OPENING UP THE FIELD OF DRAMA EDUCATION TO PERFORMANCE STUDIES

Tensions and opportunities

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Introduction

Contemporary research on drama education demonstrates considerable flux and fluidity between its pedagogical types; there are many ways of ‘doing drama’ that differ amongst teachers, schools, curricula, and locales. Yet perhaps what matters most is how drama pedagogy remains relevant, responsive, and meaningful to students and teachers in twenty-first-century classrooms. Nicholson (2000) regards the practice of drama as “both a discipline and a journey” (p. 2), which involves a synthesis of both student-centered and subject-centered educational approaches, and welcomes a range of cultural forms and aesthetic practices. Similarly, Neelands (2010) defines drama education as a “broad and encompassing term that associates a rich variety of ways of working which have as their common element the human ability to imagine and recreate other people’s behaviour at other times and in other places” (p. 36). In expanding his definition, he goes on to outline a list of features such as drama being “a practical activity,” “a form of shared cultural activity,” and “a vehicle for exploring human nature and experience” (pp. 35–37). In a complex world characterized by postnormality, turbulent political arenas, and a range of shifting uncertainties, not to mention the radical swing toward remote working and online learning instigated by the 2020–2021 global pandemic, traditional approaches to drama education may no longer be serving the needs of students and teachers, may not accurately showcase the contemporary performance arts landscape, nor indeed be reflective of the world in which we live. Scott Galloway (2020) argues that the pandemic’s primary effect has been to accelerate dynamics already present in society. Within a few short weeks in 2020, practically all business shifted to ecommerce, all teachers became online educators, and all gatherings became virtual. When we pause to consider what this means for drama education, our understanding of what performance entails, the modes of pedagogical delivery, and the breadth of content available to be explored in drama classroom has grown considerably. Newer perspectives surrounding what is actually possible in drama became essential in order for the subject to flourish as remote learning became the norm across the globe. In any crisis there is opportunity, and if one can find a silver lining it is that drama can really be so much more than perhaps we ever thought possible.
Web of Performance can provide gentle and enticing encouragement into the world of performance studies and invite students and teachers alike to think and create across multiple performance-based topics and themes in relevant, responsive, and meaningful ways. Written for students within upper-level secondary schools and junior-level postsecondary colleges and universities, each section offers an overview of key theories followed by a consideration of how this performance topic has been taken up by theater and performance artists, both past and present. Each chapter concludes with recommended ensemble performance creation activities that allow students to respond to the chapter topic via their own performance-making. As an e-book, it is designed to be interactive and mirrors the interconnectedness that performance manifests; there are dozens of images, hyperlinks, and videos embedded across the curriculum for students to access and invitations which springboard to new discoveries.

In this chapter we propose that drama teachers look to the multidisciplinary field of performance studies to offer new ways to think about drama education for twenty-first-century youth. We introduce the seven key concepts found across the field of performance studies, which are featured as chapters in Web of Performance: Performance as Play, Ritual, Healing, Education, Identity, Power and Everyday Life (see Conquergood, 1989; Schechner, 2002, 2003), and highlight some practical learning opportunities in which to explore them. Finally, we report on professional development workshops delivered by Monica Prendergast and warmly encourage all drama teachers to engage with performance studies in their teaching practice.

Why performance studies?

Performance studies is a field that examines and explores multiple types and genres of performance and uses the lens of performance in order to better study and understand the world. “Performances are actions” (Schechner, 2002, p. 1) and can broadly encompass a range of artistic and aesthetic performative behaviors such as theatrical events; musical concerts; performance art and live art; as well as social, political, and religious events such as rituals; ceremonies; proclamations and public decisions; protests; sporting events; certain kinds of language use; and those components of identity which require someone to do, rather than just be, something. Consequently, performance studies is interdisciplinary, drawing from theories of the performing arts, anthropology and sociology, literary theory, and legal studies.

