

NEO-FUTURISM  
AND CREATING A TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY HIGH SCHOOL  
THEATRE CURRICULUM

by

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my brave and talented high school students and their teacher,  
without whom none of this would have been possible.

“Yes! Sure! Make it work!”

-Trish Everett

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## ABSTRACT

Thirty-two students worked together for eight weeks to write nearly fifty short plays from which thirty were selected, produced and performed in a production titled *Warning May Cause Irritation*, inspired by the Neo-Futurists' signature show: *Too Much Light Makes the Baby Go Blind*. Nineteen students were also involved in the concurrent case study of the project and kept journals, participated in focus group sessions, developed scripts and filled out worksheets. Data generated was analyzed for evidence of student empowerment, relevancy of the work to student's lives, and their ability to work democratically.

In the end, it seems the students enjoyed and felt empowered by the democratic process used to generate the final production and the result was an educative, relevant and fulfilling experience that may inspire some to continue working in the theatre and the students seemed open to continuing to explore nontraditional theatre projects in the future.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

As a theatre artist, educator, and beginning scholar I am interested in exploring issues of power within the theatre production process and in particular how those issues arise in high school theatre production programs. The Devised Theatre Project sprang forth from my desire as both a theatre artist and theatre scholar to explore issues of power within the theatre production process and specifically to seek out ways to empower high school theatre students. I decided to design a project in which I used the theatrical style of the Neo-Futurists' signature show *Too Much Light Makes the Baby Go Blind (TML)* to frame the work with thirty-two high school students. Going into the project, I felt that an original student created production of *TML* could give students power within the production process and, moreover, it would likely create a production that was highly relevant to the student performer/writers given that the material for the production would come directly from their lived experiences and day-to-day realities.

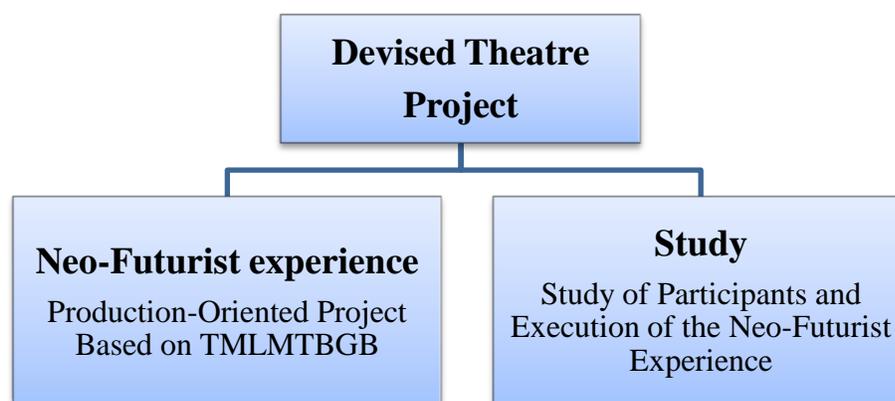
While there is some research on alternative and critical pedagogies in secondary theatre education, such as the work of Gonzalez, Lazarus, Rohd and others, more case studies are needed to describe ways in which this sort of work can be done in theatre classrooms. Such case studies can also consider the effectiveness of devised theatre project in terms of empowering theatre students and engaging them actively in their educational and artistic experience. This project was designed to serve as one case study highlighting the ways a potentially more democratic environment could be created during the production process. The research study of the experience was developed to run

concurrently in order to answer my perception of the need for more research on such projects.

I offer this case study as one way in which high school drama teachers interested in alternative ways of working with their students can achieve democratic results on the school stage. By altering power relationships within the traditional production hierarchy, students are exposed to a different way of working in which their opinions carry more weight and equally more responsibility. By giving students greater responsibility in the artistic direction of theatre work, they ultimately become thoroughly engaged in the *process* of making theatre as well as the product.

Studies about making curriculum relevant are omnipresent in educational research as seen in the work of Harrison and Scriven; Killeavy, Collinson and Stephenson; Dash; and Krell-Oishi who all advocate for curricula which tap into students' prior knowledge and experiences in a meaningful and grounded way. In addition, arts educational research has shown that students involved in the arts (especially music) and sports tend to have lower dropout rates and higher test scores (McNeal Jr., Catterall). Both areas of research suggest then that making theatre as inclusive and relevant as possible could have far reaching effects beyond the stage. The more relevant school programs can be for their students, the more likely it would seem that students will maintain interest in completion of school and becoming active, productive members of society. More research is needed however, specifically examining school-based theatre programs for their relevance to students' lives.

The Devised Theatre Project effectively encompassed two main components: the Neo-Futurist Experience, in which students democratically devised and produced a fully mounted production modeled after *Too Much Light Makes the Baby Go Blind*, and a case study of that project, in which nineteen of the students and I met to examine the process, their experiences and thoughts, and to discuss the pros and cons of doing such work (see figure 1.0).



*Figure 1.0: Model for the Devised Theatre Project*

### **Developing the Neo-Futurist Project: My Personal Investment**

The reasons one feels compelled to teach are many and varied. Some know from the very start that they were meant to teach while others become teachers after time spent doing other work. Some view being a teacher as an altruistic gift of knowledge, while others take a more pragmatic stance that work is work. Regardless of how one comes to be an educator or how one feels about the work, one's own experiences as a student color one's opinions about what it means to receive a good education and how teachers can best teach their students. In her book, *A Teaching Artist at Work*, Bobbi McKean describes this choice to teach as a calling for many, much akin to the choices made by

others in the religious and social services fields. For those most heavily influenced to become teachers because of their past educational experiences, both positive and negative memories can be influential. “For some this calling is reflected in having good teachers in their own lives and enjoying the environments of learning that schools and classrooms provide” (4-5). Yet others feel drawn to teach because of the opposite experience; “...the calling may come from a feeling the educational system was or is less than what it could be” (5). The latter is a decision based on the need to make a difference, a yearning to create positive change within the classroom, system or society and to right what is felt as a past wrong.

My call to teach is very much a combination of the two. My high school theatre experience falls in line with this second grouping and was far from the idyllic image Disney would have us believe comes from working on a high school musical. Looking back, I felt excluded from the entire process because of the formation of student cliques and a director who was undoubtedly talented, but nurtured his artistic vision for a production occasionally at the expense of his student population. It was a world where the director wielded unquestionable authority and those lucky enough to be on the ‘inside’ were effectively guaranteed a role in every show while the rest of campus was encouraged to look elsewhere.

I found a niche instead in the school’s many choirs and found myself in a world where each voice was both literally and figuratively valued; where the efforts of the many led to the success of the whole and where collaboration was happening on a daily basis. When one voice lifted above the others, it was supported by the rest of the ensemble and

the recognition that we could not exist as a group without each other created a sense of community and camaraderie. I later came to identify this as the heart and soul of collaborative work in the arts which has motivated and inspired the rest of my work in the theatre.

It was at Linfield College that I rediscovered my love for theatre in a nurturing and supportive environment of ‘scholartists’ for whom theatre was just as much about the process as the product and who found the teachable moments throughout every phase of production. The smaller size of this theatre department effectively required all hands on deck for each production, and the happy byproduct of the smaller size and production responsibilities was a well-rounded practical education in theatre-making, coupled with coursework on the theory, literature and artistry of the field.

In my third year at Linfield College, I first saw a production of *Too Much Light Makes the Baby Go Blind (TML)* written by Greg Allen and the Neo-Futurists, a Chicago and New York based avant garde theatre company, at a neighboring university, and it seemed to unite everything I had hoped theatre could be. This performance altered my ideas of what theatre was and how it could be created and performed.

### **Developing the Neo-Futurist Project: The Neo-Futurists and *Too Much Light Makes the Baby Go Blind (TML)***

To date, *TML* has run (ever changing) for twenty years in Chicago and for five in New York. The Neo-Futurists are a self-described group of “wildly productive” theatre artists who create “...theater that is a fusion of sport, poetry, and living-newspaper. Non-illusory, interactive performance that conveys our experiences and ideas as directly and

honestly as possible. We embrace those unreached or unmoved by conventional theater-inspiring them to thought, feeling, and action.” (A Not So Quick History of the Neo-Futurists). Each week, the Neo-Futurists write, rehearse and perform new plays to add to their ever changing ‘menu’ of play titles each performed in a random order called out by the audience. The topics vary wildly from the deeply emotional and dramatic to political satire and the utterly absurd but all incorporate the audience into the performance in some way. Each piece is written by ensemble members and is worked on and developed by the group collaboratively and democratically. Of the thousands of plays that have been written by the Neo-Futurists in the last twenty years, a few hundred have been published into compilations and a live performance CD, and it is possible to secure the rights to produce some of these published pieces. I directed thirty plays of my own choosing from the Neo-Futurist repertoire and created a production with an ensemble of my Linfield peers that began to embrace my developing notions of democratic and collaborative theatre work.

### **Developing the Neo-Futurist Project: Exploration of Power**

My background in Political Science undoubtedly affects my understanding of the potential of theatre to create social, cultural and personal transformation. While historically, the arts have been a vehicle for social change and the promotion of democracy and were also a foundation of Athenian democracy, I find the dominant position of the director in the traditional theatre production hierarchy to be anything but democratic. If theatre is meant to explore social issues and promote dialogue, why is the artistic direction of a production so often solely in the hands of one person? I began an

exploration of this idea while directing my first *TML* production. My hope then, and now, is that some works of theatre can be produced within a more egalitarian and democratic power structure, especially with young people who are given little agency in schools in the first place. I truly believe in the power of the *TML* process and structure to affect change on actors and audience alike and believe the pedagogical implications of doing this sort of work in a high school setting are tremendous.

My love of the *TML* aesthetic and format continued into my graduate work, and I began to wonder how much more powerful the experience could be if a group of actors wrote and devised an all new Neo-Futurist performance using their own words and experiences as material for the creation of new scripts. Upon reflection, I began to wonder how different my high school experience would have been had I experienced such a liberating, creative, inclusive and democratic style of theatre.

My experiences as a theatre student over the past ten years has heavily influenced why I feel compelled to teach as well as how. My high school self has matured somewhat, but the indelible mark left behind from my early experiences in the theatre has influenced my teaching philosophy and much of my artistry. Having spent a significant amount of time in the exploration of political theatre, devised theatre, theatre education and community outreach, I find myself deeply committed to ensuring that other young people have a more positive experience in theatre at a young age than I did and that their talent and potential is recognized and used to the fullest extent possible.

## Research Questions

The following research questions guided the creation of the Neo-Futurist Experience and the study of the project.

- In what ways does the Devised Theatre Project support an inclusive and democratic approach to theatre and empower students?
- Does using a nontraditional style of theatre in a high school setting generate student interest in theatre and school in general?
- What is on the minds of high school age students and how do they translate these issues/ideas to the stage? Or not?
- Do students have an interest in more experimental theatre or would they prefer ‘the old standbys’?
- What are the benefits and challenges of using the TML structure in high school?

My personal history is reflected clearly in the development of the Devised Theatre Project. The Devised Theatre Project was an afterschool theatre production-oriented plan with high school students based on the theatrical style of the Neo-Futurists. In the project, students were asked to write short plays, from which thirty were democratically chosen for public performance. The case study was designed to investigate the students’ reactions to the Neo-Futurist Experience and the end result of their work, a production they titled *Warning: May Cause Irritation*. The project and study called upon the traditions of democratic pedagogy, theatre for social justice and Theatre of the Oppressed and held the central aim of empowering students and fostering democratic collaboration.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The development of the Devised Theatre Project, including both the Neo-Futurist Experience and study, was grounded in the critical pedagogies of Dewey, Freire and Giroux. Each of these theorists offer models of education which speak to the need for empowerment and experiential relevant learning. By applying these theories to my work I sought to create an alternative method for teaching and producing theatre in a secondary school setting. Other teachers motivated by similar goals, such as Gonzalez and Lazarus, also shaped the creation of the project plan and the development of the study.

#### **Pedagogical Theories of Dewey**

The grounding of a case study in theory allows the researcher to develop research questions to direct the work. This project is deeply rooted in the democratic pedagogical theories of Dewey, Freire and Giroux. Though living and writing at opposite ends of a century, these theorists all advocate democratic and participatory styles of education that have the potential to inform the work of the high school theatre teacher in powerful ways. Theatre has great potential as a vehicle for democratic creativity by nature, and when the final theatre project is the result of a group of artists working together to create a new script and production within the confines of a school, the potential for the growth in the way theatre is understood by scholars teachers participants and audience alike has the potential to shift.

The notion that young people are alienated from their own learning experience has long been a topic of interest as educational pedagogies have changed over time. John

Dewey's democratic pedagogy has become a cornerstone of the constructivist philosophies of many educators. John Dewey's theories on the necessity of education are presented in his many works but particularly in "My Pedagogic Creed" (1897), The School and Society (1900), The Child and Curriculum (1902), Democracy and Education (1916) and Experience and Education (1938). In short, schooling was imperative for the proper function of civil society by way of educating the citizenry through shared experience thereby enabling them to participate in the wider democratic discourse upon reaching adulthood. "What nutrition and reproduction are to physiological life, education is to social life..." (11). Dewey says in Democracy and Education, "This education consists primarily in transmission through communication. Communication is a process of sharing experience till it becomes a common possession" (11).

For Dewey, an understanding of the power of communicative experience was key for improving the existing model of education at that time which focused on the transfer of knowledge and facts from teacher to pupil, often without concern for the student's active experience and genuine learning. "Dewey argued that the one-way delivery style of authoritarian schooling does not provide a good model for life in democratic society. Instead, students need educational experiences which enable them to become valued, equal, and responsible members of society" (Neil). In effect, for Dewey, school must become a laboratory and rehearsal space for later in life when students must become involved and aware adults. By providing students with relevant experiences, educators enable students to construct a cache of knowledge which continues to inform an individual's life well beyond the schoolyard.

James Neil, of the Center for Applied Psychology in Canberra, asserts that Dewey's pedagogy relies on two main foci which make up his theory of experience: continuity and interaction. Continuity is based on Dewey's understanding that humans cumulatively compile their experiences naturally and that collected experience is a valued form of knowledge. Interaction takes continuity one step farther in recognizing that yesterday's experiences influence today's present situation and that teachers must be aware of this when working with students.

Whilst they can't control students' past experiences, they can try to understand those past experiences so that better educational situations can be presented to the students. Ultimately, all a teacher has control over is the design of the present situation. The teacher with good insight into the effects of past experiences which students bring with them better enables the teacher to provide quality education which is relevant and meaningful for the students (Neil).

Knowledge of the past experiences of their students can allow teachers to optimize learning in the classroom by creating educational experiences through which students can learn subject matter. Dewey described a sort of pinnacle of such experiences by illuminating the difference between *an* experience and experience as the sum total of many smaller experiences. Maxine Greene described Dewey as having had "a special way of discussing segments of ordinary experience marked by a sense of wholeness and unity and often accompanied by feelings of fulfillment and delight" (4).

We have *an* experience when the material experienced runs its course to fulfillment. Then, and then only, is it integrated within and demarcated in the

general stream of experience from other experiences. A piece of work is finished in a way that is satisfactory; a problem receives its solution; a game is played through; a situation, whether that of eating a meal, playing a game of chess, carrying on a conversation, writing a book, or taking part in a political campaign, is so rounded out that its close is a consummation and not a cessation. Such an experience is a whole...It is *an* experience (Dewey qtd in Greene 4).

I chose to call the teaching/learning portion of the Devised Theatre Project the “Neo-Futurist Experience” because of the significance of the word ‘experience.’ As much of this project is influenced by the ideas of John Dewey, his definition of experience informs an understanding of the nature of the work I conducted with high school students, as well as my desired outcomes. As the Neo-Futurist Experience unfolded, Dewey’s theories continued to inform my interactions with the students as well as how I think about and analyze student responses.

From the beginning, the Neo-Futurist Experience was designed to stand alone, as *an* experience for the students involved as well as the audience who attended performances of the finished production. Students were intended to develop a work with which they were fully satisfied, to solve their own problems, develop their own way of *modus operandi* and to finish the experience feeling sated and fulfilled, valued and empowered. While this thesis focuses on both the experience and the study of that experience, it was always hoped that the designed plan could stand alone and inform other teachers interested in creating a similar kind of educative experience in their theatre classrooms.

This emphasis on connecting learning and experience clearly speaks to the process and artistry of the theatre classroom. “Dewey believed that art is a potent form of communication through which community is developed and political action undertaken” (Mattern 54). Mattern goes on however, to question the role of power in Dewey’s pedagogical model, arguing that “...he erased conflict, negotiation, and contestation— in short, politics— from the world of art. Nor does he address the crucial role of power in the world of art, which can as easily create and sustain social barriers as break through them” (Mattern 55).

### **Pedagogical Theories of Freire and Giroux**

The exploration of the power dynamic in education is undertaken by Paolo Freire in his Pedagogy of the Oppressed and somewhat later by Henry Giroux in many books and publications. Often considered two of the founding fathers of critical pedagogy, Freire and Giroux examine the power dynamic inherent in the student-teacher relationship and seek to make both “simultaneously teachers *and* students” (Freire 53). Freire was adamant in his insistence that students not be treated as blank slates or empty “banks” in want of a teacher to fill them with facts and knowledge. However, where Dewey sees education as a tool of democracy, for Freire and Giroux, democracy becomes a tool of education. By expanding the way teachers and students think about the relationship between teaching and learning, students are given an active voice in the content and methods by which they are taught.

Only insofar as learners become thinking subjects, and recognize that they are as much thinking subjects as are the teachers, is it possible for the learners to

become productive subjects of the meaning or knowledge of the object? It is in this dialectic movement that teaching and learning become knowing and reknowing. The learners gradually know what they did not yet know, and the educators reknow what they knew before (Freire 90).

Expanding on Freire's work, Giroux's pedagogical ideas have particularly salient resonance in high schools with diverse student populations. For Giroux, building on the foundation of Dewey, teachers cannot simply "dignify" the previous lived experiences of their students, but the classroom must work with and confirm their language, histories, ways of learning, cultural cache and lived experiences. The increasing diversity in American schools and across the world necessitates a new point of view.

For educators, postmodernism offers new theoretical tools to rethink [the] contexts in which authority is defined ... [T]he project of radical democracy can be deepened by expanding its sphere of applicability to increasingly wider social relations and practices; encompassing individuals and groups who have been excluded by virtue of their class, gender, race, age, or ethnic origin. What is at stake here is the recognition that postmodernism provides educators with a more complex and insightful view of the relationships of culture, power, and knowledge ... (Aranowitz and Giroux qtd in Kalantzis and Cope).

By re-envisioning the nature of classroom dynamics and the role of the teacher within that experience, Giroux built upon Freire's work to theorize ways in which teachers might create an environment well suited to increasingly diverse and pluralistic societies across the world, as epitomized by the student's experience in the public school

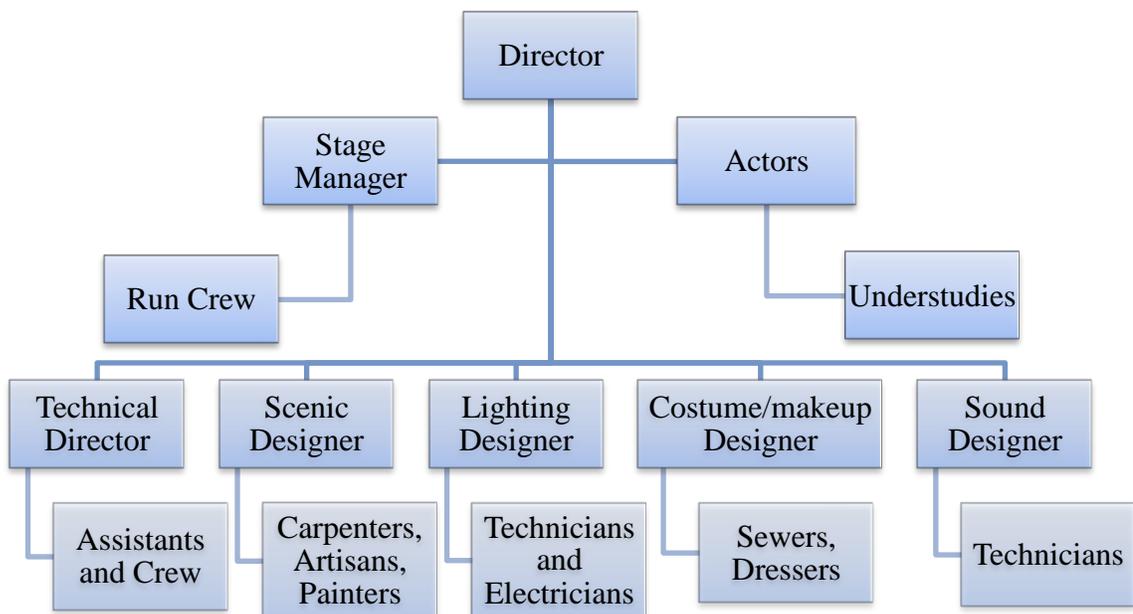
system. The post-colonial worldview, in which the western hegemonic mode of thinking is destabilized and the cultures and modes of thinking of marginalized groups are validated is in line with Giroux and Freire's theories of education. For Giroux and Freire, the concept of a public education begins to shift away from being a tool to indoctrinate immigrant children into the hegemonic way of life, but to strive for social justice and work toward a society in which difference is celebrated as the cornerstone of democracy. Critical Pedagogy ultimately asserts that as society continues to diversify, new ways of instruction will be needed to meet the growing needs of young people in schools.

### **Alternative Power Structures in Theatre**

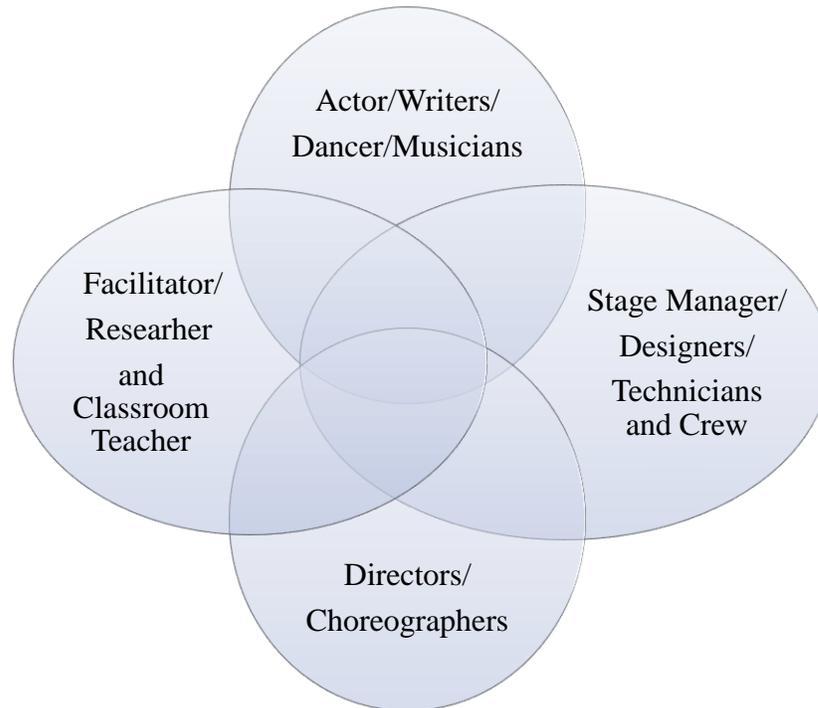
By combining the practices of Dewey, Giroux, and Freire, a critical pedagogy emerges within arts education which enables a more democratic style of teaching and learning, in which learner centered education and student empowerment are at the heart of the exploration of material relevant to the students. Teachers of the arts tend to lean toward more experiential learning methodologies naturally by virtue of the hands on nature of art making. The theatre classroom is particularly active space; it is a place for students to *act* differently than elsewhere in their school, a place for them to experiment with different ways of speech, movement and try on other characterizations of themselves. By defining the active theatre classroom as inherently unlike the traditional classroom with its rows of desks ruled by order, a world of possibilities is opened for students to explore their own agency and for teachers to engage students in the art form.

