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The Pedagogy of Adaptation: Using Specialised Disciplinary Knowledge to Develop Creative Skills

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates a pilot project which attempts to use research on 'adaptive dramaturgy' to equip students with creative and collaborative skills. Long dismissed as a form of derivative copying, adaptation is now increasingly understood not in opposition to creativity but as its basis. This paper evaluates the effectiveness of two teaching and learning interventions developed by linking creativity research, adaptation studies, and scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). Both interventions use strategies identified in research on 'adaptive dramaturgy' as the basis of group learning projects that facilitate creative and collaborative skills.

The author postulated that using adaptation to solve creative and critical problems would help students recognise creativity as a set of skills they could learn and master, not an innate or inscrutable 'talent'. This study evaluates the interventions by examining data collected from pre- and post-course questionnaires and group interviews to determine how the participants experienced them. In addition to presenting evidence about the efficacy of the interventions (and their potential for adaptability to other contexts and disciplines), this study provides a model for tackling a problem familiar to scholars across disciplines: how to make specialised disciplinary research both accessible and useful to students seeking general, transferable skills.

Keywords: adaptation,;dramaturgy; pedagogy; creativity.

Adaptation and pedagogy: across disciplines?

This paper discusses data from a pilot study of a teaching intervention that attempts to use disciplinary knowledge about adaptation to help students develop creative skills. The connection between creativity and adaptation may seem puzzling, given that conventional conceptions of adaptation – say, of novels into films – cast it as a derivative, uncreative activity. At best, it is thought, adaptations aspire to be decent replications of their sources; at worst, they 'bastardise', 'corrupt', or 'betray' them. In either case, adaptation represents the opposite of what many people define as the key trait of creativity: the ability to invent new products out of thin air. But during the last decade or so, adaptation studies have vigorously challenged this reductive notion of adaptation (Hutcheon, 2006; Stam & Raengo, 2004) and, with it, the outdated model of creativity it supports. In reality, as Fischlin and Fortier (2000, pp. 3-4) demonstrate, all creative acts and products, from the humblest utterance to the greatest literary masterpiece, are in fact adaptations of existing material. These arguments are consistent with those of creativity researchers, whose studies confirm that creativity does not consist of inventing new material *ex nihilo* (as many imagine) but of putting existing material to new uses in new contexts (Sawyer, 2006, pp. 23-24). In other words, adaptation is not anathema to creativity, but essential to it. These findings are significant to tertiary education in general, because universities are increasingly identifying creativity as a priority in their teaching mandates (Marquis & Vajoczki, 2012).

But as many scholars have found, it is one thing to reach a valuable theoretical insight and quite another to realise its potential in the classroom. As adaptation gathers increasing interest, so do ideas about its pedagogical implications (Baker, 2009; Cartmell & Whelehan, 1999; Elliott, 2003; Leitch, 2010a; Stam & Raengo, 2004). Thus far, however, most contributions to this field have suffered from at least one of two limitations: first, the field of adaptation studies is currently dominated by discussions of 'novel to film' adaptations. While the novel-to-film paradigm is certainly well worth exploring in and out of classrooms – Thomas Leitch (2010b) offers a useful model – it is hardly the only form of adaptation. Forms and models that have as yet rarely been studied include transitions and translations to and from other media (epic poetry, video games, drama and performance, dance, opera, and advertising are a few obvious possibilities) or *intra*-medial adaptations – such as plays adapted from other plays. Second, existing literature on using adaptation in the classroom, including essays collected in the recent anthology *The pedagogy of adaptation* (Cutchins, Raw, & Welsh, 2010), though exciting and well-written, rarely engages with scholarship on teaching and learning. This does not mean these essays do not contain good scholarship, but in failing to connect with scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), they also fail to fully realise or articulate their potential. SoTL can help explain the potential efficacy of adaptation and thereby point to strategies for maximising its effectiveness. This essay will attempt to both broaden the scope of 'adaptive pedagogy', by extending it to the media of drama and theatre, and deepen it, by linking adaptation-based teaching and learning activities to insights derived from SoTL.

