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Serious Fun: The Perceived Influences of Improvisational Acting on Community College Students

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Abstract

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Acting on Community College Students

by

Ruth Yamamoto

MEd, Marymount University, 1991

BA, University of Hawaii 1984

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Research in extracurricular activities and arts education demonstrate how experiences in those areas contribute to the well-being and ongoing development of students in higher education. Although practiced and performed across the United States, theatrical improvisation, as an art form or extracurricular activity, lacks investigation within the context of higher education. Without an understanding from the student perspective, higher educational stakeholders miss an opportunity to incorporate experiences that address the institutions' mission and learning goals or worse, inadvertently produce student disenfranchisement. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and describe the experience of improvisational acting training, practice, and performance of 7 college students who participated in an improvisation group. Huizinga and Caillois's theories of play and Csikszentmihalyi's theory of flow served as the conceptual framework for the study. Data collection occurred at a community college in the mid-Atlantic region through 2 interviews with each participant and 1 focus group until reaching saturation of data. Data were analyzed through iterative coding of significant statements through which themes emerged. Themes included attraction to the activity, practice of the craft, applications of skills to life, and a continuance of improvisation in the participants' lives and at college. The findings lend credibility to other research supporting arts and extracurricular activities and provide educational stakeholders with insights from students on what they value in their educational experience. Positive social change can come from providing students with an education that includes fun, creativity, and socialization for a successful future.

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Dedication

To Duncan and Walker, who keep me laughing. To John, who continues to hold my heart.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

"I'm not worried. I know how to improv." This comment came from a former

high school student of mine after a year of studying theatrical improvisation with me. The

student responded to my question or readiness for an upcoming interview. As I reflect on

it now, as I did in that moment, I agreed. Having learned theatrical improvisation in the

seventh grade, I attribute much of my ability to deal with varying aspects of my life to

that training. Over the past 23 years as an educator, I have heard other students attribute

their wellbeing and effectiveness in the world in part to learning theatrical improvisation.

Recently, a college improviser working with my students told me how wonderful it was

that I was teaching improv and, again, mentioned how important improv training is. This

college student had given up a Friday evening to engage in theatrical improvisation; thus

began my inquiry as to what this activity meant to college students.

Not everyone who learns theatrical improvisation goes on to be a professional

actor on a major television show, such as, Amy Poehler (2014), whose recent memoirs

highlighted her theatrical improvisation training and received significant media coverage.

Therefore, fame cannot be the importance of this artistic training. In high schools and

colleges across the United States and the world, improv groups exist (DeZutter, 2008;

Meyer, 2006; Sawyer, 2000). Some are school sponsored, some result from classes, and

some result for no apparent reason except for the students' desire to get together to do the

art and have a laugh. While I appreciate the ability to think on my feet and understand the

rule of "yes, and" (a rule of improvisation, which I detail in Chapter 2), something even

more subtle than a laugh or the ability to be quick witted must be happening through

these experiences. As an educator, I would like to take credit for the perceived benefits;

however, this does not explain groups who learn from each other without traditional

instructors. Something must happen through the experience of training, practicing, and

performing theatrical improvisation with or without a teacher. Something compels young

people to give up their leisure time activities to participate and offers support to colleges

in recognition of the craft's value as a college activity. With long-term goals of

educational reform and arts education advocacy for the inclusion of arts education into

the core curriculum, with this study, I looked at the individual level to gain insights on

what theatrical improvisation has meant to practitioners of the art at the collegiate level of

their education.

With this study, I investigated the phenomenon of theatrical improvisation

thoughtfully through the experiences of members of a collegiate improvisation group.

Chapter 1 represents an overview of the study including the research problem, purpose,

and question. After presenting the research question, I provide definitions for terms used

throughout the paper. These definitions will aid the reader with the concepts presented in

an abbreviated conceptual framework, which follows. The nature of the study,

assumptions, scope, delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study conclude the

first chapter, and a summary transitions to the literature review.

Background of the Study

Higher education institutions across the country have made extracurricular and

student-sponsored activities that support student learning and development a priority to

their programs (King, Baxter Magolda, Barber, Brown, & Lindsay, 2009). Theatrical improvisation, as such an activity on college campuses, has received little research attention. Educational stakeholders need an increased awareness of students' perspectives of their activities to support the activities and meet the challenges of a holistic education. My prior experiences with theatrical improvisation informed the concepts I investigated (e.g., play, improvisation, and flow).

Much of the research on leisure activities has focused on play. Several play scholars, developmental psychologists, and educational philosophers have argued for the value of play as learning in early childhood education (e.g., preschool and elementary school; Caillois, 1958; Dewey, 1910; Huizinga, 1950; Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978). However, in many traditional education settings, opportunities for students to play as part of the curriculum have become fewer (Bergen & Fromberg, 2009; Bodrova & Leong, 2003; Miller, 2010; Myck-Wayne, 2010; Nicolopoulou, 2010). Bergen (2002) and Bergen and Fromberg (2009) argued that pretend play not only relates to but also facilitates cognitive development and social competency in children, kindergarten through high school age. Although the research supports play in K–6 education, many stakeholders fear play, known as ludophobia (Botturi & Loh, 2010), and reserve play for the very young or only as an elective course for older students (Bergen & Fromberg, 2009; Jacobs, 2011; Myck-Wayne, 2010; Nicolopoulou, de Sá, Ilgaz, & Brockmeyer, 2010; Rasmussen & Gürgens, 2006; Senge, 2012). Sawyer (2006) argued that improvisational acting, as a form of play, should be included into high school curriculum; however, current curriculum standards limit or exclude arts education in lieu of what

professionals have identified as essential subjects. In many colleges, students have access to improvisation groups as extracurricular activities.

Although many different forms of improvisation exist across several different art forms and nonarts disciplines, few students learn or are exposed to improvisational acting as part of their formal education (Crooks, 2007; Hvenegaard, Johnson, & Macklin, 2008; Sawyer, 2004a, 2006). Improvisational acting founders wrote instructional books, which described the practice of improvisation (Boal, 2002; Fox, 1994; Johnstone, 1987; Spolin, 1987). These books primarily apply to theatrical training. Instruction and education for those outside the field of theatre are difficult to find (Gesell, 2005; Hough, 2011). As an educational strategy, Sawyer (2004a) and Godin (2012) argued for the importance of improvisation training for all levels of education. Some scholars noted a lack of confidence in teaching improvisation and general ludophobia (Botturi & Loh, 2010) regarding improvisation taking up academic class time as the rationale for the field's exclusion from the curriculum (Greenwood, 2009; Maples, 2007). Although research on the benefits of improvisation in music exists (Koutsoupidou, 2005; Koutsoupidou & Hargreaves, 2009), play scholars, drama researchers, and business researchers have largely argued for the need for additional research on theatrical improvisation (Gesell, 2005; Greenwood, 2009; Jacobs, 2011; Miner, Bassoff, & Moorman, 2001; Zaunbrecher, 2011). Specifically, little research or literature exists that addressed the relationship between improvisational acting and the potential benefits to students' development both in and out of the classroom ("Future Research," n.d.). Only Meyer (2006) provided an empirical foundation for understanding the meaning adults perceive through learning

improvisation. This study filled a gap with additional and more contemporary research to help interpret the dynamic phenomenon of theatrical improvisation training in which college students engage.

