A proposed model of rehearsal for bicultural Aotearoa New Zealand

NICK BROWN - WESTLAKE BOYS' HIGH SCHOOL, AUCKLAND

Abstract

Many secondary school drama teacher-practitioners in Aotearoa New Zealand struggle to find the most suitable and efficacious form of rehearsal methodology to execute, when working with young adults on an in-class or extra-curricular drama/theatre product. There are currently profound tensions that occur in the rehearsal room: between a drive by the teacher for the student-actor to experience agency versus a more formal approach of the teacher working in the role of director; between a rewarding process for students versus a quality final dramatic-theatrical product for an audience. This can lead to a compromised result, one that is neither aesthetically satisfying nor educationally sound. This research article posits a new possibility for educational-theatrical rehearsal, born from work in a Decile 9 Auckland school, in a large drama department, committed to notions of student agency, social justice and with an awareness of obligations towards Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Te Ao Māori and Biculturalism in 21st Century Aotearoa New Zealand. The paradigm reflects Freire’s statement “The dialogical theory of action does not involve a Subject, who dominates by virtue of conquest, and a dominated object. Instead, there are Subjects who meet to name the world in order to transform it” (Freire, 1970). A model of the new paradigm has been developed to frame and articulate the new possibilities that come from this research.

Biography

NICK BROWN is the Head of Drama & Theatre Arts at Westlake Boys’ High School in Auckland. He has previously held visiting lecturer positions at the University of London and the University of Canterbury, and has also worked for Cognition Education and Team Solutions. Nick’s area of research interest is the intersection of performance and cultural/inter-cultural identity.
Prologue

Tūrangawaewae (noun) domicile; standing; place where one has the right to stand - place where one has rights of residence and belonging through kinship and whakapapa (https://maoridictionary.co.nz).

"I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged" (Brook, 1968).

The young female senior school student walked upon the stage, hesitantly. Out of sorts; quietly sad; uncertain of what should happen next. Rehearsals had not been going well, so teacher intervention was needed. “What brings you comfort?” he asked. “Being on stage,” she replied. “Good,” he responded, “but can you be more specific?” “More specific,” she asked, “in what way?” “Well… which stage?” he asked; “This one,” she replied. “Okay, that’s good to know. Is it the entire stage that brings you comfort, or can you be more specific again?” “Oh, that’s easy…” she said brightening, “it’s just here. This spot is where I feel most comfortable, happiest,” and she walked and gestured to a spot on the stage, down stage right, close to the audience. At that spot was a distinct indent in the stage, where a heavy stage weight had been dropped. “Just here,” she repeated. As she spoke she began to relive the experience; it was written upon her face: “It was here in Year 8… I was standing right here in Year 8 when I got my first laugh… I can still remember the feeling, the emotion… It was wonderful.” “So this spot has a profound meaning to you personally, psychologically, emotionally? It helps, in however a small way, to define you as a performer?” “As a person, actually. The experience, its meaning is that important to me,” she responded quickly, overlapping with his last word. “Tūrangawaewae,” he spoke, out of nowhere. “I’m sorry?” she replied. “Tūrangawaewae,” he repeated, catching himself. “It is a notion in te ao Māori, and it describes a place that brings meaning to you, which helps to define you as a person. It could be where you were born, your home, the location of your iwi, but for you, a non-Māori, it would be quite acceptable to describe this spot, stage right, where the damaged stage sits (and where you got that first laugh). This could be tūrangawaewae, because this is where you found and explored a developing self of yourself as a performer, and as you have said as a young adult.”

The student smiled, the ennui and uncertainty of the start of the rehearsals diminishing. It was a brief and modest interchange between myself and a student, but a seminal one for both. For me, it was a realisation that te ao Māori (the Māori world) and tikanga (Māori customary practice) could have a profound and penetrating value for young, intelligent – but culturally malnourished – Pākehā New Zealand students. I also saw how such notions could also be used in such a way to create greater student agency, within the dramatic-aesthetic-educational experience. For the female student it was a realisation that a spiritual notion from an alien culture could bring comfort and clarity during a challenging period.

