

Performance in the classroom:  
Exploring teachers' use of dramatic performance in classroom instruction

by

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B.S., Kansas State University, 2011  
M.A., Loyola University Chicago, 2014

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

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## **Abstract**

This qualitative case study explores the ways in which an experienced educator utilizes elements of dramatic performance, and improvised drama, in her classroom instructional practices. While a great deal of existing literature articulates the benefits of participation in creative dramatics for both adults and children, and the ways creative drama and improvisation intersect with learning, literacy, and social skills development, little scholarship directly positions educators themselves as dramatic performers and improvisers. It is the goal of this research to fill this gap in existing literature by explicitly considering educators as performers of both scripted and improvised drama.

Drawing on my own experiences as a speech and theatre teacher, and my training in sketch writing and improvisation at Chicago's famed Second City Conservatory and iO Theater, this research explores the ways in which educators employ principles of dramatic performance in their daily pedagogical practices. Positioned within the interpretivist theoretical framework of phenomenology, this case study uses semi-structured, in-depth interviews with an experienced English Language Arts educator and two of her students, as well as recorded and in-person classroom observations, instructional materials, and student work samples to construct an understanding of these practices.

The findings of this study indicate that experienced educators often incorporate elements of dramatic performance and improvisation in their daily teaching and classroom management practices. Noting the participant teacher's reliance on the dramatic principles of role-play, facilitation of ensemble behaviors among students, and the foundational improvisation principle of "yes, and", this study suggests skills in performance, knowingly or otherwise, play a key role in a successful educator's daily pedagogical practice. These findings

offer significant implications for future research in classroom instruction, behavior interventions, and the training of pre-service and professional educators.

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Approved by:

Major Professor  
Vicki Sherbert

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## **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

“We learn through experience and experiencing, and no one teaches anyone anything” (Spolin, 1999, p. 79). Among educators, this quote might well evoke awe and frustration in equal measure. Spolin, a performer and theatre teacher specializing in improvisation, here suggests that improvised drama can be conceptualized as an act of experiencing the world, and thus, learning. After graduating from the Second City Conservatory, a training center founded on Spolin’s ideology, I accepted my first full-time teaching position, and was shocked to realize the extent to which my training in improvisation supplemented my degree in education. I found myself coaching my students during class in the same way my directors had coached me during improvised scenes. I noticed the foundational skills I had practiced for years at Second City—commitment to the ensemble, being present onstage, affirming others’ ideas, and building collaboratively and without judgment on the contributions of my peers—were as valuable in my teaching as they had been in my onstage performances. Likewise, I found a subtle difference between feeling a classroom of middle schoolers disengage and spiral out of control at 9:00am, and that of performing live comedy to a drunken, unimpressed crowd of adults at midnight. In both instances, the performer failed to captivate the audience’s attention. In the context of the classroom, the teacher can be positioned as a performer, and the act of teaching as an act of dramatic performance—largely improvised, often ineffective, occasionally inspiring. It is at this intersection of teaching and performance that this research begins.

### **Rationale**

Most educators would likely agree that effective teaching is equal parts an art and a science. While a wealth of research exists detailing the efficacy of various teaching strategies

and curricula, what gives a teacher the ability to captivate a class of students is far less easy to quantify (Weisman, 2012). This research seeks to understand how the act of teaching can be positioned as an act of dramatic performance, one which specifically utilizes elements of improvised drama. Notably, a fair amount of research, much of it quite recent, exists detailing how the use of drama as an instructional or assessment method is of value to students, often referred to as role-play (Gjestvang et al, 2021; Rashid & Qaisai, 2017; Ricket et al, 2018; Seltzer, 2019; Shaftel, George, & Fannie, 1950). While this research does point to the role of drama in the classroom, it is limited to a context in which students participate in intentional dramatic performance or role play, sometimes alongside the teacher, sometimes among their peers. Further, limited research exists suggesting that the ability to improvise is central to effective teaching, however, the term “improvisation” is being used outside of a dramatic context, denoting flexibility and spontaneity rather than the ability to improvise as a performed character (Maheux & Lajoie, 2011). Scholarship which deliberately positions teaching as an act of dramatic performance is extremely limited.

The origins of formalized dramatic improvisation begin with Viola Spolin, who developed a series of improvisational games initially implemented at Chicago’s Hull House with both children and adults, and formalized during her time as a teacher supervisor for the Works Progress Administration (Drinko, 2013). Often referred to as the mother of improvisation, Spolin’s son, Paul Sills, later founded Chicago’s famed sketch and improv theater The Second City. Both a theater and training center, The Second City remains to this day grounded in Spolin’s ideology, using it as the foundation for its curriculum as well as a tool for generating scripted sketch material (Proudfit, 2016). Spolin is particularly relevant to this work because she self-identified as both a performer and a teacher, and positioned the act

of dramatic improvisation as one which engages participants in the act of discovery and learning. Spolin (1963) argues “If the environment permits it, anyone can learn whatever he chooses to learn, and if the individual permits it, the environment will teach him everything it has to teach” (p. 63). While a handful of researchers have argued that Spolin’s ideology can be applied to classroom instruction, beyond their contributions the scholarship is essentially nonexistent (Holdhus et al, 2016; Proudfit, 2016). This study arch seeks to build on Spolin’s work, and position the act of classroom teaching and learning, within any content, as an act of improvised dramatic performance.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of the study is to better understand the way that the act of teaching functions as an act of dramatic performance. Of particular interest is the way that teachers’ actions in the classroom constitute a type of performed, improvised drama.

## **Research Questions**

This research explores the following research questions:

1. In what ways, if any, do teachers utilize principles of dramatic performance during their classroom instruction and interactions with students?
2. In what ways, if any, do teachers’ instructional techniques and interactions with students utilize principles of dramatic improvisation?

## **Operationalization of Constructs**

In the interest of clarity, the following are contextual definitions of words which will be utilized repeatedly in this study.



**Actors** – This can be defined simply as the individuals who participate in dramatic performance. Notably, it can also be used to indicate what Stake (2010) refers to as “people having active roles in the functioning of the case” (p. 169).

**Classroom** - A classroom will be considered any environment in which an adult in a formalized teaching role delivers instruction to students.

**Drama** - An act of performed theatre, either in a formal theatrical setting or in interpersonal interactions, such as those which occur in the classroom.

**Ensemble** – A group of performers working collaboratively to produce a work of improvised or scripted drama.

**iO** – An improv theater and training center in Chicago, founded by Del Close and Charna Halpern in 1981. Formerly known as Improv Olympic.

**Improvisation** - Improvisation can be defined in both a dramatic and behavioral context. It can be used to refer both to formalized dramatic performance, either through improvised games or longer, scenic performance (Spolin, 1966), or to a non-actor’s ability to be flexible and change plans as needed.

**Performance** - This can refer to formal, dramatic performance for an audience, or to the behavior of teachers and students in the classroom.

**Play** – This can be defined in multiple contexts. Play can refer to the recreational activity of children, which has been positioned as a vehicle for understanding culture (Mintz, 2004; Monighan-Nourot, Scales, Van Hoorn & Almy, 1987; Pellegrini, 1995; Sutton-Smith, 1972). Boyd (1971) defines play as an activity which allows children “to transport oneself psychologically into an imaginatively set up situation and to act consistently within it, simply for the intrinsic satisfaction one has in playing,” (p. 79). Finally, within a dramatic context,

particular as it relates to improvisation. Spolin (1963), who originated the now-famous improvisation games, defines play as “a term usable instead of rehearsal in improvisational theater,” (p. 388).

**Proscenium Stage** - A traditional performance space in which the audience is positioned on a single side of the stage. The stage is generally positioned behind a frame of some kind, often called the *proscenium arch*.

**Rhetorical Situation** - Originally articulated by Aristotle, the rhetorical situation is a conceptualization of circumstances in which a speaker may want to persuade an audience. Components include the speaker/writer, the audience, the message, and the context/culture in which the persuasion occurs. The rhetorical situation is related to Aristotle’s concepts of ethos, pathos, and logos, which can be used to influence an audience (Bitzer, 1968).

**Role** – A character or being of which an actor assumes the role during scripted or improvised dramatic performance.

**Role Play** – This can be positioned as distinct from dramatic improvisation or play, because it is more structured and typically not performed for an audience.

**Second City** – A sketch and improvisation training center and theater in Chicago’s Old Town neighborhood, founded in 1959 by Paul Sills, son of Viola Spolin. The Second City’s training curriculum is grounded in Spolin’s ideology.

**Sidecoaching** – A technique in which the director will provide guidance and suggestions to actors performing an improvised scene from just offstage. This concept was originally defined by Spolin (1963).

**Student** - Any adult or child in a formalized learning environment in which they receive instruction from a teacher.

**Teacher** - Any individual in a formalized role who provides academic or social instruction to students.

**Teaching** - The act of providing formalized (though not entirely scripted) instruction to students. The teacher is most often an adult in a formalized teaching role, but this study acknowledges that students can and do engage in the teaching process through collaborative learning efforts.

**Theatre** - The formal act of dramatic performance for an audience.

**Theater** - The building in which dramatic performances for an audience take place.

**Theater in-the-round** - A performance space in which the stage is entirely surrounded by the audience. Actors typically enter through the aisles, and there is no proscenium arch. Also called an arena stage.

**Theatre Games** – Improvisation games originated by Viola Spolin during her time teaching drama to children and adults at Chicago's Hull House. These games later became the ideological foundation of modern improvisation, including The Second City theater, which her son later founded.

**Thrust Stage** - A performance space in which the audience is positioned on three sides of the stage.

**Yes, And** – A concept in dramatic improvisation in which actors engaging in an improvised scene should affirm the contributions of the other performers (saying *yes*) and contribute their own content (saying *and*). This concept is the foundation of Viola Spolin's work.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research is positioned most broadly within the framework of interpretivism. With roots in Franz Boas' early anthropological work, interpretivism rejects the scientific certainty

of positivism and instead seeks to understand the social world with consideration of cultural, environmental, and experiential influences (Bhattacharya , 2017; Panourgiá, 2012). Max Weber is credited with originating interpretive sociology, arguing that the social nature of human existence cannot be divorced from qualitative research, eschewing the search for causal relationships between phenomena and instead seeking broader understanding (Milton, 2007). William Dilthey and Wilhelm Windelband later further solidified this ideology, asserting the need for investigative methods unique to the social sciences and formalizing the role of interpretivist research as one of understanding, rather than providing rules (Battacharya, 2017). Because this research is qualitative in nature, and concerned with understanding the experiences of classroom teachers and how their identities and actions within the classroom might be positioned as an act of dramatic performance, interpretivism is a fitting theoretical framework within which to begin this investigation.

More specifically, this research will work within the interpretive orientation of phenomenology, with some incorporation of phenomenological hermeneutics. In its simplest terms, phenomenology “seeks to reveal more fully the essences and meanings of human experience [and] uncover the qualitative rather than the quantitative factors in behavior and experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 105). Originally founded by Edmund Husserl, phenomenology is a field of study concerned with understanding experience and consciousness (Bhattacharya , 2017; Menon et al, 2014; Zahavi, 2003). Within phenomenology, the relationship between the researcher and the research participants is blurred. To best understand the phenomena being studied, phenomenologists emphasize the importance of a practice called bracketing, in which the researcher consciously disregards previous experiences or preconceived notions of that which is being studied, so that they may view it with fresh eyes

(Bhattacharya, 2017; Giorgi, 1997; Giorgi, 2003; Giorgi, 2006; Giorgi, 2008; Giorgi, 2017; Moustakas, 1994; Streb, 1984).

Perhaps the most prominent scholar in the field of phenomenology is German philosopher Martin Heidegger, who wrote extensively on the nature of being and human beings' interactions with the world (Fisherman, 2016; Huttunen, & Kakkori, 2018; Mertel, 2020; Neufeld, 2012). Similarly, Edmund Husserl, who formalized the concept of bracketing, posited that a study of human consciousness must pay particular attention to the phenomena on which human consciousness is directed (Bhattacharya, 2017; Heath, 2008; Streb, 1984). Later, Clark Moustakas and Amedeo Giorgi continued to formalize phenomenological methodologies into the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Bhattacharya, 2017). Within this study, the phenomenon being examined is the experiences of classroom teachers as performers, and the way they perceive their actions in the classroom.

## **Methodology**

This research utilizes case study, with borrowed elements of narrative and arts-based inquiry. Stake (2010) identifies the two most common subjects of case study within education as people and programs. While perhaps the most common examples of case study are those examining the experiences of an individual, Yin (2014) notes that case study has also been utilized to examine “decisions, programs, the implementation process, and organizational change” (p. 29). This case study can be positioned firmly within the former category, as it is concerned with the individual experiences of classroom teachers and how their instruction might be positioned as an act of improvised drama.

## **Participants**

Participants selected for this case study include a single high school English Language Arts teacher and two students. For the purpose of this study, she will be identified using the pseudonym Dr. Smith. The teacher selected for participation has 20 years of experience at the time of the research, 16 of which occurred at the research site. This teacher has been identified by colleagues, administrators, and students alike as especially effective and engaging in her instructional practices, and her class is generally understood to be one of the most rigorous in the building. She holds a PhD in education, and serves in multiple leadership roles within the building. The research site is a large high school in suburban Kansas City, serving a diverse, wealthy student population.

Students selected for participation are both sophomores in Dr. Smith's honors sophomore English class. For the purpose of this study, they will be identified using the pseudonyms William and David. Both are white males, from two-parent households. Each are involved in various extra-curricular activities, and take pride in their academic performance at school. All three participants have a previous relationship with the researcher.

## **Data collection**

Various forms of data were collected throughout this research, including observations, interviews, field notes, lesson plans, instructional materials, and student work. Observations occurred during three class periods, and Dr. Smith recorded an additional three for the researcher to view asynchronously. During these observations, a field journal was kept, and those notes later transcribed. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. Two interviews were conducted with each student, and a single interview was conducted with the teacher. During this interview, Dr. Smith was asked to reflect on her

classroom practice, particularly in ways she perceives her teaching as an act of performance. Informal conversations with students, and the analysis of student work completed during class, also proved a meaningful collection of data.

### **Data analysis**

Data collected was analyzed to see in what ways elements of improvised drama manifest in teachers' behavior in their classrooms. Data analysis methods consisted of direct interpretation, in which the data was analyzed for themes. Once identified, these themes were coded and evaluated within the entirety of the data, identifying patterns in relation to the research questions, and charted in a spreadsheet. These patterns were ultimately utilized to construct answers to the research questions, which will take a narrative form (Stake, 2010).

### **Subjectivity statement**

As with any scholarship, it is essential that I interrogate my own positionality as it relates to this research. Notably, it was not my goal, nor do I believe it is possible, to achieve neutrality in relation to my research. Battacharya (2017) argues "claiming value neutrality would be intellectually dishonest because as human beings we have values, and if we become truly neutral and have no values, beliefs or assumptions, we could argue that we would be quite robotic" (p. 36). In this spirit, it is not my intention to claim value neutrality, but instead to acknowledge the ways in which my experiences color my perceptions of my research topic. That said, it is essential that I frequently revisit the ways my experiences overlap with and diverge from those of my research participants, and explore how this might influence my ability to fully understand my findings. In this effort, it is important to evaluate the privilege I experience due to my overlapping identities, as well as my broader subjectivity in relation to my research.

First, it is essential to explore my own privilege. As a white, straight, cisgender woman, I have considerable social capital at my disposal. Despite experiencing sexism (particularly as a woman coaching competitive debate, a notoriously male-dominated activity) I enjoy immense privilege due to my race, and the proximity to the social dominance of white men which it affords me. White women sit in a unique position of societal privilege in which our race and gender can be easily weaponized against marginalized populations, particularly people of color. Our tears, sincere or otherwise, have been used as justification for racist acts of violence since well before Emmett Till's murder. Today, white women constitute nearly 80% of the teaching force (Williams, 2008) while the population of public school students is less than 50% white (Orfield, 2016). It is difficult not to connect the racial makeup of teachers and students to overwhelming data pointing to disparate discipline practices between white and Black students (Gregory & Roberts, 2017). As a white, female teacher interested in conducting research in a public school setting, I cannot divorce myself from this racialized context. When McIntosh (2007) comments of her own privilege "Whiteness protected me from many kinds of hostility, distress, and violence, which I was being subtly trained to visit, in turn, upon people of color" (p. 5) Here, I see clearly my own experiences, and I wonder endlessly to what extent I have subconsciously inflicted such violence on my students of color. Further, like most white folks, I have internalized what McIntosh (2007) describes as the "myth of meritocracy" (p. 5) in which I have for years removed my race from any consideration of my successes. Despite becoming cognizant of my own racialized privilege and working to unpack the ways white supremacy has unintentionally permeated my thinking and worldview, my race and gender still constitute a significant boundary to my ability to fully understand the experiences of people of color.



In addition to the intersection of my race and gender, my upbringing has granted me similar privilege. In addition to the privilege of growing up with two parents, stable housing and income, and access to ample educational opportunities, my parents' education deeply affected my ability to navigate the world. Though both of my parents were the first in their family to attend college, overcoming significant social, economic, and cultural barriers to do so, they had both achieved doctorates by the time I finished high school. My mother was a journalist-turned-teacher, my father an associate professor at the university I would ultimately attend, and each provided guidance as I began my post-secondary education. As a result, I entered college with the confidence of a traveler following a trail already mapped on my behalf—a privilege many do not enjoy. I did not earn this privilege, but have spent my entire life reaping its benefits. It is impossible that this privilege will not influence my ability to conduct qualitative research, because it cannot be disconnected from my perception of the world. In particular, my upbringing has led me to enter academic spaces with a strong sense that I deserve to be there, whereas many people as capable as me, or more so, have internalized the belief that they do not belong, by no fault of their own. This privilege must be constantly interrogated as I conduct research within these academic spaces that so often exclude people whose lived experiences differ from my own.

Much more broadly, my position within the world leads me to approach my research from a distinctly Western perspective. As an American, I have internalized Western conceptualizations of the world. Smith (2021) argues that “Western research draw from an ‘archive’ of knowledge and systems, rules and values which stretch beyond the boundaries of Western science to the system now referred to as the West” (p. 42). She notes that a Western positionality particularly influences conceptualizations of gender, geography, history and time.

I have come to realize that I have internalized these belief systems, engaging in what Smith (2021) describes as “research through imperial eyes” (p. 56) in which I prioritize Western conceptualizations of the most fundamental concepts as inherently accurate, and all other belief systems as falsehoods. Further, because I am of European descent, my worldview has always been the dominant global worldview, and I have rarely had to question my own belief systems. This constitutes intellectual privilege. Perhaps more than any other element of my identity, the privilege of my Western positionality influences my ability to objectively view the world, particularly my ability to understand the differing worldviews of non-Europeans.

Finally, it is important to consider my own subjectivity in relation to my research. The purpose of this work is to better understand the ways in which the act of teaching functions as an act of dramatic performance, particularly the ways teachers’ actions in the classroom constitute a type of performed, improvised drama. I was drawn to this topic due to my own background in professional drama, my training in improvisation, and my work as a high school speech and drama teacher. Most notably, while getting my master’s degree in education, I simultaneously studied improvisation at Chicago’s Second City Conservatory and The iO Theater. During my training at Second City, I was compelled by the connection I saw between elements of improvisation and effective classroom instruction. While my own connections to this research certainly motivate my work, they could likewise constitute limitations to my understanding. Having trained extensively in improvised drama, I will undoubtedly approach the research with preconceived notions and values in relation to my work. Further, my own positionality as both a teacher and trained improviser will undoubtedly color my ability to objectively evaluate my research findings. While it is impossible for me to achieve total objectivity, it is my goal to achieve what Peshkin (1988) describes as “tamed subjectivity” (p.

8) in which I acknowledge my own positionality without allowing it undue influence on my work. By interrogating my own subjectivity in this way, I am hopeful that I can engage in meaningful, authentic research.

### **Limits and possibilities of the study**

It is equally important to clearly delineate the scope of this research. Like all studies, this one poses unique opportunities as well as limitations to its contribution to scholarship, and to our understanding of the research purpose. Further, not clearly delineating the boundaries of this research risks the results ultimately becoming clouded by irrelevant or unnecessary information.

### **Boundaries**

Perhaps the most obvious limitation of this research is the fact it is taking the form of a case study. Stake (2010) argues that cases constitute bounded systems, with distinct boundaries and interacting parts. Notably, “custom has it that not everything is a case. A child may be a case. A teacher may be a case. But her teaching lacks the specificity, the boundedness, to be called a case” (Stake, 2010, p. 2). The cases, in this instance, is the classroom teacher being observed, within the classrooms in which instruction takes place, rather than the instruction itself. The integrated parts Stake (2010) describes are constituted by the overlapping roles of teacher, student, and even administrator and community members, all of whom have intersecting, and at times even competing interests about what occurs in classrooms. While these and indeed many other external forces do intersect in the classroom, the school and broader community in which it sits all lay outside the boundaries of this case, which is firmly situated in a classroom.

## **Limitations**

Similarly, a variety of limitations exist within this research. Most notably, the ability to generalize case study research and apply it to other instances is often limited. Stake (2010) argues “case study seems a poor basis for generalization. Only a single case or just a few cases will be studied, but these will be studied at length. Certain activities or problems or responses will come up again and again, thus...certain generalizations will be drawn” (p. 7). Therefore, it is unlikely that this research will be broadly generalizable outside of the educational context in which it occurred. Further, the cases themselves will likely constitute their own limitations based on a variety of factors. Even if the research took place in an ideal world in which one suburban, one urban and one rural school setting were selected as research sites, the findings within each building would scarcely be applicable to all buildings similarly situated. Schools are incredibly context-bound institutions, varying based on their community’s geography, culture, politics, and myriad other factors. This means that the findings of a case study conducted in one building are unlikely to be universally applied to all schools, no matter how similar they may appear.

