't ever feel obligated to share anything you don't want to. Your work and your experiences are your own. Listen to your instincts and take care of yourself!
- TALK TO US if you're having problems or concerns. Our main goal is to provide all of you with a positive experience and we want to help, but we don't know there's a problem if you don't tell us!

Principles We Agree to Abide By

- We agree that we respect each other as artists and as people. We agree to show that respect in word and action.
- We agree that our intention is to support each other to do the best work possible. This means setting high expectations for our own work each day, and for the work of others.
- We agree to be reliable team members who communicate, contribute, and complete our share of production responsibilities.
- We agree not to re-write or re-do another's work. If there are changes that need to be made, we agree to discuss it with the originating collaborator.
- We agree to contribute not only by creating, but by carefully observing and critiquing each other's work. We agree to give feedback respectfully, by asking questions whenever possible, rather than making conclusions or delivering orders.
- We acknowledge that critique is about the work, not the artist, and is necessary for great art. We receive feedback and critique from others as an opportunity, not an obstacle.
- We agree to keep an open mind as collaborators and not to say "no" for five minutes. Or, to put it another way, we agree to try each other's ideas and consider any possibility for at least five minutes.
- We agree to respect the privacy of others and to honor anything that someone chooses to share of themselves.
- We agree that we cannot do it alone. We agree that we need each other.

Selected Student Creative Writings

- No one knows, not even me for the most part until now have discovered that for the past couple months, I have been out of reality. I kept in my own little world imagining things I'm not sure I should have. I've kept my airpods in 99.9% of the time only talking to the voices and imaginary people in my head. They're my friends and I've become so out of touch with the real world. It's sad truly but I like that I wasn't communicating with the troubles of the world.
- Sitting on the edge of the balcony in front of a beautiful sight of the city telling myself a year ago that the only person to keep in touch with is myself. In life we lose and gain a lot of people but we should never lose our genuine self. We should learn to do and accomplish things for ourselves and not for others
- As I walk through the Aloha stadium tunnel with my diploma in hand, I feel the rush of adrenaline taking away all the pain I'd soon leave in high school. I see my parents and my grandma at the end of the tunnel. I start to run towards her and as I get to the end of the tunnel, I give her the biggest hug, almost as if I haven't seen her in centuries.
- One secret covid moment is that my relationship with this one person has greatly increased. We both shared things about each other. Including our secrets, what we like and dislike, etc. We've both been in our rooms but we've definitely gotten closer and I'm really happy about that. My face would always light up when I see his name on my phone.
- Between April to August of 2020 I didn't have many friends to talk to because we kind of lost touch and we weren't as close as I thought we were. It felt very lonely to be texting people and either they won't respond to me or they would take forever to respond. I didn't get to do much of anything except stay home, watch Netflix, and text people who I thought were my friends. But eventually, I found true friends in August of 2020. Even though we all haven't met up together in person I know that we all have a great connection with each other considering that we started this friendship from just texting and FaceTiming each other. Now, we are all still very close and talk a lot and they make me feel so happy and loved.
- It was my favorite type of summer, refreshing and sweet. As I finally stepped out of the hole I kept myself in that was drowning me in a storm of bewildering thoughts about myself and the future. And even if I ever fall into a storm again, I will see it as a beautiful painting across that sky, as the lightning tells a story through its illumination. And even if the rain runs down my skin, I will acceptingly realize that it's the way of the world telling me that it is okay to take in things that you may not like or want. Now everyday as I leave my room, the sun rays shine on me and I am filled with excitement and forget about the worries I have of what the days ahead of me will bring, but only worry where my foot will land next.
- It was a regular school day, and I had felt like everything I did wasn't enough. I had no clue what I was feeling but I felt so drained from all the work being given to me. So I decided to open my journal and start writing down what was going on that day. As I wrote down how my day went, I started to think about how similar it was compared to the many days before that. Life felt so repetitive I didn't want to keep doing that. So I started to stop talking to anyone, and I just locked myself in my room, perusal. As I closed my journal I looked at my dusty piano that hasn't

been used in a very long time. I felt the urge to plug it back in and minor chords started to base what I wanted my emotions to lay on top of. So I took words from my journal and formed it into a song. It felt so relieving to express how I feel. I haven't talked to anyone about how I felt in a while, but my journal, and my music felt like a safe space to go to when i can't get the words out of my mouth .