The project discussed here also responds to a more general challenge shared by professional scholars, that of responding to the ubiquitous call to develop and demonstrate connections between research and teaching. This imperative can seem daunting, especially for early career scholars, because while areas of research expertise become increasingly specialised, most undergraduate teaching situations still focus on equipping students with (comparatively) basic skills and general knowledge. This project illustrates how

engagement with SoTL can catalyse the transformation of esoteric disciplinary knowledge into productive strategies for teaching and learning transferable, general skills. The connections developed here, between medium- and discipline-specific activities and general theories about how to enrich and facilitate learning, may be useful to readers from all scholarly backgrounds.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows: A brief description of the concept of 'adaptive dramaturgy' and its points of intersection with SoTL will help readers understand the rationale behind the development and evaluation of the teaching interventions described below. Two variations of the same basic principle are discussed, one designed for a relatively large, 'general interest'-style course, and one for a small course that focuses on theatre practice and is taken only by senior theatre majors. Each intervention is briefly described followed by a discussion of data provided by student study participants during and after the course.

Adaptive dramaturgy: fusing creative and critical processes

The main objective of this project was to transform disciplinary research into a general model for developing creative, critical, and collaborative skills. The research in question shows how contemporary playwrights appropriate material from established masterpieces and use it to create new plays that "sa[l]vage" the canon, as Susan Bennett (1996) puts it, simultaneously affirming and contesting the prestige and influence of the canon. This kind of adaptation (which I refer to as 'the dramaturgy of appropriation') is a particularly effective strategy for playwrights who speak from the margins, because it allows spectators to see revered or familiar narratives from new perspectives. For example, Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead* (1967) and Jean Betts's *Ophelia thinks harder* (1995) show us what Hamlet's story looks like from the perspectives of their eponymous characters. In allowing us to re-evaluate Shakespeare's stories, these plays also challenge the conventional belief that creativity is synonymous with innovation – and also the notion that adaptations are not innovative, and therefore not creative. This insight is important in creative disciplines, because many students (like the general population) believe that creative genius is a mysterious gift which resists critical scrutiny (Boden, 2004; Runco, 2003; Sawyer, 2006), and a person who believes that creativity cannot be taught is unlikely to learn it.

Adaptation demystifies creative genius by revealing the strategies and tactics authors use to create. *Hamlet*, for example, is no less creative for being a 'mere' adaptation: on the contrary, it reveals the specific creative steps Shakespeare used to transform an obscure Old Norse story into a Jacobean revenge tragedy: fleshing out the characters and adding details to make them seem both authentically 'Danish' and yet recognizably 'English', compressing a story that spans a lifetime into a few days or weeks, beginning *in medias res*, deleting the narration and adding a meta-theatrical dimension. 'Creativity' is thereby transformed from a vague notion into explicit actions. Such creative acts are also explicitly critical: by setting the story in the present and making Hamlet Christian, Shakespeare emphasises the conflict between an old pagan concept of honour that demands revenge, and the new Christian ethos that forbids it – thereby challenging his audience to question its own insatiable appetite for tales of bloody vengeance. In other words, and in contrast to notions of adaptation as a kind of copying that is derivative and unthinking, to adapt is not merely to copy or replicate, but to produce new interpretations that serve new purposes. As such, adaptation exemplifies how, as creativity researchers have argued, creative and critical processes are interactive rather than mutually exclusive (Runco, 2003).

A variety of educational research in scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) was surveyed to develop strategies for converting specialist disciplinary knowledge into a model for cultivating general creative and critical skills. This search confirmed what experience had already suggested: to transform the theoretical connections between adaptation, creativity, and learning into actual learning opportunities, merely adopting different content (in lectures, for example) would not suffice. Students need opportunities to put ideas into action.

Fortunately, because adaptation is an action, it harmonises well with student-centred learning (Weimer, 2002) and also with emancipatory or 'critical pedagogy' (Boal, 2000; Freire, 2000; hooks, 1994). These theories hold that 'what the student does' is the most critical factor in determining learning outcomes (Biggs, 1999). If students spend most of their classroom time taking notes and memorising facts from lectures, they 'learn' to become passive objects who depend on authority figures for knowledge – what Freire (2000, p. 71) calls the "banking" concept of education. On the other hand, if students spend more time on active learning – explaining, applying, theorising, and so on – they become more engaged, and higher engagement leads to deeper learning (Biggs, 1999, pp. 58-59). In addition, in the context of literary and dramatic studies, if learning consists largely or entirely of reading individual works and authors (often in isolation from the conditions of their production and reception, which, creativity research tells us, are critical aspects of determining what makes an act or product 'creative'), then what students may 'learn' is that their role is to consume, appreciate, and perhaps interpret art – but not to make it.