Six years on I realise that it was this interchange that set me on the path towards my new focus as a teacher-practitioner, which in turn would lead me to undertake a PhD, as my practice had started to become research, and my modest research, practice:

Moreover, the reflective researcher cannot maintain distance from, much less superiority to, the experience of practice. Whether he is engaged in frame analysis, repertoire building, action science, or the study of reflection-in-action, he must somehow gain an inside view of the experience of practice. (Schön, 1983).

Footnote 1: This experience (with the female student) occurred at a co-educational school, also in Auckland. The research that this interchange provoked was then undertaken at a single sex boys’ school.
Setting the Scene: Positionality & Context

My current position as a teacher in Aotearoa New Zealand is predicated upon a number of factors. Firstly, I was born in London, not New Zealand. Secondly, I did not initially train as a teacher, but as a theatre director and then as an actor. My undergraduate degree saw me developing as a young director by focusing on the direction of plays by Harold Pinter, and then writing a summation of my experience in a thesis, which looked at the notion of masculinity and threat in his plays. After university I attended drama school and focused purely on the role of the actor and the actor’s craft, and then worked in theatre in London and regional theatre in the UK. I then undertook a Master’s degree and returned to directing theatre, with my work taking me to London, Rome, Bermuda and New York. As I directed, I also found myself being asked to teach in drama schools and universities, but with no formal teaching foundation I decided to train as a teacher.

This research article is one section of one project (focused on The Pohutukawa Tree, by Bruce Mason) within my PhD, and the work was undertaken with Year 11 students. The context of the school in which the research took place is a Decile 9 school on the North Shore of Auckland, Aotearoa’s largest city, and the world’s largest Pasifika city. One in five residents of Auckland nominate themselves as having Pacific Island or Māori heritage; this will rise to one in three by 2050 (http://www.stats.govt.nz/). The school itself has a broad demography, with 50% of students having been born outside of Aotearoa New Zealand, although these students now (mostly) call Auckland home. The students themselves are all male, as the school is a boys’ school. However, the school does have a sister school close by with whom regular collaboration occurs, in many cultural and artistic endeavours.

As a teacher-practitioner and researcher, my position is one of spectator/manipulator and aligns with that described by Schön (1983):

...there is an objectively knowable world, independent of the practitioner’s values and views... His stance toward inquiry is that of spectator/manipulator... Through his transaction with the situation, he shapes it and makes himself a part of it. Hence, the sense he makes of the situation must include his own contribution to it. Yet he recognizes that the situation, having a life of its own distinct from his intentions, may foil his projects and reveal new meanings.

From this paradoxical source derive the several features of a stance toward inquiry which are as necessary to reflection-in-action as the norms of on-the-spot experiment and the uses of virtual worlds. (p. 163).

I do not hover at the fringes observing dispassionately-objectively, but rather I led the process, and experienced much of the joy and frustration that my students felt, as we explored complex ideas and ambitions in theatrical form together, collaboratively.

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2 My PhD explores “How does a drama teacher-practitioner utilise New Zealand play texts, such as The Pohutukawa Tree by Bruce Mason and also colonial/coloniser texts, such as A Midsummer Night’s Dream, by Shakespeare, to explore NZ cultural identity and intercultural identity?” In essence, I am looking at how a drama teacher-practitioner use the process of devising and reconstructing performance texts in order to meet New Zealand Curriculum goals, allow for development and exploration of students’ New Zealand cultural identity and intercultural identity, as well as allow a teacher the space for personal aesthetic development?”
Numerous writers influenced my research, however, reading alone was not the focus of my study; I would have to live it also, for “The locus of study is not the object of the study. Anthropologists don’t study villages (tribes, towns, neighborhoods…); they study in villages.” (Geertz, 1973).

