

**Ensemble Culture: Co-creating Collective Efficacy
and a Sense of Belonging in a Combined Theatre Classroom**

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Chapter 1: Philosophy of Education Guideline

In this action research project, I explore the ways in which a multi-level theatre class can be structured to cultivate community or collective efficacy through an examination of the effect of Indigenous pedagogical practices on students' sense of belonging. This exploration arose as a result of my own plans to expand the currently limited theatre class options at Catamount High School (*pseudonym*), or CHS. When I began working as the theatre director at CHS in fall of 2021, I learned that although there was an active Thespian Troupe and a long history of theatre productions at the school, there were no theatre classes currently offered as part of the curriculum. Recognizing this as an equity issue wherein students could only access theatre education through participation in an audition-based extracurricular production, or through attending often-expensive theatre camps or classes outside of the school system, I advocated for the return of school day theatre education, and was hired to teach a single section trimester-length introductory theatre course starting in fall of 2022. Over the following two years, the class and program grew in limited ways; while students loved the class, there was no “next step”—no trajectory for students to continue learning. Several students took ‘Theater Arts 1’ repeatedly.

There was a clear desire for further instruction, as well as a growing contingent of Thespian Troupe students who had been involved in numerous productions and were already working at a level far beyond the curriculum goals of the introductory class. I proposed adding a Theatre 2 course. But with the school's budget allocations and my relatively small class sizes, it became clear that a split class model, with Theatre 1 and Theatre 2 students receiving concurrent instruction in the same class period, would be the next step. I imagined the challenge of getting each group of students to work independently while I instructed the other; I suspected Theatre 2 would be primarily an independent study course. I worried that I wouldn't really be offering any

new challenges to Theatre 2 students, that I would have to leave them to grapple with more advanced material while my energy and time was spent with Theatre 1 students, whose instructor support needs would likely be greater. How could I be two effective teachers at once?

However, as I embarked on the first trimester of developing this course, I noticed that the class developed less as a “split” class and more of a “combined” class; the varying levels of ability and experience have created a culture of deeper learning and engagement, and a greater sense of community amongst both groups of students through their interactions and their desire to teach and learn from one another.

But my interest in the advantages of a combined class model are rooted in something that feels more profound than effectively teaching a multi-level group of students and attempting to provide a proof of concept that our school needs, and is ready for, a broader trajectory of theatre offerings for our students. I see a class with the potential to give students an anti-colonialist educational experience through an authentic creative community—the kind of community-based education that writers such as Dewey, Freire, hooks, and Shepherd envision in their pedagogies. As a teacher, I endeavor to be the sort of social justice thinker and activist described by Bell (2023), in reference to Shepard:

There is evidence that social justice thinkers and activists today have a greater awareness of the global context of their work, an ability to create more enduring cross-group coalitions because of their attention to intersectionality, and a realization of the need for enduring communities of play, imagination, and love (Shepard, 2011). (p. 21)

In my interpretation, through this attention to intersectionality, play, imagination, and love described above, we can also “model the equity, fairness, inclusiveness, reciprocity and justice

for which we are striving” (p. 28). Within the context of my combined class model, I see an opportunity to explore ways of overcoming some of the ongoing legacies of oppression and white supremacy culture in the institutions of schooling—issues that affected my own school experience and personal development in ways that I did not recognize until well into adulthood. While I never saw myself as particularly competitive or highly individualistic in my ambitions, I did go through schooling with a deeply internalized perfectionism through which I judged myself and, unfortunately, others. Schooling was focused on what I could achieve, and how thoroughly I could prove my academic and creative worth; I didn’t form learning connections with others who weren’t “achieving” in the way I did. While I loved school, and was academically successful by traditional measures, my school experiences did not provide a liberatory experience of education—a vision that I see as the true purpose of schooling as it should be, rather than as it is.

In high school and in my undergraduate work, I studied theatre with the goal of becoming a professional theatre artist. However, I was always most attracted to creating and performing for children; I understood, without being able to name it, their embodied connection to our onstage storytelling to be a release from the oppressive aspects of schooling, and an affirmation of the culture of childhood, which is undervalued in our adultist society. My high school theatre education was imperfect, but did provide an environment through which I first truly valued the experiences of community members younger, less developed, or less experienced than I; it was a first spark that loosened my grip on the perfectionism and, frankly, snobbishness, that overshadowed my earlier schooling experiences.

Now, my interest as a theatre educator is to provide students with a robust theatre education that guides them towards becoming professional theatre artists if they choose, specifically with a foundation of anti-oppressive theatre training and a sense of personal and

community empowerment. I also appreciate that the vast majority of my theatre students will not go on to be involved in theatre professionally, or even as a hobby, beyond high school—although hopefully they will be life-long theatre-goers. A theatre education for all should provide students with an experience of liberatory education rooted in collaboration, across diversities of background, ability, experience, and skill, which guides students towards increased community or collective efficacy rather than personal or individualized self-achievement. Rather than perpetuate the white supremacist cycles of competition, perfectionism, and individualism that often pervade the institutions of both theatre and education, I hope to bring the principles of social justice education to their intersecting point in a theatre classroom to promote both personal and community empowerment.

Guiding Pedagogical Theory

I aim to use this action research project to explore pedagogical theories and instructional strategies that will support using the *form* of a combined theatre class to support its ideal *function* as a liberatory educational experience wherein students' community efficacy is developed. How can a multi-level theatre class be structured to help students channel their self-efficacy towards community efficacy—known as collective efficacy by education researchers? As I have a particular interest in pedagogies which aim to counter oppression, the primary theory underpinning the practical aspects of classroom activities and curriculum development within this project is Indigenous pedagogy. However, several other theoretical connections are key to this research; they form a chain reaction structure to my research scaffolding:

- Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) states that student self-efficacy is increased through learning in their ZPD; with a gradual withdrawal of supports, students are more able to confidently complete a task on

their own, thus continually shifting their ZPD towards higher order thinking or more advanced skills. If students' self-efficacy is ever-increasing, students will continue to develop a growth mindset around their personal learning trajectory, and an empathetic recognition that their peers are also on individual and unique trajectories of learning.

- Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory states that humans can compute information in a variety of ways, and with these approximately 7-10 distinct intelligences, we utilize each in different ways to develop our strengths and access new learning (Strauss, 2013, n.p.). I posit that if students' cultural funds of knowledge and multiple intelligences are honored as a part of the baselines that form the foundations for learning within their ZPD, then as students develop their own self-efficacy, they will honor the cultural funds of knowledge and multiple intelligences of themselves and their peers as strengths for learning and community building.
- I propose that when students are given opportunities to work in a mixed-level environment, they begin to see their strengths for learning as tools not only for individual growth, but through which their communities can progress, and to see others' strengths for learning as valuable contributions to their community. For higher-level students given the opportunity to work with and teach lower-level students, confidence in their own knowledge and contributions to the classroom community will grow. They will also see how far they have come since their own experiences as an introductory-level student, reinforcing a growth mindset. Engagement will increase as ownership of teaching and learning increases. For

lower-level students given the opportunity to work with and learn from higher-level students, they will be learning within their ZPD, gaining a sense of belonging in the group theatre culture, and envisioning their own trajectory of growth as theatre artists and community members. They will see where their theatre learning can take them in a short time, affirming a growth mindset.

Overall, for both “levels” of student, engagement will increase as ownership of learning increases.

- Using Indigenous pedagogies to help shape the form of this group work emphasizes creative and liberatory aspects of collaborative learning and provides rich, differentiated, and authentic opportunities for all students to challenge themselves and others through project-based learning. The Indigenous pedagogical principles that I attempt to incorporate in this project are
 - Personal and holistic
 - Place-based
 - Experiential
 - Intergenerational

(Antoine, Mason, Mason, Palahicky, & Rodriguez de France, 2018)

For the purposes of this project, I am designating the term “Ensemble Culture” to refer to the desired process and outcome of creating a classroom environment that employs

- a) theatre as its learning medium;
- b) collaborative, Indigenous-inspired learning amongst students of varied backgrounds and levels as its form;
- c) and liberatory education and collective empowerment as its function.

However, as an early group activity during the course of this project, I also asked students to define Ensemble Culture and describe what they think it takes to create Ensemble Culture in the classroom. Their responses, highlighted in Chapter 4, were enlightening.

Connections to InTASC Standards

My goal is to be an effective practitioner of facilitative learning (Rogers, 1983) through creating authentic community experiences in the theatre classroom, wherein a community necessarily includes mixed levels, diverse backgrounds, and varied interests and abilities. Within the INTASC standards, my goals with this exploration are primarily focused on:

- *Standard 1: Learner Development. The teacher understands how learners grow and develop, recognizing that patterns of learning and development vary individually within and across the cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, and physical areas, and designs and implements developmentally appropriate and challenging learning experiences.* This is explored through my research on the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky) and the development of student self efficacy through the Gradual Release of Responsibility (Pearson and Gallagher).
- *Standard 2: Learning Differences. The teacher uses understanding of individual differences, diverse cultures, and communities to ensure inclusive learning environments that enable learners to meet high standards.* This is explored through Differentiation Theory (Tomlinson), Culturally Responsive Teaching (Gay) and Multiple Intelligences (Gardner).
- *Standard 3: Learning Environments. The teacher works with others to create environments that support individual and collaborative learning, and that encourage positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and*

self-motivation. This is explored through Drama Based Pedagogy (Dawson & Lee), Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura), Project-based Learning (Gonzalez), and the need for Love and Belongingness (Maslow).

Within my explorations of these standards, I will be focusing my action research project on resisting white supremacy culture in the theatre classroom through Indigenous pedagogies (Antoine, Mason, Mason, Palahicky, & Rodriguez de France, 2018), (Bone, 2023), (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001) that support students' growth through belonging, joy, and collective efficacy. In this, the teacher's role is a facilitator of community in which students can safely learn and grow, and where their unique strengths and perspectives are honored as a valuable part of the educational experience that students share in their classroom communities. Challenging and dismantling white supremacy culture in my own spaces necessitates an embrace of pedagogies that have resisted colonialism for centuries. In my own teaching practice, my goals include centering the student experience through anti-oppressive practices and utilizing experiential and collaborative instructional approaches so that students' theatrical learning is fully embodied, and they have a positive experience with creative group work that they can draw from in present and future collaborations in a variety of contexts; in essence, I want to support the development of collective efficacy (Butel & Braun, 2020) for my students.

Summary

As I worked to expand the theatre program at my school, the split-class model I adopted out of necessity inspired this project as I came to view it as a boon, not a deficit. The more I reflected on the benefits to students that I was seeing in what I now consider a "combined class," the more I noted the contrasts to my own educational background, especially the ways in which white supremacy culture pervaded my school experience and my perceptions of myself as a

learner. This sparked the idea that a combined theatre classroom could be a place for dismantling white supremacy culture and providing a liberatory, community-based educational experience.

I am interested in exploring instructional and curriculum development strategies that will connect the form of my combined class to its ideal function as a liberatory educational experience, wherein self-efficacy is channeled towards community- or collective efficacy. Indigenous pedagogical practices will be the focus of this exploration, as Indigenous educators carry the wisdom of generations of resistance to white supremacy.

Chapter 2: Annotated Bibliography

The purpose of my Action Research Project is to build on existing literature by connecting teaching concepts already inherent to my own classroom format, such as the Zone of Proximal Development, Social Cognitive Theory, multi-level or combined classrooms, and collaborative drama-based pedagogies, to teaching practices that resist the oppressions inherent to the institution of schooling in the United States; namely Indigenous ways of teaching and learning that are personal and holistic, experiential, place-based, and intergenerational.

The following articles enrich my understanding of the existing research on these concepts and practices and provide important context for my investigation into the ways in which Indigenous pedagogies can guide the teaching practices of a combined theatre class in ways that support students' sense of belonging and empowerment as artists and community members.

Billings, E., & Walqui, A. (2017). Zone of proximal development an affirmative perspective in teaching ELLs. WestEd.

This article examines the importance of a learner's potential over their current abilities, as well as the role of collaboration in the learning process, for teaching English Language Learners. Billings and Walqui review notions that the goal of instruction is to support student autonomy and ability to apply/modify learning to new situations; their review of research considers the effectiveness of instructional approaches with high challenge and high support for ELL students, with an emphasis on collaboration and scaffolding. Their findings were analyzed through a literature analysis method with a focus on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development Theory, which has been shown to have a significant impact on student self-efficacy. Billings and Walqui (2017) advocate for the inclusion of ELLs in heterogeneous classrooms so that they are engaging in grade-level/appropriately challenging content while still developing their language skills. They emphasize the importance of rejecting assumptions that a student's learning can only be as "deep" as their language level.