The following figures 2.0 and 2.1 show the nature of the power dynamics within the traditional theatre production hierarchy compared to a model for the goal of

democratic and equally shared power in the Neo-Futurist Experience. The latter is inspired by Dewey, Freire and Giroux's ideas of the educative experience and negotiation of shared power in the classroom in which teacher and student become co-learners. This model for collaborative work in the theatre production process relies on rotating authority and power among all members of the group depending on their expertise and the work being done. Through collaboration and group effort, the final result is a production based on a collective vision as opposed to the unified vision of a single director/auteur.



*Figure 2.0 Model of a more traditional director-centered production hierarchy*



*Figure 2.1 Model of the potential power dynamics within the Neo-Futurist Experience*

Theatre has an established place within the world of contemporary critical pedagogy largely because of the work of Augusto Boal and the Theatre of the Oppressed. Inspired by Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Boal sought to analyze traditional foundations of Western theatre and bring attention to long accepted practices which reflect hegemonic will. In his Theatre of the Oppressed work, Boal called into question the accepted hierarchical structure of Aristotle's Poetics and invited theatre artists to consider investigations of other ways of composing, such as the Brechtian episodic structures or his structures of Image Theatre, Forum Theatre and Invisible Theatre (Patterson).

Boal and his staff hoped to bring theatre to the masses and used it in a number ways to effectively democratize the theatre experience. Like the relationship between

teacher and pupil, Boal recognized and sought to bridge the division between actor and spectator. The so-called “spect-actor,” an empowered audience member, is able to become actively involved in the performance, often taking on a role in forum theatre to explore different outcomes and options. Boal’s later work, during a brief stint as a *vereador* (city councilman) in Rio de Janeiro extended Dewey’s notions of education for democracy by taking theatre beyond community or classroom and into houses of government. Through forum theatre, Boal and his staff encouraged community dialogue with legislators on possible solutions to social issues which could then be drafted into legislation (Patterson). “[Theatre of the Oppressed] is basically a form of rehearsal theater designed for people who want to learn ways of fighting against oppression in their daily lives. The theatrical act by itself is a conscious intervention, a rehearsal for social action based on a collective analysis of shared problems of oppression” (Singhal 146).

Boal’s legacy for the theatre classroom is in making the public more aware of the potential for theatre as a tool for participatory social change and for the exploration of ideas in an active and experiential way. Boal’s critique of the Aristotelian core elements of dramatic structure exposes the still privileged position of the Western dramatic tradition. By devising work, Boal and proponents of such work are moving away from Aristotle’s model toward a more inclusive and relevant form.

Recent literature on playwriting and devising, like theories of modern theatre in general, invites us to see performance as an interactive practice that is constructed through negotiation of relationships between the text/performance, the artist and the audience. From this vantage point, composition becomes a dynamic and ever-

changing process, responding to both the personal and the collective experiences of the writer(s). Playwriting and devising become acts of investigation of the set of assumptions that inform decisions about style, conventions, structure and relationships of the given work (McKean, "Composition").

For theatre educators influenced by Dewey, Freire and Giroux, Boal's methodologies offer a model for democratizing a classroom and making relevant and meaningful theatre in schools. The use of theatre to explore issues of social justice is only one way in which the arts are used for other purposes in the classroom.

### **Arts Education: Pedagogical Potential of the Arts**

A portion of the research in the field of arts education is concerned with the issue of what the arts can do for students above and beyond their gaining knowledge in the art form itself. Different research seems to show different results in terms of the lasting benefits of arts education in schools along cognitive, motivational and personal lines. It seems an accepted practice to legitimize the arts not for art's sake, but more in terms of art as utility. Vaughn and Winner completed a study in 2000 examining the link between student's participation in the arts and their achievement on the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT). Twelve years of data from 95% of students taking the SAT between 1987 and 1998 appear to show that there is a statistically significant correlation between achievement and participation in the arts. However moving from correlation to causation has proven difficult. For Vaughn and Winner, this notion that "the arts might generalize to learning in an academic subject area" might be explained by either a cognitive link or a motivational link. That is to say that the arts might transfer skills to other areas, or

students who participate in the arts are given a stronger motivation to succeed academically or are already naturally high achievers.

James Catterall of the UCLA Imagination Project has been studying the neurological effects of art making and argues in favor of the idea of the transference of knowledge. His idea of transference implies that participating in the arts, and music in particular, can lead to unknown “silent” effects in the human mind such as a “change in knowledge, skills, dispositions, and orientations” resultant from the processes in the brain which are stimulated by learning and participating in the arts (7). Catterall goes on to explain that “research suggests that learning in art, and particularly in certain kinds of music, brings change to neural pathways and neuronal firing patterns” (6). He cites as an example the nine-year-old piano student who works away at learning a new piece for the piano, but also “works with no awareness that she might over time be gaining facility for fractions and proportions in her math lessons” (6).

In the age of the increasing significance of test scores as indicators of schools meeting government mandates, it seems natural that educators and school administrators would take notice of the notion that the arts could be some sort of panacea, and some arts advocates are echoing this claim. This correlation has been somewhat exploited as a rationale for the preservation of arts in schools, despite the lack of concrete evidence of causation. As Hetland and Winner describe “One justification for keeping the arts has now become almost a mantra for parents, arts teachers, and even politicians: arts make you smarter. The notion that arts classes improve children's scores on the SAT, the MCAS, and other tests is practically gospel among arts-advocacy groups” (1).

It seems the American public is for the most part convinced: “a Gallup poll last year found that 80 percent of Americans believed that learning a musical instrument would improve math and science skills” (Hetland and Winner).

Hetland and Winner have risen to the forefront as advocates of the arts in schools for art’s sake, abandoning the rationalization of the arts for utility. After a yearlong study of five visual arts classrooms in the Boston area, they emerged with a new understanding of the real benefits of an artistic education:

While students in art classes learn techniques specific to art, such as how to draw, how to mix paint, or how to center a pot, they're also taught a remarkable array of mental habits not emphasized elsewhere in school. Such skills include visual-spatial abilities, reflection, self-criticism, and the willingness to experiment and learn from mistakes. (2)

Many of these skills Hetland and Winner have identified find expression in the practice of theatre making within the classroom.

### **Applications to the High School Theatre Classroom**

For the theatre classroom, conversations about legitimacy of theatre education rely less on the notion that theatre will give students skills in unrelated fields as if by magic, but the arguments tend to hinge on life skills like those Hetland and Winner argue are the natural result of arts work. The creation of positive ‘habits of mind’ trains students to think critically and solve problems creatively, skills that are important in any field and have applications throughout one’s life. Even if one accepts that participation in arts

education has positive effects on students, theatre educators still disagree over how best to go about doing it.

### **The High School Theatre Canon**

A 2008 study by Time magazine sought out the top ten most produced musicals in American high schools (Zoglin). Unsurprisingly, traditional high school theatre fare, such as *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Oklahoma*, *The Music Man*, and *Anything Goes* made the list. Another list compiled by the International Thespian Society indicated that the ‘golden oldies’ of non-musical theatre such as *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *The Crucible* and *Our Town* have been the most produced plays in high schools across the country year after year dating as far back as 1938 (Gillespie). Though these plays introduce students to the theatre canon and receive parent and community support, one cannot help but wonder if this material still speaks to the students involved in these productions today. Additionally, some high school teachers deal with the extra burden of trying to find different and more relevant ways to stage plays that were originally written and performed anywhere from fifty to four hundred years before (Gonzalez, Temporary Stages).

There is however a slowly growing trend away from these old standbys towards more risky contemporary pieces including *Sweeney Todd*, *Urinetown*, and *Rent* which tackle more adult themes and/or address issues of significant social importance (Zoglin). Some opponents argue that these more modern productions and others, like *The Laramie Project* chronicling the (now infamous) hate crime murder of Matthew Sheppard, or *Bang Bang You’re Dead*, a play dramatizing High School shootings, have taken the push

to modernize the high school theatre cannon too far; causing more harm than good for young actors and audiences alike (Urice). Urice argues that the motivations for the selection of controversial pieces must be clearly examined and worries the student's ability to handle the material is often left unconsidered or at best, severely overestimated. For Urice, "it may be that in the quest to be 'relevant,' the best of intentions have gone wrong" (14).

Clearly high school theatre teachers are faced with a dilemma. Should the existing uncontroversial and beloved, but potentially outdated canon continue to serve today's teens? Or should students be exposed to more contemporary theatre with all its potentially negative social consequences? Finding a balance seems to be key.

### **Devised Theatre as a Possible Alternative for High School Drama**

A growing number of classroom teachers, teaching artists and educators associated with professional theatre programs exist who are choosing to create original theatre pieces with their students for performance instead of relying on published works. From the perspective of the high school drama teacher, there is far greater control over the direction and content of the finished piece than simply opting for a more contemporary issue-based play. The potential is also there for the creation of a powerful piece of theatre that can be tailored to fit the needs of the students, community and department administrators (Gonzalez Temporary Stages).

The importance of collaboration in devised theatre is significant. Alison Oddey defines devised theatre as a "work that has emerged from and been generated by a group of people working in collaboration" (1) while John Schmor defines it as "works which are

not initially or primarily scripted by a playwright or dominated by a director-auteur's score, works which are instead created primarily by performers, with designers and directors in intensive collaboration" (259). The methods for devising plays are many and varied, as seen in many books published on the subject, and each theory on the techniques of devising offers suggestions to manage the sometimes chaotic nature of many artists working in collaboration (Gonzalez, Kerrigan, Mandell and Wolf, McKean, Rohd, and Weigler). No matter the technique one chooses for devising theatre however, it is possible to explore socially significant issues in a deeply meaningful way with students and create theatre that rings true to the student actors, designers, crew and community audience. Heather Cousins, a proponent of devised theatre in schools argues,

Currently, American high school students, particularly in the inner cities, are faced with issues that did not affect their grandparents and perhaps their parents and teachers. Gang violence, drugs, AIDS, teenage pregnancy and racism are realities for today's youth. Students are often encouraged to write about such issues in their English classes. Similarly, drama can be an effective place to confront these issues and educate audiences, including sometimes parents, from a young person's perspective. (91)

By finding a balance between published scripted works by professional playwrights and original student driven productions in a theatre curriculum, teachers and students have the opportunity to embrace theatrical production from conceptualization to the final curtain call. By understanding all the ins and outs of the theatre making process, students are exposed to the wider range of theatre skills required outside of the school setting and gain

a social understanding which will serve them well once they leave the relative safety that comes with participation and responsibilities in the close knit school community.

Crystal Brian notes the significant meaning devised work can have in the formation of a sense of community for students. “For student performers in an academic environment, devising is a means of ensemble empowerment, building a community of artists” (3). Furthermore, through devised theatre, by encouraging students to share their ideas, opinions, hopes and fears in a public, formal, artistic and professional way, the community audience validates them as fully legitimized members of that community; the community acknowledges that what they have to say is meaningful and that they are to be taken seriously. The lasting boost to self-esteem and self-confidence from being validated so publicly is a mark that has the potential to affect the rest of a student’s life.

While there is bound to be some fear of the unknown in doing a completely devised theatre piece in place of a tried and true production, students will be challenged to think as writers, actors, directors and designers all at the same time, and will hopefully breathe new life into the theatre making the entire process an extended learning opportunity. Perhaps by including devised work in a theatre curriculum that also includes more traditional high school fare, students will be exposed to a broad spectrum of the possibilities of theatre. A broader definition of what theatre is and can be will prepare young people to become more informed artists and audiences. Finding a balance is important when exposing young people to a broad range of theatre styles and ways of working. This is clearly shown in Jo Beth Gonzalez’s classroom.

### **Alternative Models for Theatre Teaching and Production**

Jo Beth Gonzalez's work with her high school theatre students in Bowling Green, Ohio can serve as a model for teachers who seek to emphasize the life skills and habits of mind identified by Winner and Hetland. Gonzalez began the exploration of critical pedagogy and its application to teaching high school theatre in 1999, creating a theory of "democratic theatre directing." Her work, outlined in Temporary Stages: Departing From Tradition in High School Theatre Education and articles "Directing High School Theatre: The Impact of Student Empowerment Strategies and Unconventional Staging Techniques on Actors, Director and Audience," and "From Page to Stage to Teenager: Problematizing 'Transformation' in Theatre for and with Adolescents," relies on the notion that student empowerment strategies and unconventional staging techniques can alter the all too common top down hierarchal nature of directing theatre, and empower young actors and designers to work together in a more democratic and inclusive way. Gonzalez democratized the audition process and made the rehearsal space more empowering for student actors and artists.

Gonzalez creates what she calls a "Critically Conscious Production-Oriented Classroom" or CCPOC. The goals of the CCPOC are fivefold: (1) Class work is intended to create original live theatre to be performed for a live audience. (2) Students are made central to the artistic process by altering the traditional power structure of a classroom. (3) A "democratic construct" in the classroom ensures "the teacher's voice is not *the* voice of authority, but one authority among many" (Temporary Stages 16). (4) Collaborative play development encourages student understanding of self, theatre and

humanity. Finally, (5) a CCPOC will also contain elements of action for social justice, encouraging student awareness of societal difference and privilege (Temporary Stages). By structuring her classroom in such a way, Gonzalez is maximizing the potential for student learning in the art form: the practical skills and processes needed to create a theatre production.

She is also capitalizing on theatre's natural tendency to forge working relationships, teach patience, cooperation, collaboration, reflection and perseverance, all desirable qualities in future employees and coworkers, regardless of the field. These are the beneficial natural habits of mind identified by Hetland and Winner as the primary benefits of work in the arts. Even if Gonzalez's students do not spend the rest of their lives working in the theatre, her democratic pedagogy instills valuable skills in her students and makes them active participants in their own education.

For Gonzalez, the use of this sort of critical pedagogy "transforms practice of standard education, which originate from an ideology that favors white, middle class, European-descended, able-bodied heterosexual Americans (Temporary Stages 2) and is closely allied with practitioners of multicultural education. Given the increasingly pluralistic and diverse society in America, an educational model catering toward the shrinking Anglo majority is unacceptable, and it is no wonder that traditional pedagogy is adapting to meet the needs of a changing student population.

Joan Lazarus' book Signs of Change, New Directions in Secondary Theatre Education follows in a similar vein exploring best practices in theatre education with a strong focus on the issue of relevancy. Lazarus interviewed over one hundred American

theatre teacher-artists to identify the three main traits which characterize exemplary theatre educators and their programs. Lazarus relies on Zemelmann, Daniels and Hyde's definition of a practitioner of best practice as "someone who is following best practice standards, is aware of current research, and consistently offers clients the full benefits of the latest knowledge, technology, and procedures" and applies the definition to a theatre classroom. For Lazarus, a model program is one which incorporates Learner-Centered Classroom and Production Work, Socially Responsible Practice, and Comprehensive Theatre Education.

- *Learner-Centered Classroom and Production Work* implies that students are placed at the center of the educational experience. Students and teachers work together to tackle relevant problems from several perspectives. Content is highly relevant to the students' lives and previous experiences and reflection is encouraged throughout. "Dialogue, collaboration, risk-taking, and experimentation are hallmarks of this practice" (Lazarus 9).
- *Socially Responsible Practice* is indicated by a high degree of relevant performance content, the social context of theatre making is kept in mind, and finally "the program is physically, academically and socially accessible to all students in the school regardless of age, race, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, physical ability or disability" (Lazarus 9).
- *Comprehensive Theatre Education* implies an interdisciplinary and holistic exploration of theatre. Students are scholars, actors, designers, directors, playwrights, technicians, reflective critics and audience members (Lazarus 9).

In reading Lazarus' results in her exploration of best practice, one finds much in common with the progressive educational reform movements championed by Dewey and amended later by Freire and Giroux to reflect the changing needs of society and children outside of America and in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Stefani Woodson's article, "Creating an Educational Theatre Program for the Twenty-First Century," highlights her model for a theatre program which shares many similar characteristics to Gonzalez's "Critically Conscious Production-Oriented Classroom" and seems to incorporate much of Dewey, Freire and Giroux's concepts of the ideal classroom as well. Woodson holds the incorporation of student ideas and experiences as a core value, thereby creating a powerfully relevant experience for young people through their theatrical work. For Woodson, a theatre program focused on its students' lived experiences would also be:

...A program that treats young people as active agents rather than passive observers, a significant program not afraid to explore big questions, social issues and/or problems, a program that creates advocates for the arts while exploring what it means to be an artist in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a program that celebrates and uses popular culture forms, and a program that creates and promotes caring kinship bonds deeply connected into both the school and surrounding communities. (27)

These examples of the potential of theatre education offer models which depart from the traditional classroom hierarchal model, but in many ways a theatre classroom already does this most of the time by virtue of the material covered and atypical teaching methods required. Making the conscious decision to take the theatre classroom in an even

more egalitarian, collaborative and democratic direction can create opportunities for profound student growth and learning as well as the creation of powerful pieces of theatre.

My model, the Neo-Futurist Experience, expands on the aforementioned models by putting students entirely in charge of the project including the conceptualization of scripts to the directing of each play, the design of the production and making artistic decisions. Because devised theatre has the potential to be a truly democratic form of collaborative theatre work, it offers an alternative way to include as many students as possible in as many ways as possible.

### **Development of the Neo-Futurist Experience Plan**

The Neo-Futurist Experience plan was created to examine three key areas: an exploration of the Neo-Futurist's *TML* form and methodology (30 plays in 60 minutes), a chronicle of the process through which high school students navigated devised play development within a democratic framework and finally an exploration of the issue of relevancy in the high school theatre curriculum. The plan took shape in two phases, the first to work with the students to develop as many scripts as possible, and the second, to transition from a workshop setting into full rehearsal and mounting the final production. An important element in the plan was for students to lead the group in a warm-up exercise before the work began each day. These warm-ups were intended to reinforce the democratic ideals of the project so that authority and leadership rotated and was not solely vested in myself or the classroom teacher by default. Other activities geared toward building a sense of community and group identity were interspersed throughout

the process. Many of these activities came from Will Weigler's Strategies for Playbuilding, Michael Rohd's Theatre for Community Conflict and Dialogue and Sojourn Summer Institute workshop, Augusto Boal's Theatre Games for Actors and Non Actors, Viola Spolin's Theatre Games for the Classroom, as well as games and activities I have experienced as an actor, theatre student and youth counselor in various settings. See A for the complete plan.

My intention in creating this plan was to provide structure to assist students with exploring different periods and styles of modern theater history to inspire their own plays. I recognized that in order to be truly democratic however, I would have to take my cues from the students themselves and how willing and prepared they were to dive into creating their own pieces. The plan was never intended to be followed to the letter, but was ready and in place should the need arise.

The development of the Devised Theatre Project was influenced heavily by the critical pedagogies of Dewey, Freire and Giroux. The Neo-Futurist Experience was inspired by the alternative classroom models proposed by Gonzalez and Lazarus and like Woodson, sought to explore how to contemporize the practice of teaching high school theatre. By using devised theatre methodologies and the frame of the Neo-Futurists, I hoped to create an educative experience through which students could question, explore and express the world around them from the stage while operating democratically. This experience is chronicled in a descriptive case study designed to run concurrently with the Neo-Futurist Experience and details how the process unfolded for nineteen of the student

participants. Chapter Three covers the methodology used for gathering data for the case study portion of the Devised Theatre Project.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodology used in designing and collecting data for the descriptive case study of the Neo-Futurist Experience as it unfolded in the Fall of 2009 in the Southwestern United States with nineteen high school students. Combined, the descriptive case study and the Neo-Futurist Experience make up what I refer to as the Devised Theatre Project. The distinction between the two halves of the project is important to note, because only nineteen of the thirty-two students agreed to participate in the research study portion, therefore it is important to bear in mind that this case study is only reflective of the experiences of about two thirds of the students involved in the Neo-Futurist Experience.

As a participant researcher this study is imbued with many of my personal biases as an artist, educator and researcher. Because of my beliefs, it is likely that students were affected by my personal investment in ensuring the production came together democratically. In order to combat my biases as a researcher, I have tried to make the data analysis as transparent as possible to allow the reader to make a determination as to the efficacy of both my theories and the Devised Theatre Project.

#### **Nature of the Devised Theatre Project**

This study is a single descriptive case study of the experiences of a group of high school students participating in the Devised Theatre Project, a collaborative theatre project based on the aesthetic of the Neo-Futurists. Harling describes a case study as “a holistic inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its natural setting”

(“An Overview of Case Study”). Harling’s definition of case study is particularly clear on the nature of holistic inquiry by recognizing the importance of multiple sources of data from direct and participant observation as well as examination of artifacts. For Harling, a case study must take into account the broad picture as well as the specific and focused collection of data. It is this information that is analyzed to understand a given phenomenon within its specific context. A single case study is limited by the bounds of time and space and is not representative of the much broader whole; however, it offers the opportunity to examine a small portion of a given phenomenon in detail that may suggest new theories that pertain to the wider world of research.

Given the restrictions of time, a single descriptive case study of this project’s application at one school site was optimal. Given the artistic nature of the Neo-Futurist Experience, the study needed to be designed to make the most of all forms of data. Given that the most long lasting and tangible evidence of any theatrical production is generally the script it leaves behind, I have chosen to include the students’ scripts as a source of data, though IRB protocols insisted that only scripts written by study participants be included. Part of this case study then borrows from Arts-Informed research. In this kind of inquiry, the researcher is allowed to include the arts as a methodology for data collection, despite the potential subjectivity of the art form itself. Knowles and Cole describe Arts-Informed research as “a way of redefining research form and representation and creating new understandings of process, spirit, purpose, subjectivities, emotion, responsiveness, and the ethical dimensions of inquiry” (59). The central purposes of Arts-Informed research is a way to “enhance understanding of the human condition through

alternative (to conventional) processes and representational forms of inquiry, and to reach multiple audiences by making scholarship more accessible” (59). Art-Informed research, as with most qualitative research, poses a challenge to logical positivist methodologies and asserts that there are multiple ways of knowing and explaining human behaviors and experience. The transformative nature of participation in the arts calls for a research methodology that can more fully understand the process by which one engages in artistic endeavors as well as the more concrete results of those endeavors. The inclusion of student’s written work in the form of plays which were publicly performed says much about their experience in this project and is a unique source of data to explore what is on the mind of these students.