Performance studies is reflective of the vast array of ways that performance occurs, and it broadens the ways in which we are able to think and practice in the performing arts. Because performance can happen in so many places, in so many ways, the kind of performances that students might wish to explore will likely move beyond standard dramatic, musical, or movement modes and may be more reflective of the professional contemporary arts landscape, what is seen in digitized and mediatized modes popular across social media platforms such as Snapchat, Twitch, and TikTok, or as actions undertaken in their everyday lives. Performance studies in curricula should be understood less as a discrete collection of topics and ideas, and more as “[an] environment which can host/facilitate a nearly infinite variety of scholarly and artistic inquiries” (Bial, 2016, p. 403). By expanding our understanding of what performance entails, we are able to broaden our vision of what performance is, to study it not only as art form but also as a means of understanding historical, social, political, and cultural processes. In classrooms exploring only traditional drama practices, the teaching of narrow definitions and theories could lead to missed opportunities and distortion in thinking and practice, particularly in connection to current theater and performance creation practices happening in the professional world.
However, this is certainly not to say that the approaches we may know best and were trained in are no longer valid. Knowledge and skills explored in drama classrooms, such as developing acting skills; ensemble building games and exercises; role-play and improvisations; studying scripts; and practicing staging, lighting, sound, and multimedia displays, should of course remain as key components of drama education practice. The challenge is to weave newer forms of performance into the more discipline-based methods that most often feature within drama teachers’ educational backgrounds. Performance studies enriches the important work happening in drama classrooms and allow for the convergence of theater, performance, and all other performance studies pillars within our lives to be explored together. Once we begin to understand how performance is connected in all aspects of our lives, we can use that knowledge to invent, create, and build performance-based activities that can be integrated into all the other interests that define who we are and underscore our individual goals and directions in life. Web of Performance provides teachers with a blueprint to explore seven key concepts found across the field of performance studies: performance as play, ritual, healing, education, identity, power, and everyday life.

Play

Theatre has a sense of playfulness that invites the audience to play along in real time. It’s as if the actors are saying to them, “come on, just for a little while, let’s all pretend together.”

(Weigler, 2018, p. 1)

One of the most vital aspects of drama pedagogy is that it welcomes students to relish in play. Learning in the early childhood years is intrinsically tied to play, creativity, and discovery, but as students progress through their schooling, curricula in other subject areas frequently demand a more ruminative approach and play can seem firmly shut out of the classroom. Historically, from the Enlightenment through the nineteenth century, efforts were made to rationalize play, to control its unruly expressions, and to assign specific and limited places for play to occur (Schechner, 2002). Similarly, in the twenty-first century, in a world dominated by technology and screen-based learning, playfully interacting in real time and enjoying moments of live interpersonal connection and communal creativity should not be a radical idea.

Play is slippery to define and can be very hard to pin down. Schechner (2002, p. 79) describes it as “a mood, an activity, an eruption of liberty; sometimes it is rule-bound, sometimes very free… It is something everyone does as well as watch others engage in – either formally in dramas, sports, on television, in films; or casually, at parties, while working, on the street, at playgrounds.” Victor Turner (1983) characterizes play as “the joker in the deck.” He contends “Play can be everywhere and nowhere, imitate anything, yet be identified with nothing…Play is the supreme bricoleur of… transient constructions…” (pp. 233–234). For Bial & Brady (2016) to play means to “do something that is neither ‘serious’ nor ‘real’” (p. 153). Nonetheless, the act of play itself has a deeply serious and real objective. Play is at the very heart of drama education. We play for fun, to be sure, but also for an important purpose: play begets creativity and discovery. Play allows us to escape, explore, observe, and learn about the world around us, to try on a different set of rules and reflect upon possibilities of what might be. Playing is open-ended, is not usually serious in content or attitude, and at its core ‘everybody wins,’ unlike gaming which privileges competition (Kaprow, 2016). For students new to drama, the act of learning how to play again and feeling comfortable in an
educational milieu that encourages self-expression, risk-taking, and discovery can be revolutionary and deeply freeing. Through playful games, improvisations, role plays, and scene work, play fosters the building of ensemble, trust among students and students, and lays the foundation for engaging with creative tasks. Play enables students in drama to try on new ways of being and living. They are able to step into the role of the other and bear witness to other situations and experiences, providing moments of wonder and empathetic engagement beyond a singular worldview.