This article applies to my teaching practice because theatre classrooms, as an elective content area, are a space where I'm likely to have a variety of language levels (EBs and/or students with disabilities affecting their language/literacy acquisition). Therefore, collaborations are likely to be mixed-level, even without the Theatre 1/2 split model. This should be viewed as an asset; diversity of background, experiences, and language use add to the collective funds of knowledge in a classroom cohort. However, this article emphasizes the role of the instructor in the success of ZPD learning; it doesn't happen "just because." It is not inherent to a mixed-level cohort; structured and procedural scaffolding must also be carefully implemented by a teacher who is attentive to the current interests and abilities as well as the potential of their students. Those with greater experience in the content area may have strengths in content-specific literacy or embodied practice, but those with less experience or skill may bring strengths in providing an

outside perspective, thinking outside the box, or questioning practices or traditions that are assumed to be in stone by more experienced practitioners.

Ni, L. (2022). Application of the zone of proximal development in college English teaching. Adult and High Education, Clausis Scientific Press, 4 (7).

This article reviews the theory and practical application of Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) in English teaching classrooms at the college/adult level. Ni examines the heuristic, interactive, and scaffolding teaching methods, and the possibilities of peer help in ZPD-based teaching and learning. This article uses the literature analysis method and the case study of an actual classroom to examine the possibilities of using the theory of ZPD in college-level English classrooms. The authors conclude that scaffolding and group learning methods are applicable to ZPD theory, but advocate for further empirical study to "further enhance the innovation of ZPD teaching practice" (Ni, 2022, p. 6). In other words, this paper questions the practical feasibility of ZPD, because teachers need to be able to assess students' current capabilities and use that to somehow predict their ZPD—but the authors note that there aren't really empirical methods to do this, and that a student's ZPD would be highly individualized and dependent on more factors than a teacher can reasonably know about any given student.

Ni's conclusions imply that either assumptions must be made, or that teachers have to heavily lean on students to understand and communicate their own zone of proximal development. This makes me consider the idea that teachers need to help students cultivate metacognition and appreciation of working for a challenge with peers and alone in order for students to develop their own innate ability to learn within their ZPD. Or, perhaps this is where a

teacher's attunement to the procedural aspect of scaffolding (Billings & Walqui, 2017) is the real advantage that teacher-facilitators can offer. In addition to the author's own acknowledgement of the lack of empirical research in this area, the implications of this article may also be different from my own teaching practice because the article focuses on college level English classrooms, rather than high school level theatre classrooms, but I believe that many of the same concepts and practical suggestions will be applicable.

Vinney, C. (2024). Social cognitive theory: How we learn from the behavior of others.

Thoughtco. Retrieved from <https://www.thoughtco.com/social-cognitive-theory-4174567>

This article provides an overview of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasizes the agency of people to shape their environment and to be shaped by it, and that human learning through observation of others is heavily influenced by their self-efficacy beliefs. The author identifies a series of processes of observational learning: attentional, retention, production, and motivational. Their findings were analyzed through a lens of Social Cognitive Theory with an additional examination of the relationship between social cognitive theory and ZPD theory. Vinney concludes that while Social Cognitive Theory does not affirm that modeled behaviors will be reproduced, if the motivational process provides affirmation of desired behaviors, learners will be more likely to replicate the desired behaviors in the future. The models themselves can be a source of motivation, thus affirming the potential of peer interactions to support students' skill development. Vinney also points out the important role of perceptions of self-efficacy in learners' willingness to persevere.

For my own classroom practices, this research indicates that peer models of perseverance in theatre learning and prosocial collaborative behaviors have strong potential as part of a cycle

that strengthens the self- and collective efficacy of a student group. As students develop their own self-efficacy, they become models for less experienced students, who in turn become the future models of self- and collective efficacy. The suggested power of role models implies an advantage in the multilevel classroom; students see their own trajectory through observing and eventually imitating more capable peers, thereby acting within their ZPD. I would suggest further research on the extent to which the cyclical processes described by Social Cognitive Theory and ZPD theory effectively promote self-creating or self-sustaining scaffolding. It raises the question of how and when students can effectively become teachers to other students, and how interventions by the formal teacher can support the development of students as informal teachers.

Donohoo, J., Hattie, J., & Eells, R. (2018). The power of collective efficacy. Educational Leadership, 75(6), 40-44.

This article examines Bandura's (1977) observations that team members' confidence in their abilities affects their actual overall performance as a group, and compiled data regarding teacher collective efficacy in student achievement and the role of educational leaders in cultivating a culture of collective efficacy. Donohoo, Hattie, and Eells compiled their prior research in this area to affirm the power of collective efficacy and to identify recommendations for school leaders to implement collective efficacy practices. Their findings were analyzed through a literature analysis method, utilizing a meta-analysis approach through their compilation of a number of smaller related studies, and Hattie's Visible Learning approach. The article shows that for teachers, increased collective efficacy has shown outsized results in student achievement as compared with other common factors. When examining the cultural aspects of

teacher collective efficacy, the authors identify a student-centered approach where collaborative problem-solving is employed to serve student experiences and outcomes with a focus on student learning versus instructional compliance. They also determine that for teachers to develop collective efficacy, school leaders need to promote a culture of collaboration and make visible the relationship between teachers' actions and student outcomes.

This article was especially relevant to my desire to learn about and implement liberatory teaching practices. Based on the analysis provided by the authors, teacher collective efficacy results in a student-centered approach where collaborative problem-solving is employed to serve student experiences and outcomes—the focus on student learning versus instructional compliance identified above. This suggests a possible connection to concepts in bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress*, where teachers are in solidarity with students and teaching practices are non-coercive. This article brings an additional question for me to consider in my own research: How does evidence of the positive impact of teacher collective efficacy translate to the possible impact of student collective efficacy? The authors identify that social sensitivity has an impact on teacher collective efficacy, so I suggest further research on the incorporation of SEL standards in the classroom and their potential effect on student collective efficacy.

Hattie, J. (2021, June 7). The “I” and “We” Skills Needed for Collective Student Efficacy - Corwin Connect. Corwin Connect. Retrieved from <https://corwin-connect.com/2021/06/the-i-and-we-skills-needed-for-collective-student-efficacy/>

This article addresses the question of extrapolating data about teacher collective efficacy to developing student collective efficacy. The authors used their data to identify effective attitudes and instructional approaches to support student collective efficacy. The authors based

their inquiry around wondering “what would happen if we developed students’ confidence and skills to contribute effectively to group work, and have high confidence in the outcomes of the group?” (para. 3) and examined their evidence through the lens of self- and collective efficacy pedagogies. They found that intentional pre-work around content knowledge and learning attitudes were critical to student success in group work. Student group work on its own does not lead to student collective efficacy or achievement brilliance—even when well-designed or stimulating. But ensuring that the group work requires collaboration from all students, multiple interpretations are valued, students are equipped to be able to offer meaningful contributions, and effective student leaders are identified could help bridge the gap between well-intentioned but ineffective group work design and group work that builds collective student efficacy.

Developing effective group work strategies is something I've long held an interest in, because theatre, life, and social justice all require extensive collaboration. I hypothesize that collective efficacy is a form of empowerment for students and communities. My follow up question is “how?” What can a theatre classroom provide for students to gain the level of personal and group empowerment suggested by the authors? Their lists of "I and We" skills may provide a blueprint of targets I can work towards with my own students. However, the article is limited in that the authors do not clearly explain how they used their data to identify the skills to build collective student efficacy, and the article lacks suggestions for concrete interventions for helping students develop those skills. I suggest more specific inclusion of their research methods and results. The article could also be further improved by addressing not only how to identify effective student leaders, but how to develop students into effective student leaders.

Capone, V., Donizzetti, A., & Petrillo, G. (2017). Classroom relationships, sense of community, perceptions of justice, and collective efficacy for students' social well-being. Journal of Community Psychology. Wiley. DOI: 10.1002/jcop.21943

This article researches the correlation between school context and social well-being (SWB). After determining a lack of studies providing empirical data for the following, Capone, Donizzetti, and Petrillo conducted an analysis of the effects of classroom climate, sense of community, and justice beliefs on students' SWB in a study sample of 390 high school students. Their study used the structural equation model through integrating community psychology and social cognition. The authors concluded that classroom relationships, classroom climate, and sense of community are associated with collective efficacy, which the authors affirm as an indication of SWB. They suggest, given the significant influences of school and classroom environments on adolescent development, using school-based interventions to increase a sense of community and collective efficacy. The study's conclusion advocates for further research with independent sources of information, compared to the multiple variables in this study, which shows correlation, but not causality, between positive classroom climate perspectives and the social well-being of students.

This article was very impactful on my concept of teaching because it affirms that positive relationships between teachers and students, and amongst students themselves, contribute to the students' well-being and sense of belonging. This is especially critical in our society, where schooling is compulsory, and the school environment provides the bulk of the context for social interactions between adolescents. The authors poignantly state that

School and classroom are fundamental in the life of adolescents (Vieno, Santinello, Pastore, & Perkins, 2007): The need to belong, social support,

relationships with classmates, and acceptance take on special importance for SWB (Keyes, 2005), especially during adolescence, when young people try to figure out who they really are and wish to be” (Capone, Donizetti, Patrillo, 2017, p. 1).

The strengths of this article include its ability to take a fundamental concept such as the importance of schooling in adolescent development, and identify empirical evidence to show how students’ views of that ever-present schooling context deeply influences their social well-being. They are able to quantify an essentially qualitative aspect of teaching practice: relationships. Their methodology and clearly referenced rating scales not only strengthen their own research, but provide a replicable model which I could adapt to my own research within a multilevel high school theatre classroom. The study has significant ties to the social justice and anti-oppression themes of my own research interests.

Beare, D., & Belliveau, G. (2007). Theatre for Positive Youth Development: A Development Model for Collaborative Play-creating. Applied Theatre Researcher/IDEA Journal, (8).

This article proposes and evaluates a collaborative play-creating process to identify its impact on student experiences, and the meaning and learning for student collaborators. The authors used performative inquiry to conduct their study by working with secondary students on a collaborative play-creation process. Their findings were analyzed through a literature lens in theatre education and counseling psychology, with particular attention to enactivism theory (Maturana and Varela 1992), performance theory (Schechner 2003), complexity theory (Davis and Sumara 2006) and action research (Reason and Bradbury 2001) as crucial aspects of performative inquiry. The authors also collected and interpreted data using in-depth interviews,

focus groups, and extensive field notes. The authors found nine key themes in their observations of the collaborative play-creation process: the theatre-focused scriptwriting, rehearsing, performing and reflecting, and the self-focused developmental stages of inclusion, control, intimacy, empowerment and vision. They affirm that the intertwined presence of these themes supports the pedagogical approach of theatre as a means of positive youth development, especially with regards to circular patterns of involvement and the ensuing circular patterns of internal and external dialogue that process students through the stages of development proposed by the authors.

This article has influenced my views of my own students' development of theatre skills in conjunction with their development of self, since I use a very similar but highly truncated version of this same play creation process in my one-trimester theatre class—contrasted with the authors' program, wherein the playwriting process alone takes up a trimester's worth of time. One other significant difference is that their research focus is based on a program that is exclusively extra-curricular, meaning that it is ungraded and purely opt-in. While my class is an elective, it does help fulfill graduation requirements for arts or elective credits, and students are compelled to complete work in order to pass the class. However, reviewing Beare and Belliveau's framework for development across the nine themes within the play-creation process gave me new insight into developmental aspects of my own students' work both in class and in the Thespian Troupe/mainstage rehearsal and production process. I feel as though their research has illuminated some of my own observations about my students' cyclical progression through my program, and provided nuance to inferences about barriers to progression and key elements of success or further progression. The article rightfully points out its own research limitations in being focused on one particular school program, but has the advantage of covering several years

of observational research to support the authors' hypotheses about the circular nature of student development in the collective play-creation process. The authors suggest that interviewing alumni of the program would also provide additional key data about long-term effects of involvement in the program, which is something I am also curious about, since my research interests relate the idea that collective artistic processes support collective efficacy that students can then apply to their roles as community members in their present and future.

Daniels, H., & Downes, E. (2015). Identity and creativity: The transformative potential of drama. Dramatic Interactions in Education: Vygotskian and Sociocultural Approaches to Drama, Education and Research. Bloomsbury.