The same can be said for research participants. While it might be a generally fair assessment that most teachers become more skilled and confident the longer they are in the classroom, individual competencies vary based on a variety of factors. The experience, confidence, and pedagogical approach of the selected teacher will certainly color the research findings. Further, it isn’t unreasonable to assume the kinds of individuals who would be most likely to allow me to conduct research in their classrooms, might also be individuals who have been teaching for several years and feel confident enough in their abilities to allow a guest to observe. This poses potential limitations for my research, because it might prevent me from

conducting research with a diverse selection of participant-teachers. While the findings of this study are not without value, the experiences of one educator are not broadly generalizable to those with different lived experiences and classroom practices.

### **Implications for future research**

Though this research is not without its limits, it can provide a meaningful contribution to education scholarship. If this research allows a better understanding of the act of teaching, particularly how teaching might be positioned as an act of dramatic performance, it can impact the way both veteran and novice teachers prepare for their work in the classroom. This might, for example, open the door for future scholarship marrying training in improvised drama to preservice teacher training. More broadly, if a clear theoretical foundation can be established between drama and teaching, it could deepen our understanding of education and theatre as distinct disciplines. Finally, it may lend credence to the assertion that teaching is as much, or more, an art than a science—in this case, a performance art.

### **Summary**

This research seeks to explore the ways in which the act of teaching might be positioned as an act of dramatic performance. Of particular interest is the way that elements of improvised drama manifest in teachers' work in classrooms. This research is theoretically positioned within interpretivism, particularly phenomenology, utilizing a case study approach with borrowed elements of narrative and arts-based inquiry. The study was conducted using observations in a single classroom, and several types of data will be collected, including field notes, semi-structured interviews, student work, and teaching. This data was coded and analyzed for emergent and sub-themes. While this research is limited in its scope, namely due to the use of case study as a methodology, it has the potential to provide meaningful

contributions to the related disciplines of theatre and education. Chapter 2 will include a brief review of existing literature, Chapter 3 will outline the methodology used for this case study, Chapter 4 will present research findings, and Chapter 5 will provide a discussion with implications and recommendations for future research.

## Chapter 2 - Literature Review

While a wealth of research exists detailing the efficacy of various teaching strategies and curricula, what gives a teacher the ability to captivate a class of students is far less easy to quantify (Weisman, 2012). This research seeks to understand how the act of teaching can be positioned as an act of dramatic performance, one which specifically utilizes elements of improvised drama. When surveying the available scholarship on this topic, albeit limited, several themes quickly emerged. Existing literature exploring the intersection of drama, improvisation, and teaching and learning, is almost entirely historical and theoretical in nature, or qualitative case study. Primary themes of existing research are concerned with dramatic performance, creative play, improvisation, and improvisation's role in teaching and learning.

### Dramatic performance

While research discussing the origins and history of performed drama is far too vast to discuss here, much of it directly intersects with this research. To best contextualize this study, it is meaningful to consider the most relevant existing literature, namely that of Konstantin Stanislavski and Sanford Meisner.

Famed Russian director and theatre practitioner Konstantin Stanislavski rose to fame during the late 1800s, and to this day remains one of the most influential voices in Western theatre education. Deeply influenced by Tolstoy, Stanislavski eventually established the Moscow Art Theatre, and counted playwright Anton Chekhov as one of his many pupils (Butler, 2022). Of Stanislavski's prolific writings, his most influential include the trilogy of *An Actor Prepares*, *Building a Character*, and *Creating a Role*, often published as a singular volume, in which he articulates what became known as his *system*, a method for training actors still widely practiced by students of theatre and professional actors alike. This system

emphasizes the use of personal memories and body movement to help actors achieve as authentic a character performance as possible. One of his primary techniques to achieve this is table work, in which actors write detailed character histories and descriptions of their environment, often imagining these details if they are not explicitly described by the text (Butler, 2022; Davidson, 2021; Evangelatou, 2021; Ingleson, 2022; Jones, 2020; Mamet, 2010; Stanislavski 1961; Stanislavski 1972; Stanislavski 1977). Stanislavski (1972) describes this style of acting as “truth transformed into a poetical equivalent by creative imagination” (p. 151). This desire to utilize the lived experiences and emotional memory of the actor was intended to facilitate an actor’s full engagement in the action of the play and the other performers. Stanislavski (1972) continues, “during every moment we are on the stage, during every moment of the development of the action of the play, we must be aware either of the external circumstances which surround us (the whole material setting of the production), or of an inner chain of circumstances which we ourselves have imagined in order to illustrate our parts” (p. 60).

Much of what Stanislavski attempted to articulate through his system was the intangible magic of effective performance. Butler (2022) notes:

his explanations of the ‘system’ are also confusing because what he was describing was at its core, ineffable. In a way, Stanislavski was like a physicist attempting to prove the existence of the Higgs boson, the so-called God Particle that is key to the Standard Model of particle physics. The particle itself cannot be directly observed with our current technology. Instead you can, by colliding two high-powered beams of protons, create the environment in which the particle’s effects can be observed, proving its existence. Stanislavski’s God Particle was inspiration, which in *My Life in Art* he dubs the *creative mood*. The creative mood was difficult to define, but it was clearly perceptible to both actors and audiences. Take the same talented actor on two different nights, and the creative mood was what distinguished a dull, lifeless performance from a fully engaged, exciting one (p. 57).



Ingleson (2020) argues that this type of hyper-focused yet relaxed performance style is closely associated with mindfulness, wherein actors assume an almost meditative state while performing. Stanislavski termed an actor's ability to engage deeply with the performance *the magic if*, or "a state of radical imaginative empathy" (Butler, 2022, p. 62). Though Stanislavski made countless revisions to his system over the course of his lifetime (Anton Chekhov famously infuriated his former teacher by adapting the system based on his own ideology), his writings remain the foundational texts for nearly all Western theatre training, and influenced nearly every other Western theatre scholar to follow.

One of these scholars, equally relevant to the research, is Sanford Meisner. A student of Stanislavski, Meisner was deeply influenced by *the system*, which he adapted into a new actor training ideology called *the method* (Moseley, 2012; Meisner & Longwell, 1987). During his time working with The Group Theatre, which was founded on Stanislavski's teachings and methods, Meisner implemented the teaching technique which would eventually become the method. While drawing on Stanislavski's emphasis on actor spontaneity grounded in authentic emotional experiences, Meisner eschewed his teacher's focus on written table work, which he perceived as contributing to actors over-intellectualizing their work and producing less authentic performances. Instead, he emphasized improvisation, derived from some of Stanislavski's most famous, repetition exercises, in an effort to evoke an emotionally sincere, vulnerable performance by actors (Clurman et al, 1976; Durham, 2004; Gray, 2015; Halba, 2012; Moseley, 2012; Meisner & Longwell, 1987; Strandberg-Long, 2018). Durham (2004) comments on this emphasis on improvisation, noting "the system of exercises that Sanford Meisner devised is an attempt to bridge the gap between Stanislavskian will and the revelation of the unwilling spontaneous reaction" (p. 152). Here, Meisner's ideology is not

dissimilar to many conceptualizations of play, particularly due to his use of improv exercises often referred to as games. Halba (2012) argues “the Meisner Technique primarily both harnesses and re-teaches actors the principles of play through a series of exercises whose borders are constantly reinterpretable” (p. 127).

## **Improvisation**

Considerable literature exists documenting the history of improvisation, its foundational principles, and its uses beyond the stage. The origins of formalized dramatic improvisation begin with Viola Spolin, who developed a series of improv games while working under the guidance of famed sociologist Neva Boyd at Jane Addam’s Hull House (Dudeck & McClure, 2018; Ehrlich, 1974; Johnson, 2008; Jorjeana, 2019; Sahlins, 2001; Salinsky & Frances-White, 2008; Scruggs, 2008; Wasson, 2017). She was deeply influenced by elements of Stanislavski’s system, including the emphasis on improvisation, and the rejection of the teacher as the center of rehearsals (Itani, 2023). If most educators would agree that teaching is as much an art as it is a science, Spolin’s ideology sits firmly at their intersection. During her time at the settlement house, and later as a drama supervisor for the Works Progress Administration, Spolin utilized her theatre games with immigrant children and adults living in extreme poverty, both as a means of creating scripted dramatic material and as strictly recreational play. Often referred to as the mother of improvisation, Spolin believed theatre to be an essential element of both individual growth and fostering community in the settlement and beyond. She believed strongly that drama should be accessible to all, regardless of their experience in the arts, writing “I believe every one [sic] can act and believing this, I set out to prove it. I use the method of improvisation with the children – keeping it as nearly as possible a good recreation for. Theatre terms such as projecting, timing, etc., are never used

and yet through this recreational way of working, the children have become competent young actors without terms” (Viola Spolin Papers, Northwestern Special Collections, Box 1, Folder 4). Spolin brought this egalitarian view of drama to the dozens of staged productions she directed at Hull House, casting immigrant children and adults from the settlement and its neighborhood, often as new to theatre as they were to America. Notably, this type of drama was already present at Hull House by the time Spolin arrived—in 1903 the settlement famously staged Sophocles’ *Ajax*, with the cast of Greek immigrants performing in their native language (Bryan & Davis, 1969).

Spolin’s son, Paul Sills, later founded the theatre ensemble The Compass Players, which would eventually become The Second City, Chicago’s famed sketch and improv theater, which remains to this day entirely grounded in her ideology (Dudeck & McClure, 2018; Drinko, 2013; Ehrlich, 1974; Jagodowski & Pasquesi, 2015; Johnson, 2008; Jorjeana, 2019; Leonard & Yorton, 2015; McKnight & Scruggs, 2008; Proudfit, 2016; Sahlins, 2001; Salinsky, 2008; Salinsky & Frances-White, 2008; Sweet, 1996; Thomas, 2009; Wasson, 2017). Sills, along with Bernie Sahlins and Howard Alk, originated the theater in the style of the semi-improvised Italian theatrical form *commedia dell'arte*, which deliberately engaged with current events, however controversial (Patinkin, 2000; Sahlins, 2001; Sweet, 1996; Thomas, 2009). Sahlins (2001) notes “People like Studs Terkel, who has participated in the WPA Theatre in the 1930s, recalled doing a ‘living newspaper,’ that is, reading from a current newspaper and commenting on, even dramatizing, the news. This inspired us to think again of a topical review in a setting where the audience could drink and smoke—a cabaret in the European sense” (p. 24).

A great deal of literature details Second City's origins. In its earliest years, Second City attracted a variety of performers, many of them Northwestern drama students, as well as directors and playwrights. Possibly the most controversial of these directors was the infamous Del Close, twice fired by the theater for his drug abuse and volatile behavior, who would eventually go on to found the iO Theater (formerly Improv Olympic) with Charna Halpern, and originate the improvised theatrical form The Harold (Halpern et al, 1952; Halpern, 2005; Patinkin & Kozak, 2019; Sahlins, 2001; Thomas, 2009). The night before his death Close famously held what he termed a *living wake*, attended by various Second City alums, and upon his passing willed his skull to Chicago's Goodman Theater to be used during *Hamlet's* famous gravedigger scene (Sahlins, 2001). Despite his rocky relationship with the theater, Close's ideology, which emphasizes improvisation as an art form in and of itself, can still be seen in elements of Second City's teachings (Patinkin & Kozak, 2019). Today, Second City remains the world's premier sketch and improv comedy training center, and its performers—including John Belushi, Dan Aykroyd, Gilda Radner, Stephen Colbert, Harold Ramis, Rachel Dratch, Chris Farley, Steve Carell, Eugene Levy, Tina Fey, Amy Poehler, Tim Meadows, and many more—routinely go on to star in *Saturday Night, Live!* and other film and TV productions (Fey, 2011; Sahlins, 2001; Thomas, 2009).

More recent work, nearly all memoir, details the foundational principles of improvisation. The most significant of these is the concept of onstage agreement, often referred to as *Yes, and*, or the idea that improvisers should accept the reality created by their scene partners (saying *yes*) rather than negating their ideas, and then make their own contributions (*and*) to the scene (Halpern et al, 1952; Halpern, 2005; Hauck, 2012; Jagodowski & Pasquesi, 2015; Johnstone, 1989; Leonard & Yorton, 2015; Libera, 2004; Patinkin & Kozak,

2019; Sahlins, 2001; Salinsky & Frances-White, 2008; Scruggs & Gellman, 2008; Sweet, 1996). Leonard & Yorton (2015) note “Yes, And. These two words form the bedrock of all improvisation. Creative breakthroughs occur in environments where ideas are not just fully explored, but heightened and stretched to levels that might seem absurd at first” (p. 13). This emphasis on affirming others’ ideas underscores improvisation’s dependence on ensemble. Halpern (2005) refers to dramatic improvisation as “art by committee” (p. 8) rather than an individual undertaking, underscoring the importance of ensemble cohesion derived from performers’ active listening, support of one another, and ability to collaborate onstage. Such behavior results in what Scruggs & Gellman (2008) term the *point of concentration*, which consists of “discovery, and reaction” (p. 69). While they each interpret these rules with personal nuance, the most prolific performers and directors stress the importance of agreement, collaboration, and ensemble unity as the foundational principles of dramatic improvisation.

A handful of authors have also speculated about the use of improvisation beyond the stage. Marie (2019) argues that dramatic improvisation can be used by writers to generate ideas and overcome writer's block—a theme consistent with Second City’s use of improvisation to generate scripted sketch material for stage performance. Similarly, Dudeck & McClure (2018) suggest improvisation as a tool for improving social relationships within the workplace, empower employees with leadership skills, and increase a sense of community between co-workers. From a decidedly more esoteric perspective, Nachanovitch (2019) positions improvisation as a way of life:

This is something we seldom see in the public sphere: mutual respect, mutual support, building something together that we might never have dreamt of on our own. Improvising is all about human relationship. It is about listening, responding, connecting, and being generous. When a group of free players gets together and unfolds a coherent and interesting piece without prior plan or template, it is like watching separate being become integrated into a single nervous system. It is a

partnership, with each other and with the audience, in the deepest sense of the word (p. 18).

This conceptualization of improvisation is consistent with its meditative quality, often described by performers (Jagodowski & Pasquesi, 2015; Johnstone, 1989). Here, improvisation is positioned as a collaborative experience which transcends theatrical performance, underscoring its potential use beyond the stage.

### **Improvisation and teaching**

Famed playwright and Pulitzer winner David Mamet (2010) describes theatre as a culturally unifying force, tapping into the most basic, universal, and primal instincts of the audience. Interestingly, in further delineating the boundaries of dramatic performance, he invokes imagery of teaching:

The mere presentation of an idea is called a lecture. A lecture induces in the listener that ruminative state necessary for comparison and evaluation of ideas. This is the usual state of the civilized being—a dampening of the predatory instincts in order to allow communal cooperation. This is all well and good, but it is not the stuff of drama, which, by fulfilling a more basic need—to exercise our most primal instincts—has the power not only to please but also, curiously, to unite. For the audience, when moved, is moved on a proverbial level. It is not involved in sharing the *ideas* of drama, but rather experiences the thrill of the communal hunt (Mamet, 2010, pp. 18-19).

Here, Mamet identifies the largely intangible elements of dramatic performance which make it so unlike an otherwise uninspiring lecture. He likewise stresses the significance of audience engagement, noting the audience communally experiences the performance, moved by both the emotionality of the story being told onstage and the collective experience of being among a crowd of observers.

Whereas Mamet may draw a division between drama and the classroom, Viola Spolin blurs it. The originator of improvisation as an art form, Spolin directly acknowledges its

connection to education by dedicating her seminal work *Improvisation for the Theater* to, among others, educator and sociologist Neva Boyd:

I wish to thank Neva Boyd for the inspiration she gave me in the field of creative group play. A pioneer in her field, she founded the Recreational Training School at Chicago's Hull House, and from 1927 until her retirement in 1941 she served as a sociologist on the faculty of Northwestern University. From 1924 to 1927 as her student at her house, I received from her an extraordinary training in the use of games, story-telling, folk dance, and dramatics as tools for stimulating creative expression in both children and adults, through self-discovery and personal experiencing. The effects of her inspiration never left me for a single day (Spolin, 1963).

Here, Spolin explicitly connects her work in improvisation with that of education.

Further, much of Spolin's writing is designed specifically for educators. Her book *Theater Games for the Classroom*, also dedicated to Boyd, is designed to be used by teachers, not actors, to implement improvised drama into their classroom instruction. In addition to acknowledging theater games' ability to engage students in written and spoken communication, interpersonal skills, while cultivating a sense of autonomy and community, Spolin (1986) also notes "Play is democratic! Anyone can play! Anyone can *learn through playing!*" (p. 3, emphasis added). Here, Spolin identifies improvisation not just as a supplement to curriculum, but as a mechanism through which students can be engaged in active learning. In these and other texts, Spolin often invokes the concept of side-coaching, a technique in which a director will offer advice and suggestions to actors improvising a scene from just offstage. Spolin (2010) argues "sidecoaching must guide players toward and into energy exchange, keeping the play *flowing* around all players, thus creating an interaction, movement, and transformation. Sidecoaching alters the director to the necessity of producing and/or maintaining rising energy" (p. 8). The act of sidecoaching, as articulated by Spolin, seems analogous to the actions of a classroom teacher facilitating a classroom discussion,

activity, or other exercise. This further underscores how Spolin's work, often implicitly and occasionally explicitly, connects improvisation with education.

Outside of Spolin, existing scholarship connecting improvisation and education is almost entirely qualitative case study. Shem-Tov (2018) provides the most relevant example, in which a case study methodology is employed to analyze the classroom teaching of a novice teacher who is also a trained actor with experience in improvisation. After the teacher expressed concerns about her self-confidence and ability to employ adequate classroom management while teaching, the researcher (a colleague) coached her in implementing elements of improvisation in her classroom instruction. The teacher kept a journal and participated in interviews throughout this process, and ultimately reported feeling increased confidence in her work, as well as a perceived increase in student engagement.

While Shem-Tov (2018) is an example of scholarship uniquely specific to this research, most case studies addressing drama and classroom teaching approach the subject from a far broader perspective. Among these is Rashid & Qaisar (2017), which explores the use of role-play in the classroom. Notably, theatre scholarship would define role-play as something distinct from formalized dramatic performance or improvisation, but education texts tend to use all three interchangeably, making this relevant to this study. Rashid & Qaisar (2017) explore improvisation (which they term role-play) as a classroom exercise in which the students can participate, rather than a pedagogical tool for the teacher's self-improvement. They describe role-play's ability to engage elementary students in critical thinking, fostering increased engagement and deeper understanding of complex concepts. While this positions the students' behavior as drama, rather than the teachers', it nonetheless provides useful context for any research exploring the intersection of dramatic performance and the classroom. Seltzer



(2019) similarly explores this concept of role-play as an instructional tool through a case study of a single 11<sup>th</sup> grade English classroom. Here, the researcher adopts a participant-observer role, coaching the teacher to implement improvisation exercises in her classroom instruction, ultimately arguing that role-play provides a meaningful avenue through which students and teachers can engage in racialized discourse. Seltzer (2019) notes "engaging in role-play provides students with the opportunity to draw on their own translanguaging and sophisticated metalinguistic awareness to perform their experiences with language ideologies in their lives" (p. 147).

While still limited, some research exists detailing the use of dramatic play as an instructional technique, often termed role-play (Bayne, 2016; Gjestvang et al, 2021; Rashid & Qaisai, 2017; Ricket et al, 2018; Seltzer, 2019; Shaftel, George, & Fannie, 1950). While this research, much of it quite recent, does point to the role of drama in the classroom, it is limited to a context in which students participate in intentional dramatic performance or role play, sometimes alongside the teacher, sometimes among their peers. Gammon (2012) contextualizes the work of Spolin along psychologist Lev Vygotsky, Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal, before arguing that the unique ideologies of Spolin and Boal can be implemented simultaneously in the classroom. Similarly, Hamer (1999) provides a folkloristic analysis of two history teachers' performances of lectures in an eleventh-grade American history course. Teachers are positioned as oral storytellers working from a culturally significant folkloric text (curricula and textbooks), positioning the act of teaching as an act of performed folklore.

While not directly related to classroom teaching, Bayne (2016) provides a similar historical exploration of the role of improvisational skills in preservice counselor education programs. After conducting an extensive review of the literature on counselor education,

empathy as a skillset, and improvisation, Bayne (2016) provides meaningful historical and theoretical context for the use of improvisational drama as a means of teaching empathy in counselor education programs. Interesting, in the same year Holdhus et al (2016) explored this historical contextualization further, expanding beyond a therapeutic context and exploring the ways improvisational skills manifest in theatre, music, rhetoric, and education. Again, the authors conduct a lengthy literature review, positioning improvisation uniquely within each of these disciplines. Holdhus et al (2016) finds that the concept of improvisation is rooted in rhetoric (Aristotle's *Poetics*), drama, music, and performance. The historical research suggests that each of these intersect in the classroom, with educators engaging in a specific type of dramatic and social improvisation when providing classroom instruction and engaging with students. The authors suggest that educators can improve their practice by better understanding their role as improvisers, and the historical roots of improvisation. Further, limited research exists suggesting that the ability to improvise is central to effective teaching, however, the term “improvisation” is being used outside of a dramatic context, denoting flexibility and spontaneity rather than the ability to improvise as a performed character (Maheux & Lajoie, 2011). Scholarship which deliberately positions teaching as an act of dramatic performance is extremely limited.

Finally, Mæland & Espeland (2017) provides a useful analysis of how teachers perceive their classroom as a site of dramatic performance. Here, the researchers utilized case study to explore the ways teachers implement improvisation exercises in their classrooms, and their perception of its effects on student behavior and learning. Upon analyzing the data, the authors found that improvisation is an integral element of the work teachers do in the classroom. Specifically, they isolated improvisation as a factor in lesson structure and design, teachers'

communication and dialogues, teachers' repertoire, and classroom contexts. This suggests that training (or at least a brief understanding of) improvisation would benefit classroom teachers, making this relevant to this research.