The books that have influenced my thinking, and the creation of a new paradigm – Figure 2 – include four in particular, which speak to the particulars of this project: A Director Prepares, by Anne Bogart, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, by Paulo Freire, Between Theater & Anthropology, by Richard Schechner, and Te Mauri Pakeaka, by Janinka Greenwood and Arnold Manaaki Wilson.

a. Bogart

Bogart (2001) discusses the numerous words that different theatrical cultures use to describe the rehearsal process(es). Such knowledge impacts the manner in which the theatre-makers and cast engage with the process of bringing what is written on the page to life, and how we as creatives (actors, directors, designers; the creative players) engage with the aesthetic.

Let us start with the word in the English language (and in theatrical culture), used to indicate the practice of animating a performance text: rehearsal. This word seemingly privileges the auditory aspects of the process: to re-hear the performance event, and by implication review it, make necessary amendments, and move on to the next unit of rehearsal. When the word rehearsal is set into the context of taking place in what the Greeks called the auditorium, this bias towards the auditory/hearing sense is further underlined. However, is this privileging of the auditory element true in other theatrical cultures? Well no: in French theatre-making the word used (instead of rehearsal) is répétition, or in English the rather prosaic, practise. In Japanese the word keiko is used, which means to perfect through practise. In German, however, one finds the word that – to my mind and educational-theatrical philosophy – best reflects the rehearsal culture (Bogart, 2001) I was striving to create in this project (as well as in my general teaching practice): probe. Probe, as a verb, means to investigate or to explore, and with a postmodern, deconstructivist approach to textual analysis and execution (Schechner, 1985) at the heart of my process ambitions, probe appears to be a perfect word for what we should undertake in rehearsals with our students (Bogart, 2001, p. 45). Such philosophical positioning in terms of investigation and exploration impacts the way(s) that the student-actor and teacher-director alike can explore an aesthetic.

b. Freire

In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire (1970) sets out a manifesto for a revolutionary realignment of the teacher-student relationship, in order to democratise the process of education. Much of what Freire stated has now found its way both explicitly (in curricula and education ministry mandates) and implicitly (in the execution of their perceived role by teachers). However, implementation is far from universal. Freire recognised that “revolutionary leadership must accordingly practice co-intentional education. Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge” (p. 53). The shared re-creation of position, and knowledge (cultural, social and self-knowledge) are some of the aims of my PhD project, and therefore need a robust and new paradigm (in terms of rehearsal) to make this possible. Freire also recognised what I (in part) have felt is evident in certain deficit model rehearsal methodologies, in that students should no longer be
“docile listeners” but rather “co-investigators in dialogue with their teacher” (p. 62). He explained that “Problem-posing education affirms men and women as beings in the process of becoming – as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality…” (p. 65). The power of Freire’s ideas, and its potential to influence an alternative model of rehearsal, is because it is able to “resolve the contradiction between teacher and student” and therefore allow both to “address their act of cognition to the object by which they are mediated” (p. 74).

c. Schechner

If in the experimentation and later creation of this new rehearsal paradigm (and methodology) Freire is a foundation stone, then the post that supports the canopy of ambition would be Richard Schechner, the American director and academic. Schechner’s role as theatre-maker also overlaps with the role of cultural anthropologist. He recognises that “Either permanently… or temporarily… performers – and sometimes spectators too – are changed by the activity of performing” (Schechner, 1985, p. 4). My reading of this relates not only to the act of final rehearsed performance to an audience, but to the playing in role in workshops prior to any performance. For Schechner it is in the theatrical workshop, and not rehearsal, where the meaningful work on a text occurs and where the actors and creatives are challenged: “Workshop is a deconstruction process, where the ready-mades of culture (accepted ways of using the body, accepted texts, accepted feelings) are broken down and prepared to be “inscribed upon…” (p. 99). In fact Schechner goes further and states that a drama-theatrical “Workshop is analogous to the liminal-transitional space of rituals.” which is a far more virtuous, creative, meditative state to exist in than rehearsals, which “…are the opposite of workshops. In rehearsals longer and longer strips of restored behavior are arranged to make a new unified whole: the performance.” (p. 99).