This article examines the misinterpretations of Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development and, in particular, the misuse of "scaffolding" instructional approaches to control, rather than liberate, the learning of children, especially children who are categorized as "struggling" or "vulnerable"—often a euphemism for poverty—and suggests that drama education provides a better example for how Vygotsky's theories can shape students' educational experiences into transformative practices of identity and society. Daniels and Downes reviewed multiple literature and research perspectives on Vygotsky's theories and identified a case study that exemplifies "the way in which pupils who are on the FSM [Free School Meals] register can experience the transformative potential of drama in relation to identities within school and beyond" (p. 1). In other words, they investigated the effects of a practical application of ZPD and creative classroom practice on students who are often otherwise subjected to high-control methods of instruction that box in, rather than liberate, their sense of personal and social identity. Their findings were analyzed through a lens of social constructivism in service of rejecting

pedagogic imperialism. The authors conclude that when drama education is used in service of learning in the ZPD as originally intended by Vygotsky's theories of creativity, students can experience a liberatory pedagogy rather than an imperialist one.

This article clarified my understanding of ZPD theory and scaffolding pedagogy to affirm that learners themselves can provide much of their own scaffolding through creativity and imagination. It indicates that the role of the teacher should be that of a facilitator or a problem-poser, who can then provide tools and resources for students to further explore notions of identity and society, rather than have information and experiences dictated to them. Their review of the research and case study supports the idea that imagined or playacted experiences are not merely forms of self-expression, but enacted identity development. Because I have an interest in dismantling imperialist or oppressive norms of schooling, I noted the article's emphasis on Vygotsky's idea that "active promotion of creativity [is] a central function of schooling" (p. 3), and that in practical instructional terms, the ZPD is dialogic, part of the creative process, rather than preconstructed. I find myself inspired by Daniels' and Downes' adamance that

drama provides the opportunity for a form of social intervention that can help to subvert some of "positions defined by the social organization" and offer the possibility of a form of learning which enables them to experience a change in subject position and to reflect on that change. They are learning to see familiar landscapes from new positions. This is made possible through moments of collective creativity which sow the seeds of personal change. (Daniels & Downes, 2015, pp. 15-16)

In other words, drama education offers opportunities to experience new perspectives amidst the collective creation or exploration of theatre, providing a benefit to individual students' identity formation, but also shape new collective understandings of relationships and society. This article could further expand on this idea by connecting it to theories of self- and collective efficacy, especially for students who are generally more subjected to stereotyping in the education system.

Stephenson, L. (2023). Collective creativity and wellbeing dispositions: Children's perceptions of learning through drama. Thinking Skills and Creativity, 47, 101188.

This article explores the concept of Drama Worldbuilding as a pedagogy of critical hope in a tumultuous era of multiple global crises and concerning mental health trends in children. The author seeks to address research gaps through analyzing the impact of primary school students' engagement in creative arts learning as a tool for collective creativity and purposeful action. The author stated that her research “draws from theories of affect, wellbeing and immersive play to conceptualise new links between creativity, change making and wellbeing.” Stephenson's analysis leads to a new proposal for specific dispositions for creativity, well-being, and adaptability, and offers support for heuristic instructional approaches and creative pedagogies. The article also argues the need for further focus on affect as a way to deepen understanding of learners' agency in meaning making.

This work relates very closely to my own research interests—using theatre as the medium through which to offer opportunities for students to claim agency and build their capacity for community action. The experiential method of exploration of the relationships between creativity, change making, and wellbeing is similar to my own action research methodology which utilizes in-class projects and activities as the context for incorporating the pedagogies that

I am researching in this project. While my students are high schoolers, rather than primary students, Stephenson's research serves as a model that I can build upon within my specific context, and by adding the additional layers of incorporating Indigenous pedagogies into creative arts learning in my combined classroom.

Antoine, A., Mason, R., Mason, R., Palahicky, S. & Rodriguez de France, C. (2018). Pulling Together: A Guide for Curriculum Developers. Victoria, BC: BCcampus. Retrieved from <https://opentextbc.ca/indigenizationcurriculumdevelopers/>

This work describes the need to Indigenize and decolonize as ways to work toward reconciliation. It presents various activities and reading materials to help educators better understand what each of these processes entails and how we can incorporate them into our practice. The authors then describe key commonalities of Indigenous epistemologies and pedagogies, both of which are necessary foundations to approach learning and teaching from an Indigenous perspective. They also invite educators to revise our own practice in critical ways by reviewing examples of courses that integrate Indigenous perspectives and by adapting our own curriculum, learning how to build long-lasting relationships and connections with Indigenous people and communities by understanding protocols, intentionality, and purpose. We are asked to consider the diverse sources of Indigenous knowledge available to curriculum developers and explore ways in which we can learn about and include local contexts while addressing cultural appropriation and identification of authentic resources. The authors also provide us with opportunities to reflect on awareness about the role we each play in the above processes and how to understand our role in systems of oppression, which can be conscious and unconscious. Becoming aware of this will also help us identify how we can become allies and lifelong

learners. The authors conclude by proposing ways in which we can establish communities of practice in our institutions to contribute to and advocate for Indigenization at a systemic level, including institutional policies, principles, and strategies.

This writing is significant to my practice because it is written with readers like me in mind. It asks for significant reflection, accompanied by action, and provides a practical lens with which to approach Indigenizing the curriculum. The following questions posed by the authors have potential to be crucial to my development of a methodology for my action research in a way that is firmly rooted in Indigenous pedagogy, while recognizing that my positionality at a white settler educator complicates but does not excuse me from being a part of the educational progress needed to counter colonized schooling practices.

Interweaving Indigenous approaches should involve considering all of the following aspects of your course design:

- Goals: Does the course goal include holistic development of the learner? If applicable, does the course benefit Indigenous people or communities?
- Learning outcomes: Do the learning outcomes emphasize cognitive, emotional, physical, and spiritual development? Is there room for personalization, group and individual learning goals, and self-development?
- Learning activities: Have you included learning activities that are land-based, narrative, intergenerational, relational, experiential, and/or multimodal (rely on auditory, visual, physical, or tactile modes of learning)?
- Assessment: Is the assessment holistic in nature? Are there opportunities for self-assessment that allow students to reflect on their own development?

- Relationships: Are there opportunities for learning in community, intergenerational learning, and learning in relationship to the land?

- Format: Does the course include learning beyond the classroom “walls”?

(Antoine, Mason, Mason, Palahicky, & Rodriguez de France, 2018, p. 22)

To summarize, the authors ask educators to be critical of their own work and continually seek ways to incorporate Indigenous pedagogies in all aspects of their work. The authors also challenged my prior understanding of my role as a white settler teacher by clarifying the distinction between decolonization, Indigenization, and reconciliation:

Decolonization is a component of Indigenization, because it means challenging the dominance of Western thought and bringing Indigenous thought to the forefront.

Indigenization is part of reconciliation, because it involves creating a new relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. But these processes have important distinctions. Most notably, reconciliation is primarily a settler responsibility, and decolonization must be led by Indigenous people.

(Antoine, Mason, Mason, Palahicky, & Rodriguez de France, 2018, p. 7)

This prompts me to further reflect on my positionality and where I am able to have an impact in a way that uplifts decolonization led by Indigenous people. While I won’t be able to address all of the authors’—and my—questions for this particular project, this provides guideposts from which I can draw initial “first steps” in my career-spanning professional project of anti-oppression in the theatre classroom and continue questioning my role and my teaching practice.

Summary

With the purpose of my ARP focused on an exploration of how the form of a multilevel theatre class, and the curriculum I provide with it, can support its ideal function as a liberatory experience of creative collaboration and student empowerment, the articles I review above help inform, from a data-driven perspective, the practices I seek to incorporate into my own practice as a teacher-facilitator. My next chapter presents my own plans for implementing some of the practice indicated by the above research, with special attention to the Indigenous pedagogical guiding principles—personal & holistic, experiential, intergenerational, and place-based—I use to build a curriculum with the goals of supporting students’ co-creation of an Ensemble Culture-based classroom.

Chapter 3: Methods

“In this period, we need artists to create new images that will liberate us from our preoccupation with constantly expanding production and consumption and open up space in our hearts and minds to imagine and create another America that will be viewed by the world as a beacon rather than as a danger.” (Boggs 2012, p. 1.5)

Action research is defined as a process of inquiry that centers the researchers and participants as the primary beneficiaries of the project (Sagor, 2000, p. 3); it is necessarily relevant because it is conducted in service of its own practical application. While it offers immediate advantages in relevance, Sagor rightly points out that “even more important is the fact that action research helps educators be more effective at what they care most about—their teaching and the development of their students” (p. 3).

Action research for teachers, as described by Sagor (2000), follows a seven-step cycle:

1. Selecting a focus by questioning aspects of one’s teaching practice that merit further investigation;

2. *Clarifying theories* by reviewing existing research and determining the values, beliefs, and pedagogies that underpin the focus of the project;

3. *Identifying research questions* that are personally meaningful and that can guide the process of investigation;

4. *Collecting data* with an eye towards obtaining valid and reliable data that can be triangulated using multiple lenses

5. *Analyzing data* to draw out the story told by the data and to examine possible implications of the story's emergence;

6. *Reporting results* by sharing the research with colleagues;

7. *Taking informed action*, which likely includes implementation of possible findings or returning to Step 1 with a new focus for further investigation (pp. 3-7).

In my context, this is the proper method because by using action research to practice co-creation of ensemble culture in the classroom, I will be centering the student experience specific to my school community as I grow into an educator who shares with students not just theatre as an art form, but theatre as a way of connecting and growing, a way of seeing one another and being seen by one another. Within my multi-level class, the cyclical nature of formal or informal action research parallels the cyclical nature of students who cycle through Theatre 1 and into Theatre 2, thus taking on the role of leader where they once followed prior leaders.

As a theatre teacher, using action research to guide my study and practice offers advantages in its relationship to the experiential-experimental nature of theatre creation itself. We try something onstage, see its effect on an audience (or on its practitioners), and then refine, adjust, or try a new experiment. "Failures" are something to celebrate; it simply means we have more information about what *didn't* work, through which we can hone in on another idea of what

might work. Likewise, action research in a theatre classroom offers opportunities to investigate a question in real-time, with real impacts. I can cycle my findings into my next experiment, making adjustments and refining my curriculum approaches and teaching practices as I work with my next group of students, some of whom are likely to be cycling back through themselves, as Theatre 2 students who were once Theatre 1 students. Some potential limitations are the heavily qualitative and context-based nature of action research; my data collected with this particular group of students is unlikely to yield any universal truths; I won't be able to extrapolate any absolutes about "the perfect way" to teach my class, or make recommendations for how other educators may apply my findings to their own contexts. However, I do believe that my focus on *co-creation* as the "action" of my project broadens its usefulness; the students themselves, whether in my class now or in the future, or with another educator, are drivers of their experiences, with the educator as a guide.

The focus of my action research project is in facilitating an empowered educational experience in the theatre classroom. This focus arose out of my philosophy of teaching, which affirms that the teacher's role should be as a facilitator of community and connection through which students can safely learn and grow, and where their unique strengths and perspectives are honored as a valuable part of the educational experience that students share in their classroom communities. My investigations for this project are inspired by Indigenous pedagogies (Antoine, Mason, Mason, Palahicky, & Rodriguez de France, 2018), (Bone, 2023), (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001) that support students' growth through belonging, joy, and community, and resist white supremacy culture as it manifests in the institution of schooling as competition, perfectionism, and hierarchy.

In my own teaching practice, my goals include centering the student experience through anti-oppressive practices and utilizing experiential and collaborative instructional approaches so that students' theatrical learning is an embodied experience with creative group work that they can draw from in present and future collaborations in a variety of contexts; in essence, I want to support the development of collective efficacy (Butel & Braun, 2020) for my students.

My research question is: How can Indigenous pedagogies inform the co-creation of an ensemble culture that promotes a sense of belonging and collective efficacy in a combined theatre class? My rationale for this question is that while theatre as an art form is inherently collaborative, it can also be individualistic and competitive (being "good enough" to get the part, competing for roles or spots in conservatory programs). Giving intentional focus to Indigenous pedagogies that affirm community as the center of social progress is one way to work towards a model that affirms collective efficacy and a sense of belonging for all students. In addition to using principles of Indigenous pedagogies to inform my curriculum and classroom practices, I connect this investigation to my research into the existing literature on Zone of Proximal Development, multi-level classrooms, and drama-based pedagogies that center both collaboration and student agency.

In my initial analysis of the existing literature related to how Indigenous pedagogies can inform the co-creation of an ensemble culture that promotes a sense of belonging and collective efficacy in a combined theatre class, I have found that while research exists about the disparate elements of my research question, the research is largely context-dependent and not yet broadly applied, or applied in the specific intersectional context that combines theatre, multi-level learning environments, belonging, collective efficacy, and co-created classroom experiences through Indigenous pedagogies. My own research will be largely context-dependent, and can

only scratch the surface of this complex concept, but I felt that the potential for transformation for myself and my students was too great to not use this action research to begin what will be a life-long embodied exploration.