Adaptation also neatly complements the constructivist learning model, which holds that 'knowledge' does not exist independently of the person who knows it, but is *constructed* by learners. Constructivist learning theory views learning not as a process of transmitting or memorising information, but as a process of integrating new ideas into the learner's existing conceptual framework (Fosnot, 2005). Adaptation is precisely the act of assimilating new ideas, products, or stories into a familiar context or framework, or of re-examining familiar objects in a new light. Adaptation scholar Linda Hutcheon's (2006) definition of the fundamental joy of adaptation, as the interplay between the novel and the familiar, harmonises well with the constructivist learning model. When we discover a novel variation on a familiar story, such as *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead*, it leads to a revised and enlarged understanding of the meaning of the familiar story. No one sees Hamlet in quite the same way after they see what he looks like from another character's perspective.

Finally, adaptive dramaturgy enables the development of learning activities, such as those discussed below, that target learning across several domains, including cognitive (the capacity to think), affective (the capacity to feel or care), psychomotor (the capacity to move or apply physical skills), and conative (the capacity to act, decide, or do). Reeves (2006) argues that most tertiary assessment focuses on the former domain and neglects the other three.

Ideas into action: exploration of an adaptation-centred teaching intervention

Two adaptation-based learning activities were devised and tested with students in two courses with different formats and objectives: *Dramaturgy of the real*, a combined English/Theatre lecture-based course at Victoria University of Wellington; and *Conventions*, a theatre production-based course. Twenty-five students from the *Dramaturgy* course (of approximately 100 students in total), and all 17 students in *Conventions* volunteered to answer pre- and post-treatment questionnaires and participate in focus group interviews after the conclusion of the course. The first activity discussed, the *Performance-based research* (PBR) project, is highly flexible and can be scaled up or down (it was trialled in courses of approximately 100 students), or adapted to suit English, Film, or other disciplines (History or Classics, for example). The second, *Devising with adaptive dramaturgy*, is more specific to drama, theatre, and

performance studies (DTP) programmes, and represents a variation on classroom-based theatre production assessment. The discussion of findings is based on data collected from a variety of sources, including questionnaires, focus groups, in-class observation, student course evaluations, and evaluations of the work produced during the targeted activities and assessment. The data generally confirms that 'what the students do' is the most important thing: the learning experiences reported by participants more often centre on activities, particularly collaborative activities, than on the content transmitted in lectures or through readings.

The Performance-based research project

> This assignment has **two** components: a **performance** and a post-performance **seminar**. Your group will **select a scene** from one of the first three plays on our reading list, and use the dramaturgical and adaptive techniques discussed in the class to create a performance that [investigates a problem with Modernist dramaturgy]. You'll need to do some dramaturgical research on the dramatic and theatrical conventions and the historic and cultural context of the play. You'll also lead a discussion about your piece in which you justify the choices you make in your staging and talk about the important issues you confronted in regard to "the Modernist Stage." – Excerpt from THEA 205/305 Assignment

Students in THEA 205/305 (*Dramaturgy of the real*) worked on a performance-based research (PBR) project, which uses adaptive dramaturgy to improve active learning and collaboration in relatively large, lecture-oriented courses, often criticised for relying on 'transmission' models of learning and privileging individual assessment. It also provides opportunities to develop creative agency and analysis skills that are not addressed by more traditional essay-based assessments. Most dramatic (and cinematic) texts cannot be fully understood by individual reading and reflection. Staging a play, turning text into bodies performing actions in space and time, reveals things that solitary reading does not (particularly readings by inexperienced students, who tend to focus on story or semantic meaning). In addition, by encouraging students to perform creative and critical interventions in the text rather than simply analyse or discuss them, the PBR project attempts to bridge what Leitch (2010b, p. 9) calls "the pedagogical divide between canonical texts plastered with 'Do Not Disturb' signs and students' own writing, which traditionally has been excluded from any hope of being a text itself".