Problem Statement

Although researchers and scholars have documented the influences of arts, arts as play, and extra- or co-curricular activities in higher education, I could find no research connecting all three thread strands within the field of improvisation. Play scholars have noted a connection between play and learning (Bodrova & Leong, 2003; Brown, 2010; Gray, 2013), play and development (Piaget, 1962), and play and social competency (Nicolopoulou et al., 2010). Researchers have examined the connection of the arts to play and described the benefits of an arts education in early childhood education (De Backer, Lombaerts, De Mette, Buffel, & Elias, 2012) and K–12 education (Nigh, 2013). Within the field of arts education, researchers have examined music and dance within the context of improvisation (Rasmussen & Gürgens, 2006). Studies on theatrical improvisation have been performed with organizations (Crooks, 2007; Pruetipibultham & Mclean, 2010), K–12 after school programs (DeZutter, 2008; Stevenson, Limon, & Reclosado, n.d.), for professional development (Berk & Trieber 2009; Lobman, 2005), and for cognitive understanding of the processes of improvisation (Magerko et al., 2009). Little research exists on theatrical improvisational acting and higher education. One reason could be because theatrical improvisation is not part of most college curricula, and students tend to form their own groups outside their academic schedule. Higher education institutions across the country, including the study site, have student organizations, which profess to

provide students with developmental opportunities to augment academic coursework. However, without understanding from the student perspective on such an important cocurricular activity, higher educational stakeholders may be missing an opportunity to incorporate the experience into other efforts to address their institutions' missions and learning goals or worse, inadvertently produce student disenfranchisement.

In all the discussions that have taken into account the process of arts training and its relevance to the educational and developmental needs of students, the perspective of the student has not been included. This reveals the problem that without the students' perspectives on their cocurricular experiences, higher education institutions may not have all the information needed to sustain their programs and thus fail to reach their institutional and educational goals. The perceptions of the participants in this study will invite discussion and consideration to the process of development and occurs as a part of a holistic education inclusive of multiple avenues for learning.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and describe the lived experience of improvisational acting training, practice, and performance of seven college students who participated in an improvisation group. As extracurricular activities, many improvisational acting groups exist at higher education institutions. Assuming both ontological and axiological bases for this study, I examined the perspectives of improvisers to understand how the participants made meaning of their training and practice of improvisation within a group context. The central phenomenon under investigation was the meaning the participants gave to their improvisational experiences.

Research Question

Despite the scholarly discussions and empirical research surrounding the activity of theatrical improvisation, I could find little research reporting from the perspective of the participants. The prior research and construction of the conceptual framework, along with my experiences, informed this study. First, I chose a qualitative approach because one single theory did not explain the phenomenon; moreover, I tried to make sense of the multiple and complex concepts that have been previously presented in scholarly efforts to understand how theatrical improvisation helps students to make meaning or their development. Maxwell (2013) argued that qualitative research resembles a *do-it-yourself* process where no single component of a study dictates the design but that each element interacts to generate the best picture. Early in designing this study, the research question only included training and practice of the craft. During data analysis, I chose to add performance to experiences as the participants provided many experiences in front of an audience. In Chapter 4, I present a complete description of that decision.

Research question: How have experiences with theatrical improvisation training and practice helped college students make meaning of their ongoing development?

Definition of Terms

In this portion of the chapter, I introduce and define terms included in this study that have emerged from the literature, practice, and theory. For the purposes of this paper, I differentiate between the two spellings of the following word: theater and theatre. *Theater* is the physical building in which performing arts occur; *theatre* is the performing art that includes scripted or unscripted acting (Blatner & Wiener, 2007).

Bridling: Dahlberg (2006) described bridling as an attitude that phenomenological researchers should take to guide and *rein* in their preunderstandings, assumptions, and experiences when investigating a phenomenon. This process follows the concept of phenomenological reduction as presented by Husserl in the 1900s through which phenomenologists attempt to bracket or remove themselves from their research. Dahlberg (2006) argued that in accordance with the philosophy of phenomenology, humans interpret the world through their own perspectives, meaning they cannot fully remove themselves. However, following a horseback riding analogy, researchers can bridle their intentional relationship to their studies and tighten or loosen control over those connections as needed.

Emerging adulthood: Arnett (2000) described this period in life from the late teens to the late twenties. Arnett argued that young people in this age range in industrialized nations experience a time when their life possibilities are greater than at any point in their lives. Notably, Arnett identified three areas (demographic, subjective perception, and exploration of identity) that change the most during this period for people in this age range. Arnett argued that people of this age range have different and distinct developmental needs.

Flow: Csikszentmihalyi (1991) defined *flow* as a dynamic state of consciousness where focus on perceptions of personal ability meet or push the level of challenge required for the activity, resulting in a state of enjoyment. Although flow experiences can differ greatly between people, the results of flow experiences always provide the intrinsic reward of enjoyment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). Csikszentmihalyi used the Greek word

autotelic to describe activities that people perform because doing the activity is the reward. People perform *exotelic* activities for the rewards that follow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). Sometimes people do an activity that is both exotic and autotelic. Because flow activities exemplify autotelic activities, Csikszentmihalyi argued that learning to find flow in everyday life could be the secret to lifelong happiness.

Improvisation: Improvisation is the creation of new material by an individual or group immediately or without prior planning (Goldstein & Winner, 2012; Joos, 2012; Magerko et al., 2009; Sawyer & DeZutter, 2009). Composition involves the creation of a new artifact or idea but involves iterations and occurs over a period (Joos, 2012). Both terms describe modes of creativity and act as endpoints on a continuum. Many forms of improvisation exist (musical improvisation, product innovation in businesses, and theatrical improvisation), and all forms adhere to the basic definition of improvisation (Goldstein & Winner, 2012; Joos, 2012; Magerko et al., 2009; Sawyer & DeZutter, 2009). This definition and the idea of a creativity continuum aid the understanding of theatrical improvisation and guide the focus of investigations for future research.