A drama educator who embraces play can reflect meaningfully on theater games by probing the metaphors that lie within them. For example, a simple game of ball toss across the circle, in which each student remembers who tossed the ball to them and who they passed the ball on to, creates a pattern. As the pattern is repeated, the teacher starts another ball going that has no pattern and is called “chaos.” As the students work together to keep both pattern and chaos in play, they can then reflect on how this game maps onto their lived experience. Where are the patterns in their daily lives, and when and how does chaos erupt? These post-game conversations deepen the significance of games in the drama classroom and move students toward a richer appreciation of the power that lies in even the simplest of performative tasks.

Ritual

Ritual is secular/sacred, reassuring/unsettling, it takes place in real/imaginative spaces, it is here/not here.

(Birch, 2018, p. 27)

The art form of drama emerged from the rituals, rites, and ceremonies of ancient times across a variety of cultures, and ritual remains embedded throughout our drama practice today. Rituals are “memories in action, encoded into actions” (Schechner, 2002, p. 45). They can be heightened rites of passage whereby the subject moves liminally “betwixt and between” (Turner, 1967) two states and undergoes some kind of fundamental change (examples include weddings, baptisms, graduations, funerals). As human beings we are psychologically compelled to create and participate in rituals, which offer us an opportunity “to step into creative realms for a while and be temporarily lifted out of life as we know it—surrender to greater heights of wonder and euphoria—before being safely returned back to the earth of our bodies” (Birch, 2018, p. 29). Within ceremonial rituals, we exist in a realm that invokes the power of some kind of higher authority—be it religion, sacred beliefs, traditions, the state, community, or body politic—and when it’s completed, we step out of it and cross the threshold back into habitual reality. We have undertaken a shift in perspective and experience and are forever altered. There are also other types of rituals which unfold more quietly and are found within the everyday. These smaller ritualistic acts do not necessarily work to bring about great change, but rather provide comfort, stability, and meaning as we go about our lives, helping us define who we are in relation to broader society. For example, adopting a mindfulness practice when going for a walk can help us to notice things that we might otherwise miss. Thich Naht Hanh’s (1996/2011) walking meditation practice is relevant here, as it can imbue the act of walking with a ritual meaning. And paying attention is of course a great skill for any artist to develop, particularly when we begin to notice moments of aesthetic beauty in the world.

In drama, ritual is found within our subject matter and pedagogy. Lessons and rehearsals often start with students entering the room and removing their shoes, sitting in a circle,
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starting with a check-in or warm-up. As the ensemble grows together, class groups naturally develop their own idiosyncrasies, rhythms, paces, and ways of doing that are repeated as a kind of ritual whenever they come together. We read and rehearse through playscripts and texts that have been read and rehearsed by classes before us, oftentimes with the underlining and notes of the previous actors left as a remnant of past performances. Similarly, when we visit the theater, we ritually show the ushers our tickets, walk the rows to find our seats, switch off our cell phones, and prepare in the darkness to watch and listen to the performance unfolding on the sacred space of the stage. The actors present their performance, ritually rehearsed and polished to audiences night after night. When it’s all over, the stage manager sweeps and mops, cleansing the performance space and preparing it for the next iteration. Ritual is deeply imbued within theatrical performance, and embedding an understanding of ritual into drama curriculum heightens awareness of how ritual permeates throughout our lives.

Our students’ educational experience is suffused with ritual. Every exam passed, assignment handed-in, grade made, hoop jumped, culminate with the great ceremonial ritual of graduation. There are other rituals and rites of passage such as earning a driver’s license, quinceañeras, sweet sixteens, bar mitzvahs, annual sporting events and games, proms, dances, and formals, all of which shape young people’s experiences and mark their journey into adulthood. Examining ritual as part of a performance studies curriculum within the drama classroom goes beyond awareness and appreciation of how theater is conceived. It also equips students with important cultural metaknowledge and provides more fulsome understanding of how the range of performative ritualist acts that they undertake throughout their lives shape them as individuals, and also shape the values and cultural practices of the communities in which they live.

Healing

Since the days and nights that the first humans sang their songs, beat their drums, and danced as part of their rituals of well-being, healing and performance have been closely connected… Music and dance, storytelling and visual arts have generally merged over time into what we now call theatre and/or performance art, but the link to healing remains.