The PBR project treats adaptation and performance as research skills or strategies of inquiry. Students are asked to interrogate the primary texts with the same critical rigour they would bring to an essay, but using the strategies of performance, not writing: movement, light, sound, space, and time. Groups of four to six students use adaptive techniques introduced in lectures and readings to create and perform two short performances based on the primary texts. No special resources are provided. The questions are open-ended, and each performance emphasises a theoretical problem in the subject. (For example, the paradox of the 'modernist classic': why do artists, audiences, and universities put so much emphasis on revivals and remounts of modernist plays, given that their authors were motivated by the desire to smash conventions and create new genres?) Teaching staff demand and reward, in formative and summative feedback, interrogative, experimental approaches to the text. The students are asked to pursue questions rather than answers; the assignment brief advises that "there is no right answer here: every path you choose has its own risks and rewards". The only thing 'off-limits' is to stage a scene from the play as written. Following the performance, the group leads a discussion about the critical and creative rationale for their adaptive choices. In addition to being generally enjoyable and stimulating, the discussions allow students to explain their 'dream' version of the performance, what they might have done with a higher budget, a fully-equipped space, and more fully developed performance skills – this element of the assignment helps ensure an emphasis on the creative and critical process rather than performance skills or production values.

Devising with adaptive dramaturgy

Students in another course, THEA 302 (*Conventions*), worked on what was essentially a more intensive, larger-scale version of the Performance-based research project. THEA 302 is an intensive course oriented to staging a full-scale production. In this context, adaptive dramaturgy was embraced not as an alternative to lecturing or essay-writing, but as a means to ensure that the central learning activity – producing a play – facilitated the main learning objectives of developing collaborative experience and creative agency. These objectives can clash with the traditions and practices of Western theatre production, which concentrate power and creative agency in the director and the playwright. Typically, the faculty director in such situations makes most of the important creative decisions before the course begins or very early in the process: play selection, design, casting, blocking, scheduling, etc. And as Jonathan Cole (2008, p. 195) notes, there are numerous other ways "in which the traditions of directing […] continue to promote models that emphasise the controlling protocols of production". Directors are widely viewed as the source of a production's 'creative vision,' and the centre of authority in the rehearsal hall, where directors 'give direction' and actors 'take direction'. Thus, an activity ostensibly oriented to equipping students with skills in creativity, criticality, and autonomy, can become an exercise in following the implicit and explicit instructions of the script and the director to a largely predetermined outcome.

Instead of (re)producing a classic text by learning pre-written parts and taking direction for the instructor, students in THEA 302 focused on creating their own adaptation of an existing script, Alfred Jarry's iconoclastic 1896 play *Ubu Roi*, which is itself an adaptation of *Macbeth*. The text, in this model, becomes the subject of inquiry, a problem to be solved, rather than taken for granted as a work of art to be transposed faithfully to the stage. The questions of 'what?', 'how?', and 'why?' – that is, what are we doing with this play, how will we do it, and why do we think it needs to be done? – were not answered by the director as part of the preparation for the course; instead, they became the centre of the course, the objective of classroom sessions and work in the rehearsal hall. The students were given similar tools to work with as in the PBR but more resources and time, and higher stakes, since the outcome was a series of public performances of their creation.

Results

Both interventions were generally successful in that most students enjoyed the process of completing the projects, produced good or outstanding work, and felt it was a productive learning experience. Most *Dramaturgy of the real* students enjoyed the opportunity to do hands-on research with the texts and take leadership of the classroom. Instructional staff felt the results were very good, and both parties noted that seminar discussions were unusually lively compared to past experiences of small-group (tutorial) settings. Even some of the more reticent students conceded that the experience was valuable, and a few found it transformative:

> *As an English major I was worried about acting […]. However, I enjoyed the final performance […]. My group received a very positive reaction to our performance and it was very satisfying to know that our hard work had paid off. I felt like we had really accomplished something and the process was enjoyable. After our performance I was quite sad that it was over […]. (Dramaturgy of the real mid-term survey)*