### **Participant Researcher Role and Ethical Considerations**

As a participant/observer in this project, I designed the Devised Theatre Project, took part in facilitating the Neo-Futurist Experience, and conducted all data collection for the study. As a researcher and facilitator, I brought with me several biases that are seen throughout the design of the Neo-Futurist Experience and the study. I believe that theatre can encourage democratic collaboration and that this is to the benefit of high school students. I believe that students will have an interest in more experimental theatre and that the *TML* structure makes devised theatre more accessible and less intimidating to young theatre artists. I also believe that the creation of an original work will lead to greater investment in the project and a sense that the final product is relevant and meaningful to the participants who created it. I also went into the project believing that

the students were likely to find their own way to navigate writing, devising and creating a finished production.

This kind of research, particularly because of the minor status of research participants carries several key ethical considerations. To protect my subjects and preserve their safety at all times, I worked actively to preserve the anonymity of participants in the study per the protocols of the University of Arizona Institutional Review Board (IRB)/Human Subjects Board and local school district Office of Accountability and Research. IRB and District approval for this study were received, and permission and consent/assent forms were signed by parents and participants prior to their participation in the study, and permission was granted to reproduce student work in whole or in part, as well as student comments in focus group discussions (see Appendices B and C). Participation or lack thereof in no way affected student grades, and study participation was voluntary and nonbinding. Lastly, I was prepared with local resources should any signs of physical or emotional distress arise from the personal and emotional nature of theatre work or writing about personal experiences, feelings and relationships. The classroom teacher was also on hand at all times to assist in dealing with issues of discipline or the health and wellbeing of the student participants.

### **Setting**

The Devised Theatre Project took place in an urban fine arts magnet high school in the Southwestern United States. This high school was purposely selected because of its diverse student population, fine arts magnet status and the existing professional

relationship between Steve<sup>1</sup>, the high school's theatre teacher, and my thesis advisor, Dr. McKean. This particular theatre teacher has a long established history of doing less conventional work with his students, from an emphasis on improvisation and the creation of original short scenes and monologues, to less commonly produced plays. I felt given this kind of preparation in their classroom, that these student actors would be more quickly able to adapt to the Neo-Futurist style and exploration of democratic play building that were built into the design of the Devised Theatre Project.

Devised Theatre Project participants and I met in a small proscenium theater/classroom space with audience seating for about 110 people. The theatre where the project took place was equipped with a mixture of old and new lighting and sound equipment, which was maintained by students with the help of a professional theatre technician who has worked with this theatre program for about ten years. Steve, the theatre teacher, attended each meeting with students to assist in the project and help maintain IRB and School District protocols.

### **Timeline**

I began the project with an informational meeting with the advanced drama class and other interested students to explain the nature of the Neo-Futurist Experience and corresponding study. Auditions for the Devised Theatre Project were held in early September and rehearsals began the following week. Devised Theatre Project participants met after school for two and a half hours, three days a week for seven weeks, and every

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonyms are used throughout to protect the identities of project participants

school day for about three hours during production week prior to opening night. The final production, *Warning: May Cause Irritation*, ran on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights for two weeks and an additional two performances were added the next weekend due to popular demand after the first two weekends sold out.

### **Selection of Participants for the Neo-Futurist Experience and the Study**

Participants for the Neo-Futurist Experience were selected after an audition that was held in the first weeks of school. Auditions were open to any student at the high school who was interested in participating in the project. The criteria for inclusion included evidence of the students' comfort on stage, the creativity of their original audition piece, their mastery of basic theatre skills such as projection of voice, movement on stage, stage presence, confidence, availability for rehearsal dates and performances and a small amount of consideration was made to balance the number of males and females and students from each grade level. About thirty-five students were invited to attend a callback audition in which they performed published scripts by the Neo-Futurists in small groups and were invited to stage the pieces in any manner they wanted.

Participation in the study, which entailed completion of pre- and post- project questionnaires, attendance at focus group meetings, keeping a journal of the experience, audio recording of work in rehearsals and full participation in the development of the final production, was open to any of the students involved in the Neo-Futurist Experience as a writer/performer or as a technician. In order to participate in the study, students and their parents had to sign consent forms, per IRB and school district protocols. Twenty-seven students were ultimately selected to participate in the Neo-Futurist Experience

based on their demonstrated theatre skills, personality, interest in the project and Steve's recommendation. Of those twenty-seven, nineteen students ended up participating in the study.

### **Data Collection**

As with most qualitative research, this study relies on multiple sources of data to increase the validity of my findings. The primary sources of data are a qualitative pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire which were completed by the student participants to gauge their thoughts on and experiences with theatre before and after the Neo-Futurist Experience. These questionnaires can be found in Appendix D.

An additional source of data is a series of informal focus group interviews with a smaller number of the students. These were recorded in audio format for transcription and verification purposes. Questions focused on the process and depended on what issues and points of interest arose during the course of the Neo-Futurist Project. These were scheduled when convenient for the student participants and occurred about every other week for a total of five sessions lasting thirty to sixty minutes each.

Other data collection strategies included researcher observations and field notes, the actual texts of plays written by the students, both those performed and those which were cut by the group, and lastly, by having students keep journals chronicling their thoughts on the Neo-Futurist Experience.

## **Data Analysis**

Verification, reliability and validity were reinforced by sharing my findings with the students to seek verification of my interpretations and to get additional input from them as research participants. I also compared my observations of the process and final product with the classroom teacher to get the impressions of a seasoned theatre educator. Triangulation is made possible by having multiple sources of data. Lastly, the final thesis report maintains a high degree of transparency of data, allowing readers to come to their own conclusions about their interpretation of the data and how well it matches my own conclusions.

By using a descriptive case study of the thoughts and experiences of high school students who participated in the Devised Theatre Project (both the Neo-Futurist Experience and as participants in a University Study), I designed a study to explore the nature of democratic play production and the effects of creating a student empowering production environment guided by the theoretical framework of critical pedagogy and existing models for democratic theatre classrooms. Data sources I collected included qualitative pre- and post- questionnaires, five focus groups, my observations and field notes, the plays students wrote and journals kept by the students. The following chapter explores the project as it was planned and as it was actually carried out.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

For this study, I created the Neo-Futurist Experience in which high school students worked collaboratively to write and produce thirty plays to be performed in sixty minutes or less. This structure mirrors the aesthetic used by the Neo-Futurists, an avant garde performance company based in Chicago and New York. The entire Devised Theatre Project, which includes the Neo-Futurist Experience and this study, was informed by the democratic pedagogies of John Dewey, Paolo Freire and Henry Giroux. A full teaching plan for the original Neo-Futurist Experience is included in Appendix A. Throughout the process students were encouraged to work democratically in selecting plays for the final production, a performance titled *Warning May Cause Irritation*. This process will be described more or less chronologically, and scripts for the pieces in the production written by students participating in the study are included in Appendix E.

Twenty-seven students were selected from auditions to participate in the Neo-Futurist Experience as actor/writers. Of those twenty-seven actor/writers, sixteen students completed paperwork to take part in the study of the project. Three more students, two technicians and one writer, also completed the necessary paperwork to take part in the study. This chapter reports on how the Neo-Futurist Experience unfolded by discussing the analysis of the data collected from the nineteen students involved in the study as I sought to answer the following research questions.

- In what ways does the Devised Theatre Project support an inclusive and democratic approach to theatre and empower students?

- Does using a nontraditional style of theatre in a high school setting generate student interest in theatre and school in general?
- What is on the minds of high school age students and how do they translate these issues/ideas to the stage? Or not?
- Do students have an interest in more experimental theatre or would they prefer ‘the old standbys’?
- What are the benefits and challenges of using the Neo-Futurist’s TML structure in high school?

While I have tried to include as much of the students’ actual words and work as possible, in this study I only represent the experiences of nineteen of the twenty-seven students who met the guidelines of the University of Arizona IRB protocols. Study participants were required to sign subject assent forms and those under the age of eighteen were required to have consent forms signed by their parents/guardians as well. Pseudonyms are used throughout to protect the identities of all study participants.

Will, Laura, Carrie, Jordan, Laurel, Andy, Russell, Julia, Michelle, Lisa, Megan, Jane, Alicia, Anna, and Matt	Actor/Playwright/Director/Dancer/Musician
Jerry	Actor/Playwright/MC
Lydia and Autumn	Lighting Designer and Stage Manager
Melinda	Playwright

*Table 1.0: Project Participant Pseudonyms and Production Roles*

### **What the Numbers Show**

Data collected during the Neo-Futurist Experience from the study included keeping journals and attending focus group meetings periodically. In addition, the written scripts and directed plays from those consenting to participate in the study were also used

as data for analysis. Table 2.0 shows a comparison of the work completed during the Neo-Futurist Experience and divides the thirty-two Devised Theatre Project participants into groups based on those who participated in the experience and those who participated in both the experience and the study.

	ONLY Neo Futurist Experience Participants	Neo Futurist Experience AND Study Participants	
Actor/Writers	10 actor/writers (37% of actor/writer participants)	17 actor/writers (63% of actor/writer participants)	
Technicians	3 technicians (<1% of total participants)	2 technicians (<1% of total participants)	
Journals Kept	Not required	4	
Focus Group Attendance	Not required	18 attended all or some meetings	
Scripts Proposed Prior to Voting	21 of 49 (43% of scripts proposed)	28 of 49 (57% of scripts proposed)	
Authored Scripts in Final Performance	8 of 30 scripts	3 written by a mix of study participants and non-participants (not used as data- per IRB)	19 of 30 scripts
Directed Finished Plays	10 (33% the plays in <i>WMCI</i> )	20 (66% of the plays in <i>WMCI</i> )	

*Table 2.0: Comparison of levels of participation related to participation in the study.*

Five technicians worked on *Warning May Cause Irritation (WMCI)* and were invited to submit scripts for consideration by the group, though none did. What is interesting is that the 63% of the students who participated as actor/writers in both the experience and the study authored 66% of the scripts selected democratically for inclusion in the production *Warning May Cause Irritation*. Study participants also worked in collaboration with non-study participants on three of the finished plays, suggesting that study participant's scripts were chosen by their peers as being outstanding and worthy of public performance at a slightly higher rate than those written by students

who did not take part in the study. This data is also somewhat skewed by the fact that Jane, a study participant and our most prolific writer, wrote four pieces that were chosen for production and proposed many more. While I do not claim a causal link between participation in the study and higher levels of contribution to the creation of the final production, there does seem to be a relationship between study participation and increased input into the final production. I suspect there are a few potential reasons for this. First, the students who opted to participate in the study were in the advanced drama class and therefore had more theatrical production experience and were very dedicated to the production and exploring its process. Anecdotal evidence from casual conversations with these students also seemed to indicate that they were generally more studious and highly achieving academically which could suggest certain work ethic and personality traits beneficial to the process of making theatre in a school setting.

Lastly, the students involved with the study were asked to reflect more frequently on the process of creating *Warning May Cause Irritation*, both in their journals and also in focus group sessions. The research tasks they were asked to complete (primarily the focus group conversations, but also the four students who kept journals), were reflective activities that I believe created a deeper level of engagement overall in the process. As a result, I suspect they may have felt a stronger connection to the work and perhaps even a stronger obligation to actually produce work than their peers who did not take part in study activities.

The four journals that students did write offer interesting insights into these particular students' writing process, their thoughts about the project, group dynamics and

also their trust and comfort with me as a facilitator, adult figure and mentor. Two journals in particular took the form of daily letters directed to me personally. Reading these journals which chronicle students' reactions to my facilitation of this project and methods of teaching have allowed me to reflect more deeply on my own practice as both a theatre teacher and artist.

This depth of reflection speaks to the potential of concurrent production-based research work as a teaching method. Studies such as this one require both teacher and students to reflect upon their creative processes and to analyze what worked well and what can be improved. This sort of reflection is at the heart of collaborative theatre processes no matter whose particular methodologies one uses. Kerrigan, Mandell and Wolf, McKean, Rohd and Weigler all speak to the importance of allowing student artists and teachers alike to reflect on their work. By engaging the work from different places, that is to say reflecting from within the work, and once the work is over, students, theatre artists and scholars can come to see our work, our teaching, and our learning as a mutually inclusive process, each shedding light on the other.

### **The Devised Theatre Project in Action: Auditions and Callbacks**

Auditions for the Neo-Futurist Project were open to any students interested in the project and/or study. Unlike traditional auditions, students were told to prepare an *original* performance piece of their own choosing in the form of a monologue, original song, dance, improvisation, group scene etc. This was left open to the students' interpretation. The week before auditions were held, I conducted an interest session for students in the advanced drama class section to explain the project and the study, as well

as a general meeting for any interested students regardless of theatre experience before school. Seventeen students auditioned on the first day, thirty-six auditioned on the second day for a total of fifty-three auditions.

The audition process poses a challenge to theatre teachers and artists seeking to democratize the classroom. In many ways, having students audition at all places the teacher in an “expert” role to judge and critique student work behind doors; hardly a democratic way to start working together. However, Steve and I felt we needed to hold auditions to gauge the students’ theatrical skills, originality and ability to translate ideas into performance in order to move swiftly into the writing and rehearsing phase of the Neo-Futurist Experience. Without the time necessary to get every student interested in the project working and creating material together and at the same level, and also recognizing the challenge of organizing a devising project and performance with fifty-three students, we had to narrow our group down. Thirty six students were called back for the final selection on Friday of that week.

The callbacks consisted of group readings of prepared sides from the published works of the Neo-Futurists and varied from scenes exemplifying the serious to the absurd. Twenty-seven students were selected to participate in the Neo-Futurist Project as actor/writers based on their basic theatrical skills (projection, volume, stage presence etc.) which they had demonstrated in the first audition, and their ability to understand and interpret script material, which they demonstrated in the callbacks, as well as their excitement for the project and the impressions and opinions of the classroom teacher who knew the students far better than I and other purely pragmatic reasons to do with their

availability and other extracurricular time commitments. Four student technicians brought the total number of Neo-Futurist Project participants to a total of thirty-two.

### **Foreshadowing of What Is to Come**

The audition process itself was a fascinating look into the sort of work I could expect to see later from these students. Many had previous experience doing improvisational scenes and instead of planning a piece ahead, chose to ask for a prompt before performing with mixed success, and some of the improvised performances were stronger than others. Other students based their scenes off of the conversation about what to write a scene about and used this realistic conversation as the jumping off point for the rest of their group scenes; one group of four students explored the notion of “thinking outside the box” quite literally as their piece was performed in a large cardboard box. Several individual auditions by female actors were monologues about breaking up with a significant other and explored the roles of the partner left behind as well as the partner doing the leaving. One student, Laura, looking back at the audition process, described how different the auditions for this project were from her previous theatre work at this school. “I think one of the hardest, and the best things, about this play was that it just forced us to go out of our comfort zone, like starting right away with the auditions we had to break out of our comfort zone and pick a new monologue... memorize a new monologue.”

Some students performed dances and acrobatic routines for their auditions without any “acting” or narrative story line at all. Anna’s audition combined arts forms to create a monologue about the difficulty of a long distance relationship with her boyfriend who

was abroad interspersed with sequences of Irish step dancing. This piece was later included in the final production, entitled “I Need to Dance.” In our final focus group, Anna described feeling empowered by being herself on stage and saying what was on her mind. “Your own self is in the character, like for mine, when I performed mine that is exactly how I was feeling every night. Acting is... a really good way for you to just get up and...do it.” In all, after the auditions, I was left with a tremendous appreciation for the wide range of talents of the young people at this school as well as a tremendous excitement for the many directions the final performance could take given the breadth of the brief performances I had seen.

The callbacks were equally fascinating as I began to see how much these students were willing and able to understand the Neo-Futurist aesthetic from the published sides I had selected for the callback rounds. With only one exception on the part of some beginning actors, every scene showed signs of understanding the scripts’ meanings and intentions from the ironic to the over the top, to the deeply emotional and meaningful. I witnessed students working together to explore different ideas for staging each script and clear choices for objectives and intentions behind the words they performed in front of myself, their teacher and their peers. I was also impressed by their desire to work with students they had not worked with before and by the leadership shown by the advanced drama class seniors while working with and guiding the less experienced underclassmen in their scenes, while not overtly dominating them in the process. After emailing and posting the cast list, the excitement of the cast was palpable as they let me know of their acceptance of their roles within the ensemble.

### **Picking the Ensemble**

One student, Jerry, who asked for consideration during his audition, was given the role of MC for the performance. Another student, Melinda, expressed interest in assisting with the project as a writer, but not as a performer, largely because of other time commitments after school. The classroom teacher, Steve and I discussed the pros and cons of having a writer on the fringe of the project, and it was determined that we would offer the ultimate decision to the group as a whole, in keeping with our democratic goals for the project. The twenty-six other students in the cast decided to look at whatever Melinda submitted and see if there was a place for it within the final selection of thirty scenes and adapt the work as necessary. This decision was proposed to Melinda, who agreed that the cast could use her material as they saw fit. In the end, one of the final thirty pieces was written by Melinda and was edited slightly and directed by another student from the cast. Melinda only submitted two pieces at the beginning of the project, but I felt it was important to offer non-self identified performers the opportunity to participate in the project and the creation of the final production.

In hindsight, the use of auditions, a fairly standard method for a theatre director to assess a large number of actors' practical skills, was hardly democratic. However, with over fifty students auditioning for a place in the Neo-Futurist Experience, I could not think of a more democratic way to handle such a large volume of interested students given the limitations of time and space. By having the students perform original works and improvisational scenes, as well as giving them the opportunity to audition in groups, was a departure from the more standard required monologue audition, and gave some

autonomy to the students as they decided what they wanted to show me. This is very much in line with the democratic aims of the project as students are given greater agency within the audition process. Finally, I do believe this project is possible to conduct with a larger number of students, however, the lengthy amount of time required to come to consensus over the finished artistic project would require significantly more time than we had at our disposal as well as a larger theatre space.

### **The Devised Theatre Project in Action: Building Community and Beginning Work**

A significant amount of the Neo-Futurist Experience plan was devoted to games and activities designed to build a sense of community among the students and myself. My colleague, Sarah K. Smith, describes the development of a sense of community in theatre work quite eloquently. “Building community begins with creating a safe environment to work together and to create an atmosphere which fosters open dialogue, creative contributions, trust, and risk taking. Theatre work, a fundamentally collaborative art form, requires a safe space” (26). Name games, improvisational games, group challenges and group warm-ups are all ways to use theatre techniques to begin building a sense of community. By encouraging an environment based on trust, mutual responsibility and a common sense of purpose, I hoped the students would feel at ease sharing and critiquing each other’s work throughout the weeks to come.

What I had not considered ahead of time was that the majority of the students I was working with had known each other most of their lives and had been performing together for several years at the high school level. What I seem to have ended up with was two communities in one, divided largely along age lines. The more advanced

students who were all taking advanced drama together formed one faction of juniors and seniors, while the other was made up of the younger students, sophomores and freshman who were newer to the theatre program at this school by virtue of their grade status. My efforts shifted somewhat to integrate the younger students who had not been in productions with the older students. Cecily O'Neil describes her observations of students who have been given authority over the artistic direction of their theatre work.

As students become engaged in the experience and develop an interest in and commitment to the work, they are likely to begin to take an increasingly large part in...structural decisions and become co-creators with the teacher. Eventually, if the teacher is successful in transferring power and responsibility for the work to the students, the developing meaning of the event will be in their hands and they will make it their own (qtd in Gonzalez Temporary Stages 7).

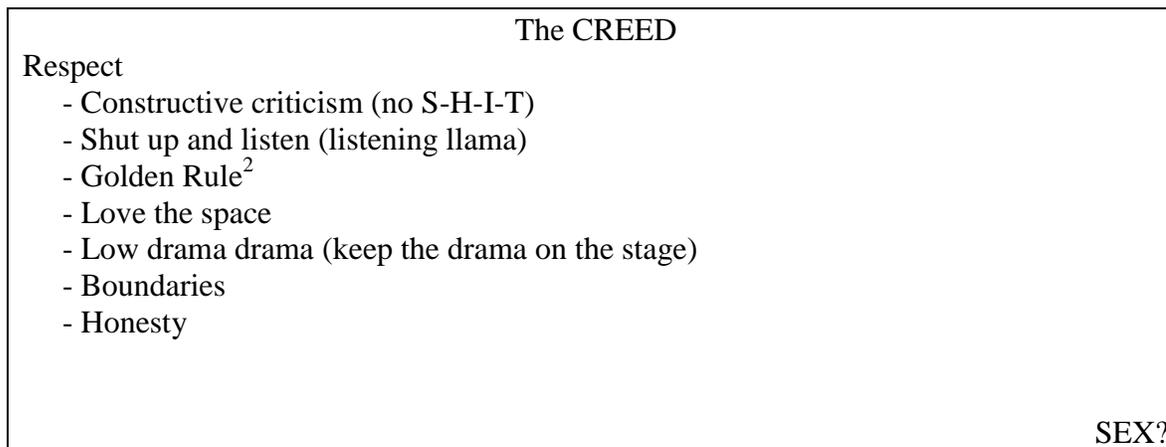
Following this idea, I began each session by having one of the students lead a group warm-up activity. The student-led warm-ups allowed the individuals within the ensemble to take on a small amount of responsibility and began to shift authority away from myself and the classroom teacher, Steve, and toward the students.

Having the final production being almost exclusively student driven meant that the transfer of power needed to begin immediately. Steve and I participated as equals in the warm-ups along with the students and tried not to interfere as students began to experience leading themselves and their peers. An interesting trend developed in which students began to base their warm-ups for the group on what one student did early on. Without any actual discussion on the matter, we seemed to start each session standing in

a circle and attempting to walk in unison three steps, turn, walk three steps out, and jump, without any particular person acting as leader. When first proposed, this seemingly simple task was very difficult and someone was invariably out of sync with the rest of the group, but as we continued to work at it over the course of the first few weeks, the group got closer and closer to working as one. This simple exercise effectively represents the process by which this group of individuals began to work as a cooperative unit. By recognizing that we were a group of individuals with group and individual goals within the context of the Neo-Futurist Experience, we learned to work with each other.

### **The Creed: Foundations for Success**

Another way of building community for the participants in the Neo-Futurist Experience was to set ground rules for what we needed in order to work effectively as a group. Again, hoping to encourage student leadership and the promotion of a democratic way of working together, I asked for a student to volunteer to take notes and lead the discussion. Autumn, the stage manager, took over gladly. After some discussion, the group decided to call our document “The Creed” which was retained for later if it needed revision or review. The following is a recreation of The Creed.



*Figure 3.0 The Creed, written by Neo-Futurist Experience participants*

On the bottom of this page is written “SEX?” in smaller letters. This was proposed by one member of the group and was hotly debated for some time by the group at large. It was important to me that the students not be censored by Steve or me at this early point in the process, so we encouraged this discussion. In the end, the group decided to include it with the list but not give it the same weight as other aspects of The Creed. The students were keen to make sure that no subject was completely off limits in this process. The meaning of the inclusion of “SEX?” is less a signifier of a desire for sex among the group members, but rather came to mean a general openness to otherwise taboo, unsavory or particularly unusual ideas being presented and discussed rationally and freely by the group. The issue of censorship and the appropriateness of material for this particular high school stage would come up on several occasions throughout the project.