(Pauluth-Penner, 2018, p. 51)

Participation in performance, and bearing witness to performance as an audience member, can be a deeply therapeutic and healing experience. In Poetics, Aristotle speaks of ‘catharsis,’ the purification and purging of emotions though art which results in a kind of restoration and renewal. As drama educators and theater makers, this is what we strive toward, fostering environments which aim to affect positive change, grow intellectual capacity, and privilege social justice, positive mental health, and overall well-being. Aesthetic experiences in the drama classroom and in performance spaces create transcendent moments where healing can happen, shifting understandings and experiences in restorative ways. Actors take on a tacit social contract with the audience, embodying our struggles, hopes, dreams, and fears, enacting them on our behalf and allowing for moments of healing self-recognition and hopeful glimpses of better worlds (Prendergast, 2011, 2016). As teachers and theater makers, we know the power of our art form: as young people, we all would have experienced some kind of positive healing experience/s as a maker of performance or as an audience member. Now in our professional roles, we want to nurture these kinds of healing and cathartic
environments with our own classes and ensembles, for we know how powerful they can be. So much of the affective power of drama in education lies in its celebratory nature where all students are welcomed and encouraged to share and participate within the ensemble. Healing occurs during those moments of beauty ensembles create together, the love and fellowship shared between participants, and when stories are brought into the light to be received by an audience, leaving them forever changed.

Importantly, however, there is a fine line between drama as a therapeutic experience, and drama as therapy, which must absolutely be avoided in the classroom and left up to experts with the appropriate psychological training. It is vital to exercise abundant ethical caution to ensure the safety and support of all participants to promote healing, and not harm. Establishing an environment that explores turbulent histories and fraught questions without appropriate support or considerations constitutes “curriculum violence” (Ighodaro & Wiggan, 2010), a term which refers to the deliberate manipulation of academic programming in a manner that ignores or compromises the intellectual and psychological well-being of learners, particularly those from non-white and non-heteronormative communities. Proper care of students can be achieved through distancing, the use of metaphor, and the keen selection and sequencing of conventions, activities, and other learning experiences (Miller & Saxton, 2016). By privileging metaphor and working in “as if” fictional worlds to avoid triggers and re-traumatization (Prendergast & Saxton, 2015), students can internally reflect and relate toward their own struggles and histories, while also increasing their own social and empathetic awareness of the plights of others. Healing is a precious by-product of the performance process, but teachers must exercise delicate care, insight, and critical reflection to ensure that it is not twisted into a process which instead actively harms.

Linking to the previous topic, one idea for exploring performance as healing in the classroom is to create a ritual. Students could work in small groups to create a ritual designed to acknowledge and heal from some kind of loss. This work could also be a symbolic performative exploration of a fictional character’s state of mind as part of a play study, or as a heightened and metaphorical exploration of a real event that the ensemble undertakes together. Some possible topics for this purpose might include: how we memorialize historic loss, such as the Holocaust, war, or mass violence (as in Rwanda, South Africa under Apartheid, or in the wake of mass shootings). In Canada, for example, we gather together online and in-person to remember the December 6th, 1989 mass shooting in Montreal when a gunman killed 14 women in the engineering program at the École Polytechnique. We light candles, gather in silent ceremony or in loud protests against a still sexist society, three decades on from this hateful misogynist event.

**Education**

Theatre can teach us a lot about what it means to be human, whether we’re making and performing theatre ourselves or watching, reading about, and responding to other people perform.

(Prendergast, 2018, p. 70)

Performance and education have a reflexive relationship. Performance is educational, and education is embedded with performative acts. Teaching and learning is hard work, and that’s what makes it performative, the actual doing part of education. Teachers across all grade levels and disciplines establish learning environments by employing various performative pedagogic strategies to help their classes learn and succeed. Every time a teacher walks into
their classroom, they take on their teacher persona or role, which is crafted out of a range of performative acts and utterances, and might be quite different to how they behave outside of educational spaces. When it comes time to measure how much learning has taken place, students must perform in their tasks, assignments, and exams, demonstrating what they know and how they can performatively apply it. As seasoned theatrical performance makers, drama teachers are perhaps most acutely aware of how the power of their teaching performance shapes their classroom interactions. Acting, after all, is really the bread and butter of the drama classroom, and teaching is a kind of acting, and vice versa. Teachers should be positioned to see themselves as interpretive performers of curriculum, as well as critically interactive spectators in their students’ performance of learning.