The *Conventions* class created an original performance piece (called *Shit show*, in allusion to the notoriously scatological dialogue of their source) and expressed both pride in their work and pleasure at what they had learned from making it. The students in both courses generally indicated positive learning experiences in course evaluations. Both courses were well rated: *Conventions* was rated in the top 10% of VUW courses in three categories (quality of feedback, creative thinking, communication skills) and the top 25% in another (critical thinking), and *Dramaturgy of the real* was rated in the top 25% in creative thinking and communication skills. More specific information was provided by study participants in both courses. Although there was no 'control' group, students were able to compare and contrast their experiences with prior university coursework.

Dramaturgy of the real: Performance-based research

While the researchers were interested in exploring the students' experience of adaptation, for the students themselves what stood out about the experience was not the methodology or the theoretical benefits of adaptive dramaturgy, but the positive effects of meaningful collaboration with peers. This is still relevant to the ultimate goal of developing creative skills, because it suggests that the PBR allows students to experience first-hand how creative productivity is more often the result of collaborative effort than solitary inspiration. While students acknowledged that group work is more difficult and demanding, they also felt that it produced better results and enabled things that could not be done individually. The participants' responses in group interviews revealed these recurring themes:

1. "It gave you your own kind of voice" – personal investment

Students responded strongly to being asked to develop and pursue their own research questions. For some, this was the first time they had thought of learning in terms of asking a question rather than answering one. Several spoke of how the task helped them become invested in what they are doing, partly because it represented a meaningful challenge.

> *S: Well normally the question's just given to you […] but with this one, at first I was like "no! we have to do this, this is so difficult!" Then in the end I thought it was really, really good because it gave you your own kind of voice, as opposed to just regurgitating […] what the lecturers have told you, you're actually having to think. Format your own idea, and then see what other people think and back them up.*
>
> *H: Yeah I found […] that I had to sit and just think about what I was trying to say, for a lot longer than I usually do.*
>
> *S: Me too. (Dramaturgy of the real Focus group 2)*

The emphasis on problem finding, not problem-solving, led to personal investment. The students became less concerned with trying to discover the answer the teacher wanted and pursued their own interests. Participants often expressed this sense of investment implicitly by referring to what the course and assessments *allowed* them to do rather than what it *made* them do: "[…] you got to think critically on someone else's creative interpretation"; "So it's more- you get to explore themes that are [provoked] though the play, without having to stick directly to the play"; "[...] in first year you don't get the chance to be as creative" (*Dramaturgy of the real* Focus groups). Instead of talking about what they 'had' to do to pass the course, they often spoke of what they had 'got' to do, indicating that they experienced assessment as an opportunity, not an obligation.

The PBR offered an opportunity to seek intrinsic pleasure, rather than obligation to perform a task for extrinsic reward – which has been shown to be associated with both high creative ability (Sawyer, 2006) and 'deep' learning approaches.

2. "You sort of just bounce off each other" – collaboration engenders better ideas

The focus group participants often used the image of 'bouncing ideas' to describe how group work enabled creativity by generating not just more but also *better* ideas. They theorised that when they work on their own, they typically stop generating ideas as soon as one good one comes to mind. But working in groups seemed to overcome the tendency to fixate on the first idea.

> *CH: Your ideas are changed by other people's, or challenged. I find I always enjoy that, when someone's there to bounce an idea off, and then they'll respond, and it's like "I actually hadn't thought of that". (Dramaturgy of the real Focus group 1)*

Students also reported that the effect of tempering and refining their ideas in the collaborative process of the PBR carried over into their individual work:

> *S: […] it made you think critically about the text. I mean, my first group work […] helped me to formulate my ideas for my final assignment because [...] bouncing ideas off other people [revealed] themes in the play and things like that, which you might not have considered when you're just reading it. (Dramaturgy of the real Focus group 2)*

Collaborative problem-finding helped students develop creative and critical skills by allowing them (or obliging them) to make decisions about which ideas to select and develop and which to relinquish.