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<sup>2</sup> i.e. do unto others as you would have them do unto you

The second page of The Creed included the following points:

<p>Communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Twinkles</li> <li>- Admit Half-Assery</li> </ul> <p>Commitment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- to the project</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Focus</li> <li>- No negativity</li> <li>- Be Punctial<sup>3</sup> (and show up)</li> <li>- To <u>school</u> (and <u>self</u>) water</li> </ul>
---

*Figure 3.1 Page two of the Creed, written by participants*

The Creed is particularly interesting as a diagnostic tool for where the students were at the beginning of this project. Much of their expectations for what the Neo-Futurist Experience was going to entail were based on their previous experiences in the classroom, at theatre workshops and summer camps, all of which were environments with one clear director or teacher/authority figure. A significant source of trepidation that arose from our discussion of how to conduct our work was the students' need for clear and respectful communication. "Twinkles," or wiggling one's fingers in the direction of another person with whom one agrees, was a visual cue added to control the chaos of excessive verbal agreement with a proposed idea. "Twinkles" was instituted during the rest of the discussion and was adopted into our *modus operandi* for the rest of the project.

The idea of working democratically without the traditional power hierarchy of the theatre production process brought up a lengthy discussion about issues of responsibility. The inclusion of the bullet points under commitment (commitment to the project, focus on the project, staying positive, punctuality and reliability and staying on top of school work and one's personal health), as well as the need for admissions of "half-assery"

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<sup>3</sup> (sic)

(referring to when a written piece was not fully developed due to laziness or lack of time) and the need for respect for the self, others and the theatre space, are all issues related to the students' perceived need for themselves and their peers to act responsibly while working together.

“Constructive criticism,” “low drama drama” (or minimization of group infighting, gossip and hurt feelings), the need to respect (and push) boundaries and deal honestly with each other are all ways in which the participants verbalized their need for clear and respectful communication. As the Neo-Futurist Experience continued into the following weeks, the students struggled with the majority of the tenets of their creed and personal responsibility and respectful communication proved to be very challenging. We referred back to the creed occasionally to remind ourselves of what we had committed ourselves to as group dynamics shifted.

### **Charting Our Course: What to Write About?**

A central research question of the study explored was what is on the minds of high school age students and how might they translate these issues/ideas to the stage. This exploration began on the first day. We developed a list of the topics that were interesting to write plays about for the production. The list of topics we brainstormed was diverse and included homosexuality, transexuality, racism, the role of the media in contemporary culture, parents and family, materialism, contradictions, vampire satires, what people do when they have to go to the bathroom, dealing with rude service people, enjoying/questioning life, cancer and sickness, the stress of college applications, high school parking, aging, budget cuts, teachers, theatre's role in society, drugs, awkward

situations, popularity, the Jonas brothers, high school romance and sex, phobias, southwestern people of note, and feeling like an outsider. Clearly there was a lot on the minds of these students and they were excited to explore these ideas using theatre as a medium for expression. I wrote in my journal that night, “I am excited that the first thing suggested was a play about homosexuality followed by “transgenderedness.” Very interesting how open and honest [the students] are with each other already. The community hasn’t really formed yet and these are already out in the open.”

Interestingly enough, almost all of the plays included in the final lineup for *Warning May Cause Irritation* were about topics on this list we made during that very first meeting. The production was a balance of political, social, and cultural influences. When asked what the show was about, Matt described it as being about “Everything and nothing” while Jane said it was about “what’s in our minds, in our hearts, in our souls” to which Autumn added “...and there was a lot of heartbreak!”

### **Getting to Know the Students and Getting Them on Their Feet**

One of first exercises I did with the students was adapted from Will Weigler’s Strategies for Playbuilding. I created my own “Inventory of Skills and Knowledge” (see Appendix E), providing students a chart where they filled in their theatre/performance/arts skills and knowledge. Weigler’s inventory recognizes performative skills that are not necessarily always used in a run of the mill theatre performance. Skills such as juggling, foreign languages, whistling, singing on and off key, knowledge of theatre and film genres and so on are only sometimes called upon by directors in a school setting. As Weigler notes, for the purposes of collaboratively

devised work, the inventories allowed students to get to know each other better (thus building community) and also provided a springboard from which we could jump into creating scenes.

All but two of the students took their completed inventories and the challenge of creating a scene using some of these skills and ran with them. While the rest of the pairs were working, I side coached the two students who felt stuck until they were satisfied they had an interesting direction to explore. I wrote in my journal that night, “Everybody was on their feet after about two minutes. There seems to be a wide variety of insanity going on. The scenes on the whole were very different but all were comedic. I didn’t really expect to have any students do anything serious, but most of the scenes incorporated elements of mockery of pop culture references, borrowed on clowning/mime traditions, or were done to get a laugh out of the audiences.”

Some of the skills discovered during this process did find their way into performances in the final production. For example, one student Will wrote on his inventory that he “love[s] to make wacky sound effects,” and that he “love[s] to jump and run around.” A piece he wrote with a few other cast mates included him in the role of a “spinotriotypus” named Sparky, a mythical and almost extinct species of raptor. Will made startlingly high pitched screeching noises and impressive vertical leaps while in his dinosaur character before devouring his scientist keepers off stage during this fake nature documentary. Meanwhile, Lisa’s inventory listed that she only wears bell bottomed jeans which became part of her monologue “To Whom it May Concern.”

As a diagnostic tool, the inventories and scenes allowed me, as a visiting teaching artist, to get a sense of the students' existing performance skills. As the students and I were still new to each other, the inventories were a way for me to establish a baseline and see if any work needed to be done in terms of teaching the students how best to present themselves on stage, how to maximize their stage space and evaluate the students' abilities to work together. The inventories also allowed ensemble members to see each other's more unusual skills. Not knowing the students as well as a classroom teacher might know their students, I felt I needed to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the cast as quickly and covertly as possible.

As a result of this exercise, I discovered that the students were quite adept at physically moving through the space, but that some time would need to be spent on the more verbal aspects of acting onstage. Many of the scenes the students devised together included the use of unusual accents which were difficult to understand from the audience. Volume and the appropriate use of their voices was also an issue to be looked at as my journal reflects. "The students used lots of weird accents which were often hard to understand. Something worth working on is how to be loud but still be comprehensible in their space, there was a lot of yelling going on which got muddled in the ceiling." Due to the long and narrow stage space and fairly high ceiling, the students' voices were being lost and from my perspective as an audience member, it felt like they were "miles upstage." The depth of the stage highlighted both an acting and design challenge I needed to pose to the students as we continued to work.

### **How Do We Want to Work Together?**

After finishing with the Inventory scenes, I initiated a conversation with the students about how to conduct our work. This discussion raised more questions than answers, but in keeping with my overall goal of creating a democratic process for devising, I was very keen on having the process for creating, working, refining and selecting plays emerge from the group. I did not want to impose a structure on them from the top down. More than actual ways of working, we discussed complexities of working together democratically. The student's two main concerns were about casting and not hurting the feelings of their fellow writers. There was a sense of concern over the fairness of the number of plays one person could have in the final production and the number of plays a given actor could perform in. In the end, the students agreed that the likelihood of these decisions being *perfectly* equal was very low and that it did not matter too much.

I was impressed by their ability to understand that the needs of the production would be best served by the group working together and that each member of the group had different skills to offer. In the final production, one student ended up writing or co-writing seven pieces and several students never even proposed a piece. The young men in the cast had a significantly higher amount of stage time than the women, but this was inevitable given the over two to one ratio of women to men in the cast. The practical realities of theatre making were not lost on the students and they realized that every person could not be in every scene.

## Changes to My Plan

As seen in Appendix A, as part of the overall design of the project, I prepared an extensive plan for the Neo-Futurist Experience. My goal with the plan was to have an outline of exercises that I could use should the students have difficulty coming up with material or generating ideas. Once we were started I soon realized that this was far from the case. Most of the students never seemed to struggle much with writing material for the group to explore. For the most part, the day to day routine was developed by the group and we were able to adjust our work depending on the mood and preparedness of the students on a given day. I sensed by the third meeting with the students that following my strict plan as originally designed was not going to best serve the students or the project, and the plan came to serve more as a safety net should we ever need more structure. Instead, over the course of the project, we developed three different ways of working. At the start of each rehearsal, students led group warm-ups. After that, I would ask what the students had prepared and how they wanted to work. From there, our work proceeded in one of three ways.

- **Facilitator Motivated Work:** On days when the students had no prepared work (usually at the beginning of the project, or as a response to the students' request for more structure), I would propose activities to generate material. These activities came from the plan I had prepared in advance for the experience. An example of this kind of work was the piece developed after the students shared their inventories of skills and knowledge with each other and created a performance piece.

- **Conceptual/Idea Pitch:** On days when one or more students had brought in ideas, those students would pitch an unwritten concept for a piece to the ensemble. The ensemble members then chose which idea they were most interested in developing. Groups would form to develop the work through improvisation and discussion leading to the creation of a script. “Awkward Situations” was one example in which one student proposed an idea of a list of awkward situations the students had been in, and any student interested in submitting a situation would be incorporated into the final piece
- **Script Pitch:** On days when one or more students had prepared a rough or even completed script, the writer(s) would ask for volunteers to perform the roles needed and the script would be performed for the group and then discussed and improved. Russell’s play “Another Way to Break Away” was one piece proposed in this way. Russell brought in his ukulele and performed his original song and described the actors in the background acting out the lyrics.

After finishing the Inventory of Skills and Knowledge scenes, I asked the students how they wanted to proceed and we moved into an idea pitch phase. Nine students explained their ideas for a possible scene, and the students broke themselves into four groups to develop four of the nine proposed ideas. From this first day of pitches and group scene work, four pieces were created which made it into the final production, though not all four were worked on during this first day.

One of the scenes, “Hint,” was pitched on this first day, but was not actually developed further until later in the process. Looking at Laurel’s journal, one can clearly

see the piece developing over time before she re-pitched the idea to the group. “Hint” was developed both as an idea pitch, from which Laurel received helpful peer input, and then eventually as a scripted pitch which allowed for further group editing. Her writing process is clearly evident in the multiple drafts of the scene and one gets a sense of her taking ownership of the piece as it develops. Laurel wrote in her journal at the beginning of the process of developing “Hint,” “Sept. 16, finishing something is very fulfilling... note to self, positive energy is bomb.” There are four different drafts of the play written in her journal over the period of about a month, each time, the piece moves further away from an adaptation of the classic board game Clue and more toward something new and different. She also toys with the idea of adding elements of audience participation, which the group ended up vetoing for the sake of keeping the production run time down. See Appendix D for the finished scripts for *Warning: May Cause Irritation* written by study participants, including “Hint.”

### **Lost in Translation**

One aspect of this work that proved difficult was the communication of an idea from author to cast members. Jerry brought this difficulty up in the focus group. “...people pitch their idea, and they have this great idea, and then people who maybe like what they heard and envisioned something else go up into the group and change what they originally pictured...” One idea pitch that was proposed during rehearsal was about the intelligent conversations the author imagined gummy worms having while in their bag. This piece got somewhat lost in translation as it was developed by a group of students. Carrie and Matt commented on this issue during a focus group session.

**Carrie:** “there’s a lot of stuff that people did and then once they did it, it wasn’t as amazing as I thought it would be... like the gummy worm thing.”

**Matt:** “...the gummy worm thing, I was walking with \_\_\_\_\_ after and [they] was like ‘That’s not how I pictured it at ALL...I wanted an intellectual conversation, and it turned into intellectual conversation, make fun of American person, American person gets dragged off, oh there’s another one’...and that’s not how she wanted it.

Deciding just how much authority the original playwright should have compared to their collaborators when the piece was worked on by a group and then how much control the actors or director had once a piece was written proved challenging for the students. For the most part, this negotiation of power was handled for the most part by having the writers direct their pieces, but with several students having written more than one or two pieces in the final performance, ultimately the group decided to give artistic authority to the director. I found this shift back to the traditional production hierarchy to be an interesting choice given the democratic aims of the project, however, at some point, the students recognized that one person was required to make sure the piece worked onstage and they handled that by looking to their director for each scene. The students’ solution mirrors the description of ways to share power in Kerrigan’s book on the collaborative process. Kerrigan also recognizes the importance of having one person who is ultimately in charge of the direction of a piece. Our solution to this dilemma was essentially an adaptation of her “rotating ogre/peon” (94) method of rotating authority among the group constructively. Given that there were so many directors in our project, I

was impressed that the students created a way to ensure that as much as possible power was shared relatively equally among the group.

### **How to Sort Through the Ideas**

Once the project was underway, for about four weeks our way of working focused almost entirely on concept/idea pitch and script pitches. By the second week, it was clear we needed a method for handling the increasing number of ideas brought in by the students. I researched the method the Neo-Futurists use to conduct their work and found Sarah B. Nelson's article about the platform of creativity used in creating *Too Much Light Makes the Baby Go Blind*. Nelson describes the process the Neo-Futurists in Chicago use to organize their rehearsals,

1. **Proposal** Writer/Performers sit in a circle. In turn, each member proposes a play by title.
2. **Pitch** Writer/Performers describe their play in more detail, perhaps sharing a script or briefly acting out the play.
3. **Pick or Discuss** Group discusses merits and weaknesses of each play.
4. **Throw or Go** Members of the group nominate other plays for inclusion. Final plays are selected for inclusion in this week's menu.
5. **Rehearse** Writer/Performers work with a technical specialist and rehearse new plays.
6. **Conclusion** Conductor assigns tasks, ties up any loose ends. Rehearsal is concluded (Nelson 3).

The "Throw or Go" method seemed like a great way to sort through the many ideas presented during each rehearsal. I offered this idea to the students who liked how efficient it could potentially make our feedback sessions. However, for our purposes,

given this was an educational experience, I wanted to give the students time to re-work their ideas and make them stronger with feedback from the group before anything could be eliminated permanently. I proposed that the group consider adding the idea of “Grow” to the conversation and after some discussion and worrying about the amount of time left to write the production, the students agreed it would allow ideas that needed more work some time to develop without being immediately thrown out. The following became our criteria for determining if a script was ready for performance or not.

**Throw:** Pieces that got the throw vote are ones we were simply not interested in at all and that students did not feel had potential for enough growth to be performance ready.

**Grow:** Pieces that got a grow vote were ones with potential, but need some substantial reworking before they are ready.

**Go:** Pieces that got a go vote were ready or almost ready for translation to performance and would then be placed in a pile for further voting later.

Our process for responding to scenes ultimately developed into a multi step process much like that of the Neo-Futurists. After a piece was performed, I asked the students to say what they had seen, what worked or what could be improved and any other thoughts they had about the piece. From there, the Throw, Grow or Go vote was taken and in most cases the vote on a scene was unanimous.

### **Destructive Criticism**

What I had not expected however, was that the students never actually threw anything away. Ideas and plays that were pitched that the audience didn't care for

seemed to get a grow vote, regardless of potential for growth or likelihood of acceptance from the group. Focus group comments and two of the four journals mention frustration over the fact that nothing ever got “thrown,” but it seemed the need to protect the feelings of their fellow writers overruled the student’s compulsion to throw a work or an idea that they would never vote for in the end. Alicia wrote in her journal,

I have noticed a trend in the scene (or “mini play”) selection process. Because we are all peers and all so close (sometimes frighteningly close) with each other it seems that no one ever turns down a pitch. This is also partly because most of the pitches are good; and the concept of the show basically accepts anything, with virtually no limitations...I just feel like we’ll have 5,000 scenes and when we have to narrow it down to 30, all hell will break loose.

During a focus group session, Jerry and Jane discussed a scene that had been pitched several times and kept getting a grow vote, but never seemed to progress to a point where it would get a “go” vote. When the piece was presented for the fourth time, they said,

**Jerry:** I did want to throw xxx’s at first, but now I like it.

**Jane:** Yeah I think it evolved into something.

**Jerry:** But the three times xxx presented it, I said grow instead of throw...

**Jane:** I think only because it didn’t really change... but then I think what

xxx presented today was better.

For this student writer, getting a grow vote each time he/she presented the scene seemed frustrating, but the piece did improve with each successive draft and allowed this

writer to continue to explore the idea that had inspired the first monologue. The piece however was cut during the final voting process and did not make it into the final production.

Laurel wrote “We all talk about how we need to learn how to throw ideas we don’t like. We end up talking about [how] we hate the idea and it’s bound to happen that the person hears it. It happened to me this morning. I pitched the idea the show should be called ‘Warning May Cause Irritation.’ Apparently a few people didn’t like it and started talking down on it in front of me.” Alicia also said in a focus group, “we’re not good at confronting each other”

Andy also came to talk to me about his frustration that his peers were trash talking other writers’ work during lunchtime in the green room. What I thought was a collaborative community of friends working together to create theatre had turned into a high school gossip nightmare. Laurel continued:

I understand different views, but if these rehearsals allowed throwing, people would act differently. It doesn’t take much to throw an idea and it doesn’t get talked about after. If you tell them you don’t like it to their face, you’ll be nicer, you’ll censor yourself, and things will get done. But when you’re with your friends, you’re ruthless and sometimes say things you don’t mean. There is a fine line between disagreeing about something and trash talking someone else’s idea, especially in front of them...

After the focus group session, I realized we needed a group discussion. This was another instance where the reflective process required by the study informed and complemented

the goals of the collaborative democratic approach. I was devastated that this kind of in-fighting was going on behind closed doors, and the classroom teacher, Steve, was just as surprised. As a former theatre clique outsider myself, I fully appreciated the effect this meanness could have on both individual students and on the group.

I facilitated a group discussion about how to communicate with each other. Our discussion was short, but it brought to light an emerging problem in our community. The students seemed to agree that what was being said behind each other's backs was detrimental to our group process and needed to stop. As a group they promised to try and self monitor their conversations and to keep criticism as constructive as possible. I wrote later that night, "I hope they mean it. I've never seen them so competitive before. I just hope that after the final voting is done and the casting decisions are made, they will settle in and stop hurting themselves and each other."

### **"You're Giving Us Too Much Freedom!"**

One of the days we met for rehearsal, I facilitated a discussion with the whole group about some of the production details. The discussion began with the continuation of a lengthy and fruitless debate over what to wear which had been started about a week before. Without a designated costume designer, and without any necessary costumes per se, the students could have worn just about anything. They seemed to be split into three camps: one group did not seem to care in the slightest; one group preferred to wear jeans and a shirt specifically designed for the show; and the other advocated for jeans and a solid colored shirt. This debate raged for about thirty minutes before we decided to have shirts made to advertise the performance dates and be a souvenir for all involved, but

wear jeans and a solid colored shirt for the actual performances. I was somewhat baffled by how strong the feelings were on this matter, but a decision needed to be made, so I allowed the students to debate all the pros and cons until they were satisfied with their choice.

Another decision we needed to make was the title of the performance, so our publicity team could begin to develop a poster and other marketing materials. A list had been kept for several weeks with ideas and after a round of voting, it was down to two titles: “Contents Under Pressure” and “Warning May Cause Irritation,” both of which were inspired by an ice pack used by a wounded peer with a twisted ankle. Another vote was taken and “Warning May Cause Irritation” was chosen.

The next matter that needed to be settled was to determine what the set should be. Steve, Autumn, Lydia and I were scheduled to meet with two gentleman who helped with the technical aspects of this high school’s productions, one working with scenery and the other with lighting design and equipment. Before this meeting could take place, we needed to decide what our production should look like. Again debate raged for much longer than I had anticipated. Some students favored the use of platforms, while others were in favor of a bare stage, some wanted to build spinning doors much like the New York Neo-Futurists used on their set, and again, a significant portion of the students could not have cared less. I wrote in my journal that night, “the students were really tired of discussion at this point and the conversation wasn’t going anywhere...how frustrating for them and for me!” Eventually, one student suggested that the decision be left to Steve and me. This student reasoned, “We don’t usually have any say in the sets, so why should

we now?!,” to which another student agreed saying, “you’re giving us too much freedom!”

In the end, I was fascinated that they did not want anything to do with these decisions and yet the costuming conversation over what would look best and most cohesive was such a source of contention. Perhaps in hindsight, I should have split up these production decisions over several days to avoid voting fatigue. Alicia would later say sarcastically, “after this production, I am allergic to voting!” Steve and I agreed to make the decisions about scenic design with the help of Autumn and Lydia our stage manager and lighting designer. The set we decided on was largely empty with a cyclorama curtain hung about eight feet from the back of the stage to make the playing space feel more intimate for the audience. Shelves were placed in front of the scrim to hold props and unusual items used as set dressing. Wooden rehearsal blocks were placed on the far side of stage right, and tables and chairs that were needed for specific scenes were stored in the wings. The most important scenic design element was the clothesline across the stage from which thirty cards bearing different numbers, all decorated by cast members, would hang, waiting to dictate the random order of each performance. The overall look was intentionally haphazard and sparse, reflecting the “poor theatre” aesthetic espoused by the Neo-Futurists. The minimal set meant that lighting design became the primary tool for differentiating between scenes and allowed our student designer Lydia free rein.

### **Preparing for the Final Vote**

My original plan devoted four weeks to the writing process and four weeks to rehearse and block scenes before the final technical week in which the lights, sound and scenery would be fully incorporated. As we entered the fourth week and neared our scheduled voting day, I asked the students if they felt they had enough work prepared to select our thirty pieces for performance. After a discussion, the students decided almost unanimously to continue the writing phase of the project for one more week before going to the final selection vote. I wrote in my journal that night, “The feeling seems to be that the actors are very familiar with the scripts and that learning them and directing them shouldn’t be too hard. I am a bit more worried though that as young directors, they think it will be much easier than it really will be...”

In hindsight, the decision to extend the writing process proved to be fruitful because several pieces we included in the final menu came from this additional week of writing. Furthermore, because the pieces were developed by the group over time and in their own words, the rehearsal process moved more swiftly than a more traditional production and the students did not need a full five weeks. Keeping their attention trained on making the material vibrant and fresh was difficult enough by the end of the third weekend of performances; I cannot imagine what it might have been like had they spent any more time in rehearsal.

The closer we got to the final selection voting process, the more the tension seemed to increase. In a focus group, Jane said “I’m a little scared cuz I know that I’m gonna end up being opinionated and I am going to be really selective and it’s gonna be

bad, but I'm excited to pick scenes, to see what really comes through the filter of what we want." Alicia responded "I don't think [being] selective is bad, so long as we do it in a nice way."

After working with this group for several weeks, I had realized that having a concrete idea in hand was the only way we could expect to give each other useful feedback. During the final session before the selection day, I gave the students a deadline. Everyone who wants to have a piece considered must have a typed script for each piece submitted to my email inbox by midnight. At this point, I had twenty six scripts that had been given a go vote by the ensemble, and I was somewhat worried that we would even have thirty scripts from which to choose. By midnight, our script count had risen to forty-three. That night, I optimistically reflected in my journal, "The group really seems ready to shift gears and work on performance." Six more plays came out of the woodwork before the next afternoon's voting session, and when asked, the students decided to include the late entries in the selection process, bringing the total submissions to forty-nine entries.

### **Voting and Selection Process**

The voting process had most of us worried about how to make tough decisions on which plays to include, while ensuring that everyone in the group felt validated and feelings were not hurt unnecessarily. Two students were not able to attend the voting session because of prior commitments and were given the option to vote via email the night before. One of the two students chose to do so, and his/her votes were included in the final tally.

I prepared a typed list of the titles of plays submitted before the midnight deadline, and students wrote in the six last minute additions. We reviewed the list of plays and reminded ourselves what each play was about if necessary. Students were asked to circle the number next to the title of plays they wanted to vote for, and each student could vote for thirty titles. I recruited Autumn and Lydia to help me tally the votes. Twenty-three pieces clearly received enough votes to be selected for inclusion in the production. Twelve pieces received between twelve and fifteen votes and were included in our run-off election to select the final seven pieces to make up our repertoire.