For Schechner, giving license to departures from a concrete performance playtext through such workshops is also not a concern, which in turn gives license to my in-class process ambitions with Year 11 students. Schechner explains the transitory nature of performance:

Hard as it may be for some scholars to swallow, performance originals disappear as fast as they are made. No notation, no reconstruction, no film or videotape recording can keep them. What they lose first and most importantly is their immediacy, their existence in a specific space and context… the occasion is different, the world view is different, the audience is different, and the performers are different (p. 50).

Schechner’s power as a researcher, dramaturg and theatre-maker is in his recognition (and promotion of the notion) that older, more established, concretised texts, need to be re-evaluated and broken open with postmodern approaches that allow for new interpretations to come to light. These new interpretations are enabled not through the traditional process of a rehearsal but in a workshop where “a deconstruction of the text and narrative of the play” can be undertaken, whilst at the same time there is a “parallel deconstruction of the lives of the performers” (p. 287). Schechner felt keenly the frustration that most “productions are not allowed enough time” to “grasp the process I am talking about – to separate the deconstruction phase from the reconstruction.

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3 “If during a rehearsal of one of Brecht’s plays, according to his authorized mise-en-scene, it is suspected that some gesture is not being performed as Brecht intended it, the gesture is checked back against the Modelbuch (and other documentary evidence). What the Modelbuch says goes. It is the authority.” (Schechner, 1985, p. 43).
People too soon are doing the work of rehearsal” (p. 287).

Schechner (p. 289) demonstrates what the relationship between workshop and rehearsal might look like graphically, to an actor or director in the figure cited below. He states that “This process can also be represented as a movement from a public space to private space and back into public space.”

![Figure 1: Schechner's workshop and rehearsal model](image)

The model shows that the deepest, most personal and private state of the process for Schechner and his actors, is during the workshops. These workshops then morph into rehearsals and then into production. This diagram gives an image of a theatre creative “diving” into the process, reaching the deepest point of the dive (the most personal and sacred space for the actors and teacher-director) in workshops, and then starting to resurface towards production (or performance). This is crucial for Schechner, and is a process I came to subscribe to. Schechner argues that “workshops find, reveal, and express material; rehearsals give this stuff performative shape”, which is possible because “workshops are liminoid, creating an “as if” scalpel used to cut into the actual lives of those making the performance (p. 103).

d. Greenwood and Wilson

At the heart of the Kaupapa for Māori education are notions also suggested, previously, by Freire (1970) in section b:

The raison d’être of liberation education, on the other hand, lies in its drive towards reconciliation. Education must begin with the solution of the teachers-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students. (p. 53).

I recognise in my practice and research crucial elements of kaupapa Māori, as found in Greenwood’s and Wilson’s research and practice (2006), such as ako4 and tuakana-teina5. For Greenwood “biculturalism is a necessity as well as a choice” (Greenwood,
2002, p. 11), for both teacher (kaiako) and student alike (akonga) must recognise the inherent differences and similarities of their positions as teacher/learner and learner/teacher, and actively engage in a philosophical shifting (Freire, 1970; Greenwood, 2002 & 2006).

Greenwood’s groundbreaking work with Arnold Manaaki Wilson, in her Te Mauri Pakeaka project, reflects these concepts, values and aspirations (Greenwood & Wilson, 2006). In her book of the same name, Greenwood articulates the art making that was undertaken in the project, and the community building of learners that occurred both in order to make the art, and as a consequence of the art-making in the following terms:

The immediate objective in each workshop was to create an art work. The intention was to move … towards the experience of living together and of making… It also allowed participants to re-examine roles they usually took… The long term aim was to create a third face for New Zealand: that of a dynamic biculturalism… For many of the thousands who participated in Pakeaka, the experience constituted a first journey into a previously unknown space. It offered them a chance to physically cross the threshold into a Māori world… (Greenwood & Wilson, 2006, p. 5/6).

Whilst also recognising the influence of research by Bogart, Freire, Schechner et al (and the aesthetic and pedagogical ambition of my PhD project to introduce Year 11 students to new ways of seeing and engaging with the world), it was crucial to introduce my culturally under-nourished students to notions from te ao Māori. In essence, it is a way of seeing (Berger, 1972) that privileges the bicultural nature of our nation, and alerts the participants (students; audience) to alternative perspectives on the relationship between Māori and Pākehā⁶, and by extension, towards all peoples of varying cultural backgrounds. Although not to the manner born, I am, however, a director and teacher growing in confidence when discussing issues relating to biculturalism, Te Tiriti o Waitangi, tangata whenua and te ao Māori.