The question that we believe all drama teachers should be asking themselves is: How am I performing education? In a fraught and transitional time when many teachers are grappling with budget cuts, strict targets and benchmarks, standardized tests, and the shift to online learning environments, this can be a challenging and confronting notion to ponder. However, performance is a tool, a method of education, and teachers should always be reflecting upon what kind of educational experience they are crafting for their students. Taylor (2000) argues that good drama praxis in education “aims to devise roles and situations which explore the human condition—not as a way of answering the problems of the world, but to help develop a perspective on the world and to understand or at least struggle with the perspectives of others as we all move to a sense of social justice and equity” (p. 90). Drama education with an overreliance on light-hearted games, theater sports, and musicals, while surely fun and entertaining, may ultimately be doing a disservice to students. Drama should provide students with ample scope to explore the complexities of existence in theatrical and performative ways, to engage in robust dialogical exchanges, and to revel in the affective dimensions of learning in order for thought and feeling to coalesce into new understandings.

In order for this to occur effectively, teachers should seek out source materials that impart some kind of educational value, and students should be made cognizant of the educational qualities of performance. They should be encouraged to write and perform their own original plays and performance pieces that have an inherent educational intent, and teachers should aim to select texts and performative works for exploration that are inclusive, topical, and/or issue-based, as well as reflect diverse BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) and LGBTQ+ populations. Students should be encouraged to boldly perform their works for audiences across the broader school community and beyond in order to transmit their educational messages. Viewing performance as education, and education as performance, and keenly reflecting upon what teachers and students do together in the drama classroom can foster deeper connections and illuminate our shared humanity.

Thinking together about the ways we learn from performance, the class ensemble could create a short performance piece (or multiple pieces created in smaller groups) that focuses on consciousness raising of some kind, or what Paolo Freire (1970/2000), the founder of critical pedagogy, called conscientization. To begin, students can ask themselves to recall an event in which they became aware of something they had not previously known. For example, when did they first became aware of racism, sexism, or homophobia as problems in society? Then, the short performances, perhaps in the form of live public service announcements, can illustrate these moments of awareness, of ‘waking-up,’ and how this new knowledge can be moved or mobilized into action. Strategies such as peaceful protests (the 2017 women’s walk with many women wearing pink caps with cat ears as performative resistance to Donald Trump’s sexism), occupations (the 2011 Occupy Wall Street movement), and broader socio-political movements (such as Idle No More and more recently the Land Back Indigenous-led
movements) can all inform students' thinking. In these ways, the Web of Performance curriculum invites young people to consider the educational potential and potency of performance in all of its myriad forms.

**Power**

We usually think of power as a thing that one person (or a group of people) has over another person or group. We think of power as something that powerful people have and use to control other people's lives. But in reality, it's more complicated than that. (Chamberlain-Snider, 2018, p. 94)

Much of the important work that occurs within drama classrooms explores the lived experiences of students negotiating the range of challenges of young adulthood and how they fit into their communities and broader society. If young people are able to understand how power operates, they are able to better understand themselves and the world around them. For Michel Foucault, a society without power relations can only be an abstraction. He contends that “Power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth” (Foucault, 1995, p. 194). Correspondingly, given that performances are actions, and that “power exists only when it is put into action” (Foucault, 1982, p. 788), it is important to recognize that all types of performance can wield considerable power for both the performer and the audience receiving them.

Additionally, as there are discursive practices inherent to all educational practices, the emancipatory drama classroom is therefore not immune from the impact of power relations. Discourse, as a social construct, is created and maintained by those who have the power and means of communication (Pitsoe & Letseka, 2013). Discourses have disciplining effects: they govern “what can be said and thought, but also about whom they can speak, when, and with what authority” (p. 24). For drama teachers, the simple routine acts that make up so much of the delivery of drama education—particular language choices, and the acts of dividing students into groups, selecting who will play what role, who will answer what question, whose work is shown to the class or to an outside audience, and so forth—shape power relations. From the moment students enter the classroom, performing the opening rituals of sitting in a circle, undertaking the class warm-up, dividing into groups to devise performance pieces, and so forth, they are controlled by the prevailing discourse of drama, the implicit attitudes, values, beliefs, ideas, actions, and social practices that construct subjects and their domains. Teachers are powerful transmitters of discourse; understanding how performance is shaped by power relations, and how these power relations play out in all kinds of classroom interactions can provide opportunity for profound reflection on pedagogical practice and opportunity to improve it.