Our ghost writer, Melinda had written one of the pieces to be included in the run-off election, and the students discussed whether or not to strike it from the second round of voting. In the end, they decided that because she had not been present throughout most of the project, they wanted to include a piece written by one of the actor-writers instead of Melinda. In hindsight, I wish Melinda had been able to attend more rehearsals and the voting day. She submitted two pieces total, but I regret she was not more involved with the process of writing the plays. However, she had signed on to the project only as a writer because of other after school activities which conflicted with rehearsal, and I am still glad that we were able to incorporate some of her work.

The run-off list was now down to ten pieces and the selection process continued slowly. The titles were written on the whiteboard which was gradually updated after each round of voting. Each of the students was given one vote for each round as we narrowed the list play by play until seven had been selected. The second round of voting took over half an hour and included some tense debates over the pros and cons of each piece. One

piece that was particularly contentious was called “déjà vu” which I had proposed to the group when we were concerned about having enough plays to vote on. “Déjà vu” is a play the Neo-Futurists include from time to time in which the play preceding it is re-done in a different style, such as pirate style or chicken style. The students were evenly split over including this piece because it was not student written, but it also offered some of the spontaneity and randomness of the Neo-Futurist aesthetic. “Déjà vu” survived six rounds of voting before one student changed their mind and it was eliminated. Interestingly, the final piece chosen to be included in the production was Melinda’s play, “La Llorona.”

In the end, after the thirty plays were chosen, we took a look at our list and discovered we had an even proportion of the serious and comedic, the profound and the absurd, and no particular writer dominated the show. During the focus group that afternoon, I asked students how they felt about the selection. Jane said “I think there is a really good balance of serious things and funny things. I think we picked some genius works. There are few things I’m a little sad that aren’t included but I think in general we will come to love everything equally and can be really good show.” Laura agreed, “I am mostly happy with what was chosen, but I think that that’s all that can be asked for because I don’t think that anyone got every single thing they are looking for in there. And I do think that the balance is what we need for the show.”

### **Casting Each Play**

With the “menu,” as the Neo-Futurists call their lists of plays, chosen, the next step was to determine who would direct and act in each piece. A short discussion was held about who should be responsible for directing each script. In some cases, the playwright felt the need to direct his/her own work, but in several instances, the playwright chose to give up ownership of his/her work to whoever was interested in working with it. Jane, who authored several of the pieces included in *Warning May Cause Irritation*, chose to direct some, but not all of the pieces she had written. Volunteers were asked for in these cases, and the decisions were discussed calmly by the group until each piece had a director. I was astounded by how easily the students made these decisions and how respectful they were of each other. Unlike previous discussions, this whole discussion took no more than ten minutes total.

Once directors were chosen, it was time to cast each of the plays and this was where the turmoil I had expected began to show. The students were very concerned about the fairness of the casting process and how decisions were going to be made. Some, like Jane, were concerned about the feelings of their fellow cast members. “I hope everyone is in enough things that they feel, that, that everyone is equal. And I, I hope it works out...” she said during one focus group before casting took place. Others, like Carrie, were more competitive and concerned with the end product. “I think that it should be that... if you’re really bad, like if you’re not good, not necessarily at acting, but you’re just like, not helpful, and like you don’t need to be used that much, and if people are better at it than you are, then they should be in it more...I mean...that’s life.”

Another big concern was over type casting and whether students would be pigeonholed because of their appearance or demeanor. Jane said, “My biggest concern is that there’s gonna be type casting, which is always, it’s kind of frustrating, when people get like ‘oh you’re this person, so you’ll get these roles.’” Alicia however defended type casting because of the personal nature of the Neo-Futurist style and the pieces that were selected. “I feel almost like that’s what we’re supposed to do, cuz the show’s supposed to be about what we are, as people rather than, like, characters...and so maybe that’s kind of what’s supposed to happen...?”

Still, Matt worried about directors already having decisions made about who to cast. “I feel like basically...a lot of the people who wrote the scenes really already have an idea of who they want to play it. I heard xxx in the hall earlier say... ‘oh when I write my scenes, I’m like, this person’s going to be this, and this person’s going to be that, and I already have it set in stone...’ so I feel like that’s probably a lot of what’s going to happen.”

The actual casting process took a good bit of time, but was relatively free of the drama I had expected after hearing all the worries of members of the focus group. On casting day, we sat in a big circle and went play by play. In a handful of cases, the director for a given piece had a clear idea of who they wanted to cast, but for the most part, the directors asked who was interested in being in a certain piece and chose from those actors. This system, proposed by the students worked fairly well. It required students to self advocate if there was a piece they really wanted to be in. As a

community, the group had reached a point where this sort of volunteering for scenes felt normal as it was how many of the scene pitches were first performed for the group.

This method of casting did have its downsides however. Some students were in fewer pieces than others because they were less forward about volunteering for roles and some favoritism was probably also happening. Two students were absent on casting day as well, and ended up appearing in fewer plays because they were not there to speak up for themselves. Also, the male cast members, who were outnumbered two to one, were cast in more pieces than the females by virtue of the gender requirements of many of the scripts. I speculate that this reflected the ingrained responses to gender specific casting in more traditional theatre in general. The students cast young men in the traditionally male roles and young women in the traditionally female roles. This was particularly clear in the scene “Nuclear Detonation” in which the concept of the nuclear family is critiqued. In hindsight, I find it fascinating that cross gendered casting was never considered by the students, and this might suggest a potential area for future research.

Despite a few drawbacks to this method, three pieces involved the entire cast, so nobody was completely left out. In the end, each student was cast in six to fourteen pieces, and on the whole, the students seemed pretty satisfied with the outcome. Alicia wrote in her journal that night:

I was honestly dreading rehearsal today. I was being overly pessimistic about the casting/directing process, but it turned out to go more smoothly than anything else we've done so far. I'm excited for the kind of conventional play part that's

coming up now: the line memorizing and blocking, and cues; all that good stuff I know and love.

### **Shifting Gears: Putting the Show Together**

With the casting decisions made, the students settled into their roles quickly and the gossip and infighting stopped. My journal reads, “[The students] are getting along, the show is progressing and there is a new energy in the theatre. I think they are glad to be doing the everyday work of theatre-making.” At this stage of the project, the greatest challenge was getting all the actors to come to rehearsal every time. The older students were making their fall college visits, the younger students were getting called away for other appointments and other extra-curricular activities were placing demands on the actor’s time. A few students also fell ill with the Swine Flu so prevalent in the Southwest in late 2009.

Despite these hang-ups, rehearsals were organized according to who was able to make it each day. For about two weeks, the students split into groups according to who was working on a particular play on a given day. The directors would organize their own time with their actors and interpret and block each play. For the most part, the larger scenes worked on the stage, while smaller pieces were worked on in the greenroom, lobby or dressing room. I did my best to circulate through these rehearsals making myself available to the students if they needed me. For the most part, they did not, and it was rewarding to watch the plays take shape driven entirely by the students.

The last twenty to thirty minutes of each day, the students would all gather in the auditorium and we would watch the day’s work. Constructive criticism and ideas for

improvement would be given by students in the audience, and I would take notes on each play and share them with the director if they asked for them. It was important to me that the power dynamic I had worked so hard to create was maintained even though the work had shifted somewhat more towards the traditional production hierarchy model. When I did offer my notes, I tried to frame them in the form of a question so they were not received as a directive, but as ideas which could be accepted or rejected.

The play “War” for instance, in which students approached the edge of the stage, glaring at the audience and threw balls of paper at them, spurring a chaotic audience participatory paper fight, prompted the following question from me when it was first performed. “Should we have paper for the audience?” to which Jerry, the director, responded “No I think it’s better if they’re defenseless...” and so the work continued. The development of another piece, “Snooze” in which the actors lament getting out of bed in the morning, was interesting to watch. The director checked in with the playwright, Jane, on several occasions so the end result of the piece was a harmony of the ideas of director and playwright, with a substantial amount of input from the cast members as well. The democratic theatre techniques we had established during the writing phase of the Neo-Futurist Experience were clearly carrying over to the rehearsal phase.

Megan chose to direct the play she had written titled “Happily Ever Never in Your Neverland.” What complicated this scene was that she had written a large part for herself and, thus, had to direct the scene from within. Watching her work was interesting because she asked her cast members what they felt like doing in the scene in terms of

blocking, and incorporated this with her own preconceived plan for the movement. The end result was another example of collaboration between director and cast. When the piece was nearly finished, she checked in with the students not working on scenes who were sitting in the audience and incorporated some of their critiques as well.

I found that when student directors were also acting in the scene they were directing, it was important to offer an outside perspective, either from myself or Steve, or to have another student watching from the house. The most basic elements of performance such as volume, not upstaging another actor, keeping sightlines clear, making sure blocking looked logical and so on were nearly impossible to manage from within and needed an outside eye. If I were to do this project again, I would ask directors to consider having an additional director to serve as this outside eye if they were performing in their own scenes (as many of my students did) or I would ask them to choose between directing or acting in the scene. Though I tried my best not to revert to the traditional authoritarian director role, in some cases, I feel I may have overstepped my boundaries and took some of the control over refining and polishing the scenes away from the student directors and though they did not seem to mind, I wish I had remained more true to the student-centered aims of the project.

The process of developing an overall aesthetic for the production is an interesting side note. No group discussion about the overall feeling or look of the production took place. The general feel of the production was dictated largely by the content of the plays, each informing the others depending on the random order in which they were performed, but no efforts were made to create a deliberate or cohesive through line among all the

plays. During the play selection process, I asked students to think about what they would like to say to the people they expected to see in the audience; their parents, teachers, peers, friends and members of the wider community. Many students took this production as an opportunity to protest/revolt/shock or alienate the audience. Others reached out, sought to explain, amuse, delight or include the audience members. These emotions were achieved through a combination of simple scenery and props, fairly minimal lighting and a strong emphasis on the work of the actors. It seemed that the end result, what I call an aesthetic of incoherency, was an unpredictable and ever changing experience that the students meant for the audience to perceive as deliberately disjointed.

Two challenges that came to the forefront during this work were responsibility and self discipline; challenges also present in traditional theatre work with young people. Because I could not be in four places at once, time was somewhat limited, and because of the inherent challenges of the democratic process we had created, students had to monitor themselves and make sure that time was being used efficiently. In a focus group, Alicia said, “we are a loud bunch. I include myself in that statement of course, but I feel that from here on out we all need to respect the rehearsal process more carefully. And...a lot more would get done if we all could identify the right moments to shut up and listen to the director and stage manager.” Carrie added “I also think it’s the seniors’ job to step up and be a good example (attention span wise) for the younger drama kids. That’s a responsibility we should all take on.” Making these kinds of observations while doing such large scale group work required a level of maturity and dedication, and for the most part all the students rose to the occasion.

## **Performance**

Originally, Steve and I had scheduled five public performances of *Warning May Cause Irritation*. The production opened on the same night as a football game on campus, but sold out nevertheless. As word about the production traveled around the school and in the community, ticket sales remained strong. The local newspaper included a short write up about the production in the arts section and the high school newspaper included a full length article with photos. As the second weekend approached, the performances were sold out. Steve and I met briefly and agreed to propose adding two more performances the following weekend. This proposal was put to a vote by the students who agreed unanimously, and these performances were also full.

Having such a huge response to the production from the school and community thrilled the student actor/writers. In the final focus group, Jane proudly said, “everyone I’ve talked to said it was great...they really loved it...” Other students described having a classmate sing the jingle from “Awkward Situations” during class and how gratifying it was, or hearing other students imitating Will’s screeching “spinostrychtipus” character in “Sparky.”

## **Reflection on the Project**

As the Devised Theatre Project came to a close, my reflections focused on how far the students had come. “I am so amazed by these students. To think that they have written an entire production from scratch! I always thought it would be fascinating to write a Neo-Futurist production, but in my wildest dreams I never could have come up with half the ideas these [students] did! I am unbelievably proud of them and what they

have achieved, and pleasantly surprised by myself as well. What a rewarding experience for us all!”

It is important to note again however, that I have only chronicled the experiences of students involved in the study. Thirteen students chose not to participate, and among these thirteen were several students whose participation in the Neo-Futurist Experience was considerably different than the reflections offered by their peers in this case study. However, as part of my data set, and with an eye toward my research questions, I collected pre- and post-questionnaires (included in Appendix B) from all of the students who participated in the study, and it seems my goals for the project, embedded within the research questions, were achieved for the most part.

- Generation of further interest in theatre

At the end of the post-questionnaire, I asked if there was anything else the students wanted to say to me. Will wrote, “All I know is after this experience it makes me want to do more drama. And it has inspired me to try for the next High School play even though it will mean me missing other activities that I like to do after school like tennis.” Anna also showed an interest in continuing to do theatre work. “Since this project and me taking drama class this year, I really want to pursue a career in drama, or some sort of field in that.” For Russell, theatre “gives [him] a reason to come to school” validating the claims of researchers that the arts and extracurricular activities can in fact motivate students to stay in school.

- Creating a relevant performance/experience

In his pre-questionnaire, Russell wrote that he was interested in theatre because he wanted “to be noticed, heard and recognized.” His post-questionnaire seems to suggest he received this validation. When asked if he liked devising and writing his own theatre pieces, he said, “I love it, especially because we could write about our own teenage lives, and not the adult’s image of us.” Andy added, “I loved being involved in the scenes that I personally felt close to and I feel like every audience member and cast member could relate to at least one scene.” When asked if the final production felt relevant to him, Will said, “It was totally relevant to me. Since all the plays were written by people of my age, the struggles (sic) they go through are often relevant if not exactly the way I feel.” For Anna, who did have a play included in the final production, “my personal performance, the one that meant most to me, got in which I was very happy about.”

- Exploring student interest in more experimental theatre styles

In his post-questionnaire, Will said he liked being able to say something new and different. “I loved non-traditional theatre because it is so different and so unique. Normal theatre is repetes (sic) of others’ ideas where in (for example) Neo-Futurism, the plays are unique and original.” Russell also was interested in doing more non-traditional work: “it’s very fun and isn’t what I don’t like about traditional theatre.” Anna simply wrote, “I absolutely loved being a part of it!”

### **Empowering Students Through a Democratic Approach to Theatre**

When asked about writing original scripts, Russell described the finished production as “personal and real and special to us.” Andy described his experience with

the democratic process; “although my scenes did not get chosen for the play, I felt like most of the time people had good judgments about what was good and what needed to grow.” For Will, he felt empowered and included because “every decision made was made democratically and I always felt I had a turn to talk and vote.” He went on to say, “I did not write any of the pieces in the play, but even being involved in some of the creation of the plays was awesome...I loved having an idea in mind and a character and then [an] entire scene comes out of it.” For Anna, the originality of the performance was the best part: “...it was our own work and it was never seen before and no one can possibly duplicate it.”

### **The Role of the Teaching Artist and Classroom Teacher**

A final source of reflection on the project was more personal and included my role within the entire process of the Devised Theatre Project. Staying open and flexible rather than following my written plan for the Neo-Futurist Experience speaks to the heart of a teacher’s role in the democratic educational process. In order to respond to what the students were bringing to each rehearsal, and the way in which they wanted to work, I had to adjust my expectations of what our work would entail and the sort of scripts the students would ultimately devise together. The end result of this flexibility was *Warning May Cause Irritation*, a production written and starring the students.

This flexibility began on the very first day when I realized I had underestimated how much time each activity in the plan would take for my students to complete. Our first game of “mafia” took the bulk of our meeting time to finish. I had not planned to spend that much time on this game, but it allowed us to get to know each other better,

which had been the primary goal of my plan for the first day. Because of the after-school nature of this project, I was operating in a third space, outside of the bounds and norms of school and the classroom, but still within the school building. The students' energy was different than I suspect it would be during school hours. I did not want the students to feel like they were in class, but I needed them to take the work seriously and produce theatre of which they could be proud. Focusing the students' explosive energy on the work was a challenge I (and they) faced every day, and in my particular situation, I found this was best done by simply asking them what they wanted to do each day.

At one point, I was asked in a casual conversation in the green room before rehearsal one afternoon if I would lead the group in some devising prompts and not just rely on pitches, which led me to facilitate the "I want my words to" exercise I had put in the plan (see Appendix A). The students seemed to hate this exercise and only a handful of students took it seriously. I wrote in my journal, "This group is so squirrely and getting them to do any sort of directed work just doesn't get very far. There's loads of talking and side conversations and no focus." I was not surprised when the play that came out of this exercise was cut during the voting process, despite the fact the students had said they wanted to write an all group scene and had asked me to facilitate its creation. The final piece was not something that developed organically from the group and it ended up feeling too scripted and had no real relevance to the students' lives. The full group pieces they did develop, "War," "Searching for the Meaning of Life" and another that was written by a student who did not participate in the study were far more reflective of this particular group of students and ended up being audience favorites.

I tried again later to facilitate an improvisation-based devising exercise which was more successful though. I wrote basic improv prompts on 3x5 cards. Students were then put into groups and drew a card and were given ten minutes to prepare a scene. One group drew the prompt to write a nature documentary, and it was this prompt which led to the creation of “Sparky” which was included in the final show.

Interestingly, though, during a focus group session with study participants, I asked how they liked the structure of the project, that is to say, its lack of structure, and Megan had this to say.

There were some points in the whole process where I think I personally would have liked more...structure. I sometimes found like...when everyone is so different and doing their own thing, sometimes it gets kind of crazy, which was good, but sometimes in other productions, I wouldn't want so much freedom... I'd want to know what to do and be like NO, or YES, or give me this, give me that... and then do it.

In hindsight, I think it is important to have a balance between teacher-directed and student-directed work in a project like this and indeed, perhaps even more so in a high school theatre curriculum in general. It is important to remember that as a facilitator and researcher, I was also part of the classroom community and probably could have had more of a voice in the creation of the production; however, the final product of all this work, *Warning May Cause Irritation*, more or less epitomizes everything I stand for as a teaching artist, and is the fulfillment of a vision I have had for several years. Gonzalez reflects on this dual role as teacher and artist.

The democratic classroom teacher is a guide whose path is driven by student need. The democratic teacher welcomes long, unexpected stops in the process because they invite opportunities for deeper student exploration that can lead to new knowledge. The authoritative director is a decision maker driven by deadlines. The [democratic] director is the one who maintains the through-line of the play, orchestrates collaborative teams of artists and technicians and whose own vested emotional connection to the play pushes everyone toward a quality production. (Temporary Stages 59)

In the end, my role was effectively the glue that held everything together. I presented the students with an obscure concept that was theirs to run with, and run they did. Given the democratic goals of the project, had I enforced my plan and maintained control over the direction I saw the project going in, I would have lost the trust of the students. The collaborative and empowering aims of the project would have been fundamentally altered. By acknowledging their need to relax and have fun while exploring theatre in their own way, I had to give up my compulsion to plan out every moment and see where the students would take us each day.

By listening to the students, I was able to find a way of teaching where students worked together and I respected their developing autonomy while also allowing the work of putting a show together to take place. During one focus group session, I asked the students to describe what they saw as my role in the Neo-Futurist Experience.

**Alicia:** "...you're like the wise one because, you know, you have all this knowledge about the concept of Neo-Futurism, and we're just following your ways, you're like the Buddha of Neo-Futurism.."

**Jerry:** "Yeah you know all this, but you just you let it out at like intervals like..."

**Alicia:** "when we need it!"

**Jerry:** "...like the karate kid, it's like you're making us do these things and then later we learn that we're doing karate..."

**Matt:** "...and then eventually, we will be able to do the crane... (laughs)"

**Jerry:** "...we have this basic idea and then it like makes more and more and more sense"

**Alicia:** "It keeps growing and we're like 'oh my god' this is huge!"

All kidding aside, the students went on to describe how nice it was to have someone who was a guide when necessary, but allowed them to make their own discoveries and find their own way of solving problems and could step in to mediate problems if they got out of control. Jane said, "you've definitely drawn the line, like I'm your friend, but I'm guiding you... it's nice cuz we had a director last year who did not draw the line between I'm the cool director friend and... it did not work at all. It was one of the worst disasters ever."

The relationship between the teaching artist, classroom teacher and students is a complex one. Often, as I did, the teaching artist enters the classroom as a relative stranger to the norms of the group with whom they will work. The classroom teacher has had the benefit of time in getting to know the students and has established a way of working and

a rapport. McKean describes a challenge for teaching artists working in schools. “The challenge for teaching artists is to find ways to be true to their artistry within the norms and ways of learning that have been set in the classroom by the teacher” (A Teaching Artist 23). While she is referring more to a teaching artist working within a non-theatre classroom setting, the same is true of a theatre teaching artist working with a theatre teacher in his classroom. Steve and I had to get used to working together just as much as the students and I did. I was incredibly lucky to have been paired with Steve, however, because he was always willing to follow my lead and see what I had planned.

While Steve was eager to learn about my theatrical aesthetic and strategies for devising work, as a veteran theatre teacher, he was also somewhat of a mentor for me, a not quite novice theatre teaching artist. His advice and help in organizing the students, managing difficult situations and dealing with disciplinary action was vital to my success. Our relationship was a complex web as we negotiated our shifting roles as teacher and student, while also working with our young cast as facilitators, participants, actors, directors, designers, disciplinarians and mentors.

McKean goes on to say, “For the collaboration to be a success, the teaching artist and the teacher must communicate clearly the expectations for working so these points can be negotiated throughout the preparing and teaching process” (A Teaching Artist 23). Steve and I met several times before the process even began to discuss the nature of the Devised Theatre Project; how auditions should run, how rehearsals would run and so on. I also made several visits to the school to observe the students before the project got underway. I attended the fall production put on by the students and observed them

interacting with the audience in a post-show talk back session. I also sat in on a class with Steve's advanced drama students and met with students before auditions during two interest sessions. My constant communication with Steve and my early exposure to the ways in which the students were used to working in Steve's classroom were incredibly valuable in ensuring the success of this project. By easing myself into the community gradually, we were able to hit the ground running when the Neo-Futurist Experience got underway and find a harmonious relationship between teachers and cast.

*Warning May Cause Irritation* was the end result of the Neo-Futurist Experience, nine weeks with thirty-two high school theatre students who worked together democratically to write and produce thirty plays which were performed in an order suggested by each audience in sixty minutes or less. With the help of a teaching artist and their drama teacher, students wrote their own performance pieces, both individually and in groups, which were refined and worked on collaboratively. Using the system of "throw, grow, go" to sort through the huge amount of work they produced, we eventually voted on a selection of thirty plays to produce. The students then proceeded to work together to bring the plays to life in time for seven public performances. In the end, it seems the students enjoyed and felt empowered by the democratic process and the result was an educative and fulfilling experience that may inspire some to continue working in the theatre. Study participants seemed to feel that the production they wrote was relevant to their lives and to the lives of their peers in the audience and seem open to continuing to explore nontraditional theatre projects in the future.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### LOOKING AHEAD

This research is situated among the several studies that explore the nature of non-traditional theatre making in high school settings as well as broader theories examining critical and democratic pedagogy. Through the design of the overall project, I explored the possibilities of working democratically to create an original devised theatre performance experience based on the avant garde model of the Neo-Futurists' *Too Much Light Makes the Baby Go Blind*. During the course of the project, I found that getting high school students to work together democratically was not without its challenges, but the end result was an empowering and rewarding experience that generated a highly relevant final production we titled *Warning May Cause Irritation*. The study chronicles the responses of the students throughout the study as well as my own reflections on the process.