Studying my own practice will enable me to invest in my own process of transformation as both an educator and a learner. Boggs (2012) says, “to achieve the miracle that is now needed to transform our schools into places of learning, we need to tap into the creative energies of our children and our teachers.” (p. 5.8); by utilizing an Action Research methodology, potential for transformation need not wait for a new curriculum to be published, or the next educational trend, however effective, to trickle down from a professional development seminar. By building upon the philosophical and pedagogical foundations of liberatory educators such as hooks (1994), Boggs (2012), and Deloria & Wildcat (2001), and incorporating Indigenous pedagogical concepts delineated by Antoine, Mason, Mason, Palahicky, & Rodriguez de France (2018) and Bone, T. (2023), I will investigate the effect of these pedagogies on students’ experiences in my combined theatre classroom, in service of learning that can empower students as creative, connected community members. My research question will help me refine my teaching practices to best suit the needs of my students and my philosophy that theatre education can be an empowering individual and collective experience wherein students grow to see themselves and their peers as valued members of their communities.

Contexts of the Study

My study was conducted in a rural high school in Clackamas County, Oregon; the school is the only public high school in its district, and serves a population of approximately 1,400 students. I will refer to the school pseudonomically as “Catamount High School” (or “CHS”) for

the purposes of this paper. The study was conducted in a 5th period (final class of the school day) theatre class with the following student demographics:

- Twenty-six students: twelve Theatre 1 students (46%) and fourteen Theatre 2 students (54%);
- Five 9th graders (19%), six 10th graders (23%), three 11th graders (12%), and eleven 12th graders (42%);
- Thirteen students (50%) are girls, seven students (27%) are boys, and six students (23%) are non-binary;
- Nine students (35%) have disclosed an LGBTQ+ identity;
- Twenty-one students (81%) are white, two students (8%) are Hispanic, and three students (12%) are multiracial;
- Two students (8%) are in the DLI (Dual Language Immersion) program, three students (12%) have a home language other than English (Spanish, Russian), and one student is identified as an 'EL' student (the school's designation for emergent bilinguals);
- One student receives Migrant Education services;
- One student is a primarily online student who attends class in person for theatre only, and one student is part of the alternative education program;
- Five students (19%) receive 504 services, and four students (15%) have an IEP;
- There are ten students (38%) with medical alerts.

The students in the study have cultural funds of knowledge drawing from international perspectives, Hispanic cultures, church involvement (primarily Christian), and experiences in extracurriculars such as theatre, choir, band, basketball, cross country, wrestling, soccer, and tennis. Many students also express interest in video games and visual arts.

This class is a single trimester course with no prerequisites for the Theatre 1 cohort. Theatre 2 students must have taken Theatre 1, or be placed at the recommendation of the instructor. Theatre 2 students, therefore, are students that I have worked with for at least one prior trimester, or have worked with extensively in my capacity as the school's theatre director. Most Theatre 1 students, however, are students that I am meeting for the first time as the term begins, though many have had some prior experiences with theatre in middle school. My strengths with this group of students include a history of building rapport with students in Theatre 2, either through prior classroom experiences or in production work. Many of these students come to this class with a foundational knowledge of theatre practices and an ability to help lead class activities or provide examples or demonstrations. I also have strengths in my own ability to meet students where they're at and adjust class activities in real time to suit the needs of each unique class cohort. Some of my professional growth areas are in providing immediate feedback as students learn so they can continue to work in their Zone of Proximal Development, and integrating opportunities to draw on students' funds of knowledge as they build content-specific literacy and meaningfully connect their theatrical learning to their own positionality in their communities.

Data Collection & Analysis

Because student efficacy is rooted in personal perceptions, and because I am invested in student agency as a philosophy of teaching, my data collection focuses on behavioral (what students choose to do) and affective (how they feel about themselves and the situation they are in) performance targets. The observations, assessments, and student work and reflections also represents longitudinal data collected over the course of a twelve-week term. The data collected for this research falls into three general categories:

- Baseline data about students' backgrounds and perceptions about collaboration and community, and self- and collective efficacy, acquired through demographic data, student surveys, and informal observations of student engagement at the beginning of the term.
- Students' work samples and project artifacts resulting from implementation of class curricula designed to emphasize key components of Indigenous teaching and learning and utilize existing structures to highlight ZPD and Social Cognitive Theory, multi-level learning, and drama-based pedagogies. This includes activities to prompt reflection, discussion, and collaboration, build relationships and identify personal and group strengths and interests, offer student leadership opportunities, create supportive feedback structures, and culminate in place-based, hands-on, collaborative projects that emphasize a transformation from the personal to the collective.
- Follow-up data including informal observations of changes in student engagement, a follow-up student survey given at the mid-point of the term, and student reflection data from the end of the term.

To encourage student engagement and provide opportunity for both formal and informal assessment, my teaching practices utilized classroom routines and teaching practices such as warmup rituals for consistent shared group experiences, gradual release of responsibility for increased student efficacy, and project-based learning for hands-on development of skills in a collaborative environment tailored to help students find and learn within their Zone of Proximal Development, and self- and group-reflection strategies for increased meta-cognition and self- and collective efficacy. My curriculum plans were compiled into a teaching timeline (Sagor, 2000, p. 77) that included specific instructional approaches and activities designed to promote collaborative learning in a multi-level theatre course, with each aspect of the curriculum

connected to one or more key tenets of Indigenous pedagogy. Informal observations about student engagement and development offer additional context to the students' self-reported data. The use of project artifacts from students (Sagor, 2000, p. 100), combined with periodic reflections on the classroom environment and culture, and probing approaches such as surveys and interviews, help further specify and contextualize the data with primary source materials.

My primary source of data comparing students' own perceptions of belonging and collective efficacy was a survey given in the first week of school, and again at the half-way point of the term (Week 6). The second version of the survey also asked students whether they felt this had changed since the beginning of the term. Students were also asked about how many students they knew at the start of the class, how many they know now, and how many students, in general, they know in their other classes. Participation in the survey was optional, with class time given to complete the survey. Students utilized a code as an identifier, rather than their names; twelve students responded each time, with seven students responding both times.

My data analysis utilized a traditional qualitative analysis procedure by collecting data from a variety of perspectives and lenses at various points across the term in connection with the curriculum trajectory and its resulting artifacts, as described above. These data were then documented and assembled so that they could be examined holistically. I triangulated the data through use of a triangulation table as described by Sagor (2000). My table categorized the data by period of time (early, middle, and end of term) against the type of data collected (student perspectives, teacher observations, and curriculum and artifacts). I further subdivided the data for the student perspectives by whether the student was in Theatre 1 or Theatre 2, since I was curious to see whether differences in their perspectives over time emerged, given that Theatre 2 students were coming into the course with experience with the pedagogical theories I had already

been applying in prior terms. The use of the triangulation table ensured conceptual congruence of my themes by aligning the various lenses through which data were collected to minimize research bias, make emergent patterns clearer, and to identify possible external factors influencing the data. Open coding was used to identify patterns in the data by pooling responses as they related to the four key elements of Indigenous pedagogy used to guide curriculum choices. The codes revealed themes of Indigenous pedagogical approaches correlating to strong engagement in classroom community, emergent behavioral markers of belonging and collective efficacy in project work utilizing principles of Indigenous pedagogy, and nuanced student perspectives on community, collaboration, belonging, and efficacy.

Researcher Positionality

My identities as a white, non-binary, socialized female, asexual, atheist, economically advantaged, neurodivergent, able-bodied, college-educated, native-born U.S. citizen, and English-speaking monolingual have and will always inform my view of the world and of my role as a teacher. I also carry my own schooling history, in which academic pressures bred stress and debilitating perfectionism; for a time I was unable to separate my judgment of myself from my judgment of others. I remain curious about where I learned the story of the necessity of perfection, and how things could be different now that I'm a teacher with students with a wide variety of stories, languages, and needs. My willingness to listen and learn from others, connect authentically, and view my own perspectives as malleable and changeable will be assets as I seek to be a life-long advocate for a socially just world.

As I am the only teacher for the class in which I am conducting my research, I am especially susceptible to bias in my collection and interpretation of data. My positionality also has the potential to result in biases that devalue the perspectives of students whose identities and

experiences are distant from my own: students of Color, emergent bilingual (EB) students, religious students, students in unstable economic or family situations, and students with disabilities. Because I am also managing the content, delivery, differentiation, and classroom behaviors of this group of students, my research will be inherently affected by my own subjective experience as their teacher. I aim to mitigate this bias in my data collection by utilizing student perspectives collected in a variety of modes in addition to my own observations and assessments. When gathering data, I must also ensure that my questioning approach accounts for differences in students' reading comprehension, English language vocabulary, and communication styles. Using reading and language acquisition level-appropriate questions using information from students' IEPs and EL data where necessary will help students respond authentically.

Chapter 4: Findings

Three major themes emerged from analyzing the data. They are:

- 1) Correlations between personal and holistic, experiential, and intergenerational approaches and strong engagement in classroom community;
- 2) Behavioral markers of belonging and collective efficacy in project work utilizing principles of Indigenous pedagogy; and
- 3) Shifts in student perspectives on community, collaboration, belonging, and efficacy.

Each theme is discussed with supportive data.

Theme I: Correlations Between Personal and Holistic, Experiential, and Intergenerational Approaches and Strong Engagement in Classroom Community

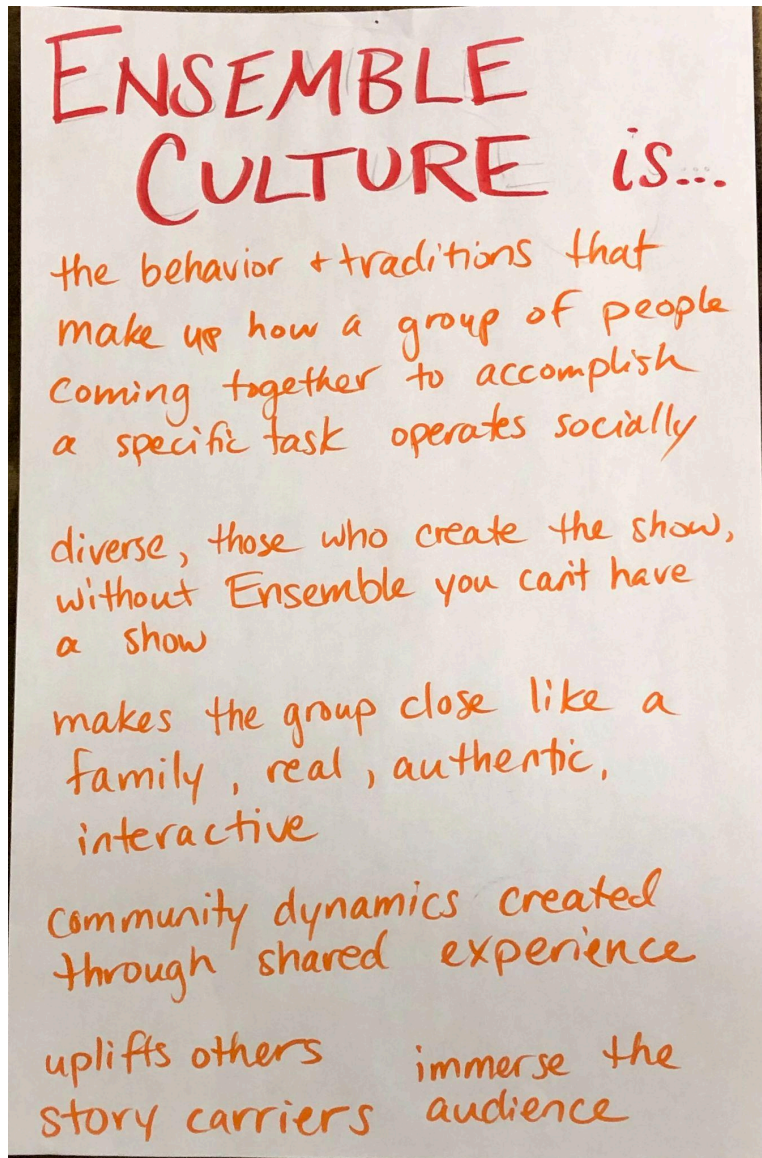
My approach to help students engage quickly and consistently during this term was to begin with the key Indigenous pedagogical elements of the personal/holistic and the

experiential—learning through creating and bringing in their personal perspectives to collaborative investigations of theatre as, essentially, a storytelling medium. I wanted students to feel that I was genuinely interested in their values and perspectives as we began our project of co-creating the classroom culture, and that they would be able to get to know one another in a way that was supported by me as their teacher-facilitator. Data included a teaching timeline for Week 1 that cycled between personal reflections, small group brainstorming, and whole-group sharing. During this trajectory of learning activities, I observed that all students successfully reflected on their own values, personal strengths and challenges in working with others, and what they felt they needed to develop mutual trust and support in a collaborative environment. All students also successfully engaged in small-group conversations where they shared their reflections, discussed the concept of ensemble culture, and brainstormed class agreements that would support their ideas of ensemble culture. In whole-group sharing, students built consensus around their class policies by sharing their ideas, asking clarifying questions, and affirming the work of each group.