## **Summary**

This study is concerned with positioning the act of teaching as an act of improvised dramatic performance, and as such, it is positioned within the shared scholarship of drama and education. While very little research exists which explicitly positions the act of teaching and learning as one of dramatic improvisation, considerable scholarship exists detailing the history of theatre, improvisation as an art form, various pedagogical approaches to teaching, including role-play, and the shared histories of improvisation and settlement house education practices. While a handful of researchers have explicitly conceptualized improvisation as a phenomenon which occurs in classrooms (Gammon, 2012; Maheux, 2011; Seltzer, 2016; Shem-Tov, 2018) most have studied improvisation and education as distinct disciplines. This suggests that bringing the history and practice of classroom teaching and dramatic improvisation into conversation with one another would be a meaningful contribution to existing scholarship, benefitting the fields of both drama and education. The following chapter will discuss the methodology utilized in this research, including the setting and participants, data collection methods, ethical considerations, and credibility concerns.

## **Chapter 3 - Methodology**

This research is a case study, using elements of narrative and arts-based inquiry. Stake (2010) identifies the two most common subjects of case study within education as people and programs. While perhaps the most common examples of case study are those examining the experiences of an individual, Yin (2014) notes that case study has also been utilized to examine “decisions, programs, the implementation process, and organizational change” (p. 29). This case study can be positioned firmly within the former category, as it is concerned with the individual experiences of classroom teachers and how their instruction might be positioned as an act of improvised drama.

### **Setting**

This research took place in a single classroom over the course of several weeks during the spring semester of the 2023-2024 academic year. In order to limit the scope of the study, a single high school was selected as a research site. To protect anonymity, the pseudonym Kauffman High School will be used when referring to the research site. The building is a large, well-resourced, public high school in the Kansas City suburbs, with just over 1500 students grades 9-12. The building is one of five high schools within the district, serving an affluent suburban population. The student body is diverse, including a large population of students who are the children of immigrants. Due in part to its close proximity to a large mosque, and several nearby synagogues and temples, the building likewise serves a significant population of Muslim, Jewish, and Hindu families. Across the district, 14% of students report speaking a primary language that is not English, with the most common home languages being Telugu, Chinese, and Arabic, among others.

Kauffman High consistently performs well above the state average on standardized assessments in all subjects, and boasts a graduation rate of 98%. Across the district, 74% of the teaching staff hold a master's degree or higher. The selected high school offers a variety of Advanced Placement and College preparatory courses, every year its students perform well above the national average on the ACT and SAT, and its graduates are routinely accepted into some of the most elite colleges in the country. The culture of the building, based on my own observations and conversations with students, parents, and teachers, is one of high academic standards, and generally caring relationships between students and teachers. As such, this building is a nearly ideal site for this case study research.

### **Participants**

Within this building, a single teacher was selected for participation in this research. For the purpose of this study, and to protect her anonymity, this teacher will be referred to using the pseudonym Dr. Smith. This individual was identified by colleagues, administrators, and students as being an especially effective and engaging teacher. A longtime English Language Arts teacher in the building, holding master's and doctoral degrees in education, Dr. Smith has a reputation within the school and broader community as a professional, skilled educator who builds meaningful relationships with students while maintaining the highest academic standards. In a building with no shortage of skilled teachers and high achieving students, being identified as one of the most effective teachers among the staff is no small feat, making Dr. Smith an excellent candidate for participation in this research.

After identifying Dr. Smith as a potential candidate for participation, I sent her an invitation e-mail outlining the purpose, timeline, and design of my research. After she agreed to participate, I obtained informed consent and scheduled times to conduct observations during

her English Language Arts classes, and interviews during her daily plan periods. Once she had agreed to participate, I sent e-mail communication home to the families of students enrolled in her courses, soliciting participation in this research. I received four initial responses, and ultimately obtained informed consent from the guardians of two students, both enrolled in Dr. Smith's Honors sophomore English course. I then worked with these students and their guardians to coordinate interview times during the school day that would not interfere with their existing coursework.

### **Data collection**

This research utilizes qualitative research methods, largely because they allow for what Denzin & Lincoln (2005) characterize as “exploration” compared to quantitative inquiry's emphasis on “confirmation” (p. 9). Various forms of data were collected throughout this research, including classroom observations, recorded lessons, interviews with the three participants, field notes, student work, and lesson materials prepared by Dr. Smith. Classroom observations took place over the course of three class periods, during which time I kept a field journal. Dr. Smith additionally filmed three class periods during which I was not physically present, which I later viewed and analyzed. Lesson plans and instructional materials were also collected with Dr. Smith's consent, and samples of the two students' work were collected. Additionally, semi-structured, informal interviews were conducted with the students and teacher. Dr. Smith participated in a single interview, and the students participated in two interviews each. Interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed for analysis and coding.

It is worth noting that the implementation of this research differed significantly from how it was originally conceptualized. Initially, research was planned to take place at a Missouri school during the week of Kansas Public School's spring break. Because Kansas and

Missouri have alternating spring breaks, this would have allowed me to spend a week conducting multiple interviews, potentially with multiple teachers in different classes and contents, without needing to take time off my own teaching schedule in Kansas. I was given written approval via e-mail early in the spring semester to conduct research at a high school in Missouri, but my request was later declined the week before it was to begin due to circumstances outside my control. I then inquired with multiple other Missouri schools, but understandably none were able to approve my request in such an accelerated timeline. I then inquired with several Kansas schools, ultimately being granted approval by the Kauffman school district. As a result of this change in the research schedule, I adjusted the research to include fewer observations in a single classroom. By narrowing the scope in this way, I was able to conduct research within the semester and with limited interruptions to my own teaching schedule.

## **Schedule**

October 2023:

Initial e-mails were sent to several area school districts to solicit participation in the study. Three responded with directions for submitting a formal application for district approval, which I then submitted. I followed up with these districts throughout the fall semester, but ultimately, they all declined to participate.

March 2024:

In early March, IRB approval was finalized. I continued searching for a research site and coordinating with area school districts. In late March, I successfully finalized a research site.

April 2024:

Formal district approval for my research was finalized, and communication was sent to potential participants. Informed consent was obtained, and interviews and observations were scheduled.

May 2024:

Data was collected, including classroom observations, interviews, recorded lessons, student work, and instructional materials.

June-August 2024:

Interviews were transcribed, and data was coded and analyzed for themes. Chapters four and five were written, and the dissertation finalized.

### **Data analysis**

Data collected were analyzed to see in what ways elements of improvised drama manifest in teachers' behavior, pedagogical practice and student engagements in their classrooms. Data analysis methods consisted of direct interpretation, in which the data is analyzed for themes. Once identified, these themes were coded and evaluated within the entirety of the data, ultimately identifying patterns in relation to the research questions, and charted in a spreadsheet. These patterns ultimately informed answers to the research questions, later presented in narrative form (Stake, 2010).

### **Ethical considerations**

Finally, there are several important ethical considerations related to this research, particularly because it involved adolescent human participants. To begin, IRB approval was a necessary prerequisite to conducting this research, because it utilizes human participants, including minors. Additionally, special ethical considerations were taken both while conducting the research and when managing the data collected at the conclusion of the



research. All data collected was anonymized and stored on a secure device, and will be deleted three years after the conclusion of the research study. Further, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and all participants and their legal guardians were told explicitly that consent can be revoked at any time without any repercussions. Finally, special care was taken to obtain informed consent from parents and guardians as well as the school district where the research ultimately occurred in order to collect any student work. This work was likewise anonymized and stored securely.

### **Credibility**

Several methods are used to establish credibility within these research findings. The most significant of these is triangulation. By collecting multiple sets of data—classroom observations, interview transcripts, student work samples, the researcher’s field journal, and instructional materials—these responses could be coded and analyzed in relation to one another. This triangulation allows for a more nuanced understanding of the data, particularly as they intersect and differ to reveal patterns, themes, or discrepancies, and thus more credible findings.

### **Dependability**

The coding and analysis of the data is paramount to ensuring dependability of the research findings. Data was collected from a variety of sources, including interview and follow-up interview transcripts, researcher journal entries, student work samples, classroom observations, and class materials. This data was coded, then direct analysis utilized to evaluate data closely for thematic similarities. Each data type, once coded, was triangulated against other data sets. This allows for a more nuanced understanding of how the data interact and overlap with each other, ultimately strengthening the dependability of the research findings.

## **Transferability**

While exact replication of a qualitative research study is rarely possible, several steps were taken to ensure relative transferability of this research. To begin, a very specific set of guidelines for selecting research participants was utilized. While in this case the research site is being chosen out of convenience (proximity to the Kansas City metro) the selection of research participants will be quite deliberate. Through informal communication with students, colleagues, administrators, and counselors, potential participant teachers will be identified. Because this research is concerned with the instructional practices of especially engaging, effective teachers, identifying potential participants through such informal avenues allows for a more authentic assessment of how this teacher is perceived by their community. After participants were selected and given consent to join the study, a series of classroom observations were conducted, as well as semi-structured interviews with the participants, and class materials and student work collected for analysis. This methodology is all reasonably simple to replicate, making it transferable to different school environments and research contexts.

## **Confirmability**

Finally, it was essential to maintain objectivity, to the extent possible, in relation to the research, particularly in the analysis of the data collected. While full objectivity is impossible, various steps were taken to mitigate the risk of personal bias influencing the research process and findings. Most notably, an audit trail was created and maintained throughout the research process, in which coding themes, the rationale for identifying data clusters, and the thought process behind the analysis of the data is explicitly outlined in as much detail as possible. This provides an essential level of transparency within the research which bolster the findings and

help provide a check my own bias and preconceived perceptions of the data. To assist in this process, meticulous notes were kept throughout the research process, chief among these being a research journal. By maintaining contemporaneous, detailed notes in a research journal, I was better able to construct an audit trail in as much nuance as possible. Finally, being explicit and detailed in the description of the coding and data triangulation process lends further credibility to the findings and further maintains and protects researcher objectivity.

### **Limitations**

Several limitations influenced this research which fall outside the control of the researcher. Arranging a research site and obtaining informed consent was the primary hinderance, and changing research sites meant that less time could be spent actually conducting this study. This delay in securing a research site also resulted in this study being conducted near the end of the school year. These circumstances undoubtedly influenced this research, because the conditions of the school environment had changed. It is possible, for example, that more guardians might have provided informed consent for their students to participate in this research, had it occurred earlier in the year. Further, more time spent in the classroom would have provided additional data, which would have bolstered these findings.

### **Delimitations**

Several delimitations were likewise imposed by the researcher. First, the criteria for selecting a research site and research participants were predetermined; a high school in close proximity to the Kansas City metro area, the schedule of which would allow me to coordinate observations with my own teaching obligations . While those delimitations were imposed for convenience, others were established to provide needed boundaries for the research. Most notably, the research participants are limited to high school teachers who have been identified

by one or more school stakeholders (parents, students, colleagues, administrators, community members, members of professional organizations, etc) as especially effective classroom performers. This community identification of suitable research participants both provides an authentic assessment of teachers' abilities in the classroom, and allows for reasonably easy coordination of a classroom within the research site.

### **Summary**

This qualitative case study explores the ways an experienced educator utilizes elements of dramatic performance, and improvised dramatics, in daily instructional practices. Positioned within interpretivism, this phenomenological research emphasized hermeneutical analysis of collected data. This research employs semi-structured interviews, live and recorded classroom observations, and the collection of lesson instructional materials and samples of student work. Data is then coded and analyzed for emergent themes, which are then categorized into sub-themes. The following chapter will include a detailed analysis of the research findings, including emergent and sub-themes related to each research question.

## **Chapter 4 - Findings**

The principles of dramatic performance have been proven applicable to a variety of disciplines outside the fine arts (Annarella, 1999; Çevik & Uygun, 2004; Güven & Adıgüzel, 2015; O'Day, 1996; Sahin, 2018; Ulubey, 2018). It has been demonstrated that participation in drama, even at a student or amateur level, has a meaningful impact on individuals' self-confidence, public speaking ability, literacy skills, critical thinking, empathy, and ability to build social relationships (Fleming et al., 2004; Jarrah, 2019; Oztug m& Ciner, 2017; Koksall, 2018; Palavan, 2017; Pat & Yilmaz, 2021; Wright, 2006; Yassa, 1997). Additionally, research has indicated that elements of drama, such as role play and readers theatre, can be implemented in the classroom to great effect (Brizendine & Thomas, 1982; Courtney, 1989; Durland, 1975; Ehrlich, 1974; Siks & Dunnington, 1961). Despite the well-established academic, social, and professional benefits of drama, and its intersection with teaching and learning, the extent to which teachers themselves utilize elements of creative and improvised drama in their instructional practices is understudied in existing literature.

### **Participant information**

To address this gap in the literature, the purpose of this research study was to investigate how, if at all, teachers utilize elements of dramatic performance, particularly improvisation, in their classroom practices. A single teacher and two of her students were selected as research participants. Over the course of several weeks, I observed the classroom teacher, Dr. Smith, as she taught her sophomore English Language Arts classes. I likewise conducted interviews with Dr. Smith, and the two students. The remainder of this chapter will include a summary of each research participant, and a presentation of themes present in the

data as they relate to each research question. Analysis and discussion of these themes will be provided in Chapter 5.

**Table 4.1. Participant Information**

| <b>Participant Name<br/>(Pseudonym)</b> | <b>Background Information</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Dr. Smith                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Teacher at Kauffman for 20 years total, and 16 at Kauffman high (at time of research)</li> <li>● White, female</li> <li>● Teaches ELA, Honors ELA, and leadership courses</li> <li>● Head of ELA Department</li> <li>● Holds various leadership/mentorship roles in the school</li> </ul> |
| William                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sophomore</li> <li>● White, male</li> <li>● Has been in the Kauffman district since 6th grade, and previously attended a district out of state</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                 |
| David                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sophomore</li> <li>● White, male</li> <li>● Has been in the Kauffman district for all of his schooling</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                         |

**Dr. Smith** - Dr. Smith has been teaching English Language Arts at Kauffman High School for 16 years, after having previously taught at another school in the same district. During her years in the building, she has developed a reputation for being an excellent teacher with high academic expectations for her students. She is chair of the English Department, and actively participates in building leadership roles. Additionally, she is sponsor of the school's student council, a role which includes teaching a leadership course as well as overseeing school dances, pep assemblies, and spirit week celebrations. Based on my own knowledge of Kauffman and conversations with students, teachers, and administrators, Dr. Smith has firmly established herself as a pillar of the school community, for both her instructional practices and relationships within the building. Further, her time teaching at Kauffman has given her a wealth of institutional knowledge which contributes to the difference she received from her

colleagues. There is perhaps no better illustration of Dr. Smith's willingness to go above and beyond what is expected of a classroom teacher than the fact she eagerly agreed to participate in this research despite her already very full schedule of responsibilities.

**William** - William (a pseudonym) is a 15-year-old white, male, high school sophomore enrolled in Dr. Smith's Honors English Language Arts class. He attended a nearby school district until sixth grade, at which point he transferred to the Kauffman district, where he attended middle and the first two years of high school. He is an only child and lives with his mother and father, both of whom hold advanced degrees, and are actively involved in his schooling. I have a previous relationship with William, and know him to be a smart, funny, outgoing student who makes friends easily and generally seems to enjoy school. He describes himself as a hard worker who values his education, noting "I take a couple honors and AP classes. I'm involved in speech and debate, and [other extra-curricular activities], and I hope to continue doing those things as I get older, broadening my horizons and my learning experiences with different teachers." William indicates repeatedly that he enjoys Dr. Smith's class, and finds the work challenging but meaningful. Over the course of this research William participated in two semi-structured interviews.

**David** - David (a pseudonym) is a 16-year-old white, male, high school sophomore, also enrolled in Dr. Smith's Honors English language Arts class. He has attended the Kauffman district for the entirety of his schooling, and indicates that he enjoys all his classes. He is a reserved, somewhat introverted student, who, during interviews, thinks deeply about each question before answering. Based on my previous relationship with David, I know him to be a smart, thoughtful student who works hard in school and values his education. He lives

with his mother and father, both of whom are college graduates and work outside the home and are actively involved in his education.

## **Research Questions**

This research explores the following research questions:

RQ 1: In what ways, if any, do teachers utilize principles of dramatic performance during their classroom instruction and interactions with students?

RQ 2: In what ways, if any, do teachers' instructional techniques and interactions with students utilize principles of dramatic improvisation?

Research was conducted over the course of several weeks during the final quarter of the school year. Data collected included in-person and recorded class observations of Dr. Smith's teaching, a single interview with Dr. Smith, two interviews each with William and David, a research field journal, student work samples, lesson plans, and instructional materials. When appropriate, this data was transcribed, then coded and analyzed for themes. These themes were then examined in relation to both research questions.

## **RQ 1 Results and Findings**

Research question one, (hereafter RQ1) is concerned with how, if at all, teachers utilize principles of dramatic performance during their classroom instruction and interactions with students. Thematic analysis of the data yielded three primary themes; the teacher's delivery, students' perception of the teacher, and the teacher's classroom management practices (see table 3.2).

**Table 4.2. RQ1 Themes and sub-themes**

| <b>Emergent Themes</b> | <b>Sub-themes</b> | <b>Explanation</b> |
|------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
|------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|



|                                     |                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Theme 1-1:<br>Delivery              | Lesson Structure              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistent</li> <li>• Very little direct instruction</li> <li>• Emphasis on collaborative work</li> <li>• Emphasis on student autonomy and responsibility</li> </ul>                                                                                                         |
|                                     | Facilitation of Lesson        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasis on student collaboration and group work</li> <li>• Instruction is responsive to student needs</li> <li>• Teacher positions classroom as the “rhetorical situation”</li> </ul>                                                                                       |
|                                     | Teacher personality           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instruction is animated, without being “too much”</li> <li>• Teacher is lighthearted, animated, peppy</li> <li>• Teacher is enthusiastic about content</li> </ul>                                                                                                            |
| Theme 1-2:<br>Perception of teacher | Care and Respect              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students are relaxed</li> <li>• Class is informal but focused</li> <li>• Classroom noise is “collaborative hum”</li> <li>• Students and teacher are relaxed and frequently joke with one another</li> </ul>                                                                  |
|                                     | Knowledge of Content          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students acknowledge teacher’s experience and knowledge</li> <li>• Teacher is trusted as the content authority</li> <li>• Teaches almost exclusively advanced or honors classes</li> </ul>                                                                                   |
|                                     | High Expectations of Students | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student responsibility and autonomy emphasized in lessons</li> <li>• Students hold each other accountable</li> <li>• Assignments include extensive writing and rhetorical analysis</li> </ul>                                                                                |
| Theme 1-3:<br>Classroom Management  | Physical Space                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desks arranged in a thrust stage format</li> <li>• Teacher almost constantly moving</li> <li>• Students asked to move 2-3 times per class</li> <li>• Desks arranged to facilitate collaboration</li> <li>• Middle “runway” used as performance/presentation space</li> </ul> |
|                                     | Behavior Expectations         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Few formal rules</li> <li>• Emphasis on respect</li> <li>• Teacher gives very little explicit behavior instruction</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                |

|  |                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|--|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  |                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Classroom is productive and relatively free from distractions</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|  | Behavior Interventions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher occasionally raises voice to be heard above student conversations</li> <li>Occasional use of explicit behavior redirections</li> <li>Technology is most common source of distraction; phones not allowed</li> <li>In instances of outright disrespect, the teacher visits quietly with individual student(s) while the rest continue working</li> </ul> |

### **Theme 1-1: Delivery**

Theme 1-1 concerns the teacher's delivery of instruction. This theme is distinct from the content or organization of the lesson, and instead identifies elements of the ways in which the teacher communicates instruction to an audience of students. Throughout interviews and observations, this theme was most evident within Dr. Smith's organization of instruction, the manner in which she facilitated each lesson, and the ways she expressed her personality during class.

#### ***Lesson structure***

To begin, Dr. Smith's delivery is couched in a relatively consistent lesson structure. Dr. Smith's lessons typically begin with a group warm-up activity of some kind, followed by a discussion, before transitioning into the focus of the lesson, and concluding with a brief closing activity. Dr. Smith describes an average class structure:

[Class will] start with some sort of a journal or warm-up activity that either connects what we did last time to what we're doing to do today, or is an anticipatory kind of set if we're doing something new. And then I will move into either some modeling or gilded practice, give some examples, just the instruction piece, and then some collaborative practice either in small groups or partners, and end with either exit slip reflection or journal assignment.

Both William and David similarly commented on the consistent routine of Dr. Smith's classes. William notes that lessons typically begin immediately, commenting "We usually get a couple minutes to socialize before the bell starts, and then once class starts, she's very...everything can go from 100 to zero very quickly. So, if people are doing their own thing or getting their stuff or people are all over the place, she's very good at kind of shutting the door and then getting right into class time" (Interview 1). Here, William is reflecting on Dr. Smith's ability to quickly engage a group of students in the day's lesson. Interestingly, he reverses the common phrase "zero to 100," seeming to indicate Dr. Smith's ability to quiet and focus an otherwise rambunctious class of students.

Similarly, all three participants noted that Dr. Smith rarely, if ever, engages in extended, formal instruction. When describing Dr. Smith's instruction, he notes "Even when she's up by the smart board or talking about something on the slide, she never just stands there and tells us content. That never happens" (Interview 1). Dr. Smith indicates this is a very deliberate choice, and that she never engages in more than 15 minutes of direct instruction per class period, commenting, "I very rarely anymore am lecturing about content. I never give a lecture about The Great Gatsby. I don't know at what point in my career that fell away, but...I never give a lecture about a book anymore, or anything like that." Instead, all three participants describe Dr. Smith's classes as emphasizing collaborative work and discussion in lieu of formal lectures.