Four critical discoveries were uncovered throughout the study which may have wider reaching implications for theatre educators. First, vital to the overall success of this project was allowing a longer amount of time for the devising and rehearsal process than a more traditional high school production might take. Second, critical to the success of the project was my own flexibility in my plans for each rehearsal period and letting the student's interests direct the progression of the work whenever possible. Third and equally important, I partnered with a classroom teacher who thoroughly supported the democratic aims of the project and helped foster an environment where all of us could achieve success. A final discovery made clear the importance of reflective practice in

furthering the learning for students engaged in the Neo-Futurist Experience, and for me as an educational theatre practitioner. By engaging in thoughtful reflection throughout the process of creating a production, both students and teacher have much to learn about themselves, others and the creative process. By encouraging students to engage in reflective practice, educators are modeling behavior which can lead to a more well rounded understanding of the students' artistic experience and the creative process and giving them practice with a valuable life skill.

### **Limitations**

This case study is reflective of the experience of nineteen students out of the thirty two who were involved with the Neo-Futurist experience and the creation of *Warning May Cause Irritation*, and as such, only portrays part of the entire story. In analyzing my data and considering the Neo-Futurist Project as a whole, several outliers were revealed which indicated findings contrary to what I had expected and presented a rather different and somewhat less positive theatre experience for some of the students at some points in the process. These were by and large difficult situations requiring disciplinary action from Steve and myself which doubtlessly affected the group as a whole. Frustratingly, all of the students in this outlying category were not study participants and therefore I cannot share or explore their experiences as part of this thesis.

Perhaps one of the more interesting aspects of studying the Neo-Futurist Experience is an analysis of the content of the scripts the students wrote, including those cut from the final performance and those which were presented to the public. I had hoped to include these scripts in my analysis; however about half the pieces were written by

students who did not complete the required consent forms, and thus could not be incorporated into the study, per IRB protocol. From a research perspective, a few of the more interesting scripts could not be discussed because I did not have parent permission forms signed by the authors' parents.

My frustration over what data I was able to analyze points to the unwieldy yet necessary constraints placed upon the research by the Human Subjects Board and Institutional Review Board. While the importance of protecting human research subjects, and minors in particular, cannot be understated, a major hurdle for the Devised Theatre Project was the requirement that parents/guardians to sign a four-page consent form (see Appendix B) that used language far more at home in a biological research study than an after school arts-based theatre project. Such a form may have appeared complex and intimidating for parents or at the least turned parents away from consenting. While I recognize and value the need to ensure the emotional and physical safety of students in a school setting and preserve their anonymity, the students who took part in the Devised Theatre Project were subjected to very minimal risk, both during and after the process, and yet the procedure for securing IRB approval differed little from the sort of approval required for research involving much greater risk to participants.

I hope the arts research community will begin to discuss alternate ways of negotiating the management of risk to human subjects in arts-based studies and that an alternative, and less intimidating, set of forms for attaining consent can be created allowing for more of this research to be conducted more easily. When I was deciding how to conduct research for this project, I considered the lengthy and tedious process required

by the IRB and school district in order to study young people and nearly chose to work with a college-aged population, however, I ultimately decided this research would be more valuable to the educational community if it reflected a school-based experience. If the process could be streamlined, perhaps more teaching artists would record and study their classroom experiences and share their findings with the arts community, allowing other educators to benefit from their experiences as well. At the very least, perhaps institutional IRBs in partnership with teaching artists can develop more parent-friendly consent forms for these kinds of qualitative educational studies.

The Devised Theatre Project was an after school activity. As a result, I could not require my student participants to complete research tasks. This limitation resulted in having less data to analyze at the end of the production process. I had asked all the students in the Neo-Futurist Experience to keep journals of their thoughts on the process. None of the students outside of the study, and only four of the seventeen students in the study, kept journals of their reflections on the experience and one student's journal contained only drafts of scripts with no personal reflection. Four different students completed the post-questionnaire form I had given all the students. While it was clear that such reflection contributed to the student's understanding of the overall project, without a way to make students accountable for completing these research tasks, the data I could collect was dependent on the students' choice to record their thoughts and opinions.

The democratic nature of the project further enabled students to choose to do (or not do) the reflective activities I asked of them. Maintaining the atmosphere in which students were given choices on what they wanted to do, I did not want to coerce students

to keep journals, something akin to homework and reminiscent of the traditional top down classroom hierarchy, but I would have liked to have had more student opinions and reflections to consider in my analysis process. I do think that by supplementing the journals and questionnaires with student responses taken from focus groups, an activity they seem to have rather enjoyed, I was able to come to some valuable conclusions about how the Devised Theatre Project went as a whole.

As this project is a case study, there are certain limitations that are implicit in understanding the findings. This study is a reflection of how this project unfolded with one group of students in a very specific setting under my facilitation. Recreating this project elsewhere or with a different facilitator and/or theatre teacher, would undoubtedly reveal different insights and create an entirely different end product. In many ways, I would argue this is both a limitation and at the same time, the greatest appeal of this work. The Neo-Futurist aesthetic and *TML* format is loosely defined and adaptable, making this project open to just about any situation and setting.

### **Future Research**

An area for potential future research would be the use of social networking sites such as Facebook to enable students to communicate and reflect on their theatre work on their own time and in a medium which they use frequently, if not daily. I observed conversations about the process of creating *Warning May Cause Irritation* on the Facebook pages of my students, in fact the pre and post show playlists for the production were compiled entirely through the use of a Facebook wall with most of the cast leaving comments and suggestions for another student to compile, but none of these digital

interactions could be used as data because of the limitations of the IRB. Perhaps finding alternative ways to encourage students to reflect on their process, an interactive web-based process using Facebook instead of writing in a journal for instance, educators can incorporate the reflective process into their students' daily routines.

Future research might include a comparative case study in which the results from the Devised Theatre Project are compared with results from a similar democratic theatre project, or an application of the Devised Theatre Project in another setting. Comparing other settings, populations, and individual teaching artists with the experience I had in this project would no doubt add to our understanding of how democratic theatre pedagogy can be implemented in a variety of schools and settings and reveal insights into the contemporary teenage experience.

I also suspect fascinating material could be generated by comparing how this project would yield different scripts and different insights when conducted in several different geographic regions. Exploring how students with different socioeconomic backgrounds, from a variety of cultural contexts and with exposure to different theatre curricula could also lead to an interesting comparative study. I anticipate some themes such as difficult romantic relationships, family relationships and uncertainty over the future would be fairly universal among teenage students' work. At the same time, regional, social and cultural differences would make for an interesting study of the teenage experience in its most universal sense.

My original design for this project included an investigation into the audience's experience watching the students' production. Given the time and resource constraints I

was working under, I abandoned this aspect of my investigation, though I suspect it could yield some interesting results. For most members of the audience, this was their first experience with Neo-Futurism as well as student run and devised theatre. Some of the final pieces were written and aimed deliberately at their parents in the audience, and an examination of the parental response could be enlightening. It would also be interesting to gauge the successfulness of the students' pieces to express the ideas intended.

Other areas for continued research include more examinations of democratic practice in the theatre in general, both in the classroom and elsewhere. The top down nature of the traditional theatrical production process has been called into question by theatre artisans for centuries, but one that is still a valid today. There is room for greater collaboration and increased agency for members of the production team who are often otherwise pigeonholed into a specific role. The cost of such collaboration is likely to be time, as the democratic process is a lengthy one, but as seen with our application of the "throw, grow, go" method, there are ways to build efficiency into the creative democratic process, and the end result is a rich tapestry of artistic disciplines and ideas. Introducing high school students to more democratic practices might in turn put more pressure on theatre programs in higher education to include exploration of collaborative and/or devised theatre as well.

The gender dynamics of my group of students, nearly a 2:1 ratio of young women to young men, reveals the issue of gender disparity which I suspect is fairly common in the theatre classroom and in school-based productions. What was intriguing in this project was that despite the fact that the young women heavily outnumbered their male

counterparts, and expressed a desire to express and advocate for their rights as empowered and liberated women, many of the scripts the group developed by and large called for traditional male roles of father, brother or boyfriend. Not only was the necessity of these traditional male roles left unquestioned by the ensemble, but theatrical means of highlighting gender issues such as cross gender casting or caricature were not used or even tried. In hindsight, I find it fascinating that cross gendered casting was never considered by the students, and this might suggest a potential area for future research.

For our group, a discussion of difference based on gender never came up, while discussions of sexual orientation and difference in age were discussed on several occasions. These discussions fed into the creation of several of the finished performance pieces in *Warning May Cause Irritation*. A study exploring the gender dynamics of democratic group work could yield fascinating findings both in terms of rates of participation by gender as well as the way young people explore (or ignore entirely) ideas of gender difference while working in the theatre.

Over the course of nine weeks, I worked with a creative and talented group of high school students to devise a production of thirty original plays performed in sixty minutes or less. By working together collaboratively and democratically, we created a production that was unlike any seen before at the school. The students engaged in the theatrical process in a myriad of ways as writers, directors, actors, technicians, designers, marketers and audience members. Our group formed a close ensemble community and together overcame the many challenges inherent in group work.

In the end, this study confirmed my belief that a well developed and unified theatre production can be produced in a democratic and collaborative way, and that the traditional production hierarchy, though effective, is not mandatory. In an educational setting, giving students agency and responsibility, can allow them to engage in creative endeavors from many angles. The result is a wider understanding of the skills necessary for theatre making and what it means to be a responsible member of a community of fellow artists. Giving students greater power in their educational experience, especially within a school setting, encourages them to accept new responsibilities and raise their expectations of themselves and each other. By empowering and motivating students to produce relevant and meaningful theatre and showing them new ways to work together and relate to each other, I hope the students I worked with have come to understand and appreciate a new way of working in the theatre and will continue to explore and experience theatre as a living and changing organism in the future.

This study adds to the ever growing body of knowledge collected by educators who seek alternative pedagogies so they can work with students in different and challenging ways to create powerful and meaningful experiences. The beauty of the theatre classroom lies in its multifaceted nature. The students who took part in the Devised Theatre Project learned a great deal about how to write a play, how to revise and improve it, and how to translate a performance from page to stage. These students also learned how to work together, how to give and receive constructive feedback, how to work towards a deadline, how to express themselves artistically, and rewards of group success. I look forward to continuing my own exploration of alternative pedagogies and

theatre's potential to inspire, move, entertain and educate. And I look forward to continuing to introduce my explorations to students.

## APPENDIX A: NEO-FUTURIST EXPERIENCE PLAN

<p><b>Week 1</b></p> <p>Getting the project started. Auditions and Callbacks to form the new “Neo-Futurist Company”</p>
<p><u>Tues, Sep 8</u> <i>Collect audition sheets</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Individual auditions-</b> Students will come in with prepared original pieces, monologues, etc</li> <li>• <b>Permission and Assent</b> forms will be handed out to all students who audition, but will not be collected until the first rehearsal so as not to bias casting decisions.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Thurs Sep 10</u> <i>Collect audition sheets</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Individual auditions-</b> Students will come in with prepared original pieces, monologues, etc</li> <li>• <b>Permission and Assent</b> forms will be handed out to all students who audition, but will not be collected until the first rehearsal so as not to bias casting decisions.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Fri, Sep 11</u> <i>Collect audition sheets</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ensemble work-</b> Students will be split into groups and will be given published ensemble pieces written by the Neos. They will be asked to go into the halls and read through the pieces, stage them in whatever way they like, divide parts in whatever way they like, and perform them when they feel comfortable. Take observations of group work and sharing.</li> <li>• <b>Casting-</b> decisions will be based on student’s interest in the project, ability to commit wholeheartedly, willingness to explore possibilities, leadership and group abilities and ensemble potential. Original work will also be considered from the previous day’s auditions</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 2</b></p> <p>This week will focus on community building, establishing company and procedures and an introduction to Neo-Futurism and the project in general</p>
<p><u>Tues, Sep 15</u> <i>Collect assent and consent forms from study volunteers</i> <i>Field notes of group work and pieces shared</i> <i>Write out ensemble expectations, name list and play selection brainstorm on giant poster paper and keep posted throughout and save for study records</i> <i>Collect Inventories from students for review as researcher and facilitator</i> <i>Brainstorm on big poster paper, post list and retain for thesis records</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Chase name game-</b> letting the group, and Trish in particular, get to know the whole ensemble</li> <li>• <b>Mafia warmup-</b> a community building game and name game as well- suggested by the classroom teacher as a particular favorite of this group of students. Students will be</li> </ul>

- asked to explain the rules of the game, establishing a precedent for this group functioning on its own set of rules as well as shifting the authority away from Trish to the students themselves.
- **Welcome to the project-** the 5 W's of the project and Neo-Futurism
  - **Explanation of thesis study** related aspects of the project, collect consent and assent forms
  - **Give all students the Pre-Questionnaire for the project-** only those who have consent/assent forms on file will be used as data, non participant's responses will not be used in the study, but these pre-questionnaires will be returned to the students at the end of the project for their final reflections. Have them fill these out at home and bring them back on Thursday.
  - **Establish ensemble expectations-** what do we expect from each other, what do we owe each other, what are the consequences, what do we need for the self and for others to feel safe and supported? Etc.
  - **Begin discussion of what to call ourselves and the show-** have students begin to think about possibilities and start a poster of potential names for the ensemble and show- to be kept up for the next few weeks until a suitable decision is made or publicity demands force us to choose something.
  - **Discussion-** what process will we use to decide which plays go into the final show? At this point we can brainstorm ideas and see if there is anything we want to be doing throughout the process, or if we want to put it off until we have some content to work with.
  - **Weigler's Inventory of skills and knowledge-** what are the skills of ensemble members? This list will allow students to recognize hidden potential in themselves and their fellow ensemble members that could be used later in the process. This process also reaffirms student's sense of self as artist, actor, writer and well rounded human being.
    - Have students form pairs and share their inventories with a partner. Once partners have shared their lists, have students create a short scene which capitalizes on some of these skills.
    - Have pairs come back to the group and perform scenes
  - **Inspiration-** Discuss with students where playwrights get their inspiration from and what they might write about, examples being personal experience, heritage, imagination, literature, and/or history, observation from nature, society, research, the news, pop culture etc.
    - Have students brainstorm a list of possible writing topics for Neo plays and keep this list visible throughout the process. Add to the list as the weeks go on, check things off as they are explored in writing and so on.
    - Also introduce idea of collecting "spark" materials to be pulled from later- these are non conceptual things that might inspire a piece and that the students would like to explore in more detail. Possible things might be an unusual prop, a favorite quote or song lyric, a song or piece of music, a visual image etc. Have students bring these things in throughout the process and check back throughout if we get stuck for

inspiration. Make this available throughout the process.

- **Writing Prompt-** Give students an assignment for Thursday to write a Neo Futurist TMLMTBGB style scene in their journals for the next class, knowing full well that they may not really have a grasp of what Neo Futurism is yet, but that it is probably a good thing because their work will be its most original. Students can use any of the ideas we brainstormed earlier for inspiration or something else entirely. By not showing the students video examples yet, or having them read too many published TMLMTBGB plays, they will not be swayed by the production as it has been done in the past, but they can make this production their own. Even if the plays are not exactly like those written by the Chicago or New York Neos, the students will have produced something uniquely their own which is the entire point of this project and the intent of using such a loose and vague model for them to follow. I anticipate that they will struggle with these first scenes and we can discuss that the next class if needs be.
- **Final thoughts-**
  - Ask students when they want to do journals- at the end of the day? At home? Etc. All students will maintain a journal throughout the process. Only those students in the study will have them collected at the end of the project.
  - Establish a closing ritual for the end of our work. Let this come from the group

Thurs, Sep 17 School ½ day, meet from 1-4

*Collect consent and assent forms*

*Collect pre-questionnaire from study participants*

*Hang on to big poster pages with brainstormed ideas from discussions*

- **Check in with the group-** how's everyone doing? Old business? New business? Study related business?
- **Discussion of how to share-** brainstorm with group how will we go about sharing scenes? Write brainstormed ideas on big poster paper. Possible ideas include reading plays in small groups with enough scripts for each role or passing the script? The playwright reads each role? Use Kerrigan's ogre/peon relationship structure? Pitch an idea and improv the dialogue from there? Get on your feet. Etc.
- **Share scenes** - split students into small groups to share their scenes with each other. If students are uncomfortable sharing scenes they can discuss the process of writing the scenes.
- **Group discussion of first batch of scenes** - open discussion up to the whole group. How did it feel writing these scenes? Is there too much freedom in this process? How do we want to proceed in the process? Do playwrights want first right of refusal in directing their own pieces? Should someone else direct the piece other than the writer? Should it be done on a group basis? Play by play basis? How do we want to negotiate the issues of power and creative control in this ensemble?
- **Share any scenes** that students feel strongly about continuing to work on. If this goes well and there is material worth pursuing, have students break into groups based on pieces people want to continue working on to explore ideas and refine scripts. If not move on to published pieces\*
  - **\*Published TML Scenes-** split students into small groups and hand out copies of scenes from TMLMTBGB, have them read through, assign parts and prepare a

rough in class performance of the scenes.

- **Perform scenes (either the re-worked original scenes or published)**
- **Discussion-** Come back together as a group to discuss the scenes and what the students thought about them. Was there a difference between the scenes they wrote and the published scenes written by the Neo Futurists? If so, what do they think about this? What direction should we continue in writing the plays? What themes should we explore in our production?
- **Staging as inspiration-** Discuss the importance of staging. Why do different kinds of staging have a different effect on the audience and on the whole piece. When have they seen this before? How can a playwright-director manipulate their piece by including ideas for the staging of the piece?
- **Staging idea cheat sheet-** Hand out copies of the list of different ways to stage people physically. Have students break into groups and choose a scene one of them wrote earlier and stage it in 3 different ways using the ideas in the list.
- **Discussion-** how did the different ways of staging the pieces effect the overall message of the scene? Etc.
- **Writing Prompt-** Assign students to revise the piece they wrote earlier given the feedback and ideas generated during rehearsal today and/or students may write a new piece if any new inspiration was sparked, perhaps students want to write a play where staging and the physical positioning of the actors is central to the piece?
- **Final thoughts-**
  - See if anyone is interested in leading the group in a warm up for the next rehearsal and establish this as a normal practice. Reminder to write in journals, pick student warm-up leader for tomorrow, closing ritual.

Fri Sept 18

- **Check in with the group-** how's everyone doing? Old business? New business? Study related business?
- **Student led warm-up**
- **Share scenes -** split students into small groups to share their second scenes with each other. Give reluctant students a lot of encouragement, and if they are still uncomfortable, have them find a scene from one of the TMLMTBGB books that they like and want to share with the group as food for thought.
- **Group discussion of second batch of scenes -**open discussion up to the whole group. How did it feel to write the second scenes? Was it any easier than writing the first one? Ensure that everyone understands the project and is onboard. What are the challenges of playwriting and how can we overcome them? How can we make the scenes more physical and not just based on dialogue? Are scenes interesting and dynamic or is it back and forth tennis match style action/dialogue?
  - **Share any scenes** that students feel strongly about continuing to work on. If this goes well and there is material worth pursuing, have students break into groups based on pieces people want to keep working on to explore ideas and refine scripts.
  - **Mobile Headline Sculpture-** (based on an exercise by Michael Rohd) Group splits in half and walks to opposite sides of room. Facilitator reads headlines aloud to

stimulate live sculpture tableaux. Each side goes back and forth, performing 10 second tableaux for each other, and generating response after (What do we see? Who is in this picture?).

- -After sculpting another headline image, people in tableaux whisper an opinion/thought from the image they just created.
- -Audience walks around and listens to text
- -Audience is asked to stand next to someone in the image, take their image, and then voice an opposing opinion from the whispered statement they just heard.
- *NOTES ON SCULPTURE*: Facilitator waits for a headline that seems to generate a good amount of energy in order to move onto improv.
- **Sculpture Improv**
  - With the partner you just sculpted with, think of a discussion topic prompted by your previous text and image.
  - -Improvise that discussion/ debate, trying to keep clear opposing points of view in the scene. Stay in it, listen, create story.
  - -If you don't feel like you created clear conflict after the first improvisation, adjust and try again.
  - Share these dialogues with the group
- **Discuss, what ideas were generated here**, is there anything we can use? Are we still being ourselves or are we caricatures? How can we neo-futurize what we've just done? Can anything explored today be used to create a Neo scene for our work?
- **Discuss and Assign**- students to write a Neo Futurist TMLMTBGB style scene about the headlines work done today or another idea about a political or social issue pertinent to the students in their journals for the next session or they can write about any topic generated on the idea spark list created on the first day
- **Final thoughts**-Reminder to write in journals, pick student warm-up leader for tomorrow, closing ritual.

### Week 3

This week we will continue writing scenes exploring the role of the audience, performances by whole ensemble and use of music

Tues, Sep 22

- **Check in with the group**- how's everyone doing? Old business? New business? Study related business?
- **Student led warm-up**
- **Share Political/Social Issue scenes** in small groups
- **Rework scenes** as in previous days and share with the group when done.
- **Discussion**- what is the role of the audience in our production? How do we envision the audience, where are they sitting, where is the action, where else can move the action and why might we do this? What do we want them to be thinking about and how can we create a piece that enables that to happen? Is there something we can do that is site specific to this theatre at this time Etc.
- **In small groups, write a piece that re-envision the role for the audience**, workshop it and prepare to perform for the group

- **View the audience participatory scenes**
- **Final thoughts**-Reminder to write in journals, pick student warm-up leader for tomorrow, closing ritual.

Thurs, Sep 24

- **Check in with the group**- how's everyone doing? Old business? New business? Study related business?
- **Student led warm-up**
- **"I want my words to"**- (based on lesson plan by Stephen DiMenna from Young Playwrights Inc. NYC) Students will create monologues that can potentially be combined into a large group script or be performed solo.
  - Ask students to make a list of action verbs as a group and list on the big pad of paper.
  - Tell students this will be their tool box for writing a poem/monologue
  - Tell students to complete the following sentence with one or more verbs from the list.
  - "I want my voice to \_\_\_\_\_" and/or "I want my words to \_\_\_\_\_"
  - This becomes the first line of a monologue they will write about what they want their words and this show to do to an audience. Have them expand on and explain what effect their words/voice would have based on the verb(s) they chose.
  - Time for writing
- **Share monologues with small groups**, have those groups write and stage a group poem that interweaves each person's monologue, overlapping words, using unison, repetition etc. using interesting blocking and movement to create a finalized group piece.
- **In larger groups still, create a whole ensemble piece** that will include every actor in the ensemble using the group scenes from before as material to work with. How can we combine aspects of each into a new big scene? Work and rehearse the script until ready
- **Entire company reads each ensemble piece-**
- **Discuss and brainstorm.** Are there commonalities? Are there some edits that need to be made, do we want to meld a few of them? Is there a new unifying idea that comes out that each person could write their own part for?
- **Spend today working on whole ensemble piece(s)**
- **Final thoughts**-Reminder to write in journals, pick student warm-up leader for tomorrow, closing ritual.