Throughout many different fields (sociology, psychology, education, and computer science), researchers have examined and continue to examine improvisation (Joos, 2012; Magerko et al., 2009; Sawyer & DeZutter, 2009). Since its formal beginnings in the 1960s and 1970s, theatrical improvisation has existed in the form of theatrical games or exercises rehearsed and performed by actors (Johnstone, 1987; Spolin, 1987). Within this artistic medium, improvisers collaboratively create scenes from audience suggestions, following game guidelines, and do so immediately

(Johnstone, 1987; Joos, 2012; Magerko et al., 2009; Sawyer & DeZutter, 2009; Spolin, 1987). Although not all who have studied theatrical improvisation agree on how actors do this, several researchers have noted common themes of acceptance, trust, and presence that influence social, academic, and intrapersonal developments (Gesell, 2005; Joos, 2012; Magerko et al., 2009; O'Neill et al., 2011; Sawyer & DeZutter, 2009; Zaunbrecher, 2011).

Play: According to Huizinga (1950), activities classified as play must adhere to the following characteristics: free or voluntary, separate from the real world in time and space, uncertain in its outcome, unproductive or without tangible gain, governed by rules determined by the players, and is make believe. Although Huizinga provided a foundational definition of play with regard to human existence, Caillois (1958) determined that the spirit of play resides in all human activities whether all of the characteristics of play exist or not. For this reason, Caillois chose to discuss play in terms of games and used the term *games* interchangeably with play activities even if an activity does not fully conform to play characteristics. According to Caillois, all forms of play lie on a spectrum with structured play—*ludus*—on one end and free play—*paidia*—on the other. *Agôn* refers to competitive play. *Alea* refers to chance play. As-if play or role-play exemplifies mimicry; *ilinx* describes dizzying play. I describe the elements in more detail in the conceptual framework of this paper.

Conceptual Framework

In this section of Chapter 1, I describe the role of a conceptual framework as it relates to this study. In addition, I introduce the foundational concepts that I will

elaborate on in Chapter 2. With this introductory section, the strands are identified that follow in the literature review, which I will weave together to create a framework. This framework will inform my analysis of the data and enable me to present a holistic overview of the phenomenon in hopes of positive educational change.

Although other researchers have described similar phenomena of improvisation, with my research I describe a *universal essence* (van Manen, 1990). Instead of relying on a single theory or underpinning for my study, the theories emerge from the data and analyses.

In prior research of theatrical improvisation, scholars discussed concepts such as play, creativity, innovation, and socialization and viewed this activity through several lenses (Hough, 2011; Joos, 2012; Koutsoupidou & Hargreaves, 2009; Miner et al., 2001; Vera & Crossan, 2005). However, no one theory explains (a) why people do it, (b) what they get out of the activity, or (c) what it means to them, particularly regarding their education and future. In seeking to understand what theatrical improvisation means to community college students, I constructed a framework of concepts from the prior research that I feel are at play in this phenomenon.

Play and Culture

Sociologist Huizinga (1950) argued that the scientific name for humans should be *humo ludens* (man the player) and not *humo sapiens* (man the reasoner). Caillois (1958) argued that play not only creates culture but also embodies culture. Both theorists divided play into three types: competition (*agon*), mimicry, and vertigo (Caillois, 1958; Huizinga, 1950). Caillois (1958) added a fourth category—chance (*alea*). Caillois (1958) argued that a culture arises from the need to balance these four play elements. Basing some of

his ideas on this concept, Csikszentmihalyi (1991) theorized that humans have the potential for optimal experiences in their lives and called this dynamic state *flow*. Within the concept of flow, Sawyer (2000) investigated creativity and added to the knowledge base with the phenomenon of creative emergence.

Within the study of play, many researchers and scholars have argued that play benefits learning in areas of not only content, but social competence and personal skills (Bergen, 2002; Dewey, 1910; Nichols & Stich, 2000; Piaget, 1962; Rasmussen & Gürgens, 2006). A lack of current research creates a gap in the knowledge of the connection between play and learning. Furthermore, despite the focus in prior research of the benefits of play to young children in education, play holds relevance for young adults in higher education as well.

Balance of Play Elements

All activities have a spirit of play (Caillois, 1958). Caillois described the elements of play against a continuum with free play on one end and structured play on the other (see Appendix A). In *agôn*, or competition, players test themselves against others or themselves (Caillois, 1958). In mimicry, players pretend play (Caillois, 1958). Acting exemplifies mimicry in a higher education culture. Games of chance exemplify *alea* (Caillois, 1958). Dizzying or exhilarating activities, such as roller coaster rides or skiing, exemplify *vertigo* (Caillois, 1958). When one element dominates or is underrepresented in a culture, humans seek to balance the elements (Caillois, 1958). Furthermore, Caillois noted that sometimes the imbalance has negative effects. In current educational settings, the elements of play appear to be heavily competitive, and students have very little

opportunity for role playing (mimicry).

The Theory of Flow

Csikszentmihalyi (1991) identified flow as a dynamic state of being during which individuals focus inward to experience optimal enjoyment while still being part of the activity and their surroundings at large. During flow, challenge matches skill (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). Researchers have sometimes called flow *active Zen* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). Since the formation of the flow theory, researchers have investigated flow in many different fields and disciplines (e.g., Ainley, Enger, & Kennedy, 2008; Bakker, 2005; Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989; Dietrich, 2004). Although not current to within the past 5 years, these studies are included in the literature review as the authors showed what research and scholarly discussion has happened in the field since Csikszentmihalyi identified flow.

Play and Learning

Play scholar Brown (2010) argued for learning through play. Psychologist Piaget (1962) argued for psychological and physical development of children through play. Scientists in the field of education have primarily studied play with young children with regard to development and social competency (Bergen & Fromberg, 2009; Burghardt, 2010; Gude, 2010; Nichols & Stich, 2000). Other play scholars argued that a lack of play could have negative effects on development (Gray, 2011; Nicolopoulou, 2010). Regarding this study, I identified improvisational acting as play as a factor in the development and learning of the participants.

Theatrical Improvisation

Improvisation describes the deliberate act of creating without prior planning or scripting (Zaunbrecher, 2011). Improvisation happens within many art forms (e.g., dance, music, and visual art). For the purpose of this study, I discuss improvisation within the theatrical acting context. Founders of this type of improvisation include Spolin, Johnstone, and Boal. Spolin (1987) created a form of improvisation for the actor as a way to develop characters and to deepen connection between the actors and the essence of the plays. Working in Canada, Johnstone (1987) concurrent to Spolin also worked on improvisational games for the actor. In the conceptual framework section of Chapter 2, I explain in more detail how modern theatrical improvisation evolved from these two seminal theorists.

Related Strands of Theory

Through investigation of the literature, two other stands of theory emerged. Stevenson and Clegg (2011) addressed the possible selves with their study of extracurricular activities. Arnett (2000) described the period of emerging adulthood as 18 to 29 years of age. During this period, young adults face dramatic changes to their lives, which Arnett argued made this period highly dynamic and influential. While both the theories may apply, I chose to narrow my focus to the aforementioned concepts of play, theatrical improvisation, and flow in the literature review. Using these concepts, I hoped to gain insights from the study's participants to help me connect these concepts of the balance of play elements, flow, and collaboration as these concepts relate to learning, creativity, and social competency. I hoped the study would lead to factors that explained

how the participants made meaning of their experiences and their ongoing development.