### ***Facilitation of the lesson***

Within this relatively consistent class structure, the data indicate Dr. Smith is skilled in facilitating student learning without relying on such formal instruction. Generally, she

assumes the role of a facilitator rather than lecturer, making frequent use of class discussions and small group collaboration. Dr. Smith again indicates that this is a deliberate choice:

In [advanced placement language arts] we talk a lot about the rhetorical situation, where you have the speaker, audience, and a purpose in mind. So from that you choose your structure and your appeals and your strategy to make those appeals happen. And I think that's just what I'm doing all the time. I'm teaching them how to do this, [and] I know my kids well enough to know some of them are really going to love that, some are going to hate it, so what kind of lesson design can I do with my skill set that will appeal to them? And so, some of it—you try to choose texts or resources that they will, their generation will like, but a lot of it is just the energy and the humor in which you present some of these things.

Here, Dr. Smith positions the classroom itself as a rhetorical situation, in which it is her responsibility to recognize the characteristics of her audience, and design instruction in whatever manner might best engage them. Often, this takes the form of group discussion. David indicates these frequent class discussions as one of the more enjoyable elements of class, noting that students are generally very engaged. He describes Dr. Smith as “the one that moves [the discussion] along, asking questions and then asking the next questions, or recapping in a way that opens up new development from what someone answered with,” (Interview 2).

In addition to group discussions, all three participants commented on Dr. Smith's frequent use of collaborative, small group work. While William expresses some frustration at a few of his peers' lack of willingness to contribute to group assignments, he indicates that these collaborative assignments “allows Dr. Smith to kind of expand the possibilities and how big and broad she can make the projects because then we can work together and be more creative...Rather, if it was just one person, it would have to be something more specific, because we wouldn't have all the creative resources and manpower to put on or conduct a bigger project” (Interview 2). David similarly commented on how such group assignments are

“more meaningful” (Interview 1) than individual work, suggesting this emphasis on collaboration is part of what makes Dr. Smith different from other, less experienced teachers. Often, this group work takes the form of group presentations, further strengthening Dr. Smith’s positioning of the classroom as a *rhetorical situation*. She notes students give in-class presentations in her Advanced Placement course “a couple times a week, because that’s the point of the class. Rhetoric is such an important part of the curriculum. Honors [English Language Arts] is probably about the same, unless we’re doing our drama unit, then it’s every day.”

This focus on collaborative group work and class discussion contributes to a classroom atmosphere in which the teacher is not the center of attention, despite playing a significant role in each lesson. Reflecting on Dr. Smith’s teaching style, William comments

She’s very good at eliminating distractions...She doesn’t walk around and look at people’s computers...she doesn’t hover, so she’ll only ever walk around the class, obviously if she’s teaching, or she will come help you, but she doesn’t hover around the class to a point that she’s just another thing to focus on, which is something I really appreciate. It can kind of just be me and whatever I’m working on, and I don’t have to worry about her... we can talk to her when we need to, but she’s not hovering (Interview 1).

While William describes Dr. Smith as taking a somewhat hands-off approach, allowing students to work without constantly monitoring their behavior, she suggests this is, to a degree, an intentional illusion. Instead, she notes that she utilizes what she describes as eavesdropping, in which she makes conscious efforts to lead the students to believe she is not listening to their conversations. She argues eavesdropping is:

almost like my formative assessment piece, because they will be more honest with one another what they know or understand than they would be for me or in front of the whole class. So then, when I bring them back together, I can correct some of that thinking. By presenting ‘you know, some people might misunderstand this in this way...’. Rather than doing [assessment] in an exit ticket, and I have to read it

afterwards, and swing back to it a couple days later. It's just so much more efficient. I can catch it [immediately]

Here, Dr. Smith explicitly indicates the use of dramatic performance in her instructional practices, noting "if [students] are talking in pods of four, I can just be carrying my computer and pretend to be on my email, and I can hear all of them." As a result, Dr. Smith can meaningfully monitor students' conversations, and thus, their understanding of material, and provide corrections, while students perceive her attention to be elsewhere. It would appear that this technique of pretending to engage in unrelated work while surreptitiously listening to students' conversations, itself a type of role-play, allows students to perceive themselves as taking a relatively independent role in their learning, free from the distraction of a "hovering" teacher.

### ***The teacher's personality***

Finally, the data frequently reference the ways Dr. Smith's unique personality is demonstrated through her instructional practices. Notably, Dr. Smith invokes dramatic imagery when describing her behavior during lessons, noting "there are definitely some classes where I have to put on a dog and pony show." Reflecting on her efforts to alter lessons based on what might best engage each group of students, she notes:

With my third block that's super quiet, I've got to bring a lot more energy, and with my 6th block who crawl the walls sometimes, I have to be very quiet when we talk...I think you put on the persona that the class needs, that makes that lesson meaningful. And whatever else is going on you have to leave it outside the classroom.

This indicates that Dr. Smith intentionally changes not only the structure and implementation of her lessons based on the needs of her students, but her expression of her personality itself. While she describes this using the word *persona*, her students use different language to express similar sentiment. When asked about student engagement, William

recognizes Dr. Smith is quite skilled, but struggles to articulate exactly what she does to maintain order during class:

She has to use her teacherness...she can ask people to be quiet or focus or be on topic in a way that's calm and subtle, to where you listen to it, you hear it, and then it's like it was said to you with a level of respect that you probably weren't expecting...she's able to still do her job, what she needs to be able to do to keep us together, while also doing it so, almost subtly and calmly at the same time, that we kind of just automatically go into productivity mode. I'm not too sure how to describe it, but it's just the way, even when she gets onto people, the way she does it is so much better and so much more efficient for her and for us (Interview 1).

Similarly, David comments that Dr. Smith's class is one in which it is relatively easy to stay engaged. He notes "I'll admit, at times my mind has wandered...most of the time, though, I do feel like it's pretty easy to pay attention" (Interview 1), suggesting that Dr. Smith's directions make sense, and she is easy to listen to.

Both students likewise indicated that Dr. Smith's energy and personality help them stay focused during her classes. David frequently describes Dr. Smith's instructional style as energetic, isolating her use of her voice as especially effective. He notes she speaks louder than some of his other teachers, especially when the students are distracted, and uses a "peppy, animated tone," and talks in a "serious yet kind of entertaining" manner (Interview 2).

Comparing her to other, less engaging teachers, David notes:

I feel like they're usually discussing something with a slideshow...if somebody is just talking and it's hypothetically one of the most monotone voices ever, this is not a scenario that's happened [in Dr. Smith's class]...So if somebody is just talking in a boring manner, that can, I guess, promote people to become drowsy or something, or simply just zone out. So, I usually feel like something is needed to keep people engaged, and that's also not just because it takes a lot to stimulate people nowadays, but...I just feel like something could be a little more beneficial than just like I mentioned, just simply boringly talking (Interview 2).

William echoes this sentiment, noting that Dr. Smith's disposition during class helps encourage all students to maintain their focus:

She's very focused, but she's still upbeat. She's not to a point to where she's sad or not sad, but downtrodden or mellow. She maintains this lightheartedness, but passionate at the same time. So, if you take her just being in a good mood and all of that, and couple it with her passion and her good teaching ability that she's a very comfortable person for us to talk to or ask questions to. So, she never really gives off too much of a disappointed vibe or a very overjoyed vibe. But she always seems into the class, she has this lightheartedness, is how I would explain it (Interview 1).

While both students struggle to articulate exactly what Dr. Smith does that makes her class so engaging, they agree that she doesn't talk "boringly." William similarly comments on Dr. Smith's use of her voice, reflecting that to calm rowdy students she occasionally "raises her voice a little bit [but] nothing compared to what some other teachers might do...I think she handles that pretty well, that there's nothing that she does in terms of discipline that's excessive, unnecessary or over the top, I guess" (Interview 2). Again referencing Dr. Smith's voice, David comments "It's dramatic...the way a teacher talks can decide how devoted a student can be" (Interview 1).

Reflecting on her own teaching, Dr. Smith also comments on her animated teaching style, saying "I try not to be too much, because sometimes that can be off putting." Here, she suggests that she takes care to maintain a teaching persona which is enthusiastic enough to maintain students' attention, without becoming so energetic that students become disengaged or annoyed. This indicates a deliberate effort to monitor and alter her expression of her personality based on the needs of each group of students. Commenting further on her own teaching style, Dr. Smith again invokes drama imagery, saying teaching "is a little bit like playing a character. I'm not an extrovert by nature, I'm more of an introvert, so I have to assert a lot more energy than some of my colleagues [when teaching]." Again, this suggests that her display of personality in the classroom is not passive, but a deliberate tool used to maintain student engagement.



## **Theme 1-2: Perception of teacher**

The second theme present in the data concerns the students' perception of the teacher, as well as her perception of herself. Within this theme, several repeated topics became apparent. Chief among these are how students perceive the culture of care and respect in Dr. Smith's classroom, her knowledge of the content being taught, and the high academic and behavioral expectations to which she holds students.

### ***Care and respect***

It became apparent quite quickly during observations of Dr. Smith's teaching that her students feel comfortable in her room and demonstrate considerable respect for one another. Even in recorded lessons, the classroom is noticeably relaxed, and even silly—when two late-entering students playfully make faces and dance for the camera on the way to their seats, Dr. Smith sees them, smiles, then continues with her instruction. During observations, both recorded and in-person, students would frequently interject with jokes during class discussions, playfully make fun of one another, and ask Dr. Smith questions about the course material. All evidence suggests Dr. Smith's students feel safe and relaxed in her classroom, and allow their individual personalities and humor to shine while maintaining focus on the given assignment. Dr. Smith herself acknowledges this balance between students feeling comfortable and relaxed while still remaining on-task. Reflecting on the noise level of an average class, she references “Collaborative noise. My morning classes, they're quiet. My afternoon classes are noisier, but still productive. It's a productive hum.”

Both William and David acknowledge this productive hum, each commenting that they work hard in her class without feeling like Dr. Smith is overbearing. Interestingly, both students use the phrase “lighthearted” when describing Dr. Smith's classes. William suggests

this is in large part due to Dr. Smith's ability to maintain relationships with her students, comparing her with other effective teachers in the building:

I noticed this with some of my other teachers I have, that I'd also consider pretty good teachers, but their interactions with students are very casual. They can be serious when it comes time to teaching, but when it comes to just talking to students or having their presence in class, it's very casual and it kind of fits the same vibe of students. If sometimes they can talk to students just like students would talk to each other, they can have personal conversations and discussions that I think some teachers just no student really in their class has the comfortability [sic] to kind of do that (Interview 2).

Observations of Dr. Smith's classes would suggest she has successfully struck the balance between lightheartedness and academic rigor, inviting students to engage meaningfully with the content being discussed while simultaneously maintaining a relaxed, easygoing atmosphere in which students feel comfortable and safe. This atmosphere is further bolstered by the fact students feel respected and cared for by Dr. Smith. Comparing her to other teachers he has enjoyed, David comments "Every [good teacher] I've had has had really good, similar qualities. Everybody I feel like has cared about their students" (Interview 2). Echoing this sentiment, William suggests that the care Dr. Smith shows ultimately contributes to the students' willingness to stay engaged and productive, arguing "When I see that a teacher cares ...it makes me feel passionate and more compelled to want to try hard to help and support this teacher" (Interview 1). Returning to this idea in his second interview, William reflects how students in her class "don't feel like Dr. Smith is alienated from the rest of the class of students...she's a part of our class too, while also teaching us" (Interview 2). It would appear students' sense that Dr. Smith respects and cares for them directly contributes not only to students' willingness to engage in lessons, but a lighthearted, relaxed atmosphere within the classroom itself.

### ***Knowledge of content***

The data likewise suggest that Dr. Smith's expertise within her content area contributes to her effectiveness in the classroom. Reflecting on her teaching, Dr. Smith argues that while she makes an effort to maintain a casual class dynamic, she simultaneously wants to establish herself as the content expert within the room. She notes:

I want [the tone of class] to be open and friendly and honest. But I also want them to respect that boundary. Not just 'I'm the teacher, you're the student' but also 'I'm the knowledge base, you need to trust me on what we're doing here.

William describes Dr. Smith using similar terms, calling her "a teacher who is very established, very accomplished, and just overall a very good teacher" (Interview 1). He returned to this theme in our second interview, specifically comparing Dr. Smith to other, less respected teachers:

I think the respect [we show her] kind of just comes with who she is, that she's kind of just garnered that respect, whereas a teacher who was brand new to teaching or whatever just doesn't have the experience and the attention or rather the, I guess notoriety you might say, of other teachers. So there just isn't that automatic respect. So they have to do more to kind of gain that respect... rather than Dr. Smith, she's very qualified, she's very passionate, she knows a whole lot, she's experienced. I think that all just kind of comes with who she is. So I think we would all tend to respect her more in class than if it was some teacher who we had never met (Interview 2).

Describing Dr. Smith as having earned "notoriety" is not an inaccurate characterization.

Based on my own experiences in Kauffman, and my relationships with Kauffman students, I have observed how the reverence shown Dr. Smith by the school community borders on celebrity. She has a reputation as an extremely skilled and knowledgeable teacher, and students rarely question this ethos. Reflecting on her content knowledge and skill, Dr. Smith credits her years of experience:

I think as I have been able to teach the same course for so long, another piece that helps...is that kids just know that I know what I'm talking about. I've got two brand new teammates teaching with me as well, and it's going to take time to build that. Some of what you're asking me has been built over 20 years, and I'm just getting to capitalize on that investment now...I'm not doing anything right now to do that, that's something that's been built over 20 years.

In this context, Dr. Smith likens the respect and engagement of her students as dividends now being paid from a long-term investment. While her students don't invoke such imagery, William and David both acknowledge that Dr. Smith has been teaching a long time, and possesses a deep knowledge of her content. Dr. Smith's reputation as a knowledgeable and skilled constitutes another component of students' overall perception of her as an educator.

### ***High expectations for students***

In addition to being known for her knowledge and experience, Dr. Smith also has a reputation for holding students to the highest academic standards. Notably, the reverence with which students treat Dr. Smith seems, at least in part, to come from intimidation at what they perceive to be a very challenging class. Reflecting on this, Dr. Smith suggests students just need some time to adjust to her classroom expectations:

[kids] were saying things like, 'I was so scared of you at the beginning of the year, but then I eventually figured out she's just way chill.' And they were just being so goofy, but I think that there's...there must be this vibe that I am scary. I think sometimes kids think that rigor and a difficult class is scary. It's scary at first. And so I think they come in sometimes and it takes a while for them to be like—I don't really know...I do want there to be an understanding that there's a rigorous expectation in my class, because our kids at Kauffman can do it. If you set the bar high, they will achieve it. You set the bar low thinking you're gonna raise it later, they won't...But then I think they eventually realize, 'oh, she's approachable, friendly. But she's got expectations.'

Dr. Smith in part credits these high expectations to her own experiences as a student, noting she "had two really tough English classes and I just appreciated...their insistence that I could do better, especially with writing. it never felt discouraging to me. It always felt motivating." These high expectations are evident in observations of Dr. Smith's teaching, as she maintains a deliberate pace throughout her instruction, and all students seem to understand they could be called on at any moment. There is an atmosphere of accountability in the

classroom—during one recorded lesson, for example, when a student was using their phone as Dr. Smith gave instruction, a nearby student quietly tapped them on the leg and motioned for them to put it away. This suggests that students understand they are expected to engage fully in the class, and the material being shared is worthy of their attention. William seems to share this attitude, saying of Dr. Smith, “She expects us to be working, to know what we’re doing, to be focused...there’s no tolerance for being off topic or unfocused” (Interview 1).

Dr. Smith utilizes multiple types of formative and summative assessments throughout the semester. These include formal tests, essays, creative projects incorporating student choice, presentations, and small group work. These assessment practices likewise demonstrate the rigorous academic standards to which she holds her students. During a play study examining Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, students were assigned to keep a journal. The directions for this journal, as presented to students online, are as follows:

- You were given a Julius Caesar spiral to keep in your possession while we read through Shakespeare's Julius Caesar. The spiral is very important, and will be necessary for the entirety of the fourth quarter. It is essential that you keep the spiral up-to-date and in your possession at all times.
- It can be 'due' at any time for a Julius Caesar spiral check-in grade or for a specific assignment grade from the spiral.
- If you miss any days, get caught up as quickly as possible (before school, after school, AST, or at home).
- It is YOUR responsibility to keep track of your own Julius Caesar spiral and to complete it in a timely and efficient manner (as directed in class).

These directions reflect an emphasis on student responsibility and autonomy, which are indicative of Dr. Smith’s high academic standards. Namely, the fact that the spiral notebook could be collected for a grade at any time, without warning, reinforces the classroom expectation that students are responsible for their own learning, and can be held accountable for their work at a moment’s notice. Students are similarly held accountable during class

discussions, in which Dr. Smith will routinely call on students to provide an answer without warning, even if the student did not volunteer to respond. All these factors contribute to an overall class environment in which students understand they will be held to high academic standards, and must put in consistent effort to be successful.

### **Theme 1-3: Classroom management**

The final theme related to RQ1 concerns Dr. Smith's classroom management practices. Like most effective teachers, Dr. Smith utilizes a variety of classroom management strategies, from proximity to students to restating behavioral expectations multiple times throughout a class period. Most notable, however, is her command of the physical space of the classroom, articulation of behavior expectations, and, when needed, direct behavior intervention with individual students.

#### ***Physical Space***

One of the most noticeable elements of Dr. Smith's classroom management is her use of physical space. Her classroom is arranged in a format similar to a thrust stage, in which student desks are positioned on three sides of the room, all facing center. Dr. Smith's desk is at the back of the room, with a small podium and projector screen set up at the opposite wall. In this way, a natural, open presentation space is created at the center of the room, towards which all desks are oriented. As a result, students are likewise facing one another, albeit from a few feet of distance, and have nearby peers for discussion and group work. In this arrangement, all students can see the teacher, and each other, at all times. Dr. Smith navigates her own movement, and the movement of her students, within this space to great effect. In each class observation, both in-person and recorded, she begins instruction at the front of the room—upstage center, if the classroom is considered a thrust stage. After providing her initial

instruction, as students begin the daily warm-up activity, Dr. Smith often paces up and down the open space in the center of the room, visiting with students, answering questions, redirecting, and referencing her laptop or other instructional materials. Additionally, Dr. Smith deliberately orchestrates student movement within the space to maintain engagement and limit off-task behavior. She notes that she tries to incorporate some type of movement into her class at least every 20-30 minutes, in an effort to maintain engagement.

In interviews, Dr. Smith suggests that the layout of the physical space of the classroom allows her to easily monitor students and eavesdrop on their conversations. She comments “In this room, the way that I have it set up... I can just be carrying my computer, pretend to be on my email, and pacing my runway.” Referring to the stretch of open space in the center of the room as a runway, Dr. Smith suggests this pacing back and forth is an intentional part of the classroom’s design. When describing this class design, she notes:

My room that I used to have upstairs...was long and skinny. And then these desks are kind of long, like, set in rows. You can't fit everybody. But then they're also like, if you set them in pods, it creates this weird rectangle, this awkward rectangle space. And I wanted to get rid of the back row as much as possible. But I also didn't want them facing each other all the time. So that's how I ended up with this...If you turn [the orientation of the room] the other way, then we just have been presenting at the front of the room, the kids that are here (*motions to back of room*) don't have to pay attention. Whereas if you put the action at the middle of the room, you can't really get away with [being disengaged] you know? Every kid is six steps from it.

By intentionally eliminating a perceived “back row” of desks, Dr. Smith is using the physical positioning of the room to encourage more participation, and thus accountability, from all students. Further, the open space at the center of the room, to which Dr. Smith refers interchangeably as a “stage,” “runway,” and “front of the room,” is frequently used as a performance space of sorts, allowing both Dr. Smith and her students to present material to the whole class. In one observed lesson during her *Julius Caesar* play study, Dr. Smith fully

embraces the classroom as a performance space, asking small groups of students to perform short scenes from the famous drama in a new, modern context. During these performances, some groups bring in props (plastic fruit helps reimagine battle as a cafeteria food fight, for instance) and many rearrange desks to act as various set pieces. Dr. Smith encourages this, coaching students between performances to “use this whole space. Come be with your audience!” (Observation 1). The overwhelming majority of students in each group participate enthusiastically, with students clapping and hollering for one another between scenes, and taking care to return the space to its original setup before leaving the makeshift stage. Observing these classes, it is clear that students have, at least for this lesson, fully embraced their classroom as a performance space.

### ***Behavior Expectations***

Another important element of Dr. Smith’s classroom management techniques is her explicit and implicit articulation of behavior expectations. Both William and David reference the fact there are few formal rules in class, with Dr. Smith instead emphasizing respect. William credits Dr. Smith’s emphasis on small group collaboration for helping foster such a respectful environment:

I just think that everyone can interact and kind of be together in one way or the another, even if they're not people that we would normally interact with outside of class. But I think the small groups, when we do those activities, I think that kind of helps get towards type of respectfulness a lot more than if we didn't interact with each other because we're essentially forced to be in groups and work together that we learn more about each other and what people are like, even if they're people we don't know very well (Interview 2).

David likewise comments on the lack of formal rules, arguing they don’t feel necessary, particularly because the class is student-driven and demands a great deal of student engagement. He notes the *Julius Caesar* lessons are particularly active, and “usually student-



oriented, or like we all take turns with given characters” (Interview #1). When asked to elaborate on the behavior expectations in Dr. Smith’s class, David refers to basic principles of responsibility and respect:

I guess probably the most basic thing I can say it's just like, just kind of just to pay attention and to kind of get your work done. I do know not to use phones. That's another thing that has been kind of stated and I do know there's one kid who has had their phone and like she has been shown, like some annoyance with it (Interview 1).