Fri, Sep 25

- **Check in with the group**- how's everyone doing? Old business? New business? Study related business?
- **Student led warm-up**
- **Discussion of Names**- decide what to call the ensemble and what to call the show.
- **Movement and music**- how can we involve music as an integral part to some scenes?
  - **Flocking exercise** - students move around rotating leadership like Geese in flight as different kinds of music is played.
  - **Writing to Music**- students will be split into groups and will be given a piece of

music to create a Neo-scene around.

- **Share scenes** - split students into small groups to share homework scenes and/or in class music scenes with each other.
- **Group share of scenes**- students will have the opportunity to share scenes with the whole class.
- **Discussion: Group discussion of third batch of scenes** - open discussion up to the whole group. How is the writing going? Is it getting any easier? Harder? Any new ideas we need to explore? Encourage students to write more, explore other styles etc.
- **Show clip of “Two Barbies and a Squirrel Do Not a Party Make”**. Talk briefly about Neo-Futurism’s position in the modernist art movement, touch on Dada, Absurdism, Cubism etc. show examples of the art movements as illustrations.
- **Brainstorm props**- that the school already has that might be interesting to use. The Teletubby mask has potential here...
- **Assign**- students to write a completely absurd/Dada Neo Futurist TMLMTBGB style scene in the same vein as “Two Barbies” in their journals for the next class. Students will also write a reflection journal entry.
- **Final thoughts**-Reminder to write in journals, pick student warm-up leader for tomorrow, closing ritual.

#### Week 4

Work continues on creating scenes as well as figuring out the selection process and criteria for inclusion in the final production

Tues, Sep 29

- **Check in with the group**- how’s everyone doing? Old business? New business? Study related business?
- **Student led warm-up**
- **Share absurd scenes**- split students into small groups to share their scenes with each other.
- **Prepare to show original works**- have small groups vote on which scene was their favorite and have them prepare a rough performance of it with the writer as the director. Possibly combine two or more scenes to create something new, or workshop and revise the groups favorite piece.
- **Perform original works**- performances of students latest Neo plays.
- **“No P”**- students are given a location, conflict and relationship and must perform a scene without words beginning with a specific letter (or letters). If an actor uses a word beginning with that letter, then they die and must incorporate the death into the scene. Once someone dies an audience member can jump into the scene and take their place.
- **“Alphabet scenes”**- students are given a location and relationship and must perform a scene with each sentence beginning with next letter in the alphabet.
- **Discuss the upcoming selection of scenes** and encourage students to think about the scenes they have seen and what might be missing. Was there anything in the improv scenes which could inspire a Neo play?
- **Assign**- students to write another TMLMTBGB scene focusing on the whole project and what will help fill it out and make it well rounded. Do we need a political piece?

<p>Do we have any social commentary we want to make? Should we criticize or laud anything in particular?</p> <p><b>Final thoughts</b>-Reminder to write in journals, pick student warm-up leader for tomorrow, closing ritual.</p>
<p><u>Thurs, Oct 1</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Check in with the group</b>- how's everyone doing? Old business? New business? Study related business?</li> <li>• <b>Student led warm-up</b></li> <li>• <b>Share new scenes that fill in a missing element in the show,</b></li> <li>• <b>workshop scenes in small groups as before and perform for the ensemble</b></li> <li>• <b>Free-write,</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What does it mean to be a young person in Tucson? 4 min</li> <li>○ It's time to say goodbye to _____ 4 min</li> <li>○ If I had 1,000 words left to say, _____ 4min</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Circle words or phrases you like</b></li> <li>• <b>Form groups and collaborate on a new piece</b> using these important phrases you circled and some alternative means of delivery</li> <li>• <b>Share scenes with the group</b></li> <li>• <b>Final thoughts</b>-Reminder to write in journals, pick student warm-up leader for tomorrow, closing ritual.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Fri, Oct 2</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Check in with the group</b>- how's everyone doing? Old business? New business? Study related business?</li> <li>• <b>Student led warm-up</b></li> <li>• <b>Debate on and decide on which 30 pieces to put into the show!</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Scripts selected must be emailed to Trish this weekend to be compiled into a working rehearsal script for the ensemble.</li> <li>○ If anything new needs to be written or altered, the group has until Sunday night to make edits and changes</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Final thoughts</b>-Reminder to write in journals, pick student warm-up leader for tomorrow, closing ritual.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 5</b></p> <p>Rehearsal of the chosen scenes begins in earnest</p>
<p><u>Tues, Oct 6</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Check in with the group</b>- how's everyone doing? Old business? New business? Study related business?</li> <li>• <b>Student led warm-up</b></li> <li>• <b>Hand out finalized scripts</b>- students will need to begin memorizing ASAP.</li> <li>• <b>Discussion of how to proceed</b>- Students will be directing each piece from here, so directors need to be chosen. Should the playwrights be the directors, or should they be volunteers, should it be decided on a play by play basis depending on who wants to direct in the first place? Etc. How will we consider casting from the ensemble for each piece? These decisions really need to be made by the students themselves and not by</li> </ul>

<p>Art or Trish. This is their own democratically decided power structure they are setting up here, and yes, it will be chaos.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>‘Production Meeting’ -discuss scenic/light/sound needs-</b> What do the students need for their scenes? What do they envision for the set? Any light requirements? Etc. Make sure students know that they need to communicate if they need specific props or scenic pieces</li> <li>• <b>Proceed as decided.</b></li> <li>• <b>Final thoughts-</b>Reminder to write in journals, pick student warm-up leader for tomorrow, closing ritual.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Thurs, Oct 8</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Check in with the group-</b> how’s everyone doing? Old business? New business? Study related business?</li> <li>• <b>Student led warm-up</b></li> <li>• <b>Rehearse Scenes-</b> students will break off into groups and work scenes as time, space and casts allow. Technical matters can also be discussed when one is not actively involved in a rehearsal of a specific scene, or that actor can function as an extra set of eyes and help other scenes</li> <li>• <b>Final thoughts-</b> Reminder to write in journals, pick student warm-up leader for tomorrow, closing ritual.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Fri, Oct 9</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Check in with the group-</b> how’s everyone doing? Old business? New business? Study related business?</li> <li>• <b>Student led warm-up</b></li> <li>• <b>Rehearse Scenes/share</b></li> <li>• <b>Final thoughts-</b>Reminder to write in journals, pick student warm-up leader for tomorrow, closing ritual.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 6</b></p> <p>Rehearsal continues on the final selection of scenes and technical aspects are being considered</p>
<p><u>Tues, Oct 13</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Check in with the group-</b> how’s everyone doing? Old business? New business? Study related business?</li> <li>• <b>Student led warm-up</b></li> <li>• <b>Rehearse Scenes/share</b></li> <li>• <b>Final thoughts-</b>Reminder to write in journals, pick student warm-up leader for tomorrow, closing ritual.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Thurs, Oct 15</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Check in with the group-</b> how’s everyone doing? Old business? New business? Study related business?</li> <li>• <b>Student led warm-up</b></li> <li>• <b>Rehearse Scenes/share</b></li> <li>• <b>Final thoughts-</b>Reminder to write in journals, pick student warm-up leader for</li> </ul>

tomorrow, closing ritual.
<p><u>Fri, Oct 16</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Check in with the group</b>- how's everyone doing? Old business? New business? Study related business?</li> <li>• <b>Student led warm-up</b></li> <li>• <b>Rehearse Scenes/share</b></li> <li>• <b>Final thoughts</b>-Reminder to write in journals, pick student warm-up leader for tomorrow, closing ritual.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 7</b></p> <p>Rehearsal continues on the final selection of scenes and technical aspects are being considered</p>
<p><u>Tues, Oct 20</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Check in with the group</b>- how's everyone doing? Old business? New business? Study related business?</li> <li>• <b>Student led warm-up</b></li> <li>• <b>Rehearse Scenes/share</b></li> <li>• <b>Final thoughts</b>-Reminder to write in journals, pick student warm-up leader for tomorrow, closing ritual.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Fri, Oct 23</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Check in with the group</b>- how's everyone doing? Old business? New business? Study related business?</li> <li>• <b>Student led warm-up</b></li> <li>• <b>Rehearse Scenes/share</b></li> <li>• <b>Final thoughts</b>-Reminder to write in journals, student warm-up leader, closing ritual.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 8</b></p> <p>Rehearsal continues on the final selection of scenes and technical aspects are being considered</p>
<p><u>Tues, Oct 27</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Check in with the group</b>- how's everyone doing? Old business? New business? Study related business?</li> <li>• <b>Student led warm-up</b></li> <li>• <b>Rehearse Scenes/share</b></li> <li>• <b>Final thoughts</b>-Reminder to write in journals, pick student warm-up leader for tomorrow, closing ritual.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Thurs, Oct 29</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Check in with the group</b>- how's everyone doing? Old business? New business?</li> <li>• <b>Student led warm-up</b></li> <li>• <b>Rehearse Scenes/share</b></li> <li>• <b>Final thoughts</b>-Reminder to write in journals, pick student warm-up leader for tomorrow, closing ritual.</li> </ul>

<p><u>Fri, Oct 30</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Check in with the group</b>- how's everyone doing? Old business? New business? Study related business?</li> <li>• <b>Student led warm-up</b></li> <li>• <b>Rehearse Scenes/share</b></li> <li>• <b>Final thoughts</b>-Reminder to write in journals, pick student warm-up leader for Sunday, closing ritual.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 9</b> Tech rehearsal week and dress rehearsals right before opening!</p>
<p><u>Sat, Oct 31</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Check in with the group</b>- how's everyone doing? Old business? New business? Study related business?</li> <li>• <b>TECH</b>- Technical day without actors to set levels for sounds and lights.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Sun, Nov 1</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Check in with the group</b>- how's everyone doing? Old business? New business? Study related business?</li> <li>• <b>TECH WITH ACTORS</b>- Technical run through scene by scene with actors to incorporate lights and sound</li> <li>• <b>Final thoughts</b>-Reminder to write in journals, pick student warm-up leader for tomorrow, closing ritual.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 10</b> Performance week</p>
<p><u>Mon, Nov 2</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Check in with the group</b>- how's everyone doing? Old business? New business? Study related business?</li> <li>• <b>Student led warm- up</b></li> <li>• <b>Full Run through</b></li> <li>• <b>Final thoughts</b>-Reminder to write in journals, pick student warm-up leader for tomorrow, closing ritual</li> </ul>
<p><u>Tues, Nov 3</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Check in with the group</b>- how's everyone doing? Old business? New business? Study related business?</li> <li>• <b>Student led warm-up</b></li> <li>• <b>Full Run Through</b></li> <li>• <b>Final thoughts</b>-Reminder to write in journals, pick student warm-up leader for tomorrow, closing ritual.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Wed, Nov 4</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Check in with the group</b>- how's everyone doing? Old business? New business? Study related business?</li> <li>• <b>Student led warm-up</b></li> <li>• <b>Dress Rehearsal 1</b></li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Final thoughts</b>-Reminder to write in journals, pick student warm-up leader for tomorrow, closing ritual.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Thurs, Nov 5</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Check in with the group</b>- how's everyone doing? Old business? New business? Study related business?</li> <li>• <b>Student led warm-up</b></li> <li>• <b>Dress Rehearsal 2</b></li> <li>• <b>Final thoughts</b>-Reminder to write in journals, pick student warm-up leader for tomorrow, closing ritual.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Fri, Nov 6</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Check in with the group</b>- how's everyone doing? Old business? New business? Study related business?</li> <li>• <b>Student led warm-up</b></li> <li>• <b>Performance of show</b></li> <li>• <b>audience talk back session</b> following the performance.</li> <li>• <b>Final thoughts</b>-Reminder to write in journals, pick student warm-up leader for tomorrow, closing ritual.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Sat, Nov 7</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Check in with the group</b>- how's everyone doing? Old business? New business? Study related business?</li> <li>• <b>Student led warm-up</b></li> <li>• <b>Performance of show</b></li> <li>• <b>Final thoughts</b>-</li> <li>• Reminder to write in journals, pick student warm-up leader for tomorrow, closing ritual.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 11</b> Performance week</p>
<p><u>Mon, Nov 9</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Check in with the group</b>- how's everyone doing? Old business? New business? Study related business?</li> <li>• <b>Student led warm-up</b></li> <li>• <b>Performance of show</b></li> <li>• <b>Final thoughts</b>-</li> <li>• Reminder to write in journals, pick student warm-up leader for tomorrow, closing ritual.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Tues, Nov 10</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Check in with the group</b>- how's everyone doing? Old business? New business? Study related business?</li> <li>• <b>Student led warm-up</b></li> <li>• <b>Pick up rehearsal</b>- Students will run through the 30 plays in a random order to refresh memory and ensure they are ready for the weekend's performances.</li> <li>• <b>Final thoughts</b>-Reminder to write in journals, pick student warm-up leader for</li> </ul>

tomorrow, closing ritual.
<u>Wed, Nov 11</u> <i>Veteran's Day! No School!!</i>
<u>Thurs, Nov 12</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Check in with the group</b>- how's everyone doing? Old business? New business? Study related business?</li> <li>• <b>Student led warm-up</b></li> <li>• <b>Performance of show</b></li> <li>• <b>Final thoughts</b>-Reminder to write in journals, pick student warm-up leader for tomorrow, closing ritual.</li> </ul>
<u>Fri, Nov 13</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Check in with the group</b>- how's everyone doing? Old business? New business? Study related business?</li> <li>• <b>Student led warm-up</b></li> <li>• <b>Performance of show</b></li> <li>• <b>Final thoughts</b>-Reminder to write in journals, pick student warm-up leader for tomorrow, closing ritual.</li> </ul>
<u>Sat, Nov 14</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Check in with the group</b>- how's everyone doing? Old business? New business? Study related business?</li> <li>• <b>Student led warm-up</b></li> <li>• <b>Performance of show</b></li> <li>• <b>Final reflection assignments</b>- Return Pre-Questionnaires to students (photocopies kept for my records) and assign post-questionnaire/reflection assignment, remind students to bring their journals so I can collect them</li> <li>• <b>Final thoughts</b>-pick student warm-up leader for tomorrow, closing ritual.</li> </ul>
<b>Week 12</b> Final week
<u>Tues, Nov 17</u> Collect Post-Questionnaires and journals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Check in with the group</b>- how's everyone doing? Old business? New business? Study related business?</li> <li>• <b>Discussion</b>- based on student's reflections and journals, how did the show go? How was the process? Were we successful in creating original democratic, collaborative theatre? How has this changed your ideas about what theatre is and what it could be? Do you feel you got a chance to say what you wanted to say? How did we negotiate compromise within the group and within oneself?</li> <li>• <b>Final thoughts</b>- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ closing ritual.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## APPENDIX B: PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

**Parental/Guardian Permission Form**

Neo-Futurism and Creating a Modern High School Theatre Curriculum  
Introduction

Your child is being invited to take part in a research study. The information in this form is provided to help you decide whether or not you wish to allow your child to take part. Study personnel will be available to answer your questions and provide additional information. If you decide to allow your child to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this consent form. A copy of this form will be given to you.

**What is the purpose of this research study?**

This research will evaluate a project at \_\_\_xxx\_\_\_ where students are introduced to a different style of theater based on the performance style of the “Neo-Futurists,” a Chicago theatre group. This study will examine the meaning of the plays themselves, the student’s responses to the entire process and provide information regarding the creation of a theatre curriculum for a modern high school.

**Why is my child being asked to participate?**

Your child is being invited because they have already participated in or shown an interest in the theatre program at \_\_\_xxx\_\_\_ and the devised theatre project being studied.

**How many people will be asked to participate in this study?**

Approximately 10-20 persons will be asked to participate in this study.

**What will happen during this study?**

Your student will be asked to complete a pre and post project questionnaire. Some of the students will be asked to participate in a focus group or interview. The Principle Investigator (PI) asks permission to review journal entries and written work of the students who participate in the research project. The student’s written work will only be reviewed if you check the first box below.

- Yes I agree to allow the PI to review my child’s written work for the Theatre Arts project during the 2009 fall semester
- No I do not agree to allow the PI to review my child’s written work for the Theatre Arts project during the 2009 fall semester

**How long will my child be in this study?**

The study will last through the fall semester 2009. Your child will be asked to complete research tasks that may take 1 to 2 hours over that time period.

**Are there any risks to my child?**

Participating in this research project involves no more risk than your child would normally experience in any classroom situation.

**Are there any benefits to my child?**

There will be no direct benefits to your child. The results of the research may have an impact on theatre education in Tucson and throughout the country.

**What are the alternatives for participating in this study?**

The alternative is not to participate in this study. Students will still be allowed to participate in the devised theatre project and performance if they so choose.

**Will there be any costs to my child?**

Aside from their time, there are no costs for taking part in the study.

**Will my child be paid to participate in the study?**

Your child will not be paid for their participation.

**Will audio recordings be made of my child during the study?**

We will make an audio recording during the study so that we can be certain that your responses are recorded accurately only if you check the first box below:

- I give my permission for audio recordings to be made of my child during their participation in this research study.
- I do not give my permission for audio recordings to be made of my child during their participation in this research study.

**Will the information that is obtained from my child be kept confidential?**

The only persons who will know that your child participated in this study will be the research team members: Patricia Everett, Principal Investigator and \_\_\_xxx\_\_\_ Theatre Teacher.

Your child's records will be confidential. Your child will not be identified in any reports or publications resulting from the study. Any identifying documents will be kept in a secure file at the University of Arizona Theatre Department for the required three years and will be destroyed following that time.

**What if my child is harmed by the study procedures?**

The \_\_\_xxx\_\_\_ on campus nurse and medical facility will be available to your child throughout the study and may be contacted at \_\_\_xxx\_\_\_. If you have any questions, concerns or complaints before, during or after the research study, or if you need to report a research related injury or issue you should immediately contact Patricia Everett at \_\_\_xxx\_\_\_ at any time, Dr. \_\_\_xxx\_\_\_ (UA Thesis Advisor) at \_\_\_xxx\_\_\_ or \_\_\_xxx\_\_\_ (Theatre Teacher) at \_\_\_xxx\_\_\_.

**May I change my mind about my child participating?**

Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. They may decide to not begin or to stop the study at any time, and you may withdraw your consent for your child's participation at any time. Refusal to participate will have no effect on your child's student status or evaluation. You can discontinue your child's participation with no effect on their student status or evaluation. Also, any new information discovered about the research will be provided to you. This information could affect your willingness to continue your participation.

**Whom can I contact for additional information?**

You can call the Principal Investigator to tell her about a concern or complaint about this research study. The Principal Investigator, Patricia Everett, U of A Theatre Education and Outreach Masters Candidate, can be called at xxx or be contacted via email xxx. Dr. xxx, the UA Faculty Advisor for this project, may be contacted at xxx or xxx.

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject you may call the University of Arizona Human Subjects Protection Program office at (520) 626-6721. If you have questions, complaints, or concerns about the research and cannot reach the Principal Investigator; or want to talk to someone other than the Investigator, you may call the University of Arizona Human Subjects Protection Program office. If you would like to contact the Human Subjects Protection Program via the web (can be anonymous), please visit <http://www.irb.arizona.edu/contact/>.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Patricia Everett, Theatre Education and Outreach MA Candidate

By signing this form, I affirm that I have read the information contained in the form, that the study has been explained to me, that my questions have been answered and that I agree to allow my child to take part in this study. I do not give up any of my legal rights by signing this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Child's Name (Printed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent's Name (Printed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent's Signature Date signed

**Statement by person obtaining consent**

I certify that I have explained the research study to the person who has agreed to participate, and that he or she has been informed of the purpose, the procedures, the possible risks and potential benefits associated with participation in this study. Any questions raised have been answered to the participant's satisfaction.

Patricia Hews Everett

Name of study personnel

\_\_\_\_\_  
Study personnel Signature Date signed

## APPENDIX C: IRB APPROVAL FORM



Human Subjects  
Protection Program

1618 E. Helen St.  
P.O. Box 245137  
Tucson, AZ 85724-5137  
Tel: (520) 626-6721  
<http://www.irb.arizona.edu>

## HSPP Correspondence Form

Date: 08/13/09

Investigator: Patricia Everett, PhD Candidate

Department: Theatre Arts

Advisor: Barbara McKean, PhD

Project No./Title: 09-0605-02 Neo-Futurism and Creating a Modern High School Theatre Curriculum

Current Period of Approval: 08/13/09 – 08/12/10

IRB Committee Information	
<input type="checkbox"/> IRB1 – IRB0000291 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> IRB2 – IRB00001751 <input type="checkbox"/> IRB3 – IRB00003012 <input type="checkbox"/> IRB4 – IRB00005448 <input type="checkbox"/> Administrative Action FWA Number: FWA00004218	<input type="checkbox"/> Full Committee Review <i>1<sup>st</sup> review –</i> <i>Conditions met –</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Expedited Review – 08/13/09 <input type="checkbox"/> Facilitated Review – <input type="checkbox"/> Administrative/Exempt Review –
Nature of Submission	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Project <input type="checkbox"/> Amendment <input type="checkbox"/> Unanticipated Problem Involving Risks to Subjects or Others <input type="checkbox"/> Response to IRB Committee <input type="checkbox"/> Other (define):	<input type="checkbox"/> Continuing Review <input type="checkbox"/> Protocol Deviation/Violation/Waiver <input type="checkbox"/> Non-Compliance <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable
Documents	
Reviewed Concurrently	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Project Review Form (06/17/09)	Appr
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consenting Instruments: Parent/Guardian Permission Form (version 6/17/09) Subject Assent Form (version 6/17/09) Re-consent: <input type="checkbox"/> All <input type="checkbox"/> Current Only <input type="checkbox"/> Not Required	Appr
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> VOTF (dated 06/17/09)	Appr
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Surveys/Questionnaires: Data Collection Instrument	Appr
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (define): Lesson Plans	Ack
Committee/Chair Determination	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Approved as submitted	

Additional Determination(s)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Expedite Approval (45 CFR 46.110 Category 5):</b> Research involving materials (data, documents, records, or specimens) that have been collected, or will be collected solely for nonresearch purposes (such as medical treatment or diagnosis).</li> <li>• <b>Expedite Approval (45 CFR 46.110 Category 6):</b> Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.</li> </ul>

**Reminder:** Continuing Review materials should be submitted 30–45 days prior to the expiration date to obtain project re-approval

- Projects may be concluded or withdrawn at any time using the forms available at [www.irb.arizona.edu](http://www.irb.arizona.edu).
- No changes to a project may be made prior to IRB approval except to eliminate apparent immediate hazard to subjects.
- Original signed consent forms must be stored in the designated departmental location determined by the Department Head.



## APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE FORMS

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Pre-Questionnaire

1. What plays have you worked on before and where?
2. Why are you interested in theatre?
3. What is your favorite play you have worked on and why?
4. What is your favorite play you have seen and why?
5. How does theatre fit in with the rest of your life at school?
6. What do you know about Neo-Futurism?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Post-Questionnaire

1. How did you like devising and writing your own theatre pieces? Why or why not?
2. Would you be interested in doing more nontraditional theatre in the future? Why or why not?
3. Do you think final devised performance was relevant to you? Why or why not?
4. What did you enjoy most about the Devised Theatre Project?
5. What did you enjoy least about the Devised Theatre Project?
6. What would you change if we did this project again?
7. Did you enjoy creating our own script for the final performance and not using another published play? Why or why not?
8. Did you feel included in the decision making process as we developed the final performance? Why or why not?

