

Student Agency in Devised Theatre Education: Creating Collaborative Theatre in Virtual and In-Person Classrooms

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Abstract

Education is, in many ways, a by-product of life. As global discourse continues to push towards reform that would allow populations around the world increased agency over their lives, one of

the most critical conversations in education today concerns how to allow students greater agency over their own learning. This conversation took on new meaning during the COVID-19

pandemic when schools were challenged with facilitating that agency within the confines of online learning.

While scholars continue to contextualize the role of student agency in virtual spaces, little of this research focuses on theatre education, and almost none explores the agentic potential of devised theatre, a collaborative performance methodology emphasizing multiple perspectives and non-verbal artistic forms. In this presentation, I will share the findings of my recent book, *Student Agency in Devised Theatre Education: Creating Collaborative Theatre in Virtual and In-Person Classrooms* (Routledge 2025), which recounts my experience facilitating two groups of Pacific Islander and Asian-American public high school students Hawai'i in creating two original pieces of digital devised theatre aimed at exploring identity in COVID-era Oceania.

Based on quantitative and qualitative analyses of survey results, group interviews, and field observations, I lay out why devised theatre is uniquely situated to solicit student agency in

remote learning environments by celebrating student cultural differences as assets, validating student efforts outside of the classroom, and fostering collaborative learning; and as such, why it has the potential to play an essential role in broad educational reform in the twenty-first century classroom.