Artifacts demonstrating the strong initial engagement and early stages of co-creating ensemble culture through collective visioning include a class-created definition board of ensemble culture, shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Ensemble Culture is...



Note. From Theatre 1 & 2 students, 2025. [Photograph of discussion notes].

Students also worked in small groups to create posters showcasing their own values and ideas for creating ensemble culture in the classroom (Fig. 2).

Figure 2

Co-Created Classroom Agreements for Ensemble Culture



Note. From Theatre 1 & 2 students, 2025. [Photo collage of student work].

By starting with students' values and personal perspectives, and bringing them together to discuss and discover where their initial ideas about ensemble culture and collaborative creative work aligned and diverged, the personal and holistic overlapped with the experiential to create a community understanding of how this specific group of students wanted to show up to create together. A critical connection emerged; the students' co-created agreements mirrored the methodology of Indigenization Project:

In Indigenous methodology, stories emphasize our relationships with our environment, our communities, and with each other. To stay on course, we are guided by the stars in the sky, with each star a project principle: deliver holistically, learn from one another, work together, share strengths, value collaboration, deepen the learning, engage respectfully, and learn to work in discomfort. (Antoine, Mason, Mason, Palahicky & Rodriguez de France, 2018, p. x)

I observed that over the course of the lesson, students' confidence in sharing with one another increased. Their conversations grew more natural, and I noted that they could have carried on these conversations for far longer than our class time allowed. Using mixed groupings of Theatre 1 and Theatre 2 students resulted in Theatre 2 students jumpstarting personal conversations and guiding the conversation into a holistic framework where all group members were encouraged to share and honor each others' perspectives. This was successful; I noted that a major advantage to the combined class model is having a substantial number of students who have already engaged with a culture of collaboration in a theatrical context and would be capable of leading by example. I also noted an emerging relationship to the intergenerational aspect of Indigenous pedagogy—the ways in which the wisdom and experiences of older or more

experienced community members are passed down to newer or less experienced community members.

As the timeline of the class progressed into the type of collaborative work they had developed their class policies to support, engagement varied more than in Week 1, but stabilized by the midpoint of the term. In the first few weeks, 76.9% of students engaged consistently in whole group activities like warmups and theatre games, with a few students who were more reluctant to engage or who sought ways to avoid participation. However, as the class progressed through smaller group activities with intentional grouping of students who had yet to work together, the engagement steadily increased to 88%-92% participation and engagement. I noted that active, experiential activities in smaller groups helped students build both accountability and trust amongst one another. After smaller group activities, student engagement in whole-group activities increased.

Student comments on the Week 6 survey helped confirm my observations about students increasing capacity for and engagement in collaboration. When asked to evaluate and comment on the extent to which they agreed with the statement “When I work with others, I feel part of creating something meaningful,” and to add an optional comment to explain their response, one student commented “I love being connected with other [sic] in many different ways” (10th grader, Theatre 1), and when asked whether they thought this had changed since the beginning of the term, students’ statements (unedited) affirmed the shift in meaningful participation in class collaborations:

“Yes I was nervous at first not as much anymore.” -9th grader, Theatre 1

“Yes, I’ve learned how to more effectively work in a group” -12th grader, Theatre 1

“Yes it has, I was very antisocial when it came to big group projects.” -10th grader,
Theatre 1

“Yes because some of my ideas will go into the whole project” -9th grader, Theatre 1

These student perspectives, and my own observations, indicate that overall, students felt empowered by their work with others and felt that their personal contributions were honored. One outlier was a student who commented that she felt that her ideas were usually pushed to the side, indicating that the experience was not universal.

As we moved into the second half of the term, projects for the class diverged from primarily Theatre 1/Theatre 2 combined work into more level-siloed projects. Theatre 1 students worked in two groups to create their own original fairy tale-inspired plays from the group up to perform for the on-site preschool. This was designed to affirm their own place in the greater cycle of the intergenerational aspect of community; whereas they had been brought into the theatre community by Theatre 2 students, they were now creating something to share with a much younger generation.

Meanwhile, Theatre 2 students proposed their own “term projects” as an opportunity for students to take ownership of their learning through a more in-depth exploration of their personal theatrical interests. Mutual support between Theatre 1 and Theatre 2 students remained an emphasis for both groups, with each providing feedback on work in progress to the other, continuing to emphasize collaboration despite the more individualized studies taking place. Student engagement remained high, with only a couple of students (7.7% of the class) participating inconsistently. The two students who participated inconsistently, as compared with the class as a whole, nevertheless showed individual improvement in this area over the course of the term.

A couple of transformative case studies regarding participation and engagement stand out in my data. My observational notes following the end of the term include the following reflections:

- *Case 1: EM, 11th grader.* “EM had extreme stage fright and was initially unable to participate in most group activities or anything ‘in front of the class.’ Over time, he became more confident in trying new things, joining activities after observing first, asking for opportunities to try again, and connecting with others in group work. By the end of the term, EM was able to perform onstage in a final class project that included working with a small group to perform in front of preschool students and the rest of the class. At the end of the term, he described the class as both scary and fun.”
- *Case 2: GV, 10th grader.* “GV was a student who initially was uninterested in the content, frequently skipped class, disappeared for long stretches of time, and ‘abandoned’ group work became fully engaged in class projects, contributed her significant artistic skill to group work, and was active in giving encouraging feedback to classmates. At the conclusion of the term, she joined the Drama Club and was a key team member for scenic and props work for the musical production. She reported at the end of the term that she had grown more social, made lots of friends she wouldn’t have otherwise, and learned to enjoy working with others.”
- *Case 3: RW, 11th grader.* “RW has been involved with several past theatre productions but was experiencing new mental health struggles, including severe anxiety. They slowly regained confidence as trust within the class

was built, in addition to their access to other supports within the school system and outside of school. At the end of the term, they commented, ‘If you have anxiety, this class can be hard. But just talk with Sulli or your friends, and it can go from anxiety-inducing to fun!’”

These findings show a potential correlation between my incorporation of projects and teaching approaches that emphasize the personal and holistic, experiential, and intergenerational aspects of the multilevel theatre class and the students in the community. By using a facilitative teaching approach to help students engage in co-creation of their own ensemble culture-based classroom environment, a theme of strong initial engagement, followed by a consistent rise in engagement across the timeline of the full term emerged. In particular, the engagement of Theatre 1 students began to more closely mirror the engagement levels of the Theatre 2 students over time, with three students in particular showing a dramatic change in their level of engagement. These findings have implications for the ways in which the Indigenous pedagogical forms, in conjunction with a co-creative approach to environment, support increased student engagement, and merit further investigation into the connections between high levels of student engagement and students’ sense of belonging and collective efficacy.

Theme II: Behavioral Markers of Belonging and Collective Efficacy in Project Work Utilizing Principles of Indigenous Pedagogy

My data for behavioral markers of belonging and collective efficacy are primarily based on curriculum and artifacts with observable behaviors or outcomes indicating students’ increased sense of belonging and collective efficacy. I observed students freely sharing their values, strengths, and interests, exhibiting curiosity about one another, and active engagement in

learning each others' names. I saw Theatre 2 students thoughtfully consider what theatre skills to share with Theatre 1 students and volunteer to lead warmups or teach theatre games. I noted how individual students determined an appropriate level of challenge for themselves on a performance project where there were a number of options for how they could structure their projects. I heard students share personal experiences to contribute to group projects, then generously adapt their ideas along with their collaborators to generate something new, and problem-solve together how to create a physical representation of a space that did not exist.

Each of these are behaviors connected to the students' own plans for co-creating an ensemble culture: including others, forming connections, being open to others' ideas and perspectives, being yourself, having fun, uplifting others and practicing empathy, having courage, trying new opportunities, taking care of yourself and others, staying engaged in class, and embracing differences to strengthen communities (see Figure 1). My role was to provide the container—the projects that utilized the pedagogical theories of Indigenous teaching and learning—that gave students the opportunity to develop the culture that they themselves expressed a desire to be a part of. Projects through which these behavioral markers were observed include:

Project Data 1: Theatrical Bio Slide Share. The Indigenous pedagogy underlying this project is the personal and holistic; an opportunity for students to share significant aspects of who they are and what is important to them. The purpose of this project was to build relationships and rapport amongst students, find common ground, and provide students an opportunity to share their background, interests, strengths, cultural connections, and to be able to ask questions of one another to learn more, sparking curiosity about those they might not have automatically connected with. I observed that every presenting student was asked multiple

follow-up questions by their peers. Classmates began to see one another more holistically, and students were more confidently able to be themselves and discuss their interests and their home lives after seeing evidence that others in the class would approach them with curiosity rather than judgement. This mutual trust and development of relationships beyond the interactions required for project collaboration demonstrated an increased sense of belonging amongst the students.

Project Data 2: Theatre Skills Create-and-Teach. This project is rooted in the experiential and intergenerational aspects of Indigenous pedagogy. Its purpose is to prompt Theatre 2 students to consider what theatre skills they think are important and how they can share those skills with newer students in a way that is fun, engaging, and effective. The students collaborated to come up with a theatre game or activity that they teach to the Theatre 1 students, thus passing down their knowledge and perspectives on theatre in a creative, hands-on way. I observed Theatre 2 students practicing empathy as they recalled their own experiences as new theatre students, sharing ideas and refining their ideas collaboratively. They demonstrated collective efficacy by determining which skills to prioritize passing on and using their whole group's perspectives to strengthen their plans for how they would engage the Theatre 1 students. They also followed their own class policies by having courage in piloting a new activity for Theatre 1 students, and Theatre 1 students then used the opportunity to try something new and jump into an unfamiliar scenario. This project also resulted in an increased sense of belonging for Theatre 1 students as they developed the vocabulary and skills to become part of the linguistic in-group of theatre practitioners. One 9th grader commented on their final reflection that she learned the most through this project because she really didn't know any of the theatre vocabulary before.

Project Data 3: Pantomimes and the "Missing Pieces" Project. After a few weeks focusing primarily on skill-building and confidence-building activities, the purpose of the

Pantomimes and “Missing Pieces” Project was to challenge students to take more independent ownership over their potential as physical storytellers. For Theatre 1 students, transforming a familiar “daily task” into a pantomime brings the personal into a performance setting in a low-stakes way. Theatre 2 students could choose to develop a pantomime, use an “open scene” script to specify the circumstances of a vague situation, or to rehearse and perform a monologue. The primary theory behind this project’s structure is to get students to identify their own Zone of Proximal Development by choosing a challenge that they’ll be able to grow from, with feedback support from both the instructor and peers in the class. There are a wide range of challenge “levels” available to students. Though it may vary based on individual student perspective, in general the choices of challenge level progress along this trajectory:

Theatre 1 Pantomime (partner) → Theatre 1 Pantomime (independent) → Theatre 2
Pantomime (partner or independent; opposite of their Theatre 1 approach), Theatre 2
Open Scene (partner only) → Theatre 2 Monologue (independent)

This connects to the Indigenous pedagogies of experiential and intergenerational learning once again, as supportive feedback structures are used to affirm students’ progress, provide realistic suggestions of adjustments to work on, and to learn through observation of others’ work. In this project, I observed that students’ self-efficacy increased as they realized they were able to develop the needed skills to successfully complete the project, as evidenced through comments such as “Yeah, I’ve got this!” or “Next, I just need to...” that they made during periodic informal check-ins. Students’ sense of belonging was also affirmed as the process of giving and receiving feedback positively and graciously was practiced consistently by 92.3% of the class. One complicating factor in this data were two otherwise engaged students who weren’t able to perform for the full class due to severe anxiety. They were instead able to receive credit by

performing for me privately, but it is possible that this was an experience of alienation rather than belonging since they didn't receive the benefit of the group's affirmation of their work in the way that the rest of the class did.