The drama classroom can also be a site for empowerment. The negotiation of the human context in drama, roles, relationships, and situations faced by characters can be brought more clearly into focus by an understanding and appreciation of how power relations are at work, in turn empowering the students themselves as they reflect upon lives. At its heart, theater and performance tell stories, and whose stories are told, how they are shared, and how power is performed by who is given voice versus those whose voices are altered or silenced matters. These stories might be derived from source materials such as plays, poems, transcripts, book extracts, or come directly from the students themselves. Consider the power of the act to invite students to devise their own collective creation to present to an audience, rather than remounting another production of a Broadway musical. Applying the lens of performance...
as power can be woven into many lessons, but particularly when exploring works by practitioners such as Bertolt Brecht and Augusto Boal, both of whom aimed to subvert the status quo, draws attention to the realities of people’s oppression and liberates marginalized and forgotten voices. In simple terms, “[performance] can share power simply by creating a space that acknowledges a person’s existence” (Chamberlain-Snider, 2018, p. 104).

An example of an activity that really gets students thinking about the ways power works is Boal’s (2002, p. 163) “Great Game of Power” in which students are tasked with rearranging five chairs to show which one has the most power. This engaging activity leads to deep discussions of the ways power works in many aspects of our lives – in schools, courtrooms, legislative chambers, doctor’s offices, and so on. Keith Johnstone’s work on status in his books *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre* (1979) and *Impro for Storytellers* (1999) also offers many worthwhile activities for students to consider the many ways power structures influence our day-to-day existence.

**Identity**

Identity isn’t something that defines us; we define our identity and we do it by making choices about how we want the world to see us. *(Bishop, 2018, p. 116)*

For most young people, the high school experience is marked by years of enormous personal growth among heightened moments of intellectual and emotional turbulence as they try on different ways of being and come to understand who they are and what they might become. Performance theory (Schechner, 1988; Conquergood, 1989; Carlson, 1996) contends that all people undertake performances in our society, communicating ideas surrounding identity to the receiving audience. These performances might include fashion, grooming and makeup choices, our language use and the types of conversations we have, the food we eat, the media we consume, and how we express ourselves in person and across various digital platforms. These performances seek to construct, reinforce, and communicate our identities to broader society. Engaging with performance studies in the drama classroom and exploring performance as identity can provide a greater depth of awareness of this phenomena, as well as a welcome space where students are able to consider how they shape their personal self-expression, and see the differences and likenesses in others.

Identity doesn’t exist in isolation; it has relational and dialogical qualities that require some kind of interpersonal interaction, and the drama classroom provides a generative site for exploring identity in theatrical performance. Helen Carver (2007) writes that “Performance can make the raw self real to an audience, with a vulnerability that exists in the very moment of expression” (p. 7). In this way, performance identifies us; an audience is able to read identity through their interpretations of what they see us doing, their interpretations of what we look like to them, and how we appear to be making meaning in the world (Bishop, 2018).

Exploring identity in performance can happen in a number of ways in the drama classroom. Discussion of the performative aspects of identity can also be woven into all kinds of role work, providing greater consideration and nuance to improvisations, tableaux, devised scenes, and short scripted pieces. A student in role is able to experience and reflect upon identity not only directly but also through the medium of experiencing relational interactions with others. Schechner (1985, pp. 111–112) maintains, “[the performer] no longer has a ‘me’ but has a ‘not not me’ and this double negative relationship shows how restored behaviour is
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simultaneously private and social.” This state helps to illuminate the shared qualities of identity between the me and ‘not not me’ that the performer can only come to know through the act of performance.

Students should also be encouraged to write and stage their own performances, perhaps in the form of monologues or one-person shows, showcasing their own identities and inhabiting their own authentic selves in theatrical performance for audiences to bear witness. Staging the self is a powerful act, opening up a pathway of recognition and acceptance between performer and audience. This expression, in all its vulnerability, can cultivate moments of great profundity and affirmation of identity for the performer. In addition to this kind of embodied approach, teachers can position students to explore how identities are revealed in theatrical performance by discussing how characters are constructed by playwrights in scripts, and through various staging choices such as acting, costuming, scene blocking, music, soundscapes, and audiovisual effects. Students can also compare how the identities of characters in the same play can shift across different productions due to distinct directorial choices.