David goes on to suggest that despite the often high-energy activities, Dr. Smith does expect students to remain focused and engaged. Reflecting on his classes with Dr. Smith, he remarks the only behavior issues he has noticed in class are “just kids being loud and such, but then that's usually then like, immediately kind of shut down” (David, Interview #1). William also references Dr. Smith occasionally taking steps to refocus the class when it gets too noisy or unfocused. While referencing her use of volume to regain students’ attention, William argues that Dr. Smith’s interventions use a much lighter touch than many other teachers:

[To get the class’s attention] she probably just raises her voice a little bit, and nothing that I would even consider raising her voice compared to what some other teachers might do. She never has to get overly loud or try and get our attention. It's kind of just a quick one-two thing that maybe she says ‘Hey!’ and then we listen and quiet down and she says, ‘okay, we should be doing this,’ or ‘we’ll be going to lunch soon,’ or ‘we need to be quiet’. I think she handles that pretty well, that there's nothing that she does in terms of discipline that's excessive, unnecessary or over the top, I guess (Interview 2)

In addition to occasional behavior reminders addressed to the entire class, Dr. Smith is constantly checking in with students on an individual and small group basis. Making great use of physical space, she is almost never stationary during lessons, pacing the room and visiting quietly with students. In observed lessons she repeatedly uses her proximity to students to mitigate unwanted behaviors, such as students being on their phones. On the few instances where she asks a student to change their behavior directly, it is typically a very quick, quiet comment made in passing as she moves from one end of the room to another. William argues

this light touch approach to classroom management is also evident in Dr. Smith's expectations for student participation in group discussions and activities:

There's no forcefulness to participate rather, but it's to a point where if you want to participate, there's openness. If you want to raise your hand and give an answer, there's nothing. There's no forcefulness. So, if she asks us something or there's not really an answer or just no one for whatever reason raises their hand to speak, then she doesn't just stand there and wait for us to talk. She will move up. There's never any awkwardness in her class and everything that she does, it doesn't leave us feeling confused or anything. So, to participate if you want to participate, and the questions she asks, it requires thinking and understanding, but it's never anything that people wouldn't be able to answer (Interview 2).

Here, William suggests that Dr. Smith threads a careful classroom management needle, expecting students to participate in discussions without them feeling forced. This is consistent with the ways Dr. Smith's instructional practices emphasize student autonomy and responsibility. Ultimately, William suggests these methods contribute to the overall productivity of her classes:

Dr. Smith commands a lot of productivity and effectiveness in her class, so even when we're doing projects or fun activities, nothing we do is off topic or out of the ordinary that she's very good at, even when she doesn't have full control over the class, that we're all still doing what we need to be doing and she doesn't need to just be hovering around us or physically be up there teaching to keep all of us in check (Interview 1).

Data would suggest that this emphasis on productivity, respect, and student responsibility not only contribute to the impressive academic achievement of Dr. Smith's students, but likewise acts as a meaningful classroom management framework.

### ***Behavior Interventions***

Dr. Smith and her students both acknowledge that there are few instances in which students engage in overt noncompliance, disrespect, or disengagement during class. While these behaviors were not directly observed by the researcher, they were reflected in the data. This suggests that while Dr. Smith is skilled enough to largely avoid the need for direct

behavior intervention with individual students, it is an occasional part of her teaching practice. Again referencing her preference for a light touch on issues of classroom management, William recalls Dr. Smith typically addressing disruptive student behavior by ignoring it and maintaining a deliberate pace within the lesson:

She might get a teensy bit loud, but she kind of just talks in a normal voice and by the time that she starts talking eventually it's kind of like a domino effect. One person will hear it and then someone else will hear it and it kind of just spirals into everyone will eventually be quiet. It's kind of a weird thing, but it kind of just happens that she doesn't need to get loud. Eventually people will hear her [and refocus] (Interview #2).

David likewise references Dr. Smith's ability to generally maintain the students' attention without explicit redirections. While he cannot recall any extreme examples of behavior issues in her class, he does note that Dr. Smith occasionally directly engages with students who are consistently disruptive or disengaged. He recalls student cell phone use as the primary behavior Dr. Smith must explicitly correct:

So one, [she tells students to] calm down or to work on stuff. I believe usually the group in question who is acting rowdy was probably not doing the work. So, it was probably trying to guide them back to the work and such. I guess on extreme occasions too, phones would be taken away if that was the reason why there was rowdiness, or the work wasn't being done. I believe really, as long as phones are in bags or something, they're fine, but if they're being used, then phone wise, it's kind of try to first use words, but then on extreme measures to take 'em away (Interview #2).

The use of technology contributing to disengaged or disruptive student behavior is a common thread between all three interviewees. Dr. Smith submits that many of Kauffman's high achieving students over-burden themselves with multiple advanced courses and extracurricular activities. She suggests this heavy workload, "something most adults wouldn't be able to manage" (Smith, Interview 1), leads to students trying to complete multiple assignments at once, which contributes to disengagement. She describes the most typical off-task behavior she sees during her class:

It's usually the computer that comes out when they're bored. They start to do different tasks, and then they have trouble. Because you can't multitask. Right? So they get lost between going back and forth between [another assignment] and what we are doing. And so then they're spacing out. [The student] got lost between math and ELA.

According to Dr. Smith, students are generally receptive to individual redirections, such as reminders to put cell phones or laptops away during class. On the rare occasion that a student refuses to refocus their attention, or the even rarer occasion they show overt disrespect or anger toward Dr. Smith, she responds directly and immediately. Typically, she does this by having a quiet conversation with the individual student while the rest remain engaged in the given task. She notes that a quick, explicit redirection is usually an effective way to deescalate the situation, particularly because she believes “The kids in your AP or honors classes are pretty good about recognizing ‘I can't do this with her right now.’ We can tackle [the issue] before or after class.” While avoiding the outburst altogether is preferable, she stresses that she is not afraid to directly confront a student does not respond to quick redirections:

I think if a student is insistent on having this out right now, I will stay in it with them, because the rest of the kids, because they're honors and AP kids, can keep themselves busy while we finish [the conversation]. I'll stay with them. And I'll keep my voice really, really low so that not everybody else can hear what I am saying, even if they can hear what the outburst is.

Though rare, William and David both reference Dr. Smith's willingness to directly engage with defiant or disrespectful students. William suggests that by having quiet, candid conversations with individual students about their behavior, Dr. Smith is again reinforcing her care for students, as well as her high academic and behavior expectations:

When she talks to us more privately, it points out personal flaws rather than just being told to be quiet for the sake of being quiet. It also demonstrates a level of care she has...It's just more personal. I think because it's more personal, people take it more seriously than if she were to just tell them to be quiet for no reason (Interview #2).

William's response, emphasizing Dr. Smith's "level of care," indicate he believes her behavior expectations are grounded in respect for her students. Interestingly, his suggestion that these conversations with disruptive students reveal a student's "personal flaws," point again to the culture of autonomy and responsibility in Dr. Smith's class, in which students are held accountable for their behavior. In William's telling, a disruptive or disrespectful student, being confronted by Dr. Smith, is being asked to examine their own mistakes. Further, his emphasis on these conversations feeling "personal" suggests that Dr. Smith has developed meaningful relationships with her students.

Dr. Smith credits her years of experience with helping her to develop classroom management techniques which are generally effective. She remembers, as a novice teacher, becoming overwhelmed with student behavior, and not feeling confident in her ability to minimize outbursts. She recalls her growth as a teacher:

When you're younger, you're less confident and you think 'I should have somehow prevented this behavior,' and I think over time you just realize you can't control students' behavior. All you can do is manage and regulate yourself in response to it. When I get that kiddo to a point where I'm like, okay, 'we need to get back to class, we can finish this later. You good?' ...And then we'll have to finish [the conversation] later typically.

This comment reiterates how Dr. Smith's years of experience in education have contributed to her effectiveness in her current role. Further, it suggests that her own confidence, born from her experience, directly contributes to her ability to effectively manage a classroom of high school students. Considering the fact that no serious behavior issues were observed by the researcher, and all three interviewees struggled to provide examples of any significant behavior disruptions throughout the year, it would appear that her classroom management practices are certainly quite effective.

## RQ 2 Results and Findings

Research question two, (hereafter RQ2) is concerned with how, if at all, teachers utilize principles of improvisational drama during their classroom instruction and interactions with students. Thematic analysis of the data yielded two primary themes; the teacher’s delivery, and the content being taught.

**Table 4.3. RQ 2 Data and Themes**

| Emergent Themes     | Sub-themes   | Explanation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|---------------------|--------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Theme 2-1: Delivery | Enthusiasm   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Teacher is enthusiastic about content</li> <li>● Excitement in instruction</li> <li>● Teacher puts on a “dog and pony show” to engage students</li> <li>● Teacher is rarely still</li> <li>● Adjusting volume to maintain engagement</li> </ul> |
|                     | Humor        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Teacher and students frequently joke</li> <li>● Lots of silly student behavior throughout lessons</li> <li>● Teacher uses playfulness to redirect behavior and correct content misunderstandings</li> </ul>                                     |
| Theme 2-2: Content  | Presentation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Presentation adjusted as needed in response to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Student engagement</li> <li>○ Unwanted student behaviors</li> <li>○ Students’ understanding of content</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                          |
|                     | Flexibility  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Teacher is flexible in response to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Technology failures</li> <li>○ Unanticipated circumstances</li> <li>○ Student behavior/disruptions</li> <li>○ Student engagement</li> </ul> </li> </ul>            |

## **Theme 2-1: Delivery**

The initial theme reflected in the data in relation to RQ2 relates to how Dr. Smith delivers content during class. For the purposes of this research, delivery can relate to academic material, lesson instructions, or informal conversations between teacher and students. Theme 2-1 was represented in two primary subcategories: enthusiasm, and humor.

### ***Enthusiasm***

The data repeatedly reference Dr. Smith's enthusiasm for both her content and her students. David repeatedly describes her as "peppy and animated," and "using a loud voice" to maintain the attention of the room (Interviews 1 and 2). William also references this, referring to Dr. Smith as "passionate" and "excited" about her lessons (Interview 2). Dr. Smith herself reflects in her interview about the need to occasionally "put on a dog and pony show" to keep students engaged in lessons. While she may make an effort to entertain with her lessons, she acknowledges that her enthusiasm is sincere, stating "I think I'm genuinely enthusiastic about my content and knowledgeable about it. And I try to make [students] see everything we do every day is important, in how I present it to them."

While she notes that her lessons sometimes feel like performances of sorts, and her lesson plans and course materials demonstrate a great deal of premeditation, the entirety of any lesson cannot be scripted. In many instances, particularly in relation to classroom management, Dr. Smith engages in what can be described as improvisation, adjusting her voice, articulation, volume, and enthusiasm based on the needs of the students in the moment. During one observation, she begins class before the bell has finished chiming, standing at the front of the room and loudly declaring, "Good morning, sophomores! Let's get started," before immediately beginning to give directions for the beginning of the lesson. She projects her

voice considerably in this instance, in order to be heard above the din of student conversations. She is similarly energetic when explaining to the class how to understand multiple-choice test questions related to rhetorical analysis. When reading the questions aloud, she varies her tone, volume, and pace dramatically, emphasizing significant words to help students understand the meaning of a wordy, complicated question. In some instances, she almost seems to assume a character of sorts, particularly when summarizing the text after reading it aloud. When explaining two alternative views presented in a passage, she throws her arms out wide, indicating the two differing opinions. Referring to one hand, she summarizes one opinion, before assuming an entirely different voice and explaining the alternative opinion, referencing her other hand. By literally assigning each position a different voice, she helps students better understand how they are distinct from one another.

Interestingly, Dr. Smith does not rely entirely on volume to demonstrate enthusiasm. While she often projects her voice to gain students' attention or emphasize details within a lesson, she makes equal use of quieter speech. When giving students instructions about their *Julius Caesar* scene rehearsals, she projects to get the students' attention at the beginning of the hour, then drops her volume drastically when providing instructions. Despite entering the room with considerable energy, the class of sophomores almost immediately quiets so they can hear her directions. This is perhaps due to the fact that, despite lowering her volume, Dr. Smith maintains a very excited speaking style, leaning forward a bit, almost as though she is sharing a secret with her students. The pace of her speech likewise fluctuates to great effect. While she frequently pauses, sometimes for several seconds, waiting for students to answer questions, Dr. Smith moves at a very deliberate pace when providing instruction. While her speech itself is not overly fast, her directions are concise, and leave little room for interjection



or distraction. She moves quickly from one set of directions to the next, and the students seem to instinctively follow along, not wanting to be left behind. Watching from my seat, I too find myself leaning in, not wanting to miss a word. Before releasing students to begin their work, Dr. Smith pauses, looks quickly around the room, then says slowly, drawing out each word, “Ready...go!”

In addition to using her voice to indicate enthusiasm, Dr. Smith also makes skillful use of movement within the physical space of the classroom to maintain student attention and help illustrate the content being taught. During all observations, Dr. Smith is almost never stationary. She is nearly constantly walking throughout the room, check in in with students, redirecting off-task behaviors, answering questions, and providing instruction. The only instance when she was still for any meaningful length of time was when she sat near her desk at the back of the room as students took turns performing their scenes in small groups. Even then, she was constantly engaged, laughing at students’ performances, quietly redirecting students who weren’t paying attention, and offering quick suggestions for performers. When providing direct instruction, she typically positions herself by the projector screen at the front of the room. From this position she can easily close the door as the bell signals the start of class, and provide immediate instruction, often referencing text or images projected on the board. Once the direct instruction has concluded, she typically walks back and forth across the empty space in the center of the room, what she terms her “runway,” sometimes holding a computer or papers, and sometimes explicitly checking in with students. This near constant movement not only mitigates students’ off-task behaviors, but reflects Dr. Smith’s enthusiasm for the lesson.

### ***Humor***

In addition to showing enthusiasm in her instruction, Dr. Smith likewise makes frequent use of humor in her interactions with students. Repeatedly throughout the lesson, individual students interject with jokes, or silly behavior. Before beginning one set of *Julius Caesar* scene performances, Dr. Smith tells the class, “We have to go quickly today. We’re short on time but big on enthusiasm,” to which a student yelled “Yeah!” and clapped dramatically, prompting laughter from the room. During a different lesson, when a student asks an unrelated question during her instruction, Dr. Smith responds “That is not the question on the table. Not even close. Wowzers,” to which the class, including the student who had asked the question, laughs. The kids themselves seem very comfortable joking throughout class, and several interject during Dr. Smith’s explanation to voice feigned devastation at a difficult assignment—one lets out a long, dramatic groan, another asks her, “again?!” and another simply shouts, “no!” While Dr. Smith laughs playfully at each of these comments, she does not pause her instruction. Further, once she directs students to get to work, the entire class, including those who had loudly objected, begin the assignment without further complaint.

Dr. Smith also utilizes humor throughout her instruction, seemingly as both a means of maintaining engagement, and making light of small issues that arise while teaching. When one student makes an offhand comment about finishing English homework during a math class, Dr. Smith, with mock astonishment, yells, “Math? You did it during math?!” to which the student rolls her eyes and laughs. Similarly, Dr. Smith makes several lighthearted asides throughout her classes. While reminding students of the requirements for their *Julius Caesar* scenes, she jokingly comments, “We’ve got some swords over there...some sword fighting in the [hallway] pod, all kinds of good stuff.” Additionally, Dr. Smith repeatedly uses humor when

responding to minor issues that arise during her instruction, particularly in relation to technology. When her laptop fails to load the needed page while projecting to the classroom screen, causing an awkward delay, she shakes her fist at the ceiling dramatically and declares “why does it always do this to me?” When the screen still fails to load several seconds later, she pretends to cry, asking, “Is it going to make me go all the way back?” even turning to face the class so they can see her mock anguish. As the class laughs at the display, she takes a students’ textbook from their desk to reference to continue instruction without the aid of her laptop. Later in the same hour, when a student jokingly suggests that the answer to each of the test questions is choice E, Dr. Smith pretends to become exasperated, playfully yelling at the student “It’s not always, E! It’s not! I will lose my marbles. I’m already close,” prompting yet more laughter from the class.

## **Theme 2-2: Content**

The second theme reflected in the data in relation to RQ2 relates to how Dr. Smith utilizes elements of dramatic improvisation during her classroom instruction. For the purposes of this research, this can include the formal presentation of lessons, classroom management, or informal interactions between teacher and students. Theme 2-2 was represented in two primary subcategories: presentation, and flexibility.

### ***Presentation***

The first area in which Dr. Smith demonstrates an incorporation of improvised dramatics is her presentation of content. Namely, she displays an ability to improvise instructional practices as needed in response to students’ understanding of the material. This is most clearly illustrated in her facilitation of class discussions, in which she must be directly responsive to the comments made by students. During discussions, Dr. Smith is often moving

throughout the room, asking a variety of questions to solicit student responses. In describing class discussions, David positions Dr. Smith as the facilitator, noting “she's usually the one that moves [the conversation] along, asking the questions and then asking the next questions usually, or recapping in a way that opens up new development for what somebody be answered with,” (Interview 2). William likewise references the improvisational nature of her facilitation of class discussions, noting “it's just her talking to us, and us responding or asking questions or giving answers. [She'll] ask us questions, or we give answers, or she asks discussion questions we'll talk about in small groups” (Interview 1). Here, he references the semi-structured nature of these conversations, and Dr. Smith's ability to respond as needed based on students' contributions. In his second interview, William again references Dr. Smith's use of class conversations, suggesting they build meaningfully on the more formal assignments. He reflects, “I find the [assignments] she gives us actually necessary and the discussions we have in class actually help build our understanding and knowledge of what we do” (William, Interview 2). This suggests that Dr. Smith's ability to improvise when facilitating class discussions is, at least in part, due to the extensive planning she puts into her other instructional practices.

Dr. Smith demonstrates a similar willingness to improvise during more structured lessons, such as when students take turns reading assigned characters from *Julius Caesar*. David remembers Dr. Smith adjusting her presentation of these scenes as needed, by encouraging students to participate, or joining in herself:

We've had small group [scenes] and we've had whole group [scenes]...she just kind of, like, oversees. First off, I'll say that if people don't volunteer [to read] she volunteers them. In that case, she sort of oversees...she reads along with it, too. And if somebody doesn't talk also, she like (*mimics her making an expectant face at a student*) kind of tries to indicate that it's that person's turn (Interview 1).

Again, this suggests Dr. Smith is willing to improvise her instruction based on students' level of engagement. In doing so, she both encourages desired participation while subtly discouraging less desired or off-task behaviors from students.

Additionally, this semi-improvised instructional style allows Dr. Smith to adjust as needed based on students' understanding of material. When reading passages of text aloud to the class, for example, Dr. Smith frequently re-reads sentences and places additional emphasis on specific words, in an attempt to clarify student confusion (Observation 2). Similarly, her practice of intentionally eavesdropping on student discussions while pretending to be engaged in another task, such as answering emails, allows her to directly respond as needed to student confusion. In describing this practice as a type of "formative assessment," Dr. Smith is further illustrating her ability to improvise the presentation of content as needed, based on students' responses to her instruction.

### ***Flexibility***

Also evident in the data is Dr. Smith's flexibility in her classroom instructional practices. Most obvious of these practices is Dr. Smith's flexibility in response to the unanticipated circumstances which occur in any classroom, such as technology failures. While feigning anguish at a frozen laptop, or exasperation at an off-task student may seem inconsequential, these responses demonstrate Dr. Smith's ability to improvise as needed based on classroom conditions. One observed lesson occurred on a day with an adjusted hourly schedule due to schoolwide activities, resulting in only two students showing up for class. Obviously surprised at just how few students were in attendance, Dr. Smith responded with humor and flexibility, laughing with the students and jokingly asking "where is everyone?" with mock frustration, before giving instructions for the hour. Notably, Dr. Smith invited

feedback from both students on which assignments they would prefer to work during the class period. Ultimately, both students worked independently throughout the hour, while engaging in lighthearted conversation with each other and Dr. Smith. Again, this is further evidence of Dr. Smith's ability to improvise meaningful class activities based on unanticipated circumstances, while remaining responsive to students' needs.

Dr. Smith encourages similar flexibility from her students in various lessons. When students performed assigned scenes from *Julius Caesar* in small groups, Dr. Smith asked them to imagine the scenes in new, modern context. Throughout the lesson, she encouraged students to make creative, often silly choices. On performance day, when students produced a football for one performance, she laughingly instructed "don't hit the projector." When another group performed an especially spirited death scene, causing the entire room to erupt in laughter, Dr. Smith exclaimed "It's a tragedy...I'm crying!" In another scene, after a student pantomimed his own death and collapsed on the ground, he waited a few seconds, then scurried offstage. Between laughs Dr. Smith commented, "there he goes...". While each of these examples may seem like somewhat typical classroom interactions, they are evidence of a teacher highly competent not only in her instructional practices, but in an ability to improvise based on given classroom conditions.

## **Summary**

This case study relied on semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and the collection of instructional material and student work to better understand the instructor's use of principles of dramatic performance and improvisation in her teaching practices. After collection, data was coded and analyzed for emergent themes, which were then categorized

into sub-themes. Analysis of the data revealed three key themes in relation to RQ1, and two in relation to RQ2.

RQ1 is concerned with the ways Dr. Smith incorporates elements of dramatic performance in her instructional practices. Here, the data indicated three key themes: delivery, perception of teacher, and classroom management. In theme 1-1, delivery, data indicated that elements of dramatic performance were evident in Dr. Smith's lesson structure, her facilitation of the lesson, and her personality within the classroom. In theme 1-2, perception of teacher, data indicated sub-themes of care and respect, Dr. Smith's knowledge of content, and her high expectations for students. In theme 1-3, classroom management, data pointed to sub-themes of Dr. Smith's use of physical space, behavior expectations, and behavior interventions. RQ2 is concerned with Dr. Smith's use of principles of improvised drama in her classroom instructional practices. Here, data pointed to the two primary themes of delivery and content. In theme 2-1, delivery, data indicated the two sub-themes of enthusiasm and humor. In theme 2-2, content, data was categorized into the two sub-themes of presentation of flexibility.