Nature of Study

To examine, interpret, and illustrate the meaning theatrical improvisation as an extracurricular activity holds for the members of a community college group, I used a phenomenological approach of study. Employing a qualitative methodology best suited the nature of the phenomenon in question, as data included the feelings and beliefs of these improvisers. Thus, the data collected from the participants informed questions qualitatively (how and why) rather than quantitatively, which address measurable data (how much; Gravetter & Wallnau, 2013).

After IRB approval, I collected data from seven members of an extracurricular improvisation group at a community college in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Members of this group included both current students, at the time of data collection, and alumni of the college. Three data collection sessions (individual interviews and a focus group) of 60–90 minutes each were recorded, transcribed for analysis, and then coded. As the sole investigator, I performed iterative coding to search for reoccurring themes and patterns. Through a hermeneutic circle of inquiry, participants and I reflected on patterns and themes identified from previous sessions until we felt satisfied by the analysis. This hermeneutic circle of analysis produced rich, thick descriptions of the phenomenon.

My engagement with theatre arts education, specifically theatrical improvisation, and my interest in understanding the development that improvisers undergo though the training, practice, and performance prompted this hermeneutic investigation. In

hermeneutic investigation, researchers interpret text through a series of back and forth

processes in which a researcher takes the individual meanings apart and puts them back

together to gain a consensus for overall meaning (Kvale, 1996). In the traditions of the

philosophy and approach, *text* referred to the written word (Kvale, 1996); postmodern

phenomenologists (e.g., Kvale and Vagle) accepted *text* to include action and discourse,

thus justifying the hermeneutic interpretation of transcripts of interviews. In addition, I

collected data in the form of a focus group, where, as the researcher but also cocreator of

meaning making, I guided the participants with semistructured questions. Bradbury-

Jones, Sambrook, and Irvine (2009) argued that use of focus groups in phenomenological

studies could provide greater insights into phenomena, particularly those that have a

group dynamic. After each session, I analyzed transcripts, which I then used to inform the

follow-up interview questions. With each round of interpretation and question and

through analyses of the data, I responsibly aided students to understand how theatrical

improvisation has influenced their development.

Other qualitative methods (case studies, ethnographies, and grounded theories)

came close but did not align with the research question or fit the intended sample of this

study. In case studies, the context holds more importance than the experience, which

confirms the questions about the context rather than exploring the essence of the

experience (Miles et al., 2014). In ethnography, the focus of the research also revolves

around the cultural context; furthermore, some aspect of the composition of the sample

population directly or indirectly influences the phenomenon in question (Miles et al.,

2014). Because no theory explained what happens in a college level, extracurricular,

theatrical improvisation group, I rejected a grounded theory. A grounded theory study would differ in the data collection portion of the investigation and would answer a different research question that focused on discovering emerging theory rather than the perceptions of the participants (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000). With the guided reflection of this study, the essence of the experience unfolded for the participants and the researcher (van Manen, 2014). Engaging with the findings from the study, I hope to inform educational practice to include of theatre arts education, specifically improvisation, to general education.

Assumptions

On a foundational level, several assumptions existed that made this study possible. I assumed and anticipated that the participants would participate in all three data collection sessions to provide substantive data. I assumed that the participants would feel comfortable to share any aspect of their experiences without concern for researcher judgment or a need to filter their responses. It was assumed that the student group, The Society (pseudonym), represented an appropriate and accessible sample population of emerging adults (e.g., students and alumni). Finally, it was assumed that the members of the Society would provide insights into their experiences of extracurricular improvisation that had influenced them as individuals and members of this student organization. All of these assumptions were necessary to produce a credible report on the findings. I describe the scope of the study in the following section and justify my participant selection in Chapter 3 as meeting the criteria for participation.

Scope and Delimitations

In the literature review, I present many different aspects of improvisational theatre that researchers and scholars have previously examined. To narrow the scope and define the boundaries of the many characteristics, I studied college-aged males who participated in an extracurricular theatrical improvisation group at a community college in the mid-Atlantic region of a metropolitan area. All participants must have attended at least one-semester length period of time with the group and performed. Rationale for this sample included meeting the criteria for having participated in the activity. It was also necessary to sample a demographic of higher education learners to gain insight on the potential influence the participants believed the phenomenon might have had on their future. Within a community college environment, a greater diversity of students exists (Clay, 2012), which added the potential for transferability.

Areas of research beyond the scope of this investigation included differences that might exist in community college versus a traditional 4-year institution (including research investigating influences of or correlations with student age, socioeconomic backgrounds, and programs of study) and the influences of prior training styles and techniques. Furthermore, although researchers and authors from the reviewed literature noted similar studies, the scope of this research did not include K–12 students or institutions outside of the United States. An investigation of theatrical improvisation as an extracurricular activity as approached through descriptive phenomenology provided a richer, thicker description obtained with interviews and focus groups than by case study, ethnography, or grounded theory research.

My personal experiences include working with K–12 learners in both public and private schools with theatrical improvisation as part of the curriculum and as an extracurricular activity. Having had similar experiences as a teenager influenced me to share the craft with others. Once again, while I disclose my personal experiences with the subject matter of the study, my personal epoché of those prior beliefs provided a springboard and not a restrictive structure for the investigation.

Limitations

Weaknesses to this study included threats to credibility. The goal of this research was to determine how theatrical improvisation helped college-aged students make meaning of their development. To establish credibility, all elements of the study must align to answer the research question. Furthermore, the research question must have some relevance to the field and a larger community. Playing and extracurricular activities at any level of education hold differing levels of importance for educational stakeholders. As a theatre arts educator, my personal biases lie toward advocating for the arts curriculum. Therefore, threats to credibility included both substantive and ethical validation (Maxwell, 2013). The choice of a phenomenological approach helped provide credibility in that the substance or essence of the experience came through the researcher but from the participants.

Following Creswell's (2007) strategies to guard against threats to validity, I made use of multiple sources and types of data. I sought peer or faculty review, I tried to work with a negative hypothesis, and I clarified my personal biases. Another weakness might have included sampling size. In the postmodern tradition of phenomenological

investigations, the sample size depends more on the phenomenon and the data collection strategy than on the traditional sample size of 20 (Englander, 2012; Kvale, 1996; Vagle, 2014). The target number for this study was between six and eight participants. Seven members of the group volunteered; thus, requesting a change in procedures to approach another college proved unnecessary. In addition, by presenting only information that advocates an arts program within college studies threatened validity. To guard against this, I searched for discrepancies and contrary points of views. Finally, I felt that being a novice researcher weakened the study. To combat that weakness, I sought guidance and oversight from my faculty panel members.