In my research I found that the two precepts within te ao Māori and kaupapa⁷ Māori that were most valuable to my research were ako and tuakana-teina⁸. Ako, is the word in te reo Māori that describes the exchange between teacher and student. This exchange is not predicated upon a hierarchy of status between the teacher (high status; the knower) and the student (low status; the potential receiver). Ako recognises that – under the right conditions – the teacher can also be the student, and that the student can also be a teacher, in a democratic sharing of knowledge, experience and position. It reflects what Greenwood saw in Te Mauri Pakeaka: “What happens in the third space is unscripted. It evolves out of dialogues, confrontations, accommodations, risk-taking and unplanned discoveries… it engages with the development of something new” (Greenwood & Wilson, 2006, p. 12). Such a “something new” could be seen as either the art work or a relationship, or perhaps both, simultaneously.

Democratic notions of education found in te ao Māori (ako; tuakana-teina), that were

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6 I have been cautioned, however, by kuia and kaumataua that not all tangata whenua necessarily speak with one voice. My teachers have taught me that no iwi presumes to speak for Māori in broader national terms, but rather the unique identity of Māori, tangata whenua and/or mana whenua is upheld in specific regional locales (Silich, 2010)

7 topic, policy, matter for discussion, plan, purpose, scheme, proposal, agenda, subject, programme, theme, issue, initiative

8 https://maoridictionary.co.nz/
being practiced by iwi and in kaupapa Māori, were also being propounded by Freire forty years ago within the academy. What unites both Freire’s and Greenwood’s work is their proposal that we break away from educational models and classroom practice predicated on “educational system(s) of the 1970s”, which were by nature “monocultural”, dominated by “a single cultural value system” (Greenwood & Wilson, 2006, p. 35). This is not just in terms of the challenging, developing notion of biculturalism in Aotearoa, but also the culture of the perceived hegemony of teacher over the student. As Greenwood has seen in her projects, and as I hoped for in mine, “Teachers knelt on the floor with their students, arguing, without claim to authority…” (p. 41).

Condensing Thought and Practice: a Diagram depicting the divergence between a Euro-American traditional-linear rehearsal model versus an alternative paradigm

My preferred manner of explaining this new way of engaging in the rehearsal process is by describing the paradigm (Figure 2 and Figure 3 below) I created in light of the rehearsal practice I undertook in a Year 11 class, which was (in part) co-constructed with the students. When these figures are seen side by side comparisons between the two methodologies can be explored. The desire to create a new rehearsal methodology, whilst recognising its antecedents, reflects Schechner’s research (1985) when he stated that:

Many other directors… felt this same double tug… (in that they) … neither interpret old texts nor compose wholly new ones but practice a kind of theatrical bricolage, deconstructing/reconstructing texts and mises-en-scènes from a variety of sources… But mainstream Euro-American theater still works from literary texts. (p. 230).

Over time my teaching, reflection and research began to aggregate into a new way of seeing, and a new potentiality in, the rehearsal process, provoked by the “double tug”. This was not to be a rehearsal method that was driven by the need to create a final performance product. But one, rather, that was driven by embracing various processes that mitigate in favour of a rewarding aesthetic and learning experience, for students and teacher alike.