The following chapter will include a more in-depth analysis of this data in relation to both research questions. This will include an analysis of the data within the context of the theoretical framework, the implications and limitations of this case study. Additionally, chapter five will include discussions of the implications of this study on future research within the field.

## Chapter 5 - Discussion

Participation in creative drama positively impacts individual's communication, interpersonal, critical thinking, and logical reasoning skills (Annarella, 1999; Çevik & Uygun, 2004; Güven & Adıgüzel, 2015; O'Day, 1996; Sahin, 2018; Ulubey, 2018). Moreover, drama participation fosters social-emotional growth, empathy, and peer relationship development (Fleming et al, 2004; Jarrah, 2019; Oztug m& Ciner, 2017; Koksall, 2018; Palavan, 2017; Pat & Yilmaz, 2021; Wright, 2006; Yassa, 1997). Cross-curricular implementation of drama activities has long been used by both secondary and elementary educators to great effect (Brizendine & Thomas, 1982; Courtney, 1989; Durland, 1975; Ehrlich, 1974; Siks & Dunnington, 1961). Improvised drama in particular has been used to foster creativity, critical thinking, writing and literacy, and interpersonal skills since its formalized origin by Viola Spolin at Chicago's Hull House (Scruggs & Hellman, 2008; Halpern, Close & Johnson, 1952; Jagodowski & Pasquesi, 2015; Johnstone, 1981; Libera, 2004; Marie, 2019; McKnight & Scruggs, 2008; Spolin, 1963; Spolin, 1986; Spolin, 2010; Sweet, 1996; Robbins & McClure, 2018; Salinsky & Frances-White, 2008; Wasson, 2017).

Despite the wealth of scholarship pointing to its benefits, far less explored is the extent to which teachers themselves might be positioned as performers, or improvisers. This research explores the ways in which experienced, effective educators implement principles of dramatic performance and improvisation in their daily classroom practices. Two research questions were investigated, the findings of which were presented in the previous chapter. Both research questions are concerned with the methods educators use in their instructional practices, with RQ1 exploring their use of dramatic performance, and RQ2 exploring their use of improvised dramatics.



Chapter five analyzes the findings of this research. Findings are discussed in relation to the emergent and sub-themes identified in chapter four, and analyzed in relation to existing research and this study's theoretical framework. Implications of the study include an understanding of how familiarity with creative dramatics and improvisation might benefit classroom teachers, and how teacher evaluation methods might be altered to include these principles.

### Discussion of themes

Two research questions are investigated in this study. RQ1 considers the ways in which experienced educators implement principles of dramatic performance in their daily instructional practices and interactions with students. Three themes and nine sub-themes are identified in relation to RQ1.

**Table 5.1. RQ 1 Themes and Findings**

| <b>RQ1: In what ways, if any, do teachers utilize principles of dramatic performance during their classroom instruction and interactions with students?</b> |                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Theme</b>                                                                                                                                                | <b>Sub-Theme</b>       | <b>Findings</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 1-1: Delivery                                                                                                                                               | Lesson Structure       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Emphasis on collaboration and group work is consistent with the dramatic concept of ensemble</li> </ul>                                                                                  |
|                                                                                                                                                             | Facilitation of Lesson | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Teacher as facilitator rather than lecturer aligns with director role in performed theatre</li> <li>● Frequent use of classroom as a stage, both implicitly and explicitly</li> </ul>    |
|                                                                                                                                                             | Teacher Personality    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Teacher “performs” elements of her identity to maintain student engagement</li> <li>● Teacher constantly adjusts her energy and level of animation based on student responses</li> </ul> |
|                                                                                                                                                             | Care and Respect       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Promotion of classroom respect is consistent with dramatic ensemble-building</li> </ul>                                                                                                  |

|                            |                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|----------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1-2: Perception of Teacher |                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher affirms the ideas of students, fostering additional contributions</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|                            | Knowledge of Content   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Like a director, the teacher knows the content but guides students in their own learning rather than dictating concepts</li> <li>Students show deference to and trust in the teacher's content knowledge</li> </ul>                                                                                                                         |
|                            | High Expectations      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Like in a dramatic performance, there is a sense that the learning process in this classroom is never complete. Students are constantly being asked to deepen their understanding.</li> <li>Teacher provides frequent, brief feedback, in a manner similar to a director of a play.</li> </ul>                                              |
| 1-3: Classroom Management  | Physical Space         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Classroom is arranged in a thrust stage format</li> <li>Open space is frequently utilized as a performance or presentation space</li> <li>The teacher moves about the space almost constantly to maintain student engagement</li> <li>Students are asked to move, both to form new groups (ensembles) and to maintain engagement</li> </ul> |
|                            | Behavior Expectations  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students are given a great deal of autonomy, not unlike actors in a play</li> <li>Students hold themselves and one another accountable</li> <li>Students are expected to collaborate respectfully and meaningfully</li> </ul>                                                                                                               |
|                            | Behavior Interventions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explicit behavior corrections are rarely needed</li> <li>The teacher intervenes in a manner which protects the dignity of the individual student and the class as a whole</li> <li>Interventions typically reference students' need to be accountable to one another</li> </ul>                                                             |

## **Discussion of RQ1, Theme 1-1: Delivery**

The first theme evident in the data related to RQ1 is delivery. The data indicate that Dr. Smith frequently incorporates elements of performed theatre into her classroom practices, in both her own behavior and the behaviors she encourages among students. Within this emergent theme, three sub-themes were present in lesson structure, facilitation of the lesson, and teacher personality. What follows is an analysis of how these themes and sub-themes intersect with the principles of performed drama.

### ***RQ1, Theme 1-1, Sub-theme: Lesson Structure***

The data indicate that the structure of lessons utilized in Dr. Smith's classroom is closely aligned with principles of dramatic storytelling. Notably, Dr. Smith's lessons follow a predictable daily pattern, including an opening activity, content instruction (often in the form of small group collaboration), and a closing activity. This structure is analogous to the three act play structure often used in Western drama, consisting of expository information, followed by a central conflict or struggle, and ending with some sort of conclusionary action. This structure was originated by Aristotle in his *Poetics*, in which he argues all drama must have a beginning, middle, and end, which he termed prologue, episode, and exodus (Aristotle, 1907). This three-act structure can be observed in the dramatic works of Ibsen, Mamet, and others (Mamet, 1998; Roe, 1905).

Additionally, Dr. Smith's emphasis on collaboration and small group work is consistent with the dramatic concept of ensemble. In simple terms, a dramatic ensemble is a group of performers working together to present a work of theatre to an audience. The ability of an ensemble, or a group of performers, to work together in a meaningful, respectful, and cohesive manner, is integral to their ability to tell a cohesive story. Directors work endlessly to

engender a sense of ensemble support within their cast of performers, even at an amateur level. In what scholars have coined ensemble pedagogy, research indicates that participation in a healthy performance ensemble, in addition to producing meaningful theatrical performances, promotes democratic norms and interpersonal caring, and undermines populist ideals (Boyd, 2009; Enciso et al., 2011; Neelands, 2009b; Pigkou-Repousi, 2012). In the same way, Dr. Smith has worked hard to cultivate a safe, collaborative environment in her classroom, in which all students understand they are accountable to one another. William's description of her classroom having a "productive hum," and David's emphasis that she "doesn't tolerate distractions" suggest that Dr. Smith's students understand they are working together towards a common goal, in much the same manner as performers in a dramatic ensemble. Further, the emphasis on collaboration and group work, and the relatively light touch with which Dr. Smith directs the action in her classroom, both foster a classroom atmosphere in which students understand they are working together to create something bigger than themselves.

***RQ1, Theme 1-1, Sub-Theme: Facilitation of Lesson***

Dr. Smith's facilitation of lessons is likewise consistent with principles of creative drama. Most notable is Dr. Smith's preference for collaboration and group work rather than direct, formalized lectures. By opting for just 15 minutes of direct instruction per class period and using that time primarily to provide directions for the day's task rather than lecture, Dr. Smith is assuming a role not unlike that of a director of a dramatic performance. The director of a staged play will conduct extensive analysis of the script, narrative, themes, and characters prior to rehearsals, but rather than dictating explicitly the choices actors should make, they will instead ask questions and facilitate exercises which guide the performers toward finding their own interpretation of each character. Additionally, directors will intentionally observe and

cater their feedback and group exercises in direct response to choices made by members of the ensemble. This is not dissimilar to Dr. Smith's penchant for "eavesdropping" on students and offering guidance in response. This practice, like a director providing notes after a rehearsal, allows the students to feel a sense of ownership over their learning, in the same way actors benefit from the autonomy to discover their characters for themselves.

Finally, and most literally, Dr. Smith routinely utilizes her classroom as a performance space. Student desks are arranged in a thrust stage format, with empty space in the center of the room. This creates a natural presentation space from which Dr. Smith provides instruction, solicits conversation among students, and presents information. Notably, the use of this space is largely fluid, with Dr. Smith and her students participating equally as performer and audience. She often invites students to the center of her room, or the stage, to present to their peers. The most obvious example of this marriage of classroom and stage is students' performances of scenes from *Julius Caesar*, in which they literally assumed roles and performed for their audience of peers. Here, Dr. Smith literally assumes a director role, providing sporadic feedback to the performers and encouraging them to utilize their performance space more efficiently.

***RQ1, Theme 1-1, Sub-Theme: Teacher Personality***

Dr. Smith's personality in the classroom likewise intersects with various elements of performed dramatics. Most notably, she performs elements of her personality deliberately in an attempt to build relationships with students and maintain their engagement. Her assertion that she "tries not to be too much" to avoid being "off-putting" to students, for instance, suggests that her personality in the classroom, while sincere, is deliberately calibrated based on

how she thinks students might respond. In doing so, she is constructing a character of sorts, based on what her audience.

Additionally, Dr. Smith is constantly evaluating her classes, making real-time adjustments to her behavior based on students' mood, behaviors, and grasp of the given content. William and David both reference her skill in moderating class discussions, soliciting participation from all students without force. She references this herself when noting that some, less energetic classes require her to "put on a dog and pony show," in which she ratchets up her own energy to encourage more participation from students. Similarly, she references her need to maintain a calmer demeanor during more rambunctious classes that "crawl the walls," in an effort to keep those students focused. While every skilled teacher engages in near constant classroom management, it is distinct from what Dr. Smith is describing here. By intentionally augmenting her portrayal of her own personality based on the mood of each group of students, she is assuming the role of a performer, constantly reading her audience and making adjustments as needed to maintain engagement.

### **Discussion of RQ1 Theme 1-2: Perception of teacher**

The second theme evident in the data related to RQ1 is the perception of the teacher. The data indicate that students' perception of Dr. Smith, as well as her perception of herself, align with various principles of drama. Within this emergent theme, three sub-themes were present in care and respect, knowledge of content, and high expectations for students. What follows is an analysis of how these themes and sub-themes intersect with principles of theatre.

#### ***RQ1, Theme 1-2, Sub-Theme: Care and Respect***

A classroom, like a dramatic ensemble, thrives when a culture of care and respect has been cultivated (Kitchen, 2018). In the same way students are more likely to engage

meaningfully with lessons if they feel respected and valued within the classroom, actors are far more likely to make unique character choices and take creative risks when they feel supported by their ensemble. Both the classroom and the stage are sites of vulnerability, in which students and performers must be comfortable putting forth a sincere effort without fear of ridicule or dismissal. Observations and interviews would suggest Dr. Smith's classroom is an environment where students are comfortable taking risks because they are confident in the support of their teacher and classmates. The lightheartedness that permeates the classroom is evidenced by students' willingness to make jokes, even playfully making fun of the teacher and one another, dancing for the camera, and giving their full attention to whoever is speaking. Class discussions are comfortable ordeals, with students chiming in without the need to raise hands, and students seem to genuinely value their classmates' contributions. David and William both reference Dr. Smith's frequent use of small group, collaborative activities throughout the semester, and David goes so far as to argue that this collaboration, even when he was assigned to work with peers with whom he wasn't close, helped him improve his interpersonal skills and "prepare for real life." Further, this culture of interpersonal respect and care only further illustrates the ensemble pedagogy present in Dr. Smith's classroom.

***RQ1, Theme 1-2, Sub-Theme: Knowledge of Content***

Notably, while her classroom is decidedly egalitarian in nature, the students still show a great deal of deference to Dr. Smith. This is in large part due to her reputation as a knowledgeable, experienced educator, who has a deep understanding of the content she teaches. Both students interviewed reference her years of experience, with David noting she has "earned her reputation" as a skilled educator. She likewise references these years of

experience, suggesting that her teaching practices have become so effective in part because she has taught some of the same material for several years.

This deep understanding of the material she teaches is consistent with what drama practitioners might term table work, or the in-depth script analysis which occurs before more formalized scene rehearsals may begin. Believing that drama had enormous cultural significance for audiences, Stanislavski emphasized such table work in his system for training actors. This typically involved reading the dramatic text multiple times, and doing a series of in-depth writing exercises in which actors explored their characters' realities, often imagining details not explicitly noted in the script (Butler, 2022; Davidson, 2021; Evangelatou, 2021; Ingleson, 2022; Jones, 2020; Mamet, 2010; Stanislavski 1961; Stanislavski 1972; Stanislavski, 1977). Interestingly, Dr. Smith describes a similar process for preparing her lessons. She suggests repeatedly that her years of experience and familiarity with her content contribute directly to her success in the classroom. William and David similarly reference her experience as one reason why they find Dr. Smith so engaging. Pointing directly to her knowledge of the texts being taught, David states simply, "she knows her stuff" (Interview 1). Her frequent re-reading of assigned texts, and the hours spent planning each lesson over the course of her tenure contribute to Dr. Smith's deep understanding of the content she teaches, not unlike a director or performer utilizing Stanislavski's system to cultivate the best performance possible. In much the same way Stanislavski's system fosters among actors more authentic, sincere dramatic depictions of character, Dr. Smith's similar lesson preparation methods allow her to provide a more engaging, meaningful, and in-depth presentation of her content.

***RQ1, Theme 1-2, Sub-Theme: High Expectations for Students***



The high expectations to which Dr. Smith holds her students are also consistent with elements of dramatic performance. Perhaps because English language arts and drama are each grounded in foundational principles of rhetoric which can be traced back to Aristotle's *Poetics*, there is considerable similarity between Dr. Smith's emphasis on collaboration and peer-editing, and the behavior of a dramatic ensemble. With her expectation students engage meaningfully in collaborative exercises almost daily, Dr. Smith is encouraging a kind of ensemble behavior observed in dramatic productions. Both William and David indicate that Dr. Smith has high expectations for both academic performance and interpersonal behavior during class. Further, Dr. Smith herself references the need to "set the bar high," because her students are capable of meeting her standards, when pushed. Her emphasis on collaboration, coupled with these high expectations, seems to cultivate a classroom environment in which students are accountable to one another in ways not seen in the typical English classroom.

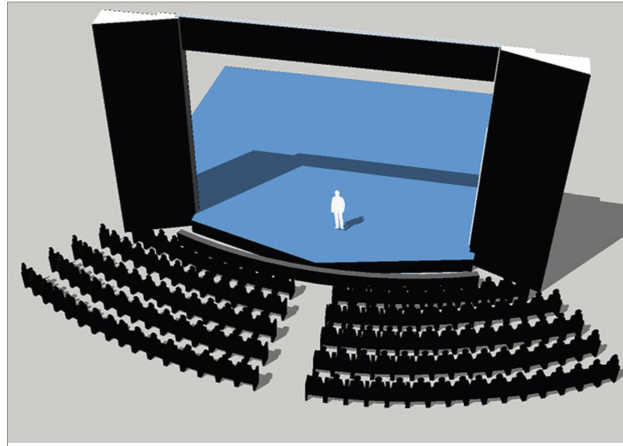
### **Discussion of RQ1 Theme 1-3: Classroom Management**

The final theme evident in the data related to RQ1 is classroom management. Dr. Smith relies on a variety of classroom management techniques to maintain an orderly and engaged classroom, without sacrificing the easygoing and respectful environment she has worked hard to cultivate. Within this emergent theme, three sub-themes were present in Dr. Smith's use of physical space, behavior expectations, and behavior interventions. What follows is an analysis of how these themes and sub-themes intersect with principles of theatre.

#### ***RQ1, Theme 1-3, Sub-Theme: Physical Space***

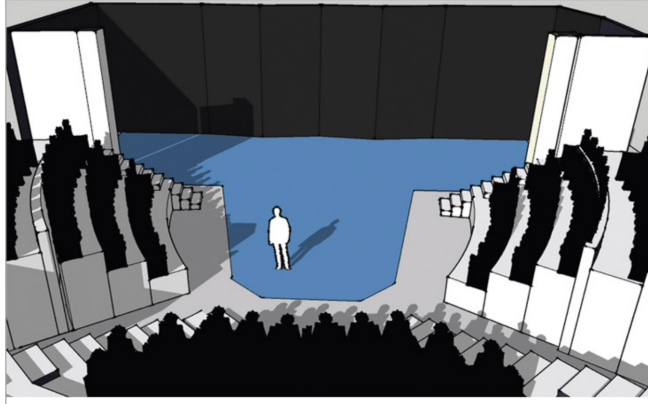
One of the more obvious intersections of Dr. Smith's classroom and dramatic performance can be observed in her use of physical space. Dr. Smith deliberately positions the elements of her classroom to facilitate student engagement, collaboration, and presentation of

material. In dramatic stage design, three types of theater orientations are most common; proscenium, thrust, and arena (Klingelhoef, 2017). Proscenium stages, the most traditional style of theater, are arranged with performers on an elevated performance space facing an audience, typically arranged in rows. Seating is sometimes raked (positioned on an incline) to allow those in the back of the auditorium to see the stage.



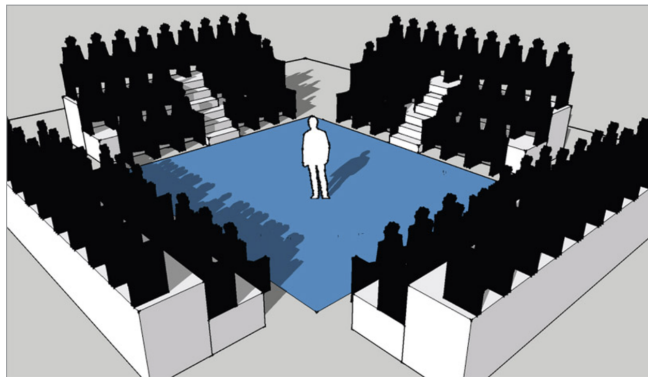
**Figure 5.1. From Klingelhoef, 2017.**

In a thrust stage, the audience is positioned on three sides of the performance space, rather than on a single side as in a proscenium stage. This can create a more intimate and dynamic performance space, as audience members are typically positioned closer to the performers.



**Figure 5.2. From Klingelhoef, 2017.**

Arena stages are arranged with the performance space entirely surrounded by the audience on all sides. Often, these stages are circular or square. Aisles are typically constructed between seats to allow actors to enter and exit through the audience, since, unlike the proscenium or thrust stages, there is no traditional backstage area.



**Figure 5.3. From Klingelhoef, 2017.**

Historically, classrooms have most commonly been arranged in a manner similar to a proscenium stage—students sitting in neat rows, all facing the teacher, who presents from the front of the room, with very little movement by performer or audience. Increasingly, teachers

have begun to eschew this dated format in favor of more flexible, dynamic classroom arrangements. Dr. Smith's classroom is positioned in a thrust stage format, with students positioned on three sides of an open space used for instruction and presentation. This was most apparent during students' performances of scenes from *Julius Caesar*, in which they literally used this open space as a stage. During these scenes, Dr. Smith interjected repeatedly to provide guidance, describing the students as "performers" and those observing as their "audience." When describing her rationale for her classroom arrangement, Dr. Smith cites her desire to "eliminate the back row as much as possible," by positioning all students as near as possible to the action at the center of the room. This suggests a deliberate positioning of the empty space at the center of the classroom as a site of dynamic performance to which all students are held accountable.

Her arrangement of physical space also facilitates a great deal of movement within Dr. Smith's classes. Throughout a class period, she is very rarely still, choosing instead to walk about the room, and pacing up and down the empty space at the center of the room she refers to occasionally as a "runway." While the student desks themselves remain largely stationary, the students are asked to move multiple times each class period (about every 20-30 minutes). This most often occurs when Dr. Smith asks students to form new groups for collaborative work or discussion, sometimes culminating in groups presenting their work to the class. In informal small group discussions, students typically share their group's perspective with the rest of the class while remaining seated, but for more formalized presentations students often stand in the center of the room, facing the audience of their peers. Notably, Dr. Smith's desk is positioned in the back corner of the room, on the wall opposite the projector screen. In this orientation,

her desk is aligned with the student desks, allowing her to assume the role of audience member when seated, and seamlessly integrate herself into the performance as needed.

***RQ1, Theme 1-3, Sub-Theme: Behavior Expectations***

Many similarities exist between the behavior expectations of Dr. Smith's classroom, and those of a dramatic ensemble. Though Dr. Smith does not explicitly instruct students in their behavior expectations, there is a general understanding among students that they must demonstrate respect and cooperation at all times. The expectation is bolstered by the classroom emphasis on group work and collaboration. This emphasis on respect and collaboration is consistent with the dramatic concept of ensemble, in which many individuals participate equally in the creative process. Dr. Smith expects her students to be accountable both for their own behavior and, to an extent, that of their peers. This peer accountability was observed several times throughout lessons, including a student encouraging a peer to put away their phone, another quietly reminding their partner to return to the assigned task, and group members encouraging one another to stay focused during independent *Julius Caesar* rehearsals. This suggests students understand that the actions of their peers directly influence their own experience in Dr. Smith's class, and they are incentivized to help one another make appropriate behavior choices. Here, the concept of ensemble pedagogy is evident in Dr. Smith's classroom, as her behavior expectations and collaborative emphasis result in unspoken democratic, egalitarian norms (Boyd, 2009; Enciso et al., 2011; Neelands, 2009b; Pigkou-Repousi, 2012).