Significance

Higher education institutions recognize the need to support and foster student organizations for a holistic educational experience. The institutions support the organizations; however, the students provide the impetus, execution, and rationale. While research points to the practical and theoretical development that occurs through theatrical improvisation, I supported and extended that research through the voices of collegiate improvisers. This was done to increase communication and collaboration between those who participated in extracurricular activities and those who provided the opportunities. With this study, I hoped for transferability rather than generalizability. The interpretations were specific to a theatrical improvisation group and not applicable to all student organizations or all theatrical improvisation groups. However, with this study, I hope to open the dialogue between improvisers and educational stakeholders and invite further inquiry into how theatrical improvisers make meaning of their training and

practice beyond simply *having a laugh.* Such information would aim to meet the pedagogical goal of becoming more fully human (van Manen, 1990). Furthermore, because the target improvisation group fell under the auspices of the college's student life program, I assumed that increased awareness to potential educational and life benefits could reinforce the need for the existence and continued support of the student organization and meet the college's aim for student development.

Summary

Studies from the 1990s to today note a connection between learning of skills (problem solving, adaptability, innovation, and social competency) and arts education and play activities. However, the practice in most higher education institutions is to focus on academics and leave such activities for outside of the classroom. What the literature lacks is an understanding of the specific influences of improvisational acting as a combination of arts and leisure and the particular meaning students who participate in the discipline outside of a traditional instructional setting give to it. With this research, I hope to fill that gap from the perspective of the students to gain insight on the influences community college students and alumni feel improvisational acting has had on them.

Chang (2010) described interpretive inquiry as both a "work of the heart" and "inherently messy" (pp. 28–29). In many ways, theatrical improvisation training approached me and beckoned to be heard and understood. As with other phenomenological studies, I anticipated becoming different as I moved through the cocreation of meaning with the participants of this study. In this respect, it was truly a work of the heart. However, in the proposal phase of this study, I encountered the

messiness that Chang described. Because of a connection with the topic, hermeneutical researchers can be neither objective or neutral; however, they must control their biases (Nyström & Dahlberg, 2001; Vagle, 2014; Wimpenny & Gass, 2000). As a novice researcher, I invite the reader to follow my journey as I wind my way through the experiences of others with what some may find to be unconventional research techniques. My goal was to push past the inherent messiness and provide interpretations of rich, thick descriptions of experiences. The pathways of this topic lie in the literature and are many. Using those pathways described in prior scholarly work, I hoped to gain insights that fill the gaps connecting what these experiences mean to students, why they do them, and how educational stakeholders can foster similar experiences. In the next chapter, I present the literature I found that informed this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In Chapter 2, I present the literature review of the current research and older studies that still hold relevance to this study. The influences community college students perceive that participating in an improvisational acting group has had on them fall under three broad categories in the literature: play, flow, and improvisation. In reviewing the literature, these concepts are interrelated and describe the possible influences expected in the findings of the study. Chapter 2 also includes the searching strategies I employed to gather the research I reviewed.

Literature Search Strategy

Based on my professional epoché and prior experiences with the subject matter, I identified the following list of initial keywords used to search the databases: *improvisation, theatre, theater, play, role-play, education, extracurricular, higher education, phenomenological, flow, drama*, and *applied theatre*. Using the Walden University library system, initial searches were performed through Thoreau, which searches multiple databases. As the subject matter became more specific or if I was searching for an article discovered from other literature, I used Google Scholar. After the searches became more specific, I created an alert on Google Scholar to notify me of new articles. In addition, since the initial research, I ran the keywords through the database Education Research Complete and continued to do so throughout the dissertation process.

Conceptual Framework

In Chapter 1, I described the foundational theories that, based on my personal experiences, informed the research I performed for the literature review. In this section, I

elaborate on the theories of Huizinga (1950), Caillois (1958), and Csikszentmihalyi (1991) through an educational lens and begin to show how other researchers have also built on the theories. In addition, I give a brief history and description of theatrical improvisation and the different forms of theatrical improvisation. In the literature review section, I provide more depth and analysis of each article.

Play and Education

In Chapter 1, I introduced Huizinga's (1950) theory of play as culture described in the elements of play (*agôn*, *ilinx*, and mimicry). In addition, I described Caillois's (1958) theory of the balance of these play elements and the addition of *alea* or chance. Play also exists on a continuum with free play (*paidia*) on one end and structured play (*ludus*) on the other (Caillois, 1958; Huizinga, 1950). Within this framework of the elements of play, all aspects of life should embody some form of play and exist somewhere on the continuum (Caillois, 1958). With this logic, education and school lie on the play continuum.

Role of play. In ancient times, only the free man had the opportunity to pursue leisure activities since they had no need for a job (Huizinga, 1950). The Greek word for leisure is *skhole* or *schole*, from which the modern day word for school derives (Harper, 2001). Aristotle argued for the pursuit of leisure and happiness as a goal for education (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). Plato (1994, 2009) argued for education to include the study and playing of music as well as mathematics, dialects, and philosophy. Students pursued these subjects in the hopes of attaining higher enlightenment; any other studies Plato considered only worthy of the mundane and lower class citizens (Huizinga, 1950). Plato

philosophized playfully (Ardley, 1967). For the ancients, the spirit and nature of education focused on play and leisure activities (Huizinga, 1950). At some point in history, this philosophy on education flipped and subjects such as reading and writing took places of prominence whereas play the lessened in importance for an education (Huizinga, 1950). In 2015, while I could identify elements of play in education, I found it difficult to describe much of contemporary education for children or adults as play.

Process learning. One of the major changes in U.S. education occurred during the Industrial Revolution (Senge, 2012). People began to view education more as a product than as a process. Dewey (1910, 1916) argued against such learning and for learning through doing. Similarly, Dewey (2005) extended this theory to art and differentiated between a work of art (the product) and art work (the process). Both ideas seem to involve a level of engagement and action with these activities that go beyond what has become standard in education today with transmission teaching strategies (DeZutter, 2008). "In play, and in particular in the diversity of play modes, we learn without at the time knowing we learn," stated Ardley (1967, p. 237). This would appear to be the potential benefit of not only process learning but learning through play.

Flow and Education

Csikszentmihalyi (1991) defined flow as the dynamic state of optimal enjoyment. Csikszentmihalyi argued that the human goal of life is happiness. While humans do not experience happiness during moments of flow, the happiness that follows propels and sustains people through the adversity and drudgery of their lives (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991).