In her chapter in *Web of Performance*, Kathy Bishop details a rich learning experience for exploring identity. Working individually or in small groups, students are invited to create an interactive art installation or performance that invites people to express something about their identity. This could incorporate a range of ordinary personal objects, or images from magazines, or selfies of participants, or single words or phrases written on paper, or, really, anything at all. Students can give viewers/audience members/ participants something they can do that lets them respond to the questions: What shows who I am? What shows what I am? What shows what I do to make sense of the world and other people? Students can then reflect on the overlaps, similarities, and big differences between people’s responses and may then consider how they can highlight these within their interactive art installation or performances.

**Everyday life**

What happens when we start to look at every aspect of our lives, no matter how seemingly boring or mundane, as a performance choice?… Could the small actually be huge in the grand scheme of life?

*(Clement, 2018, pp. 138–139)*

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Erving Goffman argues that social life can be understood as a series of performances. He highlights how the lines between theatrical performance and the performances within daily life performances can blur, and began to question whether or not we might, in fact, always be performing. Schechner (2002, p. 174) sums this up succinctly: “All actors are performers, but not all performers are actors.” Likewise, when discussing food as performance, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1999) emphasizes the everyday nature of performance, arguing that at its most fundamental “to perform is do… to perform is to behave [and]… to perform is to show” (pp. 1–2).

Students should be positioned to consider how particular everyday performance activities and decisions can both reflect and challenge perceptions of the self and impact the wider community. For example, in a self-recorded video detailing her skincare and makeup routine for *Vogue*, Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez highlights the power behind this seemingly innocuous everyday performance:

There’s this really false idea that if you care about makeup or if your interests are in beauty and fashion, that that’s somehow frivolous. But I actually think these are some of
the most substantive decisions that we make – and we make them every morning… Our culture is so predicated on diminishing women and preying on our self-esteem, and so it's quite a radical act – and it's almost like a mini protest – to love yourself in a society that's always telling you you're not the right weight, you're not the right color, you're not the right, you know, whatever it is.

(Ruffner, 2020)

The 2020–2021 global pandemic, which of course shut down most live performance in 2020, still managed to generate a number of shared everyday performative acts that connected communities across the world during a time of momentous isolation. People from all over the globe placed hearts in their windows, cheered nightly at 7 pm for all frontline healthcare and essential workers, and left cheerily painted rocks in public places to spread happiness and joy for those on socially distanced walks. These acts were subsequently shared across traditional and social media where they could be seen and replicated.

The performance of everyday life as mediated through digital media is truly a hallmark of social interaction for young people in the twenty-first century. People make and curate media, revealing aspects of their everyday life for audiences to consume across an array of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, Twitch, YouTube, and TikTok. Social media posts may be heightened, contemplative, pedestrian, humorous, or even theatrical. Rather than merely accepting the impact of these technologies on their lives, students should reflect upon why they are popular and why they choose to (or choose not to) engage with them. They may consider how the performance of the everyday on social media might be indicative of their ‘real’ everyday life, and if there is an intermediary between the performance of watching others and the performance of doing something ourselves. For young people, being cognizant of how everyday life can be viewed as performance can truly foster a greater depth of understanding of the complexities of ordinary human nature and the relationships we have between one another.

A particularly useful tool for exploring the performance of everyday life is the “A Day in the Life” convention from Structuring Drama Work: A Handbook of Available Forms in Theatre and Drama (Neelands & Goode, 2000, p. 30) in which students create a chronological sequence of events involving either themselves or a dramatic character over a 24-hour span. This can be woven into all kinds of learning experiences that explore characterization and how we perform ourselves in our daily lives. Another idea for an extended exploration of everyday life comes from Colleen Clement in Web of Performance, developed from theater artist/activist Darren O’Donnell’s 2006 book Social Acupuncture. Students can be invited to simply go for a walk in their neighborhood. They can take notes on what they see and who they encounter on their walk, observe possible performance spaces, and engage in conversation with some people they encounter along the way: shopkeepers, seniors, parents with young children, and so forth. Consider: What can you find out about them, without being too intrusive? How long have they lived or worked in this neighborhood? What brought them here? How do they feel about the neighborhood? What are some issues or some changes they would like to see? Then, students can write a short monologue or scene based on this experience which they can then perform in chosen space in the neighborhood for the rest of the ensemble as a piece of site-specific processional theater.