Figure 2: Euro-American traditional-linear rehearsal paradigm
Figure 2, the Euro-American traditional-linear rehearsal model, is the model that most directors would apply to the time-precious rehearsal period, which traditionally last between three and five weeks, in professional theatre, or three to six months in a school context. This model I have developed through my own training and practice as a professional theatre director in Europe and the US, and my experience of discussing rehearsal methodologies with other theatre directors, and whilst chair of the Directors’ Guild of Great Britain’s theatre group.

a. Choice & Context

In the first instance, the start of the process(es) begins when a producer or director feel the impetus to consider a new or old text for performance. This in itself can have many antecedents or energies that precipitate the decision to stage (or restage) a text. For example, a touring production of George Orwell’s “1984” has captured the zeitgeist and imagination of audiences worldwide, as it taps into the hysteria around Russian hacking of the US elections in 2016. In my project, and in the use of Bruce Mason’s 1960 play *The Pohutukawa Tree*, my desire was to use the play as a tool to enable investigation of the Year 11 student’s national and cultural identity (a further unpacking of these ideas will be a focus of my full PhD). I am grateful to the estate of Bruce Mason whose permission enabled me to explore and experiment with the text of *The Pohutukawa Tree* as I did.

9 Bertolt Brecht was a radical exception, with his heavily state-sponsored theatre (the Berliner Ensemble) having rehearsal periods of up to six months
10 Schools often rehearse afterschool two to three times a week, with possibly a weekend rehearsal day, plus (if fortunate) a production camp over a long weekend
11 https://www.atc.co.nz/auckland-theatre-company/2017-18/1984/
12 *The Pohutukawa Tree* was first presented as a play in 1957 and latterly published as a playtext in 1960
From the diagram outlining the new paradigm (Part i), the reader can see that there are two pathways: the Rehearsal Methodology and the Production Methodology. These two pathways are differentiated by the fact that the Production Methodology (PM) is the foundation that allows the Rehearsal Methodology (RM) to occur. The two – PM and RM – are separate functions of bringing the text to life – from page to stage – however, they overlap in many areas. For reasons of clarity I have kept the two quite separate.

In Part i, the Euro-American traditional-linear rehearsal paradigm, I have nominated a hierarchical-typical process. The producer and/or the director, with the aim of serving an external objective, choose the playtext (Figure 2a.). This could be, for example, to create a piece of dramatic art that reflects the zeitgeist. The producer and the director, who are looking for talent that fits their vision of what the final product will look like, then audition a cast. There is an inherent problem with this notion: that the product is almost predetermined; flexibility, participant voice and spontaneity are all but denied, which, in educational terms, is a bankrupt kaupapa (philosophy). As Freire wrote, the teacher’s:

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\text{efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization. His efforts must be imbedded with profound trust in people and their creative power. To achieve this they must be partners of the students in their relations with them. (Freire, 1970, p. 56).}
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By contrast in Part ii, I have designed a non-hierarchical based in part upon Bogart, Freire, Schechner, Greenwood and Tikanga/Te Ao Māori. In this paradigm, the playtext is chosen as a response to the internal forces of the institution and its student (and teacher) population; to serve the student-actor need and further the narratives and discourses of the institution. Whereas in Figure 2 the cast is chosen through a typical audition process (which is inherently hierarchical), in Figure 3 the student actors are invited to audition workshops, where the process is transparent and co-constructed, framed around notions of student agency, as can be seen in Ako and Tuakana-Teina. In the final analysis, roles in what will become the performance product are assigned by mutual consent (teacher-director in negotiation with student-actor). It must be recognised that paradoxically the choice by the teacher-director in Figure 3 could be seen to reflect some of the limited values and processes of the producer/director in Figure 2, as both imagine a product they wish to explore (Figure 2: Product; Figure 3: Process). However,

13 In The Shifting Point (1988), Peter Brook discusses how it is only once the play is performed that he finally realises the actors he should have cast, the set design he should have executed, the music that he should have had accompany the performance, but by this point it is too late.
Figure 3 offers far greater flexibility for student-actors and their participant voice, as I will explain further.

b. Research

Within a contemporary professional rehearsal methodology, many directors employ the services of a dramaturg. The dramaturg’s role, and the purpose of dramaturgy, is one of objective research and analysis, on behalf of the production. Often reporting to the director, and sometimes fulfilling the role of assistant director, the dramaturg traditionally undertakes research into the period that the playtext was set in, the politics and economic situation of the time (Eagleton, 1989). Beyond this, the director might charge the dramaturg to investigate other productions of the same playtext, and/or apply various lenses of analysis to both playtext and previous productions of the playtext (that is presuming that it is not an original text). For example, constructivism, post-structuralism, modernism, post-modernism, post-colonialism, feminism and post-feminism viewpoints might also be researched by the dramaturg in order to better prepare the director, and sometimes the cast. In the latter example, the dramaturg might speak with or lecture the cast on her or his discoveries. However, as you can see in this example, the presence of hierarchy and typicality is pronounced. In the alternative paradigm, Figure 3, I am proposing that, as we did for The Pohutukawa Tree project, that the dramaturgy is a shared process of the whole class and students (Figure 3b.).