The goal of education. The goal of education should be to create happy, socially competent, young adults who are prepared to take their places in society (Godin, 2012; Senge, 2012). Csikszentmihalyi (1991) described the flow theory in terms that have influenced and can influence education by making schools more conducive to flow. With ideas for educational reform, the goal of education switches to become training for real life experience, life-long learning, and pursuit of happiness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). In the literature review, I describe how some researchers have used the theory of flow to inform educational reform to meet these goals.

Flow in arts education. While flow can potentially occur in any activity in which skill matches the challenge, perhaps the most frequent occurrences happen in play activities and in art work. The potential for giftedness exists in all students, but without the resources or opportunities to discover and nurture talent, they could go unrealized (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). Ardley (1967) noted that a dichotomy existed in the 1960s that still exists today: schools include either serious studies or ones considered playful. As political policymakers try to achieve higher ranking for U.S. public schools, nonessential instruction (arts and sports) have been reduced or eliminated (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; A. Johnson, 2004; J. Johnson, 2010).

Improvisation

Many definitions exist for improvisation. In a case study presented for the purposes of understanding the cognitive process of improvisation, Magerko et al. (2009) defined improvisation as "the creation of an artifact and/or performance with aesthetic goals in real-time that is not completely prescribed in terms of functional and/or content

constraints" (p. 117). Although this description serves as a good scientific definition, it does little to describe the aesthetic quality of which the researchers speak. The why and how of theatrical improvisation is the subject of this study; I merely offer this definition to place improvisation as an activity that can then be examined with the lens of flow.

History of theatrical improvisation. Prior research provides extensive samples of and background on improv history (Joos, 2012; Meyers, 2006; Sawyer, 2003; Zaunbrecher, 2011). For the purposes of this study, the form of improvisation that I investigated was similar to the work done by actors at Second City Theatre in Chicago and Lone Moose Theatre in Canada. These two theatre companies pioneered the game-like version that can be seen today on the show *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* Second City's form evolved from Spolin's seminal work on improvisation for the actor (Joos, 2012; Sawyer, 2003). Lone Moose's Theatresports format evolved from Johnstone, as improvisation as noncompetitive games, and Boal as theatrical games for nonactors (Johnstone, 1983; Joos, 2102). Although improv has been practiced and performed since the 1970s, this game-like form of improv became accessible through the British radio production in the 1980s and television broadcasting of *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* in both Britain and the Unites States in the 1990s (Berk & Trieber, 2009).

Form structure of improvisation. While improvisational actors appear to be freely creating instant scenes, a framework of rules provides the structure that allows improvisers to work (Joos, 2012; Magerko et al., 2009; Sawyer & DeZutter, 2009). Spolin (1987) presented the basic rules in her seminal work, *Improvisation for the Theater*; researchers continue to see these rules appearing in the data analyses (Joos,

2012; Magerko et al., 2009; Sawyer & DeZutter, 2009). These basic rules include trust,

presence, and acceptance (Gesell, 2005; Spolin, 1987). These rules provide an

overarching framework from which the actors work (Joos, 2012; Magerko et al., 2009;

Sawyer & DeZutter, 2009). In addition, each game has a set of rules, and within each

group, the performers have rules for the group (Magerko et al., 2009; Sawyer &

DeZutter, 2009). Joos (2012) argued that improvisation as an action lies on one end of a

creative continuum with the other end being composition. Theatrical improvisation has

rules and a framework, much like play (Berk & Trieber, 2009). All of this structure limits

the freedom of the actors but also fosters the creative environment of the improvisation,

thus putting it further away from the improvisational end of the continuum but still not on

the compositional end (Joos, 2012).

Improvisation as a noncompetitive sport. With his seminal work, Johnstone

(1987) stressed the competitive nature of improv only as a means to get improvisers

together to collaborate and play together. In the opening to *Whose Line Is It Anyway?*, the

host always makes a point to note, "The points don't matter" (Hat Trick Productions &

Warner Bros. Television, 1998). Boal (2002) stressed the benefits of these theatrical

games to the social collective as a means of nonthreatening way to work out problems.

Boal's work tended more toward socio-drama, as did Moreno's and Fox's work. In this

study, while social competencies and semitherapeutic elements emerged from data, I

focused on the game-like quality and playful nature of this form of improvisation.

Furthermore, because improvisation is both process and product, I investigated both sides

of the arguments of process versus product creativity training.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Of the theory and research on improvisation, authors of the literature indicated connections of creativity, empathy, and social competency to improvisation (De Backer et al., 2012; Gesell, 2005; Koutsoupidou & Hargreaves, 2009; Miner et al., 2001) and theatrical improvisation in particular (Lobman, 2005; Maples, 2007; Sawyer, 2006; Zaunbrecher, 2012). In the past, researchers studied improvisation as a method or strategy for teaching creativity and building collaborative learning environments, but only in a general sense. In looking for a deeper meaning to understand why young adults pursue and practice theatrical improvisation outside of a standard college curriculum, I reviewed literature from different fields using different approaches. The findings from the study confirmed some of findings from this vein of research. However, much of the literature predated this study by over 5 years. These theoretical articles and studies are included as they serve to underpin and describe the concepts of this study and identify areas where research happened and current research is needed.

Rules and Structure of Improvisation

As with play, all forms of improvisation lie on the free play versus structured play continuum. Improvisation intended for performance (theatre, music, and dance) has rules and structure, which place the art form away from free play and more towards the structured end of that continuum. Gesell (2005) argued that theatrical improvisation must adhere to the rules of acceptance, trust, and presence. Actors and practitioners of theatrical improvisation have extrapolated these rules from the works of Spolin and Johnstone (Aho, 2006; Gesell, 2005; Joos, 2012; Sawyer, 2004; Zaunbrecher, 2011). The

rules and structure inform the actors or players and provide a greater opportunity for creative thought (Gesell, 2005). Furthermore, Gesell argued the rules should be thought of as irreducible in the context of theatrical improvisation. All three rules are important to the art form; the art fails to happen without all three. In several of the studies included in this review, researchers noted and discussed the necessity and role of the rules of improvisation.

Acceptance and the *yes, and…* rule. In theatrical improvisation, actors speak in terms of making an offer; this can be verbal or nonverbal (Spolin, 1987). The responsibility of any other actor on stage is not only to agree (say *yes*) but also to extend that offer by adding *and.* Adding just *yes* does not perpetuate the scene; adding *but* is really not accepting and poses a contradiction to the offer (Zaunbrecher, 2012). The rule of *yes, and…* serves two purposes: promoting ongoing scene and play framework through which cognition happens (Wiener, 1999; Zaunbrecher, 2012). Because rules and standard structure exist in theatrical improvisation, the actors begin to create meaning without confusion or disagreement.