Project Data 4: Collaborative Set Design: A Place of Belonging and Connection. This project was inspired by the Indigenous pedagogical principles of learning that is place-based, experiential, and personal/holistic, and focused on transformation from the individual to the collective. Students were asked to think of a place where they had felt a strong sense of belonging or connection, and to make note of the emotions and sensory experiences of that space, and, if possible, to bring in artifacts from their space. See Figure 3 for an example of student work.

Figure 3

Student Work Sample: Notes on a Personal Place of Belonging or Connection

Write a few bullet points to start your personal "pool" of inspiration:
Be as detailed as you can and lean on your feelings & memories without judgement.
Skip questions if they're getting you stuck; you can always come back to it later!

- 1) What place was this?
my van | camp
- 2) Why is this place significant to you?
It brings back memories | friends had meeting new ppl
- 3) What feelings/emotions did you experience while there?
happy. | happy, fulfilled, sad
- 4) What were key aspects of the environment?
inside a van, | outside, near the mountain

Consider your 5 senses. In your space, what did/do you...

- 1) See?
Colors
- 2) Hear?
music, people talking
- 3) Smell?
food, smell of rain
- 4) Taste?
whatever we order
- 5) touch/feel?
the seats and blankets

see lots of nature
Birds, campfire crackle
food, smell of rain
food and water from the ground
the wooden cabin floor, plants, thorns

Once you've created your notes, start gathering **artifacts** of this space. These artifacts will serve as visual research for your designs, so consider examples that help show key things from the notes you wrote. Consider bringing in physical items that are from your space, or represent your space; these are powerful!

- photos (personal or image search)
- personal sketches
- items from this space (if you have access)
- other ideas???

Note. From LS, Theatre 1 student, 2025. [Photo of student work]. This student brainstormed a couple of ideas before settling on “camp” as her contribution to the group work.

Figure 4

Student Work Sample: Inspiration Comparison Chart

COLLABORATIVE SET DESIGN: INSPIRATION COMPARISON CHART
 Fill out the chart, using 1 column per person.

NAME:	Ellie	Harley	Madi
LOCATION:	Bedroom	Grandma's kitchen	Bedroom
Indoor/outdoor?	Indoor	outdoor	Indoor
Time of year?	Summer	Summer	autumn
Time of day?	late afternoon	late afternoon	Sunset/Pusk
Weather?	little cloudy	little cloudy	cold
Details for "walls"/ surrounding space?	teal & pink	back of house, Big shed, Potted plants	reflective, Pictos & tapestries
Details for "floor"/ underneath space?	Tan carpet	deck	Wood flooring, Black fur carpet
Details for "ceiling"/ above space?	popcorn	sky over hanging	disco ball, reflective stars
Main colors?	teal, pink, white	Brown, green, blue	white, purple, brown
Important textures?	Smooth, carpet	wood planks, roof shingle	fur, glass
Lighting?	light, sunny	sunlight	warm & bright
Key furniture / objects in the space?	bed, snake, desk	grill, deck, potted plants, lawn ornaments	loft, couch
Size, scale?	medium	large	10 by 10
Other senses? (Taste, smell, sound, etc)	outside	ocean smell, child	pumpkin spice

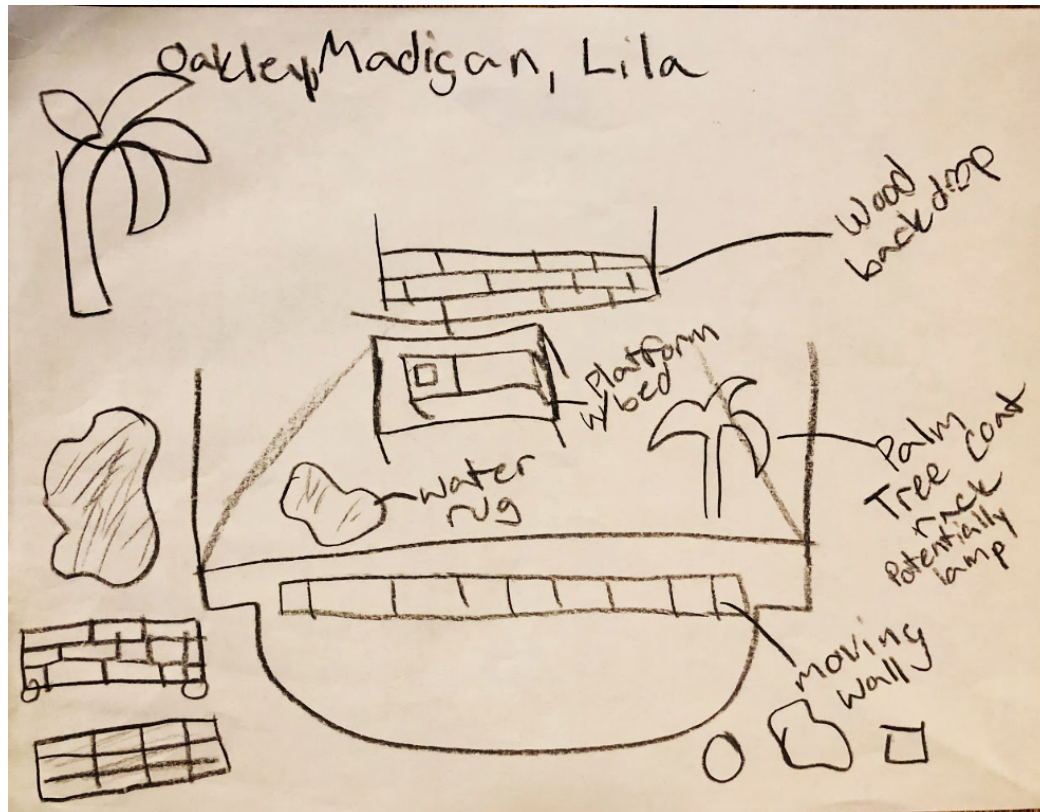
Note. From ED, HB, & MA, Theatre 2 students, 2025. [Photo of student work]. Students marked the similarities and differences in their spaces with circles and stars to help guide their design process.

In groups of three, students compared their pools of inspiration (see Figure 4 for an example) and co-created a set design for a new imaginative location that incorporated and transformed key aspects of each of their spaces. The process of this project included respectful conversations about meaningful places and memories in the students' lives, collective efficacy behaviors like creative problem solving and adaptability, and creative transformation of individual inspirations

to a collective creative pursuit—not only in concept sketches, such as those in Figures 5 and 6, but in the physical creation of a set model that showcased the new space created by each group.

Figure 5

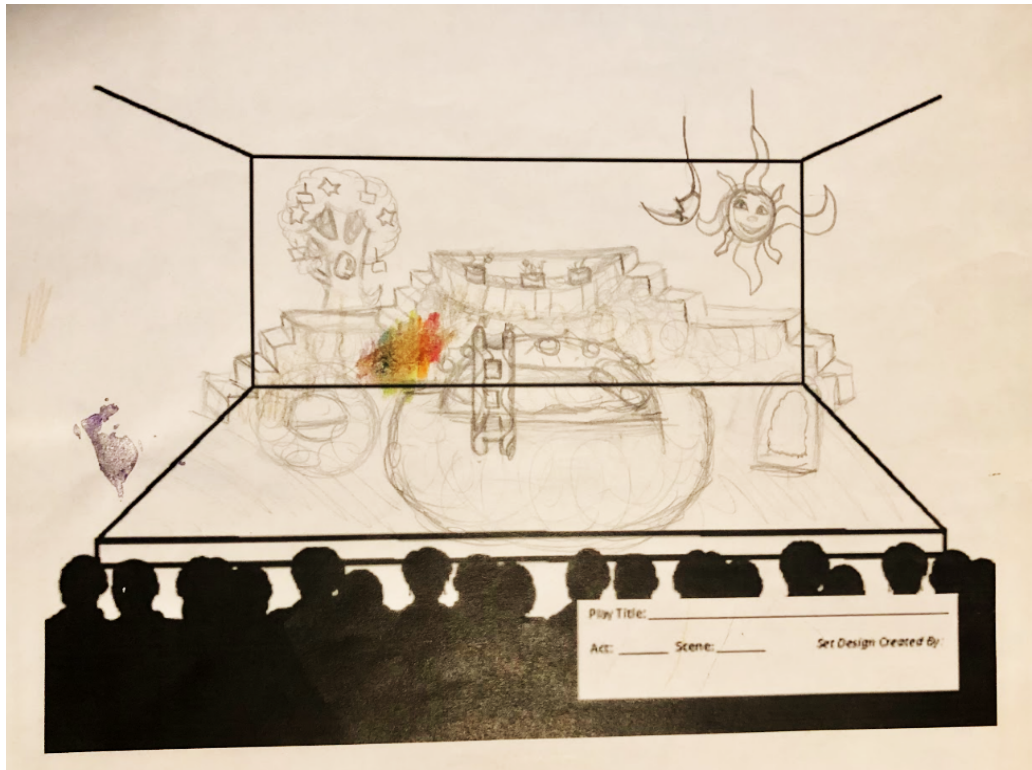
Student Work Sample: Collaborative Set Design Draft Sketch



Note. From OR, MN, & LS, Theatre 1 students, 2025. [Photo of student work]. This design includes the contribution of the “camp” space described by the student in Figure 3.

Figure 6

Student Work Sample: Collaborative Set Design Draft Sketch



Note. From ED, HB, & MA, Theatre 2 students, 2025. [Photo of student work]. This sketch represents the next stage of work from the group of students whose chart is shown in Figure 4.

Students also continued to develop meaningful personal connections with one another as they found the similarities and differences in their places of inspiration and worked together to combine and transform their inspirations into something new. This project was a good example of the outcome being greater than the sum of its parts—each group member’s contributions affected the creation of the project in a completely unique and irreplaceable way.

Outside of observed behaviors and project artifacts, one quantitative data source indicating a sense of belonging was a simple measure of students’ reports of how many others in

the class they knew at the beginning of the term as compared with the number they felt they knew by Week 6, halfway through the term. 75% of survey respondents reported that at the beginning of the school year, they knew ten or fewer other people in the class. The same percentage (75%) reported knowing twenty or more others in the class by Week 6, with over half of respondents (58.3%) stating that they know “All” others in the class. By contrast, 66.7% reported that for their other classes overall, they estimate that they know less than half of their classmates. This could indicate a stronger sense of belonging after the first half of the term in Theatre class than in the school environment overall, which has implications for the possible effectiveness of curricula and teaching approaches that emphasize personal and holistic, experiential, intergenerational, and/or place-based projects.

Theme III: Shifts in Student Perspectives on Community, Collaboration, Belonging, and Efficacy

The survey used to gather student beliefs and attitudes related to community, collaboration, belonging, and efficacy included twelve statements of belief that respondents could “Agree,” “Somewhat Agree,” “Neither Agree nor Disagree,” “Somewhat Disagree,” or “Disagree” with, with a space for optional comments or explanations following each question. The survey was given in Week 1, with a followup given in Week 6. For the Week 1 survey, 17% of respondents were in their first year at CHS and 25% were in their first theatre class, but only one respondent had not been part of a theatre production before. For the Week 6 survey, 33.3% were in their first year at CHS, and 66.7% were in their first theatre class. Two respondents had not been a part of a theatre production before.

Theatre 2 students’ survey comments at the start of the term created a strong baseline for the potential development of the classroom culture with regards to the beliefs and attitudes that

may be passed down to newer students as they are integrated into the cyclical classroom culture of a combined class model. Their Week 1 comments included (unedited):

“I have worked in many group scenarios and I feel that I am well at listening to others especially when they are scared to speak.” -10th grader, Theatre 2

“I’m not very good at communicating feelings, but I do well with communicating what I want to achieve.” -12th grader, Theatre 2

“I like to ask a lot of questions and talk to people and get their opinions.” -10th grader, Theatre 2

“I try to help others if they ask me for it, but my solutions may not be what they need.” -12th grader, Theatre 2

“I always try to be helpful but I never want to overstep and push someone.” -10th grader, Theatre 2

“I’m good at working on my own separate from others goals, but advancing to achieve the same goal is also right up my alley” -12th grader, Theatre 2

“Theatre is where I have found a footing and a place I can hopefully forever call a second home” -10th grader, Theatre 2

“I feel like people know me and like to have me around.” -12th grader, Theatre 2

“I feel like stories especially personal builds how I feel about people and things.” -10th grader, Theatre 2

(on the choice to be here and make each day my own) “While it is mostly mandatory I show I still like to go head on into my day and give it my best that I can” -10th grader, Theatre 2

(on the choice to be here and make each day my own) “I always am outgoing and I tell myself everyday that it’s gonna be my life/year/day” -12th grader, Theatre 2

(on whether mistakes or setbacks help me grow) “I think in someways yes but I’m also not a very confident person in work that I do and so sometimes critiques don’t always land well with me and they create self doubt but I try really hard to stray away from that especially when working with someone like you because your critiques are always really helpful and they are really nice to hear.” -10th grader, Theatre 2

(same respondent, on whether my strengths and values are a benefit to my communities) “Kinda like I was saying I don’t always know my worth. Like in theatre I always compare myself because there are so many people with more talent than I could dream of so sometimes I get down about that but others times I know that I’m a very flexible person and I’m ready for any challenge ever which is something that I believe benefits my communities.” -10th grader, Theatre 2

“different values and ideas keeps the world progressing and growing.” -10th grader, Theatre 2

“I always like to listen to people who don’t share my beliefs because I think it can always give a chance to teach me something or even change my beliefs because I’m not always 100 percent right.” -10th grader, Theatre 2

The trends in this data set include baseline beliefs that they work well with others and do their best to be open-minded leaders. They also express their view of theatre as a community of belonging within the school environment, and awareness of their personal growth trajectories as artists and learners.