The power of such a teacher choice is in the democratisation of the process: “The dialogical theory of action does not involve a Subject, who dominates by virtue of conquest, and a dominated object. Instead, there are Subjects who meet to name the world in order to transform it”, (Freire, 1970, p. 148). Each student is charged with an area of interest and/or importance, born from the discussion within the drama class and workshop. They then researched that area during and after class, and then report back to the class††, where questions and realisations are shared amongst the students. Non-teacher-directed discussion can then occur and unbidden insights and unexpected outcomes are welcomed. At the heart of this process are both ako and tuakana-teina, as articulated previously. The students are endowed with expertise by the teacher-director and his peers, and all listen and respond to the student-researchers with respect for the student’s knowledge(s) generated through this process. During this process (but not exclusive to this period), the teacher is able to model and encourage students to also model whakawhanaungatanga. In te ao Māori and in tikanga†† Māori, whakawhanaungatanga is the demonstration of care and respect in relation to the student and their history and story, regardless of where that student originates. In a project such as The Pohutukawa Tree, which examines cultural and national locatedness this is a key notion of tikanga to include in the class workshop processes.

†† Students were being assessed against AS1.5 for this particular task; AS1.6 was the Achievement Standard being used as the assessment tool for the other aspects of this Year 11 project

†† Māori practice and/or custom
c. Refinements

The notion of ‘refinements’ is key to both Figure 2 and Figure 3. In Figure 2 these refinements are quite typical (Figure 2b.), in theatrical terms, focusing on the inclusion of complex and/or expensive and/or time-consuming elements that complete a rehearsal process as it approaches the performance season: music to underscore stage action; set design that frames the action; and technology that creates stage effect and impact. However, what Figure 3 is suggesting as refinements is quite different (Figure 3c.), and focused less on how the final production product will be viewed by an audience (external perspective), but rather on what can be created from within the creative company (actors, directors, researchers et al) as they head towards the mid-point of the process (internal perspective). In Figure 2, these refinements include elements that we as theatre consumers might recognise, as they are outer manifestations of a polished production. Figure 3 is not proposing a process that dismisses the inclusion of such ideas, however, at the same point in the process as Figure 2, as creatives we are more interested in a departure from normal workshop-rehearsal protocol. What eventuates is not possible for all texts, especially those that are still liable for performing rights. As Richard Schechner (1985) wrote:

… more recently, many non-Westerners have participated in experimental performance. This has led to the development of intercultural companies and a marvelously complicated exchange of technique and concepts that can no longer be easily located as belonging to this culture or that one. This dialogue relating modern, traditional, and postmodern elements even takes place within single nations… where deep learning takes place, eventuating in artistic works that may not at all look like what they have come from (p. 24).

Schechner’s words prefigure this part of the new process I am proposing in Figure 3, which is a clear departure from the typical form of rehearsal, as seen in Figure 2. The process(es) engaged in by teacher-director and student-actor during the refinement of the play in Figure 3, allow for the students to consider alternatives. What is meant by alternatives is a re-examination of the play at its core (Figure 3d.), unpicking the tensions, the context, the characters, and the time and place of the play (the socio-historical context; Eagleton, 1989). Such re-examination, however, is undertaken in order to shed light on the students’ lives as they currently live them; to enable them to unpick what it is to live in Aotearoa New Zealand in the 21st Century. The refinements that are undertaken in Figure 3 are therefore focused on “deconstruction” of the original Bruce Mason text of The Pohutukawa Tree, and by doing so discovering relevance in the lives of the students in 2017. This aligns with Schechner’s statement: “What happens at workshops like this is not only a deconstruction of the text and narrative

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16 The estate of Bruce Mason kindly gave permission for this experimentation, and this research, to occur. If a teacher-practitioner were keen to explore other texts it would be advisable to make contact with the rights holders of the text to discuss the feasibility of doing the same. Playmarket NZ, and their agents, would be a good place to begin research and also a conversation: http://www.playmarket.org.nz/agent
of the play being done...but also a parallel deconstruction of the lives of the performers...” (Schechner, 1985, p. 287).