Imagine a pick-up game of tag. Most people who wish to play the game come to it with a general framework. When someone violates one of the agreed upon conventions, play stops. An example would be if tagged, the *tagee* refuses to become *it,* a violation to a basic rule of the game. Acceptance means adhering to the framework or platform (Gesell, 2005; Sawyer, 2004; Zaunbrecher, 2012). The rules of the real world only exist in a theatrical improvisation if an actor presents them as such. If an actor says, "The sky is green," any other actor on stage must accept that statement and move that scene forward.

If the second actor fails to do so, the audience may laugh, but the scene has nowhere to go (Sawyer, 2004; Zaunbrecher, 2011, 2012). Gesell (2005) noted that agreement alone is not sufficient. The key and importance of acceptance (the *and* part) allows cocreation of an environment where opposing opinions can exist. Many nontheatrical organizations use this catch phrase for the reasons noted by Gesell, which making it a useful life skill (O'Neill et al., 2011).

Miner et al. (2001) studied organizational improvisation and noted that conflict sometimes occurred between team members when improvising. In this study, the researchers investigated improvisation where the *yes, and* rule did not exist and reported an increase in conflict within the groups studied. In the field of education, Berk and Trieber (2009) argued for the inclusion of theatrical improvisation to learner-centered teaching. In a collaborative classroom, teachers who negate what students offer to the learning process stop the process and, often, disengage the students (Berk & Trieber, 2009). In a case study of preschool teachers ($N = 4$) who used the *yes, and* rule as part of their play-based classroom, Lobman (2005) noted the teachers reported development of leadership skills for and engagement of the students as evolving from this rule of their classroom play. Sawyer (2004) argued for the necessity of acceptance in classroom discussion as a way for the group to learn as a collective. Although many consider acceptance as the golden rule of theatrical improvisation, Spolin (1987) described point of concentration as another valuable rule.

Point of concentration and presence. Within a scene, a goal or a problem always exists; the job of the improviser is to focus on that problem (Spolin, 1987). The

point of concentration provides a framework in the chaos so that spontaneous creation can occur. Zaunbrecher (2011) noted that focus could also mean the rules of the particular game. Gesell (2005) chose to argue more for the power of presence for helping to focus out extraneous factors and being in the moment. In their report of improvisational games used in a college mental health class, Berk and Trieber (2009) argued for the use of improv games with students of the Net Generation because of the students' characteristic tendency of overly multitasking. Berk and Treiber interpreted the rule of presence or point of concentration as being in the moment. Unfortunately, the authors did not perform a formal study, so while the findings were interesting, the validity is unreliable. However, the idea of being in the moment has real-life implications for not only students but also anyone who needs to work as a collective.

For Crooks (2007), presence and being in the moment are essential for team cohesion in the workplace. Crooks presented games of presence in sample workshop outline, stressed the importance of focusing on the rules of the games so that creativity could happen. In this way, Crooks and Zaunbrecher agreed. Nigh's arguments followed Gesell's interpretation of presence. Nigh's (2013) phenomenological study of the influences that dramatic centering exercises, similar to some improvisational warm-ups, had on student development, and indicated an increased capacity for collective awareness. Although the exercises Nigh investigated were passive, the concept of presence appeared a key aspect of the process. The students in Nigh's study reported a sense of trust between the other members that provided them with a sense of creative freedom. Interestingly enough, both sides of the role of presence spoke from the

educational and workplace perspectives. However, beyond Nigh's study, these arguments were theoretical and lacked scientific investigation.

Trust. In a reflective article, Maples (2007) described incorporating theatrical improvisational strategies to her middle school English class in hopes of cultivating students' different intelligences and engaging them in the subject matter. Although not an empirical study, Maples's (2007) study included reflection on the outcomes she observed: most notably, increased confidence and community by the students. Gesell (2005) attributed outcomes such as those Maples observed to the rule of trust. The trust rule has two prongs. The first involves trusting the process; the second involves trusting the others in the scene or group. Having shared rules increases the ability to communicate, integrate, and engage (Crooks, 2007).

Trusting the process involves a level of confidence within the activity. Wiener (1999) argued for the use of theatrical improvisation in developing interpersonal skills. Although Wiener spoke from a psychological standpoint, other researchers and scholars have echoed the idea. For the rule of trust, the literature reviewed bordered more in the psychological domain and the subjects of psycho and social drama. Trust plays a large role in therapeutic settings (Moreno, 2008). Humans generally feel more capable of spontaneity when they feel a sense of trust in the process or the others with whom they interact (Gesell, 2005). Because theatrical improvisation actors need to have the freedom for the spontaneity that the art form requires of them, additional research is needed to find out how actors perceive the influences of trust in their art work.

Trusting the other members of the scene depends on the reliability of fellow

players (Berk & Trieber, 2009; Crooks, 2007; Gesell, 2005). A tangential rule of trust is to make the other actors look good (Zaunbrecher, 2011). Fear of failure often acts as a block; knowing that another person always has your back can be incredibly empowering. Beyond trusting the team, trust includes the audience. Boal's (2002) work was in social theatre where communities included the audience to help work through community problems (Moreno, 2008). Wiener argued that people without the qualities described by these rules (unaware and unaccepting) often display the opposite qualities of being shallow and self-serving. Furthermore, people who do not trust and accept often fail to fulfill ethical social obligations that promote community (Wiener, 1999). The rules of theatrical improvisational and their applications in nontheatrical situations need further investigation from the perspective of the actors for increased awareness and insight.

Creativity and Improvisation

Although all art forms have been found to enhance learning, foster creativity, and promote social skills (Milgram, 2003; Reilly, 2009; Ribeiro & Fonseca, 201; Sanguinetti et al., 2005; Stevenson et al., n.d.), other researchers have argued that improvisational acting produces significant gains in these areas (Goldstein & Winner, 2012; Lobman, 2005; Sawyer; 2004; Vera & Crossan, 2005). In Belgium, De Backer et al. (2012) studied the potential long-term benefits of arts education to primary education curricula. Of the three forms of arts education studied, De Backer et al. reported improvisational acting to have the highest factor loading for creativity stimulation as measured by artists within that artistic medium. With these findings, the researchers added positive input to the discussion of arts education early in a child's development and for the sustainability of

such a program throughout a child's education. Unfortunately, the De Backer et al. study investigated a program inconsistent with most of the educational opportunities offered in the United States.

Sawyer (1999) described collaborative emergence as creativity that arises from a group activity. Novel ideas happen during improvisation; however, the group filters these ideas according to the appropriateness of the situation or scene, doing so together and almost instantly (Sawyer, 1999). Improvised scenes cannot be reduced or attributed to an individual performer; thus, these scenes need to be examined holistically (Berk & Trieber, 2009; Joos, 2012; Sawyer & DeZutter, 2009). With the framework of the rules, theatrical improvisers not only share mental models but also create knowledge together (Sawyer, 1999; Sawyer & DeZutter, 2009). Conversely, Zaunbrecher noted educational philosophers and scholars have examined the strategy of collaborative learning as it occurs in improvisational groups and determined this to influence the social competency and intrapersonal skills of the group members (Berk & Trieber, 2009; Goldstein & Winner, 2012; Sawyer & DeZutter, 2009). In addition to collaborative learning and development, Goldstein and Winner (2012) reported significant gains to theory of the mind (TOM) and empathy for students that studied improvisational acting over other forms of art education.