This classroom atmosphere, in which the teacher provides overarching guidance while allowing students the autonomy to work collaboratively with minimal adult intervention, is consistent with a director's role in a dramatic production. In the same way Dr. Smith expects

her students to arrive to class prepared and ready to interact in a supportive manner with their peers, a director will expect actors to arrive at rehearsal familiar with their script and ready to collaborate in good faith with their castmates. The “productive hum” and general content dispositions of the students in her classes would indicate the vast majority of Dr. Smith’s students have fully embraced this ideology. The end result is a classroom where failing to participate or behaving in an unkind manner is not just undesired, but fundamentally incongruent with the prevailing classroom culture.

***RQ1, Theme 1-3, Sub-Theme: Behavior Interventions***

Because Dr. Smith has so skillfully cultivated a classroom culture which privileges collaboration, personal responsibility, and high academic achievement, interventions to explicitly address unwanted student behavior are quite rare. With the exception of the occasional student having their phone taken away, neither David nor William were able to think of any time when Dr. Smith has had to intervene to correct an individual student’s behavior. Dr. Smith likewise acknowledges that her classroom management is generally quite effective, and that student outbursts, disrespect, and defiance are uncommon.

While rare, it is worth noting that when she must intervene to address unwanted student behavior, she does so while prioritizing the dignity and privacy of the student involved. Dr. Smith notes that on the rare occasion students are overtly defiant, she is careful to be measured in her response. Emphasizing a need to control her response to student behavior, rather than controlling the behavior itself, Dr. Smith prefers to handle these situations individually, rather than in front of the entire class. By talking with students privately, and keeping her voice “really, really low,” she is demonstrating compassion for the student while still holding them accountable for their behavior. She suggests this helps avoid the situation escalating into an

outright power struggle between herself and the student, because it removes, to the extent possible, the rest of the students in the room from the conflict. While it may seem insignificant, expecting the remainder of the class to continue their work while she speaks with a single student is further evidence of the ensemble nature of her classroom. In the same way a rehearsal or performance cannot stop because one performer is struggling, the work of Dr. Smith's classroom does not stop if one student requires intervention. Additionally, if a single performer does not fully embrace the spirit of collaborative artistic creation, a dramatic ensemble cannot thrive. Dr. Smith's classroom is no different—she intervenes immediately when a student is overtly disrespectful, because the collaborative work of the classroom cannot occur without full student engagement. While kind, Dr. Smith's behavior interventions are a necessity, not just to maintain calm and focus, but to protect the spirit of ensemble pedagogy present in her room.

**Table 5.2. RQ 2 Themes and Findings**

| <b>RQ2: In what ways, if any, do teachers' instructional techniques and interactions with students utilize principles of dramatic improvisation?</b> |                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Theme</b>                                                                                                                                         | <b>Sub-Theme</b> | <b>Findings</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 2-1: Delivery                                                                                                                                        | Enthusiasm       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The teacher constantly adjusts tone, pace, volume, and energy of presentation to maintain student focus</li> <li>• Teacher's enthusiasm sets the tone for student participation. Students feel the need to match her energy.</li> </ul>                                                                |
|                                                                                                                                                      | Humor            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lots of silly behavior and jokes from students throughout lessons</li> <li>• The teacher frequently uses humor to deflect, redirect, or adapt to unexpected circumstances</li> <li>• Humor is used as needed to mitigate unwanted student behaviors, or address confusion regarding content</li> </ul> |

|              |              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|--------------|--------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2-2: Content | Presentation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A foundational structure is used every day, giving the instructor freedom to improvise within each lesson, similar to improv forms</li> </ul>                                                                                                   |
|              | Flexibility  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The teacher adapts quickly and effectively to changing circumstances, student behaviors, technology failures, etc.</li> <li>• The teacher adjusts instructional practices as needed based on students' understanding of the material</li> </ul> |

RQ2 investigates the ways educators implement elements of improvised drama in their instructional practices. Two themes and four sub-themes are indicated by the data in relation to RQ2. What follows is an analysis of each.

### **Discussion of RQ2 Theme 2-1: Delivery**

The first theme indicated by the data in relation to RQ2 is delivery. This includes Dr. Smith's use of her voice, body, and classroom tools to present content and interact with students during classes. The two primary sub-themes present in the data include Dr. Smith's use of enthusiasm and humor.

#### ***RQ2, Theme 2-1, Sub-Theme: Enthusiasm***

The passion with which a teacher does their job can have an enormous impact on students' willingness to engage (Frenzel et al, 2019; Frommelt et al, 2021; Keller et al, 2013; Lazarides et al, 2018; Palmer, 2020; Patrick et al, 2000). This scholarship seems to reflect what students and teachers already know, as David states simply, "The way a teacher talks can decide how devoted a student can be" (Interview 1). David and William each reference Dr. Smith's energy in the classroom, describing her as passionate, enthusiastic, animated, and peppy. Interestingly, Dr. Smith demonstrates her enthusiasm while maintaining an otherwise calm demeanor; her voice is rarely raised above what is needed for students to hear her, and



her physical movements within the room are reserved, slow, and deliberate. Despite her measured behavior, her enthusiasm is referenced repeatedly by students. Further, Dr. Smith herself acknowledges her passion for teaching, noting, “I’m genuinely enthusiastic about my content ...and I try to make them see everything that we do every day is important, in how I present to them.” This suggests her presentation of content is deliberately tailored to help students maintain engagement.

Dr. Smith demonstrates her enthusiasm for her content without yelling or adopting exaggerated physical movements. Instead, she navigates her instruction while almost constantly recalibrating her delivery based on the response of her pupils. She acknowledges she adjusts her energy based on the needs of her students, from maintaining a calmer demeanor for rowdy classes, to putting on a “dog and pony show” for those who are less engaged. During an observed class of energetic sophomores, Dr. Smith’s voice noticeably dropped in volume and her speech slowed. Interestingly, even when adjusting her speech in this manner, she maintained an intensity and engagement with her students which is somewhat difficult to articulate—she maintained her physical movement throughout the classroom space, and made deliberate, sustained eye contact with students, all of which indicated her own passion about the subject being discussed.

This constant adjustment of tone, energy, pace, volume, and intensity directly intersects with principles of dramatic improvisation. Spolin’s (1999) advice to directors of children’s theatre emphasizes a need to constantly monitor students’ engagement and contributions, and respond enthusiastically:

The cue for the teacher-director is basically simple: he must see that each student is participating freely at every moment. *The challenge to the teacher or leader is to activize [sic] each student in the group while respecting each one’s immediate capacity for participation [emphasis added].* Though the gifted student will always seem to have

more to give, yet if a student is participating to the limit of his powers and using his abilities to their fullest extent, he must be respected for so doing, no matter how minute his contribution. The student cannot always do what the teacher thinks he should do, but as he progresses, his capacities will enlarge. Work with the student where he is, not where you think he should be (Spolin, p. 10).

Spolin's language, while in the context of those teaching drama, is similarly applicable to the non-drama classroom. By constantly evaluating the participation, energy, engagement, and understanding of her students, and adjusting her behavior accordingly, Dr. Smith is, in Spolin's words, evaluating students' *capacity for participation*, and taking the necessary steps to *activize* them. By calibrating her own enthusiasm in this manner, Dr. Smith is engaging in a kind of teacher performance directly aligned with Viola Spolin's improvisation ideology.

Leonard & Yorton (2015) make this connection more explicitly, arguing that improvisers "create art not only in front of the audience, but also in tacit conversation with the audience—seeking suggestions, monitoring feedback, and transforming material in return. The sum of co-creation is greater than its parts" (p. 14). This description of improvisation as a constant act of altering behavior based on audience response is directly analogous to Dr. Smith's navigation of her own behavior based on the classroom atmosphere.

### ***RQ2, Theme 2-1, Sub-Theme: Humor***

Humor plays a key role in Dr. Smith's classroom, and is one of the more obvious intersections between her work and the principles of dramatic improvisation. While humor manifests throughout each lesson by students and teacher making jokes, this is only possible because of the lighthearted yet focused nature of the classroom. This atmosphere is consistent with Spolin's ideology of structured play among an ensemble, in which each member is valued equally and encouraged to participate to the fullest extent of their abilities (Spolin, 1999; Spolin, 1986; Spolin & Sills, 2010). Within this environment, humor occurs naturally,

building organically from interpersonal conversation rather than individuals attempting to make jokes. In Dr. Smith's classroom, there are no jokes, but there is a lot of laughter. Leonard & Yorton (2015) explain this phenomenon when reflecting on the foundational principles of improv comedy employed by The Second City: "When people laugh, they're often laughing at the shared truth in the room," (p. 15). Halpern et al (2001) echoes this sentiment, suggesting that among strategies for getting an audience to laugh, "The simplest and most basic concept may also be the most effective. *The truth is funny* [emphasis in original]. Honest discovery, observation, and reaction is better than contrived invention" (p. 15). In other words, improvised comedy garners laughs from an audience not through jokes, but through the authentic, shared experience of the performers onstage.

The ensemble-oriented humor that arises during improvisation is quite similar to the humor observed in Dr. Smith's classroom. When Dr. Smith feigns anguish and yells jokingly at a student, "the answer is not always C!" the students in the room laugh, though no one has told a joke. Absent their context (for example, when written in a dissertation) these words aren't particularly funny. The humor arises from the authenticity of Dr. Smith's reaction—a student claims every test answer is C, and she responds with an exasperation which, while exaggerated, is still sincere. Further, affirming and building on the ideas of others—saying "yes, and" --is a foundational principle of improvisation, and is key to producing laughs without jokes. Halpern et al (2001) identifies this phenomenon explicitly, noting, "The audience laughs at agreement – a secret of comedy that very few people realize" (p. 51). The student in this scenario likely did not actually believe that every test answer was C, but in that moment Dr. Smith agreed with his premise (that he believed every test answer was C) and responded as though he were making a serious claim. In this interaction, while Dr. Smith is

playfully correcting her student, she is simultaneously agreeing and building on his contribution.

### **Discussion of RQ2 Theme 2-2: Content**

The second theme indicated by the data in relation to RQ2 is content. This includes the information, instructional materials, and texts Dr. Smith uses during lessons. The two primary sub-themes present in the data include Dr. Smith's presentation of material, and flexibility during instruction.

#### ***RQ2, Theme 2-2, Sub-Theme: Presentation***

The second theme indicated within the data in relation to RQ2 is concerned with Dr. Smith's presentation of course material. The most obvious intersection between Dr. Smith's presentation of instruction and improvisation can be seen in the underlying structure of her lessons. A foundational structure is used in each of Dr. Smith's classes, as referenced by William, David, and Dr. Smith herself. This structure typically begins with an introduction activity of some kind (often discussion, reading, or writing) before transitioning into the primary content topic of the day (almost always a collaborative project of some kind) before ending with some type of concluding activity (often written or through discussion). Dr. Smith notes this structure is consistently used from the beginning of the year, and based on interviews with students, it is clear they quickly became comfortable with this pattern. This foundational structure, coupled with Dr. Smith's years of experience, allow her to improvise as needed when presenting content based on students' responses. Further, this use of a common structure within which students and teacher can be flexible is consistent with the basic principles of ensemble improvisation.

It is worth noting that while improvised drama is, by definition, created spontaneously, it is not without structure. A variety of improv forms exist, from long-form scenic improvisation to the short improv games originated by Spolin. Within Spolin's games, a clearly defined set of rules exist which dictate the dramatic action (Dudeck & McClure, 2018; Marie, 2019; McKnight, & Scruggs, 2008; Sahlins, 2001; Spolin, 1986; Spolin, 1999; Spolin & Sills, 2010; Wasson, 2017). In scenic, or long-form improvisation, structural guidelines exist which inform the choices made by actors. The most famous of these forms is the Harold, originated by Del Close and still taught at the iO Theater in Chicago (Gellman, 2008; Griggs, 2005; Halpern et al, 1952; Halpern, 2005; Nachmanovitch, 2019; Patinkin & Kozak, 2019; Sahlins, 2001; Salinsky & Frances-White, 2008; Wasson, 2017; Thomas, 2009). The Harold consists of a series of scenes broken up by organic, dramatic games—these sometimes take the form of monologues, group movement, songs, or anything else the ensemble feels called to present. In their instructional text used at iO, Halpern et al (2001) provide the following example Harold:

***Opening Pattern Game:***

*"Camera" "High school...high speed...dope...Indy 500...Most likely to...crash and burn ... In Memoriam ... Viet Nam... Don't write on the wall...smokin'... I caught you ... Smile!... I think I got it...Clap ... I think I got it...The answer is...Let's see what develops ...I think I got it...photo-finish ... by a nose...buy a vowel...by the hair of my chinny-chin-chin...buy a bond...propaganda...buy it... Viet Nam...bye bye...dope... speed ...it happened so fast...Indy 500...highspeed...high school."*

***Round One:***

*1A — Two high school boys smoke dope in the restroom, while searching for their names in the graffiti on the walls. Finding their names, they proudly read their sexual exploits, as well as those of others. One girl in particular seems to be prominently mentioned in every message. They find a line reading, "Sue has V.D.," and look frightened.*

*1B — A married couple packs their belongings in preparation for their move. They are*

*leaving the country. The man finds his old high school yearbook. He looks up his picture and proudly reads his stats: track star, All-American, voted most likely to succeed. He seems guilty about moving.*

**1C** — *News commentators report events of the day, including car wrecks, racing results, and photo coverage of casualties in Viet Nam.*

***First Group Game:***

*The team improvised a game which they called "A Picture Is Worth a Thousand Words. The actors performed their own "slide show," freezing in position to depict historical events which reveal ironic truths about political and social issues.*

***Round Two:***

**2A** — *The same boys from the high school scene are now in a foxhole. They aren't as cocky as they were before, and one of them abuses cocaine to overcome the pain from a wound.*

**2B** — *The man tells his wife that the president has declared amnesty for draft dodgers, and they decide to return to the U.S.*

**2C** — *A newscast still shows reports from the Viet Nam era, while making connections to the other scenes and the game.*

***Second Group Game:***

*The team presented a narration game, where they were presenting an inside view of the workings of the C.I.A. The game dealt with surveillance techniques and conspiracy theories, ranging from Watergate to the assassination of JFK (connections to the theme included information on the C.I.A. doctoring photos of Lee Harvey Oswald).*

***Round Three:***

**3A** — *One of the two boys sits in front of the Viet Nam Memorial in a wheelchair, searching for the name of his buddy on the wall, and then proudly reads it out loud.*

**3B** — *The couple is photographing their new baby. She notices a man on TV who seems to look like one of the guys they went to high school with (the boy from the first scene).*

**3C** — *The newscasters are now showing the Viet Nam Memorial. This becomes a three-way split scene; the video of the wall has the guy from 3A looking for his buddy's name. The couple is watching this on TV — the husband is not surprised that his wife, Sue, recognizes the guy. She knew all of the guys in that school!*

*The lights fade after the boy sits in silence at the Memorial, and the newscaster closes with a final remark: "That's the news. Tune in at ten for an interview with the winner of the Indy 500." (pp. 142-144).*

While some of this humor might not stand up to modern scrutiny, this provides an excellent example of the structure of a Harold. Within this form, all players in the ensemble understand and are performing within the prescribed scenic structure. By grounding themselves in this structure, the performers are free to improvise as wildly as they would like, assuming vastly different characters, invoking current events, or conjuring entirely fictitious worlds. In the context of Dr. Smith's English Language Arts classroom, her foundational structure (opening activity, collaborative exercise, closing activity) seems to operate in a manner similar to improv forms like the Harold. Within the general structure of each of her classes, Dr. Smith gives students considerable autonomy to navigate both collaborative work and individual assignments. This lends itself to an environment where students feel at ease joking with each other and Dr. Smith, dancing for the camera recording the lesson, and taking creative risks in their group assignments. Further, while the example Harold provided above is at times crass, it explores the sincere dramatic themes of loss, aging, relationships, and national tragedy. In the same way, while Dr. Smith's students may dance and playfully joke with another, they are doing so while simultaneously engaging in the serious academic work of an honors class. This suggests that while students are free to exercise creativity, even silliness during classes, the grounding structure of Dr. Smith's classes still facilitate in-depth learning.

***RQ2, Theme 2-1, Sub-Theme: Flexibility***

Similarly, the data indicate Dr. Smith's flexibility in her instructional practices align with various principles of dramatic improvisation. The most significant, basic principle of improvisation is the concept of *yes, and*. At its most basic, *yes, and* means actors in an improvised scene or game should affirm the ideas of their fellow players (literally saying "yes" to their ideas) and to build upon it by making their own creative contributions (saying "and,"

before providing additional information). This allows scenes to progress, as each actor is building on the contributions of another, collaboratively creating a cohesive dramatic performance (Halpern et al, 1952; Halpern, 2005; Hauck, 2012; Jagodowski & Pasquesi, 2015; Johnstone, 1989; Leonard & Yorton, 2015; Libera, 2004; Patinkin & Kozak, 2019; Sahlins, 2001; Salinsky & Frances-White, 2008; Scruggs & Gellman, 2008; Sweet, 1996).

On a deeper level, however, *yes, and* represents a form of active agreement and support between each performer. While characters in a scene may argue (though conventional improv wisdom discourages this, too), the performers themselves are collectively agreeing on the circumstances in which the scene takes place. Charna Halpern et al (2001) emphasizes this significance, arguing “*Agreement is the one rule [of improv] that can never be broken: the players must be in agreement to forward the action of the scene [emphasis in original]*” (p. 47). Del Close, originator of the Harold and co-founder of the iO Theatre with Halpern, found this principle of mutual agreement and support so important that he once famously leapt from a second story balcony while teaching an improv class, instructing his students to catch him. They ultimately dropped him, twice, and on the second occasion he broke his collarbone (Halpern et al, 2001).

Thankfully, nothing in this research suggests that Dr. Smith’s students are leaping from balconies—at least not during her class. She does, however, demonstrate a fondness for this *yes, and* mentality in her instruction, despite admittedly having no training in drama or improvisation. This manifests in several ways in Dr. Smith’s teaching practices. During class discussions, she skillfully finds ways to affirm the contributions of each student, even some are more meaningful or serious than others. When a student is reluctant to participate, she says the student’s name, then asks, “what do you think about this?” in reference to the content being



discussed. This quick, kind redirection is likewise consistent with the *yes, and* ideology, because it invited participation and contribution, rather than objecting to an unwanted behavior. When, on a very hot day, a student asks to have class outside, Dr. Smith responds, “that does sound fun, but the Wi-Fi is best inside,” before immediately transitioning back to her instruction. While she ultimately declined this student’s request, she did so in a manner that affirmed their idea (that it would be fun to have class outside) before providing context as to why having class outside wasn’t an option (the Wi-Fi wouldn’t be as fast). Even her penchant for what she describes as eavesdropping reflects a commitment to *yes, and*. By surreptitiously listening to students’ conversations, and interjecting with instruction based on what she hears, she is accepting what students have said to be true (saying “yes”) and providing additional information and context from her position as the content expert (saying “and”).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the guidance that Dr. Smith provides students during class is aligned with the improvisation concept of side-coaching. Side-coaching is the practice of a drama teacher or director providing suggestions and asking questions to improvisers as they perform a scene. This feedback is typically quick, direct, and invites the improvisers to make new choices and continue to build the scene (Dudeck & McClure, 2018; McKnight & Scruggs, 2008; Spolin & Sills, 2010; Spolin, 1999; Spolin, 1986). Spolin (1999) provides a useful explanation of side-coaching:

Side coaching gives self-identity and acts as a guide while working on a problem within a group. As in a ball game, it is accepted by the student-actor once it is understood. It is used as the players are working on stage. It is a method used in holding the student-actor to the Point of Concentration whenever he may have wandered away (*Keep your eye on the ball!*) This gives the student-actor self-identity within the activity and keeps him functioning at a fresh moment of experience and, further, it gives the teacher-director his place and makes him part of the group as well...A simple, direct call-out is best. *Share the stage picture! See the buttons on John’s coat! Share your voice with the*

*audience! Write with a pen, not your finger!* (When writing is done early in training, most players pretend by using fingers). *You walked through a table! Contact!* (pp. 28-29).

The feedback Dr. Smith provides her class based on what she observes or overhears is directly analogous to this concept of side-coaching, in that it provides students with useful information while maintaining student autonomy and creative control over their collaborative classwork. Interestingly, Dr. Smith engages in literal side-coaching when providing guidance to students as they perform their *Julius Caesar* scenes, encouraging them to use the whole performance space and inch closer to their audience. This suggests that, despite having no improv training, Dr. Smith is utilizing varying elements of improvised drama in her teaching practices, most notably by demonstrating exceptional flexibility.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research is positioned within the theoretical framework of interpretivism, with phenomenology as its anchor. The goal of this study was to explore the ways in which an effective educator utilizes elements of creative drama, and dramatic improvisation, in their teaching practices. At its core, this research sought to better understand the experiences of an effective teacher and her students, through the lens of creative drama and improvisation. This includes not only the actions of teacher and students, but their understanding of the classroom and their role within it. Basic tenants of phenomenology include an emphasis on human consciousness, and individual's interactions with each other and the world (Bhattacharya, 2017; Fisherman, 2016; Huttunen, & Kakkori, 2018; Mertel, 2020; Neufeld, 2012). Zahavi, 2003). These principles are repeatedly indicated in this research.