Through exercises, improvisation, provocations, discussion and rehearsal of ideas – suggested by, and predicated upon, the original Bruce Mason playtext – students come to better understand how they are situated as a young New Zealander.

The fundamental result of such unpicking were suggestions for new scenes, inspired by and/or departing from The Pohutukawa Tree. Student-actors were enabled and given agency so that they could propose new scenes taking place in the past, the present or future that reflect the concerns of the original play, whilst also allowing them to explore their concerns as 21st Century New Zealanders. Once these suggestions were made, the teacher-director takes on a third role as writer, shaping these new student-centred ideas into a text that can be rehearsd. Rehearsal then takes place, as in a typical theatrical process, which in turn leads to dress rehearsals and performances of the work in front of an audience17. The final performance is crucial, as without an audience to engage in a meaning-making process, and to engage in a discourse with the actors, all the dramatic-theatrical work will have been for nought. As Geertz (1973) stated “Culture is public because meaning is” (p. 12), and “Cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses” (p. 20). The performance is thus designed to offer the student-actors an opportunity to examine the veracity of the decisions under performance feedback conditions, and allows the audience to question their own positionality in light of the student-actors' choices.

17 As a unit of in-class assessed NCEA study, students were marked against AS1.6 Perform an acting role
Conclusion

In my experience as an arts-educator and theatre maker, the most damaging creative choice can be to purely focus on the *product*, an arbitrary notion of what a client-audience needs or wants, settled upon long before the creatives become involved in the process of theatre-making. I have worked in institutions where this has been an unstated aim, due to the particular forces at work in that time and place. Even the father of 20th Century experimentation, and research in drama and theatre, Konstantin Stanislavski, could not avoid this fate. After his death in 1938, the Soviet authorities preserved his works for political reasons, only allowing productions to be reproduced based upon his original rehearsal models and books (Benedetti, 1998 & 2000; Mitter, 1992). These products toured the world for thirty years, until aesthetic fashions had changed, and such an approach – and what had become known colloquially as museum piece theatre – had become unpopular.

However, to work solely on *process* without a healthy respect for the moment of organised communion between artist and audience is also potentially damaging to the performance art work. In an educational context it is finding the balance between these two competing forces, marrying them in such a way as to make them allies and collaborators, seeking out the synergies that allow for efficacious work. Work that is both educationally rich and aesthetically satisfying, for teacher and student, and audience. I have tried to posit here that, through a refining/refined process, I have found a way of marrying my broad knowledge as a theatre practitioner with the distinct knowledges that I possess as a teacher, and this is eminently replicable in other contexts.

Furthermore, as a teacher-practitioner, a discussion on the issues discussed in these pages is crucial. In Aotearoa New Zealand student teachers on graduate diploma programmes in universities are finding that there are fewer and fewer hours that they share with their academic tutors, exploring the aesthetic as well as class and rehearsal paradigms; one on one class time is being squeezed by budget constraints18, and in many cases is being replaced with online eLearning options. Thus learning the nuance of how to structure an educational-aesthetic programme that mitigates in favour of student agency is under pressure.

Finally, many schools are now asking that drama teachers provide an extra-curricular musical or play once a year, as a promotional exercise for the school, allowing the school’s leadership to champion culture. Beginning teachers, and especially those new to drama, coming from a variety of other curriculum backgrounds, and/or the theatre industry, must realise that a realignment of expectation, process, practice and execution needs to be engineered for the good of all participants.

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18 Greenwood, 2016, private correspondence
References