3. "I think talking about my ideas with someone gave me confidence": working in groups enhances autonomy

Students reported, somewhat counter-intuitively, that working in groups made them feel more confident about their individual abilities. This finding contrasted with the students' own expectations, based on negative experiences of group work which they shared in discussions at the beginning of the course. Group work poses the risk that one's ideas will be ignored, or that some members will dominate while others will rely on their ideas. In this case, though, they felt that collaboration engendered autonomy. One student, who confessed to finding the assignment 'intimidating' at first, found that sharing ideas with others "really gave me confidence in my own ideas, and made me talk about them and then they threw their ideas at my ideas and it built from there" ('A', *Dramaturgy* Focus group 1). Collaborating on adaptations in the PBR groups allowed students to develop and test ideas with peers before submitting them for summative assessment, and this increased their confidence.

These findings have clear implications for teaching and learning in almost any discipline. Working on collaborative projects was a valuable experience, and the benefits continued beyond the duration of the group project, because those collaborative relationships created opportunities for students to discuss their *individual* projects with each other. In addition, students were motivated – in both the group and individual projects – by the opportunity to develop new and unique products reflecting their own interests. And they frequently reported benefiting from the opportunity to present and discuss their work with their peers, in both formal post-performance discussions and informal meetings. Although the task of developing and presenting a response to a problem using theatrical skills and methods may seem discipline-specific, these benefits can be readily achieved in other disciplines. Moreover, the 'theatrical skills and methods' in play here are for the most part simply the basic elements of human communication and expression: bodies, voices, space, and time. No advanced performance techniques or technologies were required.

Conventions: Devising with adaptive dramaturgy – Shit show

Fifteen out of 17 *Conventions* students participated in group interviews after the class concluded, and nine completed post-course questionnaires. The written questionnaires focused on the key concepts of creative and critical thinking, adaptation, and individual learning outcomes, while the group interviews were comparatively wide ranging and directed more by the participants' interests. In general, questionnaire responses described how adaptive dramaturgy allowed students to both recognise and develop creative, critical and collaborative skills. In pre-course questionnaires, students had often struggled to define explicit examples of creativity in theatre (in fact, they had generally been better at naming examples of creative acts in daily life). At the end of the course, most students claimed to have achieved a more explicit understanding of these formerly vague concepts:

> *I think this course has actually made me think about what 'critical thinking' actually is. […] Never in my three years of being at university have I been asked once from anyone what creativity or critical thinking are which seems really silly to me because they're the main principles of this university! (Conventions post-course questionnaire).*

Individual responses are diverse, reflecting how each student constructed the experience in a unique way: some believed they had developed broadly, others felt that they had complemented an existing strength in one area by focusing on another. One student reported that the course did not challenge or develop their critical thinking skill, but qualified this by explaining that this was the result of a conscious (critical!) decision to focus on creative skills because of their belief that critical thinking 'limits' the options – which, they later reasoned, is an important part of the creative process.

The interviews, and to a lesser extent the questionnaires, focused on the unusual extent to which the course devolved authority and responsibility to the students, and the mostly novel and sometimes frightening experience of being able (or sometimes being forced) to make meaningful decisions, as individuals and as a group, about how to allocate their time and resources and set objectives and priorities. Many students felt this was uncomfortable or even terrifying at first, but all the respondents in both formats acknowledged that in the long run, having creative control over the central learning activity – creating and performing a new play – resulted in a powerful learning experience and an unprecedented degree of pride in their coursework. The focus groups and surveys give the overwhelming impression of a sense of ownership of the show:

> *A: I suppose that's because, like, we were a collaborative group, whereas other companies have the director that does everything […] so if the show fails it's on their head. But in this case it was on all of us. (Conventions Focus group 1).*

These comments speak to both affective and conative development: the students deeply cared about the value of the work because it was a product of their choices and actions. All respondents acknowledged the unique and profound impact of taking responsibility for their creation and their learning. One student drew a distinction between *Conventions* and a theatre workshop the year before. Whereas they felt that the audiences viewed the final workshop scenes as a reflection of the creativity and interests of their (non-student) directors, they believed the audience of *Shit show* wouldn't make this association. Another student replied, "I think in general they'd say it was [the instructor's], but *we* know". Using adaptive dramaturgy to create a new work of art was profoundly motivating, and students were able to articulate very clearly what they had learned and how they had put that learning to use, both in devising creative material and in managing practical, personal, and logistical issues.