Within the context of this case study, the phenomenon being explored is the experience of an experienced teacher while engaged in instructional practices with students. The data

indicate that Dr. Smith actively engages in elements of dramatic performance in her classroom behaviors, both during formal instruction and informal interactions with her pupils. This manifests through her constant augmentation of her performed identity and behaviors based on the response of her students. Further, data suggest Dr. Smith moves fluidly during her instruction between the role of performer and director, at times taking steps to captivate students' attention, and at times stepping back to actively facilitate students' formal and informal performances. Further, data indicate that students and teacher alike are each cognizant of their role within the classroom, and have a clear sense of their responsibilities within that role. Theme 1-1, Delivery, indicates that students are aware of the ways their teacher adjusts her instructional practices to maintain their interest. Additionally, Theme 1-2, Perception of Teacher, suggests that while Dr. Smith is constantly evaluating the behaviors of her students, they are doing the same to her. Rather than being passive members of a class, Dr. Smith's students are keen observers of her teaching practices, and have a clear idea of who she is as an educator. Students' indication that Dr. Smith is experienced, effective, and knowledgeable all suggest they are interpreting her behavior in much the same way she interprets theirs.

Additionally, her use of physical space within her classroom indicates Dr. Smith is intentionally fostering a dynamic, cohesive classroom environment by employing, intentionally or otherwise, elements of stage design and dramatic movement within a performance space. Similarly, Theme 2-1, Delivery, and 2-2, Content, each suggest that within the phenomenon of a classroom, teachers are constantly evaluating the interpersonal conditions of the room and consciously adjusting their own behavior in response. In sum, data suggest that not only does the effective classroom incorporate various elements of scripted and improvised dramatics, but

it is a dynamic site in which teacher and students are constantly constructing their own identities in relation to one another.

### **Implications for Educators**

Several implications for educators can be drawn from this research. It appears that experienced teachers are, at least in some instances, utilizing principles of dramatic performance and improvisation in their daily teaching practices. It is likely that most teachers are doing this without realizing that their actions are consistent with dramatic ideologies and are instead implementing these practices intuitively. This, coupled with the relative scarcity of literature on the intersection of drama, particularly improvised drama, and the classroom, suggests that further exploration of the themes present in this research may be of benefit to broader education scholarship. Namely, this research has potential applications in teacher training, evaluation, and classroom culture-building.

Most notably, this research suggests that some training in principles of creative dramatics and improvisation could be of benefit to educators. If the most effective teachers among us are implementing elements of drama and improvisation in their classroom practices, some dramatic training might educators employ these methods more effectively and empower those with less experience with new instructional tools. This could be especially true for those new to the profession, including preservice and early-career teachers. If teaching is equal parts art and science, the latter is far easier to explicitly teach to novice educators. Instructional best practices, lesson planning, and assessment techniques all certainly contribute to effective instruction, but any first-year teacher knows that these alone are not enough to captivate the attention of a classroom of students. The findings of this research suggest that some training in principles of drama—engaging an audience, maintaining performative flexibility, and constantly negotiating

and recalibrating one's performance based on audience response—might be of real value to beginning teachers.

Additionally, this research has potential implications for teacher assessment. If the art of teaching is far easier to learn than the science, the same can be said for assessing teacher performance. Teacher evaluation methods can easily assess the technical instructional proficiency of an educator, from how the teacher scaffolds a lesson, to their movement throughout the room, to their questioning techniques. Far more difficult to evaluate, however, is how a teacher's behavior can captivate an audience of students. Convincing a classroom of 10<sup>th</sup> graders that *The Grapes of Wrath* is deserving of their undivided attention at 8:00am is no small task, yet some teachers do so with apparent ease. This research would suggest that a familiarity with principles of dramatic performance would not only empower educators, but allow administrators a new vocabulary for teacher evaluation. This could contribute to more meaningful teacher evaluation practices, and more effective coaching by administrators and instructional support specialists.

Finally, this research has clear implications for the ways teachers establish classroom culture and management. Most notably, additional research on the use of ensemble pedagogy practices in the classroom setting could have enormous influence on how teachers establish classroom behavior expectations and norms. Incorporating ensemble pedagogy in teacher preparation courses and district professional development could provide a framework for cultivating a classroom environment of creative freedom, student autonomy, and strong interpersonal relationships. This, too, would provide best practices and formalized methods to empower teachers, especially early-career teachers, to foster the kind of classroom environment that so many veteran teachers seem to foster with ease.

## **Implications for future research**

Further research is needed to explore the intricacies of the intersection of drama and the classroom. For a variety of reasons, this case study was limited in scope to a single teacher in a single high school classroom, which limits the extent to which its findings can be broadly applied. Additional research is needed, particularly exploring the experiences of teachers of differing grades and contents, and in different academic settings. Dr. Smith's experiences teaching in a wealthy, suburban district with high-achieving students is likely much different than those of a teacher in a private or charter school, a rural community, or an urban city center. Further, because English Language Arts and drama share a common historical origin, it is likely that principles of drama and improvisation are more easily implemented in classrooms like Dr. Smith's. Additional research exploring these practices in science, mathematics, social studies, or art classes would likely yield different results.

Finally, it is worth exploring how formalized training in the basic principles of drama and improvisation might impact the classroom practices of novice teachers. While evidence from this study suggests that some basic dramatic training would be of benefit to educators, the scope of this research is far too limited to draw any broad conclusions. Additional research exploring the intersection of drama, improvisation, ensemble pedagogy, and the instructional practices of educators would be a welcome addition to existing scholarship.

## **Summary**

The pedagogical best practices of classroom teachers are reasonably well established, from curriculum to classroom management. Conversely, the skills that allow a teacher to captivate the attention of a room full of adolescents is far less easy to define. Even the most effective teachers may be able to maintain students' attention on a Monday, but fail miserably on

a Wednesday. Based on my own training in both teaching and creative dramatics, I originated this research in an attempt to position the act of teaching as an act of dramatic performance. Every teacher knows the uneasy feeling that comes with an unsuccessful lesson and disengaged students, and every performer has felt the gut-punch of bombing onstage. Having experienced both the defiance of unruly students and the jeers of drunken adults in a late-night comedy club, I to this day remain unsure which is worse.

The findings of this qualitative case study suggest several meaningful intersections between the teaching practices of experienced educators and the principles of performed drama, particularly improvised drama. This research suggests that the act of teaching can be evaluated in the context of a dramatic performance, and that skilled educators make frequent use of principles of both scripted and improvised drama. By constantly negotiating the physical and emotional space of their classroom, this research indicates teachers are engaging in a performance of sorts, consciously manipulating their own behavior and the conditions of their class based on the response of their students. Teachers navigate their classroom as a site of performance, moving fluidly between the role of performer and director, with the very best teachers facilitating a performance pedagogy within their classes that empowers all students to participate fully, support their peers, and take creative risks.

These findings provide several implications for educators and current research. While the scope of this study is limited, additional research on the intersection of performance and teaching would greatly benefit scholarship in both fields. Further, this research suggests that training in the foundational principles of drama and improvisation could be of great benefit to teachers. Preservice and early career teachers especially could benefit from exposure to creative dramatics as they navigate for the first time the challenges of engaging students and managing

behaviors. Pursuing this scholarship further has the potential not only to deepen our understanding of the fields of education and drama, but to revolutionize the way we train and evaluate teachers. If teaching is an art and a science, this research is exploring the former—and it suggests there is a great deal more to be uncovered.



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## Appendix A - Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol  
Annie Goodson  
Doctoral Candidate,  
Kansas State University College of Education

### FOR TEACHERS

#### Introduction:

Hello! My name is Annie Goodson and I'm a doctoral candidate at Kansas State University. As part of my dissertation, I am studying the ways teachers use principals of dramatic performance in their classroom instruction. I appreciate you taking the time to visit with me today. The purpose of this interview is to learn more about your teaching strategies. There are no *right* or *wrong* answers, or answers that are more desirable than others. I would like you to feel comfortable sharing honest answers, telling me what you really think and feel. If it's ok with you, I will tape record our interview today so I can listen well and not get distracted by trying to write down everything you say. Do I have your consent to tape record?

Everything you say will remain confidential, meaning that only myself and my Doctoral Committee Chair will be aware of your answers. Your answers will be anonymized and any details in your answers that might allow someone to identify you will be omitted when I write my final research findings. As a reminder, you have provided informed consent to participate in this research, but you can choose to stop participating in this study at any time. If you choose to stop participating in this study, any answers you have already provided will still remain anonymous and confidential. Can you confirm the best e-mail address or phone number I can use to contact you after this interview if I have more questions? Do you have any questions? Are you ready to begin?

#### Interview Questions:

1. Can you provide some background information about how you ended up in education?
  1. Where did you go to school?
  2. Did you have a career before teaching?
  3. Did you always know you wanted to be a teacher?
2. What initially drew you to teaching?
  1. What initially drew you to your content area?
  2. What drew you to high school teaching?
3. Describe an average day in your class.
  1. How does the class begin? How does it end?
  2. What do students do?
  3. How much direct instruction do you provide?
4. How would you describe your *personality* in the classroom?
5. How would you describe your energy level during an average lesson?
6. How would you describe your use of movement during a typical lesson? How much do you move around the room, if at all?
7. How would you describe your ideal relationship with a student? What kinds of relationships do you try to build in your classroom?

8. How would you describe the noise in your classroom during an average lesson?
9. How would you describe the movement of students in your classroom during an average lesson?
10. How do you know when your students are engaged?
  1. What do the students look and sound like?
  2. What should students be doing?
  3. What verbal and nonverbal cues do students give you to indicate their engagement?
11. How do you know when students are *not* engaged?
  1. What does a bored student look like?
12. What strategies do you use to keep students from getting bored?
  1. When you notice students getting bored, what do you do?
  2. If your interventions don't work, what do you do?
13. Would you describe yourself as a performer in the classroom? Why or why not?
14. Do you think you employ any acting or dramatic techniques when teaching? Why or why not?
15. Is there anything else you would like to share?

### **Closing:**

Thank you so much for allowing me to interview you today. Your answers were extremely helpful and I appreciate you taking the time to participate. Before we conclude, do you have any questions for me?

## **FOR STUDENTS**

### **Introduction:**

Hello! My name is Annie Goodson and I'm a doctoral candidate at Kansas State University. As part of my dissertation, I am studying the ways teachers use principals of dramatic performance in their classroom instruction. I appreciate you taking the time to visit with me today. The purpose of this interview is to learn more about your experiences in this class. There are no *right* or *wrong* answers, or answers that are more desirable than others. I would like you to feel comfortable sharing honest answers, telling me what you really think and feel. If it's ok with you, I will tape record our interview today so I can listen well and not get distracted by trying to write down everything you say. Do I have your consent to tape record?

Everything you say will remain confidential, meaning that only myself and my Doctoral Committee Chair will be aware of your answers. Your answers will be anonymized and any details in your answers that might allow someone to identify you will be omitted when I write my final research findings. As a reminder, you have provided informed consent to participate in this research, but you can choose to stop participating in this study at any time. If you choose to stop participating in this study, any answers you have already provided will still remain anonymous and confidential. Can you confirm the best e-mail address or phone number I can use to contact you after this interview if I have more questions? Do you have any questions? Are you ready to begin?

**Interview Questions:**

1. Can you provide some background info about yourself?
  1. Age
  2. Grade
  3. How long you have gone to school in this building
2. What classes in school are your favorites? Why do you enjoy them so much?
3. Is this your first class with [TEACHER]?
4. How would you describe an average day in [TEACHER]'s classroom?
  1. How does the class usually begin?
  2. What are you expected to do during class?
  3. How does class usually end?
5. How much direct instruction does [TEACHER] do during an average class?
6. How much are students expected to participate (answering questions, talking with neighbors, etc) in an average class with [TEACHER]?
7. How would you describe [TEACHER]'s personality in the classroom?
8. How would you describe the atmosphere in [TEACHER]'s classroom?
9. How would you describe [TEACHER]'s style when teaching?
10. Describe your engagement during class.
  1. Is it easy to stay focused? Why or why not?
  2. Is [TEACHER] fun to listen to? Why or why not?
  3. On a good day, why is [TEACHER] fun to listen to? What do they do that makes them interesting?
11. How does [TEACHER] make their content interesting?
12. Would you describe [TEACHER] as dramatic? Why or why not?
13. Is there anything else you would like to share?

**Closing:**

Thank you so much for allowing me to interview you today. Your answers were extremely helpful and I appreciate you taking the time to participate. Before we conclude, do you have any questions for me?

## Appendix B - Informed Consent



### Institutional Review Board (IRB) Informed Consent for Adults

comply@k-state.edu | 785-532-3224

**PROJECT TITLE:**

Performance in the classroom: Exploring teachers' use of dramatic performance in classroom instruction

**PROJECT APPROVAL  
DATE:**

**PROJECT EXPIRATION  
DATE:**

**LENGTH OF  
STUDY:**

1 Week

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:**

Dr. Vicki Sherbert (College of Education)

**CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):**

Annie Goodson (Doctoral Candidate)

**CONTACT DETAILS FOR PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS:**

Dr. Vicki Sherbert, [785-532-5525](tel:785-532-5525), sherbev@ksu.edu

**IRB CHAIR CONTACT INFORMATION:**

Lisa Rubin, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224; Brad Woods, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

**PROJECT SPONSOR:**

n/a

**PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:**

The purpose of this research study is to explore the ways teachers utilize elements of dramatic performance in their classroom instructional practices, and how those practices influence student engagement. This research is being conducted as part of a doctoral dissertation.

**PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED:**

Participating teachers will be observed as they conduct class, and interviewed no more than 3 times by the researcher. Notes will be taken during classes, and interviews will be video recorded. Participating students will be interviewed no more than 3 times, and interviews will be audio/video recorded. Classroom materials will be collected (lesson plans, assignment documents, student work). Anything that could identify students will be redacted from these documents prior to publication. All notes, collected materials, and interview recordings will be stored securely, and all results will be anonymized in final publication.

**RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED:**

The primary risks involved in this research involve potential disruptions to adult participants' employment, as well as disruptions to student learning and the disclosure of some students' academic work. To minimize these risks, all participants will be told explicitly of these risks and their right to revoke consent at any time. Informed consent will be granted from all adult participants and the guardians of minor participants prior to any research being conducted. The researcher will take every step to ensure observations disrupt the classroom environment as little as possible, including

coordinating with the classroom teacher to ensure the research is not a distraction. Further, all data will be stored securely in the cloud, and anonymized prior to publication. All confidential data collected will be destroyed one year after publication.

By observing classes and using participant teachers' plan time for interviews, the research does pose a minimal employment/occupational risk. This is primarily due to time being taken away from classroom work in order to participate in interviews. The teacher may also feel uncomfortable being observed, which could decrease the effectiveness of their instruction. These risks will be minimized by taking all steps possible to minimize interruptions to class time. Observations will be as discreet as possible, and the researcher will take all reasonable steps to avoid being distracting to students and classroom instruction.

Potential invasion of privacy is another possible risk of the research. It is possible the researcher may observe otherwise confidential materials during classes, and in collection of class materials. To reduce this risk, the researcher will anonymize all materials collected, and will not collect or view any sensitive materials such as IEPs or other protected documents. In the event a student has an emergency related to their mental or physical health during an observation, this would also constitute an invasion of their privacy. These risks are minimal, but the researcher would immediately leave the classroom in the event of an outburst or emergency.

**BENEFITS ANTICIPATED:**

No benefits are anticipated.

**EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY:**

All material collected during research will be kept strictly confidential. Notes, audio-video recordings, and collected materials will be stored securely on a digital storage platform only accessed by the researcher. All data will be anonymized prior to publication, and all materials will be deleted no later than one year following publication.

**The information or biospecimens collected as part of the research, even if identifiers are removed, will not be used or distributed for future research studies.**



**Terms of participation:** I understand this project is research, and that my participation is voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

(Remember that it is a requirement for the P.I. to maintain a signed and dated copy of the same consent form signed and kept by the participant).

**PARTICIPANT NAME:**

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**PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE:**

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**DATE:**

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**WITNESS TO SIGNATURE:  
(PROJECT STAFF)**

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# Institutional Review Board (IRB) Informed Consent for Minors

comply@k-state.edu | 785-532-3224

## PROJECT TITLE:

Performance in the classroom: Exploring teachers' use of dramatic performance in classroom instruction

PROJECT APPROVAL  
DATE:

PROJECT EXPIRATION  
DATE:

LENGTH OF  
STUDY:

1 Week

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

Dr. Vicki Sherbert (College of Education)

CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):

Annie Goodson (Doctoral Candidate)

CONTACT DETAILS FOR PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS:

Dr. Vicki Sherbert, [785-532-5525](tel:785-532-5525), sherbev@ksu.edu

IRB CHAIR CONTACT INFORMATION:

Lisa Rubin, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224; Brad Woods, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

PROJECT SPONSOR:

n/a

## PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:

The purpose of this research study is to explore the ways teachers utilize elements of dramatic performance in their classroom instructional practices, and how those practices influence student engagement. This research is being conducted as part of a doctoral dissertation.

## PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED:

Participating teachers will be observed as they conduct class, and interviewed no more than 3 times by the researcher. Notes will be taken during classes, and interviews will be video recorded. Participating students will be interviewed no more than 3 times, and interviews will be audio/video recorded. Classroom materials will be collected (lesson plans, assignment documents, student work). Anything that could identify students will be redacted from these documents prior to publication. All notes, collected materials, and interview recordings will be stored securely, and all results will be anonymized in final publication.

## RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED:

The primary risks involved in this research involve potential disruptions to adult participants' employment, as well as disruptions to student learning and the disclosure of some students' academic work. To minimize these risks, all

participants will be told explicitly of these risks and their right to revoke consent at any time. Informed consent will be granted from all adult participants and the guardians of minor participants prior to any research being conducted. The researcher will take every step to ensure observations disrupt the classroom environment as little as possible, including coordinating with the classroom teacher to ensure the research is not a distraction. Further, all data will be stored securely in the cloud, and anonymized prior to publication. All confidential data collected will be destroyed one year after publication.

By observing classes and using participant teachers' plan time for interviews, the research does pose a minimal employment/occupational risk. This is primarily due to time being taken away from classroom work in order to participate in interviews. The teacher may also feel uncomfortable being observed, which could decrease the effectiveness of their instruction. These risks will be minimized by taking all steps possible to minimize interruptions to class time. Observations will be as discreet as possible, and the researcher will take all reasonable steps to avoid being distracting to students and classroom instruction.

Potential invasion of privacy is another possible risk of the research. It is possible the researcher may observe otherwise confidential materials during classes, and in collection of class materials. To reduce this risk, the researcher will anonymize all materials collected, and will not collect or view any sensitive materials such as IEPs or other protected documents. In the event a student has an emergency related to their mental or physical health during an observation, this would also constitute an invasion of their privacy. These risks are minimal, but the researcher would immediately leave the classroom in the event of an outburst or emergency.

**BENEFITS ANTICIPATED:**

No benefits are anticipated.

**EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY:**

All material collected during research will be kept strictly confidential. Notes, audio-video recordings, and collected materials will be stored securely on a digital storage platform only accessed by the researcher. All data will be anonymized prior to publication, and all materials will be deleted no later than one year following publication.

**The information or biospecimens collected as part of the research, even if identifiers are removed, will not be used or distributed for future research studies.**

**PARENTAL APPROVAL FOR MINORS:**

**PARENT/GUARDIAN APPROVAL  
SIGNATURE:**

**DATE:**

**Terms of participation: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.**

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

(Remember that it is a requirement for the P.I. to maintain a signed and dated copy of the same consent form signed and kept by the participant).

**PARTICIPANT NAME:**

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**PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE:**

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**DATE:**

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**WITNESS TO SIGNATURE:  
(PROJECT STAFF)**

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## Appendix D – IRB Approval



TO: Vicki Sherbert  
Curriculum and Instruction  
Manhattan, KS 66506

FROM: Lisa Rubin, Chair  
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 04/30/2024

RE: Proposal #IRB-12129, entitled "Performance in the classroom: Exploring teachers' use of dramatic performance in classroom instruction."

MODIFICATION OF IRB PROTOCOL #IRB-12129, ENTITLED, "Performance in the classroom: Exploring teachers' use of dramatic performance in classroom instruction"

EXPIRATION DATE: Exempt

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB) has reviewed and approved the request identified above as a modification of a previously approved protocol. **Please note that the original expiration remains the same.**

All approved IRB protocols are subject to continuing review at least annually, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced in-progress reviews may also be performed during the course of this approval period by a member of the University Research Compliance Office staff. Unanticipated adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB, and / or the URCO

It is important that your human subjects activity is consistent with submissions to funding / contract entities. It is your responsibility to initiate notification procedures to any funding / contract entity of any changes in your activity that affects the use of human subjects.

Electronically signed by Lisa Rubin on 04/30/2024 6:01 PM ET

## Appendix E - Letter to Families

Good afternoon,

My name is Annie Goodson, and I'm a doctoral candidate in the Kansas State University College of Education. This semester, I am conducting my doctoral research, and am hoping to interview 2-3 students from Dr. Smith's classes.

My research is exploring the ways effective teachers use elements of dramatic performance in their classroom instruction to maintain student engagement. If you choose to allow your student to participate, I will interview them for no more than 30 minutes, twice next week. I will conduct these interviews during non-instructional time (likely advisory/AST time) to avoid disruptions to student learning. These interviews will take place next week, May 20<sup>th</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup>, at Kauffman High School. Interviews will be audio recorded, and all recordings/notes will be kept strictly confidential and only accessed by myself and my committee chair, Dr. Vicki Sherbert. During interviews, I will ask students to reflect on their experiences in class. There are no right or wrong answers, student responses will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous, and student responses will not impact their grades or academic standing at Kauffman in any way.

Participation is entirely voluntary, and consent can be revoked at any time without penalty. If you choose to allow your student to participate in this research, please sign the attached document and return it to me (via e-mail or a hard copy) by Monday, May 20<sup>th</sup>. If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to me at any time at [annieg@ksu.edu](mailto:annieg@ksu.edu).

Thank you for considering this request! Have a great rest of your day.

Sincerely,

Doctoral Candidate  
University Supervisor and GradCat  
Kansas State University College of Education  
[annieg@ksu.edu](mailto:annieg@ksu.edu)