Conclusion

In our view, performance studies in the secondary drama classroom offer drama educators many effective lenses and approaches to add to their thinking about curriculum design and delivery. It is the drama teacher’s responsibility to consider how best to prepare students for
postsecondary theater training, as well as to recognize that most students will not be following that career path. The strength of performance studies becoming more infused into drama education practices—for those students who want to become theater artists and those who do not—is that the seven topics included in *Web of Performance* are valuable for both groups of students in extending their understanding of the ways performance works beyond the scripted play or musical. No matter what professional pathways our students choose to pursue, the ways of thinking about how humans perform, for what purposes, and to what effect, are powerful opportunities for developing a critical performance literacy that can be applied across many fields and endeavors. For example, a student who trains as a political scientist will bring awareness of the performative qualities of power to her studies, and a student in law will recognize the performative aspects of presenting a case in a courtroom. Theater students will bring with them a rich language of performance that will enhance their abilities to create their own work. This skill is becoming more and more essential for graduating theater students who go on to build independent theater companies that are rooted in devising original performances.

So, if we can agree that performance studies offer all of these good things, for ourselves and our students, how can we begin to influence the field? First, there is a need to provide professional development opportunities for working teachers. Second, author Monica Prendergast has had the opportunity to deliver this professional development to drama educators in British Columbia, and she will summarize that experience below as a possible template for readers of this chapter to follow. Third, we need to more mindfully bring performance studies into teacher training programs. Our recommendation would be to have pre-service drama teachers take a dedicated course in performance studies. If this ideal scenario is not possible, then to expose students to the key concepts of performance studies and work with the *Web of Performance* curriculum guide resource is the next best option.

Professional development workshops delivered by Monica Prendergast in the autumn of 2018 for the Association of BC Drama Educators (ABCDE) were designed to invite drama teacher participants to consider the ways that the seven key concepts were already being addressed in their drama classes. Large pieces of chart paper were spread out in the workshop studio, with each of the key concepts written in the middle of each one: play, ritual, healing, education, power, identity, and everyday life. After a brief introduction to the *Web of Performance* workbook, teachers were broken out into small groups and asked to rotate together around the seven mind maps, for around 5–10 minutes spent at each one. At each station, teachers were invited to add all the ways they could think of that they incorporated the topic into their practice. The facilitator circled the room throughout this process and gently invited participants to go deeper into their thinking. Teachers were able to make some unexpected connections that revealed that, indeed, these performance studies topics were being taken up in their classrooms. And where they might have struggled a bit more in finding some examples, other participants might share a strategy, or the facilitator offer some ideas from the workbook as an illustration of the concept in action. The conversations sparked by this activity left workshop participants feeling empowered to begin to use the language of performance studies and to include the free *Web of Performance* curriculum in their future planning.

The final activity in the workshop was to have participants visually and physically place themselves in relation to the web of performance, as seen in the room on the seven pieces of chart paper, that were now filled with many practical ideas for implementation. First, teachers were asked to use both arms to indicate the two concepts they felt most confident in bringing into their practice, or that were already established parts of their curricula. Here,
it was clear that play, education, identity and power were most commonly seen as the top choices. Next, and finally, teachers were asked to indicate, with each arm pointing, what topics were less comfortable or familiar to them. Ritual, healing, and everyday life were the most frequent choices seen. A final discussion led to brainstorm some ways to bring the less familiar concepts more visibly into the classroom, and all participants were given a link to download the Web of Performance.

We close this chapter with a call to our imaginary reader: whoever you are, and whatever your work (as an academic, or practitioner, or both), we encourage you to take a closer look at the workbook we have developed for secondary-level drama students and their teachers (see References for link). We also invite you to read some of the recommended key texts in the richly diverse and fascinating field of performance studies, many of which appear in the references you will begin to read right at this very moment in time.

References