- Things really do get better, no matter how bad things get. There will always be that one person who would hold you and make you feel warm inside. There will be people who will help you to see the better things in life. That one person will always be there for you, help you, and tell you how much they love you.

Study 1 and Study 2 Survey Statements

Statements on both the Intake and Outgoing Surveys

- I consider myself to be a creative person.
- I enjoy theatre.
- I consider myself to be a valuable part of my community.
- I feel comfortable when I don't know what is going to happen next⁴⁵
- I feel like I am good at learning on my own outside of school
- I love learning for its own sake
- I try to relate learning in school to practical issues
- I like to learn by doing
- I think learning from my peers is as valuable as learning from my educators
- In general, I am in full control of what I do

Statements solely on the Outgoing Surveys

- I felt like I was able to express myself throughout the rehearsal process.
- I was just an instrument in the hands of Mike and Kat in the rehearsal process without any real control.⁴⁶
- I am the author of my creative material that appeared in the final performance.
- I did not learn any new skills from this process.
- I would like to make devised theatre again.

⁴⁵ In Study 1 the phrasing of this statement was, "I feel uncomfortable when I don't know what is going to happen next." It was rephrased in Study 2 to be less confusing.

⁴⁶ In Study 1 the phrasing of this statement was, "I didn't have any real control in the rehearsal process, I just did whatever Kat and Mike said." It was rephrased in Study 2 to be less confusing.

Study 1 Outgoing Interview Questions

A lot of what we did are established devised theatre exercises, a lot we made up ourselves. So we just want to know what worked and what didn't as we continue this kind of work.

- What worked about this process?
- What's one way the rehearsal experience could have been improved for you?
- Do you feel like you can now go create your own devised show?
- Did you feel you had sufficient guidance and support throughout this process?
- How did you feel about working independently?
- Did you always feel safe in the rehearsal room?
- What would you tell Mike and Kat's next theatre group if you could give them a message on the first day?
- Do you think that you will want to keep creating art, theatrical or otherwise?
- How did you feel about this process in comparison to other theatre methodologies you have encountered? Easier/harder to understand?
- How do you think audiences received the performance?
- What is one thing you learned - about others, yourself, theatre, or the world - in your work on this production?
- Did this feel like a nurturing, playful and expressive environment in comparison to other artistic environments you've been in?
- Did you feel any cultural barriers in the rehearsal room?
- What, if anything, do you feel you've learned about your community through this process?
- Any questions about theatre or school that we can answer for you?

Study 2 Outgoing Interview Questions

A lot of what we did are established devised theatre exercises, a lot we made up ourselves. So we just want to know what worked and what didn't as we continue this kind of work.

- What do you think about devised theatre?
- How did you feel about this process in comparison to other theatre? Easier/harder to understand? What about those of you with no theatre background?
- What worked about this process? What were your favorite moments?
- What could be improved about this process? What were your least favorite moments?
- Did you feel you had sufficient guidance and support throughout this process?
- For those of you who were with us in the spring, how was this similar or different?
- How was the breakdown of group roles? Did that work for you?
- Did you always feel safe in the rehearsal room?
- If we had had more time, what would you want to do?
- Do you think that you will want to keep creating art, theatrical or otherwise?
- How do you think audiences received the performance?
- What is one thing you learned - about others, yourself, theatre, or the world - in your work on this production?
- Did you have to look up anything for this show, i.e. research? Is it any easier to do research for a project like this than for your regular classes?
- Were we always clear? Did you understand us? Were things confusing?
- What would you tell Mike and Kat's next theatre group if you could give them a message on the first day?
- Do you feel that you could now create your own devised show?
- Any questions about theatre or school that we can answer for you?