For the Week 6 survey, students had spent the prior five weeks on a variety of large and small group activities and projects, as well as some independent or partner work for which they'd assisted each other with feedback. At the time this follow-up survey was given, they were in the middle of working on the collaborative set design project, incorporating and transforming inspiration from a place of belonging and connection for each group member into one design.

While the aggregate survey results from respondents in both Theatre 1 and Theatre 2 did not show a significant overall change in attitude or beliefs between Week 1 and Week 6 for most of the twelve questions asked, a few notable data points stand out. The statements that drew an increase in the number of students who say they "Agree" were:

- 1) I am able to work with others to creatively solve a problem.
- 2) I seek support from others to learn more or work towards my goals.
- 3) Connecting to stories is one way that I learn and grow.
- 4) I choose to be here and make each day my own.
- 5) Mistakes or setbacks encourage me to learn more or adjust my goals.
- 6) I learn a lot from other students who are very different from me.

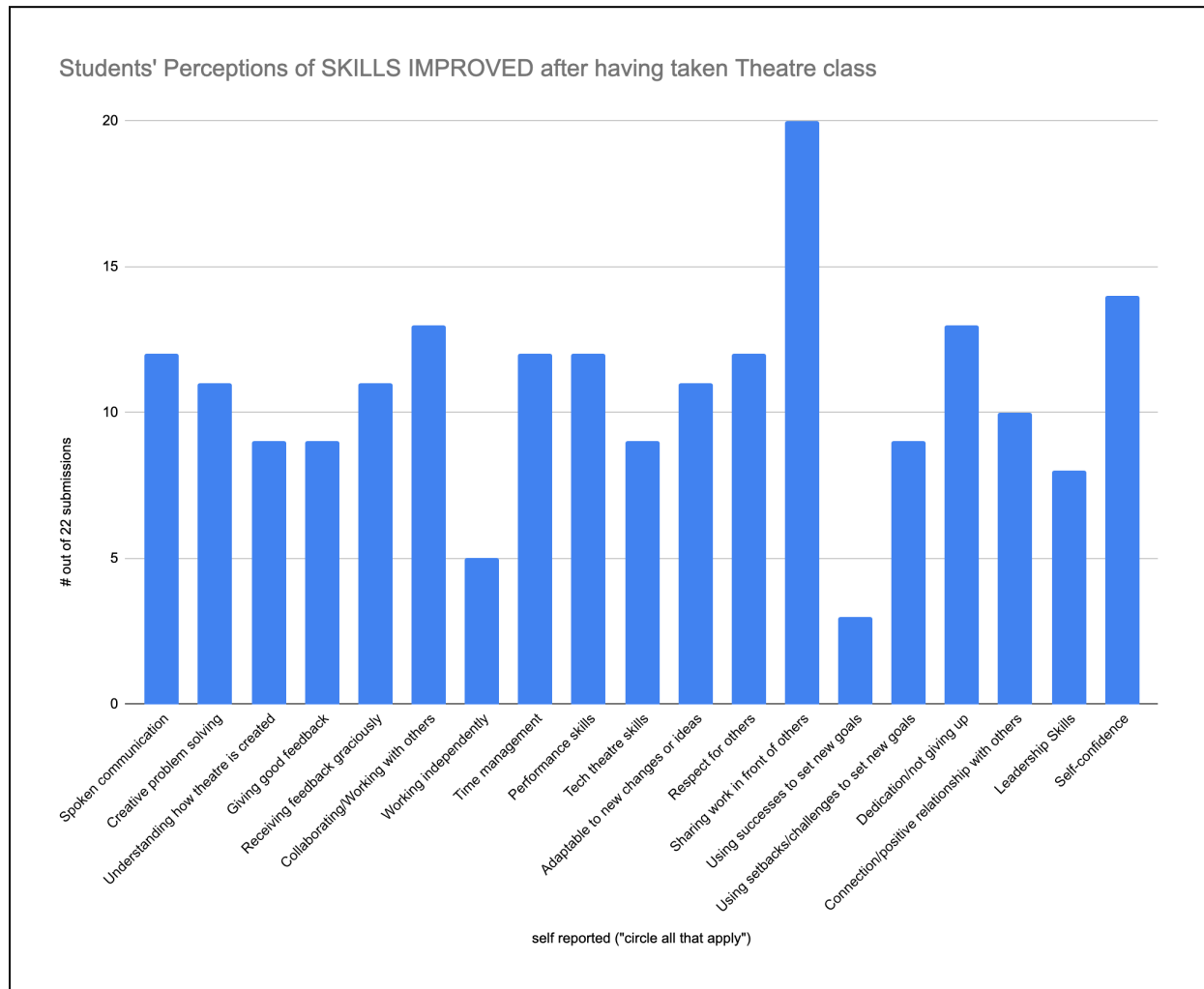
Most questions stayed the same or had an overall decrease in the number of respondents who say they "Agree" or "Somewhat agree" with the statements. The distribution of responses broadened and/or shifted towards the "Disagree" end of the spectrum for almost all of the statements. This could indicate that students were developing more nuanced views of the statements, encountering more challenges to their beliefs than they'd anticipated in Week 1 now that collaboration was part of their everyday practice, or had lost some of the rosy view that they'd started the school year with. Because the respondent demographics also shifted to a younger/newer set of respondents, however, this could also indicate that overall, newer Theatre

students were still developing their attitudes/beliefs around belonging and efficacy in a way that Theatre 2 students had already more strongly developed at the beginning of the term. Further analysis on the differences in responses for the students who responded to both surveys could yield some more specific data, but as their seven responses would represent only a small portion of the students overall, this data would be most useful as case study material for those individuals, rather than data from which any broad trends could be summarized.

At the end of the course (Week 13, during finals), students were asked to identify, from a list of nineteen options plus an “other” (fill-in-the-blank) option, which skills they felt they had improved on after having taken this theatre class. There was no expectation that students identify a minimum or maximum number of responses. Twenty-two students submitted responses; the number of skills each student circled averaged to 9.2. As shown in the graph below, “Sharing work in front of others” was the most commonly reported response (90.9%). Half or greater of respondents also reported that they felt they had improved in spoken communication, creative problem-solving, receiving feedback graciously, collaborating/working with others, time management, performance skills, adaptability to new changes or ideas, respect for others, dedication/not giving up, and/or self-confidence.

Figure 7

Students' Perceptions of Skills Improved after having taken Theatre class



Note. Compiled from student final reflections, 2025, [Graph].

Student comments in their final reflection included many comments relating to student collaboration, creative challenges, emotionally safe experiences, and the strength of personal connections created in the class:

“I learned the most from the set design project because it helped me learn how to better work with others and collaborate our ideas.” -10th grader, Theatre 2

“[I hope in theatre class, you'll get to experience] new relationships and challenging

projects.” -12th grader, Theatre 2

“[If you are nervous about being in Theatre class, my advice is] know that you are safe here, being nervous is okay.” -12th grader, Theatre 2

“E., S., C., A., T., M., thank you for including me in things and thank you for becoming my friends. Love you guys!” -9th grader, Theatre 1

“[The best way to succeed in Theatre class is] be open to random ideas and to work with others that you wouldn't normally work with” -12th grader, Theatre 2

“This class helped me be more social. S. was very nice to me and we became friends through this class” -11th grader, Theatre 1

“There are so many people in this class who have helped me feel welcome.” -12th grader, Theatre 2

“I enjoyed being here a lot. It was super fun and a cool experience.” -9th grader, Theatre 1

Students were asked to describe the class in three words; their responses are shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8

Word Cloud: Student Descriptors of Class

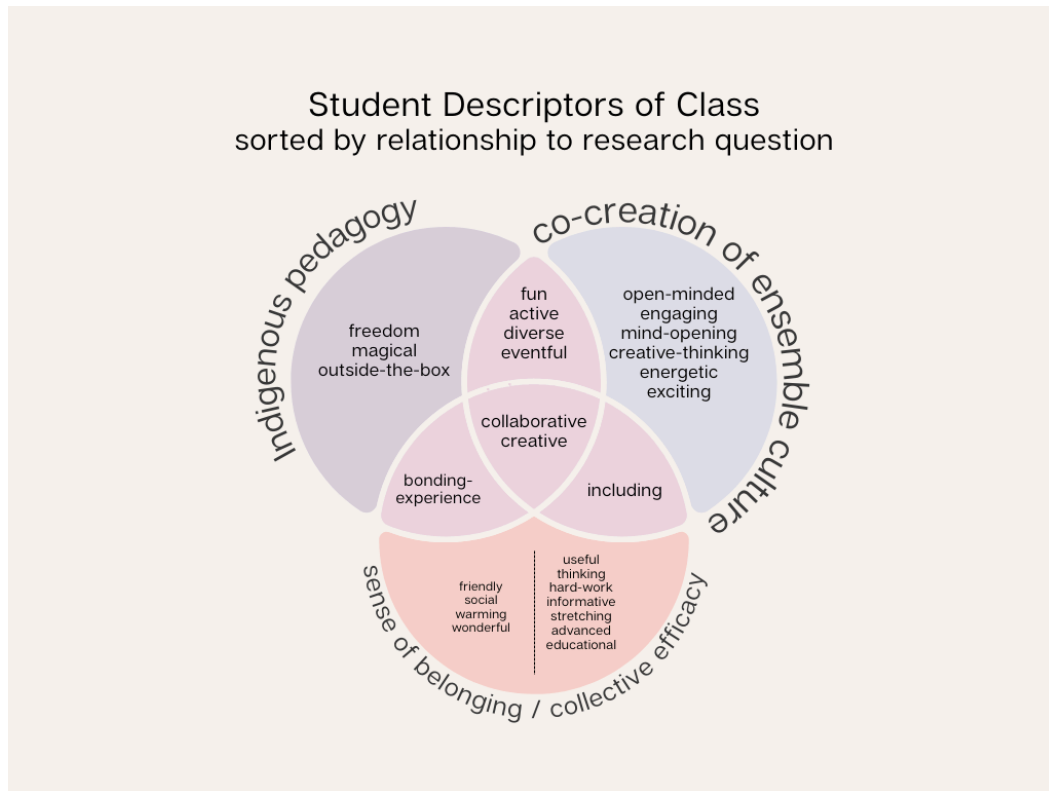


Note. Graphic was compiled from student final reflections, with size of text reflecting frequency of word usage in student responses, 2025, [Graphic].

The word “fun” was the most commonly included (fourteen instances), indicating a broad sense of joy in the classroom environment. I also categorized responses by their relationship to my research concepts; many of the terms students used to describe the class could suit multiple categories, indicating a possible “success” in integrating these theories in a way that felt substantial enough for a student to describe the class with a term that is a marker of multiple categories.

Figure 9

Venn Diagram: Student Descriptors of Class in Relationship to Research Question



Note. 2025, [Graphic].

Data on student perceptions of belonging and collective efficacy reveals varied perspectives when comparing survey responses between the beginning and the middle of the term, with trends showing little to no significant increase and an overall broader spread of responses. However, by the end of the term, many students described the class in terms related to collective efficacy, a sense of belonging, ensemble culture, or Indigenous ways of learning. On average, students indicated the belief that they had improved on nine skills, many in critical areas related to collaborative community work and strong interpersonal relationships, indicating an increased sense of belonging and collective efficacy.