## APPENDIX E: INVENTORY OF SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

**Inventory of Skills + Knowledge = Expertise!**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**Inventory of Skills: Be Specific!**

VOICE	PHYSICAL MOVMENT
Whistle (loud, tunes, etc), hum (on/off key), imitations, sound effects?	Somersaults, handstands, cartwheels, backward handstand, headstand, dive roll, other tumbling and/or acrobatics?
Speaking loudly and clearly, memorization, dialects, other languages, reciting poems, telling stories, jokes?	Wheels – skateboard, roller skates, inline skates, bicycle, scooter, unicycle?
Singing on key, off key, with/without music, different styles?	Dance – ballet, modern, tap, swing, hip-hop, disco – others?
Do you read music? Play instrument? Rhythm?	Other physical skills – jump rope, baton twirling, catching/throwing, stilts, imitations, pantomime?

Art/Design – do you draw, paint, sculpt, build things, lettering signs, designing sets, designing/making costumes, making props?

**Inventory of *Knowledge*: Be Specific!**

<b>THEATRE</b>	<b>OTHER DISCIPLINES</b>
Theatre Genres: comedy, tragedy, tragicomedy, melodrama, farce, etc..	Literature: Poetry, Novels, Short Stories
Western Theatre Styles: Greek, Commedia dell'arte, Shakespeare, Restoration, Realism, Abstraction	Film: Classic, Modern, Underground, Foreign
Eastern Theatre Styles: Noh, Kabuki, Beijing Opera	TV/Video/Computer: Games, music video, cartoons, internet web stuff, etc...
Other forms: Puppets, Mime, Multimedia, etc..	Other cultural/historical knowledge – family heritage, own experiences, etc

APPENDIX F: FINALIZED SCRIPTS BY STUDY PARTICIPANTS FROM  
*WARNING MAY CAUSE IRRITAION*



*By the xxx Neo Futurist Ensemble*

**Designed to make heavy heart relate**

By Matt

*Man is sitting alone at a table with a chess board set up. Behind the scrim someone is positioned so that it looks as if their shadow is opposite the man.*

**Man:** Where is she? Why isn't she here with me? This is not how it was supposed to be. We were perfect together! She was my best friend, and almost something more. Where did I go wrong? One day it's snuggling and holding hands and watching movies in the park, and the next, I might as well not exist. What happened to the times where we didn't miss a day without seeing each other? Things were great so I took the risk and tried to take it one step further and make it official. Bad idea! The worst part is the hole it left in our friendship. We can't go back to how it used to be, not now. It will never be the same. I just can't get over it, *(pause)* her. Every time I see her smile, I wish it was me who had put it on her face. But I know it wasn't. It was him, and I will never be her him again. I had my chance and I screwed up. It's over. But sometimes it's just hard to pick yourself up and move on when without that person you feel utterly alone.

*On the word "alone" the shadow person stands up and walks off stage leaving the man alone staring at the chess board. Black out.*

CURTAIN

**Justification for Procrastination**

By Laurel

xxx : *(Sits on stage with a book she has to read for Homework. The Book is Othello, She opens the book)*

**Offstage:** *(Misc screams, hoots, and hollers)*

xxx : *(Slams book closed, ponders for a while and again meekly opens the book)*

**Offstage:** *(Misc screams, hoots, and hollers)*

xxx : *(Again slams the book shut, toys with the book with uncertainty wondering if the sounds are for sure coming from the book, she peeks inside slowly and begins to gradually open the book)*

**Offstage:** *(Scream and such yet again, but gradually with the book being opened.)*

xxx : *(Closes book for good,) Yeah, Home work can wait (Leaves book on chair and walks offstage)*

CURTAIN

**Get Up**

By Jane

*Twelve cast members are lying on the stage on their stomachs and backs, spread out at random. Person 1 is up center, lying on their back. They are the only person who ever sits up.*

Person 1 (*sitting up*) – Get up!

ALL – No!

Persons 2, 3, 4 – Oh my god!

Person 5 – Tired!

Person 6 – Tired!

Person 7 – Tired!

Person 8 – Really tired!

Person 9 – And everything hurts!

ALL – Gravity!

Person 10 – Fuck gravity!

Person 11 – But maybe-!

Person 12 – Maybe?

Person 2 – No!

Person 3 – Stop!

Person 1 (*slams fist on stage*) – No, get up!

*All roll over left onto stomachs and groan.*

Person 4 – Sad!

Person 5 – Sad!

Person 6 – Sad!

Person 9 – And everything hurts!

ALL – Gravity!

Person 10 – Fucking gravity!

Person 7 – But what if -!

Person 8 – If?

Person 9 – No!

Person 5 – Stop!

Person 11 – What?

Person 2, 3, 4 – Oh my god!

Person 1 – Up!

*All roll over right onto stomachs and groan, contented sigh.*

Person 4 – Better? (*Beat*)

ALL – No!

Persons 5,6 – Need sleep!

Person 1 (*stands with enthusiasm, gestures up*) – No, need sun!

ALL – No!

Person 7 – Need nothing!

Person 8 – Nothing!

Person 9 – Nothing!

Person 10 – Nothing!

Person 1 (*stomps*) – Up!

ALL – Gravity!

*All roll over onto stomachs, groan.*

Person 12 (*begins to get up*) Fuck...Gravity! (*stands completely, looks like they are about to fall*) Fuck...gravity...(falls back down)

CURTAIN

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**Go**

By Jane

The first person runs out to center stage left and waits eagerly at a “door” to a bathroom. They knock and begin to do whatever their nervous habit is. More and more people continuously come out and wait in line. Each person has a nervous habit that they do when they need to pee. They may say things like “How long have you been waiting?” and “I can’t take this!” Two people walk by drinking water bottles and everyone in lines moans in agony. Then, one person says, “I can’t take this anymore!” They race off stage. There is a big sigh of relief and everyone in line moans in agony. Then, the “door” opens and one girl comes out, tussling her hair and walks off stage. Then, as the first person in line is about to go in, a guy comes out of the bathroom with “sex hair”, nods and says, “Yeah, I did.” The first person is then hesitant about going into the bathroom but the second person says, “GO!” and pushes them in.

CURTAIN

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**A Sad State of Affairs**

By Jane

*Jane sits on a stool somewhere on stage (olio?) and makes awkward conversation with the audience. As this continues, cast members come out and ask, “What are you doing?” and she tells them she’s doing a scene. The conversation is awkward and strange and oddly funny. It persists for an uncomfortably long time. Eventually, someone calls, “Oh, for the love of God, Jane, curtain!” and the scene ends.*

CURTAIN

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**Man-erisms**

By Matt, Carrie and Alicia

*Two men enter and cross center. When they reach center a conversation consisting only of high pitched “ohs” starts. The conversation is normal physically. After a few moments of this three more men enter and join in the “oh” conversation still acting completely normal. Two women enter having a conversation that is completely normal. As they pass the men react with double “oh-ohs”. More “oh” conversation follows until curtain is called.*

CURTAIN

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## Happily Ever Never in Your Never Land

by Megan

*[bright lights. pinkish orange ish] (Girl and Boy USC holding hands)*

**Girl:** This is perfect. Better than a dream come true. I am convinced that I have fallen head over heels in love with you. You're honest. You're playful. And you taught me how to fly.

*(Boy lets go and skips offstage. Girl skips forward to CC)*

It was easy. I didn't have to put any effort in it besides believing. And I believe in you.

*[lights turn bright green](Girl claps hands and four girls do some sort of leap dance across US)*

I believe in fairies too.

*(Girl walks FSC and sits down cross legged. Four boys enter, two from each side, and sit next to her in a semi circle, mouthing laughter. pushing each other a little. being BOYS)*

I have never been in such a land. A land where we are free. Free to live the way we want to live. NO RULES! I get lost with you, and your boys. Every day is a new crazy adventure. And I love it. *(Boys rush off stage. When they are gone she looks around and gets up)*

No! I don't want to leave! I don't want to grow up! I want to be with you and live this way till forever!

*(Girl walks back slowly) as [lights get darker]*

But time just goes Tick Tock. Tick Tock. Tick Tock. Tick Tock.

*[Bell noise? maybe]*

I grow up. Go to college, get a real career, get married, maybe have my own children. I grow and change but I still think about you and miss you. I remember everything about you. I don't believe I will ever forget about how much I cared about you and how happy you made me.

But while I grow, you stay the same. Now that I'm gone, I'm sure you don't think about me at all anymore. I bet you are flying high right now being the same careless stupid irresponsible ridiculous fun amazing beautiful special boy. The same boy who taught me how to fly

*[lights get a little brighter to how it was in beginning but not AS bright]*

I knew from the moment we met we would have a fairy tale ending. I thought that after my two months of absence, we would see each other again and that you would still be my prince charming and you would kiss me and we would live happily ever after.

But our fairy tale ending wasn't like the ones with princes, princesses, and love. Ours was the one with indians, pirates, mermaids, fairy's, lost boys, a curious girl, and the boy who will never grow up.

*(Boy walks back on stage USL crossing down not noticing the girl looking happy to Right Olio where he looks out as her eyes follow him. He doesn't see her)*

But you're not actually Peter Pan. Peter Pan will never leave never land and he will NEVER grow up. We both know that you can, I believe you can. So own up to the reason you can't handle a girl friend right now and GROW UP!

*(He suddenly looks sad. looking around realizing reality. walks over to her grabs her hands and they stand in same position as they did in opening)*

So the next time you teach a girl how to fly, you can be there for her.  
 (They step away from each other and look before he skips off and she skips forward)  
 [slowly gets very dark again]  
 So the next time you teach a girl how to fly, you can catch her when she falls head over  
 heels in love with you

CURTAIN

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**Hint- A 'Clue' story**

By Laurel

*(Jane, Matt, Carrie, \_\_\_xxx\_\_\_, and \_\_\_xxx\_\_\_ are all sitting in a room conversing)*

**Jane** : *(Reveals a rolling pin as her gift but places it aside)* What the woman in the corner  
 over there is wearing, I'm not entirely sure.

**Matt**: *(See's he was given a yo-yo and also sets it aside)* Agreed, and I don't really see  
 the importance of this get together if our host doesn't come out soon.

**Jane**: *(Nods)*

\_\_\_xxx\_\_\_ : These are very curious gifts; I'm not entirely sure why I was given a broom.

\_\_\_xxx\_\_\_ : *(Holds Rubberchicken)* At least a broom is used in everyday life.

**Carrie**: Does anyone even know why we're all here? *(Holds a jump rope)*

*(Andy- the host, \_\_\_xxx\_\_\_; Laurel, & \_\_\_xxx\_\_\_: all enter the room from SL)*

**Andy**: Ah, It appears all my company has arrived, you may be quite confused as to why I  
 brought you all here and gave you the mysterious gifts you have received. You see, I  
 believe they all fit to your character in some way. And somehow or another you could  
 use these objects, even today.

*(Doorbell)*

**Andy**: Excuse me. *(Exits SL)*

\_\_\_xxx\_\_\_ :: Used today? I can't imagine why I'd have to use a hammer today.

\_\_\_xxx\_\_\_ :: *(Holds a boot)* I can see where he'd think we might use them,

\_\_\_xxx\_\_\_ :: *(References to Chicken)* Honestly? You can?

**Laurel**: *(Holds a giant pen)* I don't know why he'd give them to us though, even if we  
 could use them.

*(Andy Re-enters with Russell)*

**Andy**: The catering is here.

**Russell**: Anyone order a pizza?

**Jane**: This is ridiculous, why did you bring us here?

**Andy**: I'm getting to that, you see I have a game for all of you; I have placed a small  
 fortune throughout—

*(Lights down, misc thuds and noises. Andy falls to the floor.)*

\_\_\_xxx\_\_\_ : For Pete's sake someone turn on the lights.

\_\_\_xxx\_\_\_ : That...isn't the lights.

*(Lights up, everyone looks slightly flustered, all objects are on the floor near Andy's  
 body)*

**Matt**: Well that was strange.

\_\_\_xxx\_\_\_ : Everything about this situation is strange!

**Laurel**: Where did he go?

**Carrie:** (*points to the floor*) I didn't do that.

\_\_\_xxx\_\_\_: Isn't that what people say when they did? Your object could have been used to strangle him!

**Carrie:** You could have beaten him over the head! Your gift is also on the floor.

\_\_\_xxx\_\_\_: Everyone's gift is on the floor!

**Russell:** Maybe I should go...

**All** (*Except Russell, obviously*): NO!

**Laurel:** You could have killed him you can't leave.

**Russell:** With what? It's not like a hot pizza box could have done it

\_\_\_xxx\_\_\_: Who knows with what! All we know is that our host is for some reason on the floor and we have no idea what is going on, so nobody leaves!

**Matt:** (*kneels down*) Guys, I think he's really dead.

**Jane:** Well enough of this I didn't kill him, I'm leaving.

**Carrie:** You can't leave you probably did kill him! You hate everyone here!

**Jane:** That's no justification for blaming me.

**Russell:** Guys I really have to deliver other pizza.

**All:** SIT DOWN!

**Laurel:** Well someone did it and no can and I mean no one can leave.

\_\_\_xxx\_\_\_: How are we supposed to figure it out?

\_\_\_xxx\_\_\_: What if the person just keeps killing us off?

\_\_\_xxx\_\_\_: We have to figure out who it is, and quick.

\_\_\_xxx\_\_\_: I honestly see no way how. We're going to need help.

*That's where the audience comes in. semi, curtain.*

(NOTE: In the actual performance, the MC came onstage and gave an improvised story for what happened which was acted out by the cast. Each night was different.)

CURTAIN

## I Need to Dance

By Anna

**Anna:** ARGENTINA!! Really?! Six thousand miles away...for a year? And I thought this was going to be a piece of cake!

I thought I could handle it. I thought I would be sad for a few days but then get back to MY life. It's been little over a month and the time is just dragging...for me, that is.

Sweet Max is having the time of his life, exploring new cities and towns, going to his new school and meeting new friends. Every day is a new adventure for him. Every day to me seems like eternity.

God I am so frustrated! (*do kick*). I want to be supportive of him and I want to be happy for him but I also want to feel sorry for myself just a little bit. My family and friends are trying to be supportive but they just don't realize it feels like a piece of my heart has been cut out. Am I angry or just sad? (*do hard shoe move across the floor*) Hmmmm...I think I am angry AND sad.

Maybe we should just break up. I mean, a long distance relationship is hard work for any couple, but we're only fifteen and sixteen. I see those cute Argentinian girls who are now

his facebook friends and it makes me crazy. I know he loves me but could he fall in love with one of them too? (*do another dance move*)

I need to stay busy. I need to stay focused and have fun and keep up my grades. I need to laugh with my friends and stop thinking about him all the time. (*do long dance move to get out your frustrations*).Or maybe..

(*STOP...look out at audience*) I just need to dance...

CURTAIN

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**Nuclear Detonation**

By Jane

*The song "Fitter Happier" by Radiohead plays. A table is set up center stage with four (or five) chairs. There is a pile of plates and napkins on the table. Two(or three) kids are seen running around the stage, playing. Everyone is smiling and happy. The kids are playing and giggling. A woman enters, the mother, carrying a warm pan (dinner) with oven mitts. She sets the pan on the table. She then sets the plates and napkins at each table setting. She does this with extreme care. The children form a line for their mother. The mother has a huge smile on her face and she goes around checking her children's hands. They take their seats at the table. She then makes sure they all have napkins on their laps. A man enters, the father. He is also smiling. He takes off his hat and coat and hands them to his wife, who gives him a kiss on the cheek and rushes them off stage. The father pats his children on their heads and takes a seat at the table, putting his napkin on his lap. The mother returns and sits with them. She leans over to the nearest child and wipes a smudge from their face (in that way mothers do). The father then holds out his hands for the people on either side of him to take. The mother and father smile at each other lovingly. Everyone takes hands and closes their eyes to say grace but instead of thanking God for their meal, everyone simply screams at the top of their lungs. The song plays throughout the scene.*

*Note: If possible, the image of a nuclear bomb exploding goes off during the scream.*

CURTAIN

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**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:**

By: Lisa

**Lisa :** You and I don't hear each other very well. So tonight I will sit here in my world, and you will sit there in yours. And maybe today, we'll hear each other better. We always did seem to function better when we were worlds apart. You said I probably wouldn't want to see you ever again. I'm not sure if you are right about that yet. You have no idea who I am. You don't know that my favorite color is purple, and you don't know that I only wear bell bottom jeans. And you don't know that I have always wondered if you thought about what my life would be like if you left like you did. And you don't know, that *if in fact* you did think about my life, that I wonder what justifiable reason you found, that made it ok for you to get on that plane and leave... for years. I don't want an answer to that question. Because I have thought of every possibility, and not one of them fixes anything. I guess I'm just not young enough to know everything, or old enough to hate everything. Maybe then I can figure it out. But what I did figure out is that I think we

have a shot at this father/daughter thing. You said I traded you for the life I wanted. And you're right, I did. But you traded me for a war zone. I forgive you. And if you'll forgive me, we can start over from here, from this stage, from this point forward. What do you say? Hi, I'm Lisa. My favorite color is purple and I only wear bell bottom jeans...

CURTAIN

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**Another Way To Break Away**

By Russell

(NOTE: sung with ukulele accompaniment)

Did I mention  
 That when  
 I walked through the  
 Door I was so  
 Happy  
 To see  
 One good-lookin'  
 Gal who's got me  
 Trippin'  
 And I swore  
 That I'd capture  
 Her heart for sure  
 I  
 Was the knight  
 In shining armor  
 She was waiting for  
 But  
 I guess  
 I was a mess  
 Cause she confessed  
 We  
 Were never  
 Gonna be  
 Forever  
 Cause she  
 Broke my  
 Heart and left me  
 For some other guy  
 You Can  
 Flirt all you want  
 But I know by now  
 There Are more  
 Fish in this sea  
 Patiently waiting for Me

So you  
 Can try all you want  
 I've given up  
 On  
 Love  
 With our hearts  
 Spread so far apart  
 (repeat)  
 (repeat chorus with change)

*With repeat rhythm will be slowed down so: two girls are on stage talking. The boy enters stage left with another boy on "I walked through the..." the boy then sees the girl and instantly gets nervous on "one good looking gal..." he then goes up to her and starts to talk to her on "I swore that I'd..." until "I was a mess". The girl then walks away (stage right) with the other boy on "Left me for some other guy..." the boy starts to walk away but then is pulled back by the other girl on "there are more fish..." they then walk off stage left hand in hand.*

**WAR**

By Jerry

*No dialogue. A few actors enter onto the stage with paper balls hidden. One of the actors pulls out a paper ball, and throws it at the unarmed audience members. Slowly more actors throw paper at the audience. The audience is like "WTF?!" and then the audience has a stroke of brilliance, and is like "Ohhhhhh" An all out paper war has been started. It can go on for however long is deemed necessary.*

CURTAIN

**The Search for the Meaning of Life**

By Jane

*The entire cast (or a large majority of the cast) searches frantically for the "meaning of life." They go around the stage, into the audience, and into the tech booth. People say things like "Not under the techie!" or "Not in (audience member's name)'s pocket!" or "Not in the program!" There is a silence as everyone searches and then someone yells out, "Found it! It's name is (reads audience member's name)!" Everyone says, "Ohhhh." Someone says, "I knew it!"*

CURTAIN

**I Want it Now!**

By Julia

*(Human is sitting alone on stage and each time a new actor enters they place their object on the person)*

**Actor 1:** I could go to listen to my favorite band in concert... or I could just listen to my ipod.

**Actor 2:** I could go and talk to my friends in person... but it's easier to text them.

**Actor 3** I would send my grandma a letter... but I could just send her an email.

**Actor 4:** I could read a book...but TV fits my attention span better

**Actor 5:** I could go for a walk outside... but I think I would rather play Wii Fit.

**Actor 6:** I would go to the store to get a personal birthday present for my friend...but I could just order something online.

**Actor 7** I could do all my math work by hand... but why not just use a calculator?

**Actor 8** I could make a nice home cooked meal... or I could just get take out

**Actor 9** I could eat my fruits and vegetables... or I could just drink V8.

**Actor 11** I could catch up on sleep... or I could just drink coffee

**Actor 11** I could make a scrapbook... or I could just create an album on Facebook

**Actor 12** I could hang out with my friends and tell them how I'm feeling...or I could just tell them to follow me on twitter.

**Human:** What about Beauty, Nature, Splendor, and Simplicity? Things like sunsets, flowers, trees, oceans and mountains.

**Actor 13:** Oh, there's an App for that.

CURTAIN

**Whack- a-Controversy:**

By Laurel

\_\_\_\_\_ *xxx* \_\_\_\_\_ is a contest in a carnival game based off of Wack-A-Mole. The moles are actually common controversies and he is simply expressing his opinion. In the end he is awarded said opinion.

**Matt:** Homosexuality\_\_\_\_\_ *xxx* \_\_\_\_\_ Hits;\_\_\_\_\_ *xxx* \_\_\_\_\_ : Abortion\_\_\_\_\_ *xxx* \_\_\_\_\_ Hits;**Carrie:** Healthcare\_\_\_\_\_ *xxx* \_\_\_\_\_ Hits;**Andy:** Border de-construction\_\_\_\_\_ *xxx* \_\_\_\_\_ Hits;**Laurel:** Assisted Suicide\_\_\_\_\_ *xxx* \_\_\_\_\_ Hits;\_\_\_\_\_ *xxx* \_\_\_\_\_ : George W. Bush\_\_\_\_\_ *xxx* \_\_\_\_\_ Hits;*(Everything is repeated twice)***Lisa:** Congratulations, you have an opinion;\_\_\_\_\_ *xxx* \_\_\_\_\_ : *(Takes the document)***Moles:** *(Giggle)*

CURTAIN

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**???****By Jordan**

*(Three people are onstage, two women and one man. The women are sitting across from each other while the boy is standing behind F2. The boy moves about a lot but never leaves F2's side, but the girls never EVER look at him. F1 addressed f2 firmly with attempted eye contact but F2 only looks up when answering.)*

F1: So, do you like boys or girls?

F2: (keeps head down as M begins to speak)

M: Boys or girls? What right do you have to ask that? Either way I answer you'll turn it against me! I can say boy—and then I'm a freak! I know what you think, about people like me. 'Why would you want to become a man? No one would want to sleep with you then!'. Or I can lie through my teeth and tell you I like girls—and there goes any parties I might ever have! So what do you want me to say? Boy, so you can throw it in my face how much of a freak I am? Or girl, so my social life goes from pathetic to nonexistent? But you're always telling me not to lie...so...

M and F2 together: Boys...

F1: ...You...like boys...but you want to be a boy?

M and F2: (flinch)

M: ...Yeah! How many times do you think I say that to myself? I get it, okay? I get how...messed up it is. I know what the world thinks, I know what the gay boys lucky enough to be born BOYS think of people like me! But...*please*. I've tried being a girl, and I've tried liking girls. And it's not who I am. I'm...I'm your son! Your gay son!...who you call daughter. So...So I am what you said. I like boys...and I want to be one too.

M and F2: (nod)

F1: (sigh) I just don't... Why couldn't you be a lesbian? At least there are other lesbians in the world.

M and F2: (jerk back, hurt)

M: I...I...you...There are other people like me! (discouraged) There...are...

F1: (shakes head hopelessly, exits stage left)

(M and F2 stare at where F1 exited, blank.)

CURTAIN

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