Conclusions

Results suggest that the teaching and learning interventions based on adaptive dramaturgy can help students to develop explicit creative knowledge, skills, and agency, as well as a keen sense of the nature and value of collaborative skills in facilitating the creative process. Based on the evidence presented above and on other data that cannot be presented here in detail (including course evaluations and informal student feedback), both of these assessments provoked *intrinsic motivation*, which is associated both with 'deep learning' approaches (Hoskins & Newstead, 2009) and with creative productivity (Sawyer, 2006, pp. 53-54). In addition, each activity engaged learning in multiple domains: making adaptive choices requires cognitive skills, rehearsal and performance entail psychomotor processes, and the mandate to present and discuss their work in public, along with the *frisson* of collaborative group work, stimulates affective and conative development, as seen in the statements presented above. Several participants reported being profoundly affected by the experience of learning by actively producing new creative products (in contrast with their tacit concepts of learning as a process of passively consuming information to meet extrinsic goals). From the perspective of constructivist learning theory, learning takes place when students construct a personal meaning from experience; so if the students reflect on the interventions as having precipitated meaningful creative and collaborative skill development, then at the very least the interventions made such learning *possible*.

The success and popularity of the PBR project, combined with the relative ease of adjusting it to suit specific course content, has led to its adoption in other courses in the programme and thus opportunities to collect more data and determine whether the results are generally repeatable. In the most recent version of the course, a new option was added for students to submit short written responses to PBR performances to a blog. This option extends the duration and impact of the experience for both the performers, who receive more feedback about how their work was received, and the respondents, who develop their initial reception into a more fully articulated and meaningful response.

The *Conventions*/*Shit show* experience, though successful, suggests that while the adaptive dramaturgy concept can be scaled up, it comes with certain risks. A group of 4-6 students working independently can almost always marshal the creative and collaborative skills needed to respond to the demands of developing a ten-minute performance within well-defined aesthetic and intellectual parameters – and if not, the negative consequences of 'failure' are minor enough that the students can still reflect on it as a learning experience. But when the group becomes larger, the stakes get higher, and expectations of the level of polish and sophistication increase; both the risk and the consequences of 'failure' increase as well. The participants were proud of their success – but also traumatised by the possibility of failure. This method of creation comes with risks that not all students – or instructors – may find acceptable.

As this paper reflects a relatively subjectivist/interpretive stance, further investigation using a more positivist method might add new insight into the impact of adaptation-based assessment and learning activities. Such an effort would need to address the lack of a widely-accepted general instrument for measuring the development of creative skill. Research suggests that concepts of creativity may be so domain- and culture-specific that they cannot be assessed with a general test (Sawyer, 2006), and there is, to our knowledge, no reliable test for quantifying creative achievement in dramaturgical terms. The development of such instruments would in itself be useful.

Further investigation might also explore how the principles of adaptation-based assessment could be applied to other contexts and disciplines. While theatre-based learning activities may not be practical

or appropriate in all contexts, the strategies of adaptive dramaturgy can be transferred to other disciplines (see Leitch (2010b), for example). Theatre is, after all, not only a field of study but a *medium* of learning, and theatre techniques are often applied in several other fields (including medicine, nursing, and law). The PBR project, in particular, insofar as it applies the principles and strategies common to several evidence-based theories of teaching and learning (including student-centred learning, constructivist learning theory, experiential learning), should prove highly adaptable. It would be interesting to conceive an adaptation-*centred* curriculum, in contrast to the current norm, in which adaptation is considered, if at all, as either a debased (but conveniently cinematic) form of the 'real' work of art, or as a niche subject. In addition to creating effective teaching and learning experiences, such a curriculum might also facilitate the development of interdisciplinary courses, programmes and campuses.

Biography

James McKinnon completed his PhD at the University of Toronto's Graduate Centre for the Study of Drama in 2010 and took up a post as a lecturer at Victoria University of Wellington shortly afterward. His research focuses on dramatic adaptation and appropriation, particularly contemporary Canadian appropriations of Chekhov and Shakespeare, and on the pedagogical implications of adaptive dramaturgy.

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