Chapter 5. Discussion, Limitations, & Conclusion

My primary teaching techniques for this project included facilitative approaches to buoy students' work within their Zone of Proximal Development within the context of a multilevel learning environment, the use of collaboration and drama-based pedagogies in independent, partner, small group, large group, and whole class projects in relation to Social Cognitive Theory and its connections to the practical learning effects of belonging and efficacy, and the incorporation of Indigenous pedagogies into the form and focus of class curricula.

My approaches drew directly from Antoine, Mason, Mason, Palahicky, & Rodriguez de France (2018), who emphasize the critical relationship between self-development and curriculum development in Indigenizing education:

The journey to Indigenize curriculum fosters self-development. Whether you are an Indigenous or non-Indigenous person, through this journey you will gain insight into your own culture and background, privileges, or oppressions that have affected your life, and you will identify biases or gaps in your knowledge . . . and actively participate in the hands-on work of revising your curriculum and pedagogical approaches. . . you will reflect upon your own agency in regards to Indigenization, and take action toward systemic change in your institution. (p. 1)

I used their questions for teachers investing in Indigenizing education to shape this initial cycle of personal action research. The following reflection addresses the ways in which my approach aligned or diverged from their recommended approaches to Indigenous pedagogy, ways in which my approach extended their concepts into my specific classroom and research contexts of the combined theatre classroom, and looks towards next steps for my concurrent self- and curriculum development.

• *Goals: Does the course goal include holistic development of the learner? If applicable, does the course benefit Indigenous people or communities?*

The course goals actively emphasized holistic development of the learner. While theatrical learning is the medium and the content focus, the outcomes are focused on students' ability to identify their own values and interests, draw upon their strengths, and develop independent and group goals that serve students in their lives beyond the theatre classroom. The course, however, did not have a clear benefit for Indigenous people or communities in ways that are distinct from the benefits to the student population at large. A possible next step for me as a teacher could be connecting with Indigenous communities in the school district to learn about possible partnerships with the school theatre community in a way that will directly benefit Indigenous students.

• *Learning outcomes: Do the learning outcomes emphasize cognitive, emotional, physical, and spiritual development? Is there room for personalization, group and individual learning goals, and self-development?*

Learning outcomes for the course emphasized cognitive, emotional, and physical development in substantial ways. Each of these facets are addressed through the lens of onstage storytelling by the class community in a variety of configurations, and from the ground up through authentic and original theatrical creation. Spiritual development was not intentionally addressed within this action research project, although a possible connection could be made between students' reflections on their values early in the term and their spiritual development. However, without more research into teaching approaches for intentionally nurturing spiritual development, I do not yet feel equipped as an educator to incorporate specific learning outcomes related to students' spiritual development.

• *Learning activities & Relationships: Have you included learning activities that are land-based, narrative, intergenerational, relational, experiential, and/or multimodal (rely on auditory, visual, physical, or tactile modes of learning)? Are there opportunities for learning in community, intergenerational learning, and learning in relationship to the land?*

Nearly all learning activities in the class were narrative, relational, experiential, and/or multimodal. Drama-based pedagogy necessarily emphasizes these modes of learning, and actively engages multiple intelligences and learning in community. In this course, I attempted to further incorporate intergenerational aspects of learning through leadership opportunities for Theatre 2 students to pass down skills, knowledge, and classroom cultural norms, and through outreach to the onsite preschool to bring them into our community as the audience for the Theatre 1 students' final project. Future opportunities to expand intergenerational learning could be explored through connections to elders in the community. Land-based learning activities were a greater challenge to incorporate in an authentic way, especially if a distinction is made between *land-based* and *place-based* activities. While the collaborative set design project engaged students' connections to meaningful *places*, connection to the *land* requires a more intentional shaping of experiences that students may not yet have in regards to land-based learning. As a teacher, this is also an area in which I am lacking; I will need to do more personal work and research into land-based learning in order to effectively incorporate it into my teaching practice.

• *Assessment: Is the assessment holistic in nature? Are there opportunities for self-assessment that allow students to reflect on their own development?*

Assessment practices, while not studied in the data collection of this action research, tend towards the holistic, especially through process-based evaluation practices. Students reflected on their own development through participation in the surveys used for my project data collection;

this opportunity for reflection on beliefs related to belonging and efficacy could be a benefit to students themselves, not just my own research. The final reflection for the class is the most substantial self-assessment for students, as they are asked to consider which aspects of the class they benefited from, which skills they developed, and what advice they'd give to future students of the class.

• *Format: Does the course include learning beyond the classroom "walls"?*

In one sense, the course does include learning beyond the classroom walls; multiple spaces are utilized for different purposes throughout the course, and the heavily hands-on aspects of the course brings the learning out of the traditional classroom use model. However, I think the authors here are asking me to consider how my course might connect with the spaces and communities outside of the classroom more substantially. I believe that if my future investigations into Indigenous pedagogy focus more on land-based learning, the format of the class will continue to expand beyond the classroom walls. For instance, in the future, I may be able to incorporate site-specific theatre creation for a more meaningful point of engagement with place while still using theatre as the medium for learning.

With the above approaches applied in service of this action research project, my findings aligned with the premise that Indigenous pedagogies could guide the effective co-creation of an empowering ensemble culture. For instance, the personal and holistic aspects of the class helped students identify their own positionality within the theatre classroom community as well as the positionality of the class itself within their lives and trajectories as community members outside of the theatre. The intergenerational aspects of the multilevel class helped create a culture where students are challenged to work within their Zone of Proximal Development and contextualize their learning along a greater trajectory made tangible by the presence of engaged students with a

wide variety of theatrical and cultural backgrounds, and support the growth of the classroom community by contributing to group work and supportive feedback. The place-based aspects of the course, while more limited in its current form, provided an opportunity to transform their individual experiences of meaningful spaces into an experience of collective imagination and creativity. Finally, the experiential nature of the course enabled all students to utilize their various strengths with embodied learning experiences.

The findings of this ARP indicate that when students in a combined theatre class are invited to co-create their classroom culture in substantial ways with the structural guidance of a curriculum utilizing premises of Indigenized education, an empowered ensemble culture can flourish. Data show a likely correlation between personal and holistic, experiential, and intergenerational approaches and increased student engagement in classroom community, especially for younger or newer theatre students, and the presence of clear behavioral markers of belonging and collective efficacy as a result of project work that intentionally incorporates Indigenous ways of learning. The findings also indicate a need, in this specific context, for further experimentation with land-based learning approaches. Because student perspectives largely did not indicate a substantial change in their own beliefs about belonging and efficacy, despite my observation of behavioral markers indicating otherwise, a next step could also include incorporating instructional approaches to increase student meta-cognition of their own personal and community development.

Limitations

The theoretical limitations of this action research project are primarily related to its conceptual vastness. In truth, I feel that my questions were too broad to be fully explored in an action research project spanning one term. I was unable to isolate my findings regarding the

specific effects of any one tenet of the guiding pedagogical theories on any one of the outcomes I desired to measure; there were too many factors to control for, many of which were created by the presence of such an extensive theoretical guide to my action research. With the practical limitations of time, resources, and my own knowledge base, the tenet least explored was place-based learning. However, I do believe that by focusing my examination of my own teaching through the questions presented in my discussion above, I am further able to see where I am already effectively implementing teaching practices that support my guiding theories, and plan to further address the gaps in my own professional development.

The methodological limitations of this project include a limited number of subjects, no control group, subjectivity of the data sources (students themselves), and potential weaknesses in the framing of questions of student surveys. The most complete data came from the project artifacts and the final reflection responses, which were part of the graded curriculum; engagement in these parts of the study was much higher than the optional surveys, which were also disclosed as part of the study to “Help Sullivan with their project!” The data from activities where students were not directly reminded that they were being studied are more robust and more reliable, as participation and engagement were high and students were focused primarily on their own work and interactions; data is more objective, based on observation and on actual artifacts. However, including student survey responses in my analysis also provided thoughtful reflection from the students as insights into their personal perceptions. Still, this data has limitations, especially in my wording of each question; framing questions such that affirmative responses are assumed to be the desired response, especially amongst a group of students who are largely inclined to want to please me as their teacher and director, has the potential to skew the results in favor of overconfidence in the effectiveness of my teaching approach. This is

potentially somewhat mitigated by the opportunity I included for respondents to include comments or explanations in their surveys, giving them an “out” to share a less affirmative response with the option to justify it. Implications for methodology in future study include rewording questions to a more neutral framework, and including survey questions that ask students to identify more objective aspects of their experience, such as the question I included in the Week 6 survey that asked students to identify how many students they knew in the class.

I encountered my greatest personal challenge of my teaching practice in my attempt to incorporate the place-based tenet of Indigenous pedagogy. Challenges of this project included my own lack of experience guiding the unit that focused primarily on; I was piloting this project for the first time. 15.4% of students struggled to identify a place of belonging or connection, and I realized that the project assumes all students have a place or memory that sparks a sense of belonging/connection. While all students did eventually find their inspiration, it made me consider how I might frame the project differently in the future to ensure greater accessibility for all students. I also believe that of all the tenets of Indigenous pedagogy that I brought in to this action research, the place-based aspect was the most challenging for me to incorporate as a non-Indigenous educator who also does not live in the community in which I teach; a major implication is the need for my to continue my own personal work on Indigenizing my perspectives and finding ways to connect to the land on which I teach. Another challenge of the project was the length of time that this project took, since it involved 3D crafting using scrap materials. One observed behavior was the creative use of materials to bring their visions to life, but this type of hands-on learning takes trial and error, which is necessarily lengthy. In their final reflections, multiple students identified that this project was the part of class they learned the most from, but many also commented that the project had taken too long to complete. This is

useful data for me to continue to refine the ways in which I structure this project to keep the momentum of learning from plateauing.

The practical limitations of this action research project are primarily rooted in the unique context of this study as situated within my multilevel classroom, at its point of development as an emergent program in the school day-offerings of the district, and which includes significant influence from the extracurricular components of the program. Although many of the curriculum approaches could be echoed by other theatre educators in their own contexts, the study as a whole is not replicable in a way that could support any universal theories that purport to address the effects of incorporating key aspects of Indigenous pedagogy on the co-creation of ensemble culture in a combined theatre class. Because there is little standardization for theatre curricula and program trajectories across, for instance, public high schools, even in the same geographical area, similar studies would likely yield different results, especially since so much of the data sourced from student perspectives would also be influenced by each student's unique background, values, personal beliefs, and personal priorities. In a study such as this, there are simply too many factors to control for. However, the methodology and pedagogical approaches could still be used in other contexts—for instance, to investigate the comparative development of ensemble culture in a classroom before and after, or with and without, incorporating the approaches utilized in this study. A meta-analysis approach, such as the one used in Donohoo, J., Hattie, J., & Eells, R. (2018), then could be used to look for trends across different school or program contexts, which could yield more confident assertions. Further, applying a longitudinal approach to study the effects of the approach over the course of several school years, or cycles of students, could potentially result in researchers' ability to make more specific recommendations

about which approaches yield more consistent results in terms of impact of student collective efficacy.

Conclusion

The purpose of my study was to challenge the default methods of theatrical education in the United States, which centers product over process and achievement over collaboration, and instead align my teaching approach with principles long-used by Indigenous peoples to center community in learning. After completing this study, I have learned how incorporating Indigenous pedagogies supports the development of a co-created ensemble culture, and been challenged to release ingrained aspects of white supremacy culture in order to better support all students in pursuit of a liberatory education. My research has highlighted the vastness of the project beyond my current action research—and thereby the urgency with which I should implement, however imperfectly, anti-oppressive practices into my teaching work. After all, as Antoine, Mason, Mason, Palahicky, & Rodriguez de France (2018) point out,

in a world that has been saturated in Western dominated values, and in which Indigenous knowledge has been systematically excluded and devalued, doing nothing is a form of perpetuating this exclusion. It is critical that people from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous backgrounds contribute to the work of Indigenization. This is everyone's responsibility.

In fact, learning from mistakes is a common aspect of Indigenous pedagogy, as it involves experiential learning and self-development. (p.

34)

My experience of working on this action research within a theatre classroom, where experimentation is celebrated, is the ideal space to make the necessary mistakes of progress.

Likewise, my findings, while too limited for statements of sweeping universality, affirm that theatre, as an experiential, relational, and narrative medium, is an ideal context in which to provide opportunities for students to learn, in an embodied way, how to create and participate in collective endeavors that will benefit all.

This research provides a stepping stone for further exploration of the ways in which Indigenous pedagogies can be further incorporated into the theatre classroom, as well as other content areas, to transform our schools and communities through the empowerment of students, not for their potential future contributions to society, but as *current* community members whose backgrounds, experiences, and ideas are valued.

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