Social Skills

In this section, I describe specific skills as noted by authors of the literature. The researchers and authors noted in this section took different methodological approaches but arrived at similar findings. Some researchers have studied the connections

between improvisation and social skills development (empathy and adaptability) when improvisational acting is used as a learning strategy and organizational tool, but not resulting from the praxis of improvisation as art work.

Empathy and theory of the mind. Thinking of empathy development as seen as an emergent from the process of improvisation, Ribeiro and Fonseca (2011) described the shared experiences of improvising dance as leading to the development of kinesthetic empathy. Ribeiro and Fonseca (2011) attributed this empathy to the existence of mirror neutrons in the brain. Conversely, Ribeiro and Fonseca (2011) presented counterarguments that addressed the theory of mirror neurons exist in humans; these arguments hinged on a lack of observational research from the field of neural sciences. Goldstein and Winner (2012) performed two concurrent quantitative studies with elementary ($n = 75$) and high school students ($n = 28$) to determine if a positive correlation existed between acting training (improvisation) and the students' development of empathy and TOM. As control groups, Goldstein and Winner (2012) sampled music classes. Although noting limitations, which included preexistent classes and teacher reporting, the researchers determined an increase in both TOM and empathy for the high school students. Goldstein and Winner (2012) noted that the older students scored higher than did the younger ones. The researchers discussed the possibility that the older students had a higher capacity for empathy development. In rationalizing the sample for this study, I was interested to see if this could also be true of young adults at the collegiate level. Furthermore, I added to the discussion of empathy development as seen through the research and scholarly articles on role-playing.

Adaptability and problem solving. On an immediate level, improvisational actors have to adhere to the point of concentration rule; in doing so, actors must adapt and problem solve within the scene or games. Sawyer (2004) argued that within the classroom improvisation strategies help students develop skills they need in the real world. While controversial and still not validated, Ribeiro and Fonseca (2011) used the concept of mirror neurons to describe the action of collective decision-making. Ribeiro and Fonseca noted that improvisational dancers adhered to a structure of rules within a dance and collectively problem solve throughout the improvisation. Sawyer and DeZutter (2009) noted a need for a platform or structure from which the students in their study adapted the performance material for each performance. As I investigated the meaning participants held for theatrical improvisation, similar themes of development emerged from the participants' descriptions.

Underpinning their study on prior research that connected musical improvisation and creativity in children, Koutsoupidou and Hargreaves (2009) performed a mixed method study. Koutsoupidou and Hargreaves addressed the problem of creativity training in primary school music instruction as required in the National Curriculum of England. These researchers performed a quasi-experimental intervention in which the variable was the inclusion of improvisational music instruction to the students' music curricula. All the subjects in the experimental group ($n = 12$) scored higher on the posttest on the Webster's Measure of Creative Thinking in Music II (MCTM-II) than the control group ($n = 13$). As a call for future research, Koutsoupidou and Hargreaves (2009) discussed the need to study whether musical improvisation training can affect creativity gains in other

domains. In looking for other research, I could find no similar studies from the medium of theatrical improvisation. This lack of literature indicated a gap between the domains of research and provided an avenue for future research.

Social tolerance. In addressing tolerance and theatre, the works of Boal (2002), Freire (2001), and Fox (1994) come into play. These founding artists set out to bring people together in a nonviolent manner to address social issues. Of this genre of theatrical improvisation, a different branch of research emerged. I reviewed a few studies that represented a cross over between the fields of sociology, psychology, and education. In education, this genre is called Theatre in Education (TiE). Koukounaras-Liagis (2011) researched the question of whether a TiE program in two Greek schools could positively influence students' perceptions and attitudes towards religious and cultural diversity. While the researchers determined that the TiE program provided a framework that opened the dialogue for tolerance, they were unable to determine long-term effects of the program. Within the field of psychology, researchers reported sociotheatre and psychodrama in the form of theatrical improvisation and roleplaying aided in social skills training (Wiener, 1999). Another term that gained use is *applied theatre* (Taylor, 2002). Similar to TiE, applied theatre happens in nontheatrical settings; the performers and audience share the goal of nonviolent solutions to social issues for community building (Taylor, 2002). With researchers and authors arguing for the potential gains to social skills development, a gap appeared in the form of substantive research in this area.

Improvisation for Education

Prior researchers investigated and described how improvisation has been and could be incorporated in education both in and out of the classroom for students of all ages. Much of this literature predates this study by over 5 years. The next section reviews the literature specific to the practice of improvisation in education.

Within the classroom. The majority of studies in which researchers investigate the phenomenon of improvisation refer to musical improvisation. Koutsoupidou (2005) concluded through statistical analysis that older teachers used musical improvisation in their classes more than younger ones who had less experience. Across the curriculum in nonarts classes, educators have used theatrical improvisation as learning and teaching strategies rather than as an art form unto itself (i.e., Maples, 2007). Furthermore, most of the literature from this perspective represents reflection or theoretical points of view. Two researchers, Nigh (2013) and Meyer (2006), performed their dissertation work on drama exercises and theatrical improvisation (respectively) within theatre arts classes. I discuss the Meyer (2006) study toward the conclusion of this literature review, as Meyer's work closely resembles my study.

Outside the classroom. One possible reason researchers have conducted few studies on theatrical improvisation inside the classroom could be the decline of theatre arts education at the different levels of education. Policies such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Race to the Top, and Common Core have affected public school education to focus on core subjects such as math, science, and language arts (Amrein-Beardsley, 2009; A. Johnson, 2004; J. Johnson, 2010; Kataoka & Vandell, 2013). However, arts instruction

still occurs outside the classroom in the form or extracurricular activities, after school programs, and clubs. The eight articles I reviewed included a meta-analysis of after school arts programs (Stevenson, Limon, & Reclosada, n.d.), a dissertation on after school dramatic program for high school students (Stevenson, 2011), two quantitative studies with after school arts programs (Kataoka & Vandell, 2013; Milgram, 2003), and three studies at the collegiate level (Foubert & Urbanski, 2006; Graham & Donaldson, 1999; Stevenson & Clegg, 2011).

Although the study was over 10 years old at the time of data collection for this study, Milgram (2003) statistically determined a correlation between participation in non-academic after school activities (dance, drama, art, and social leadership) in high school and personal satisfaction in adult life. At the time of the study, Milgram noted limitations to the study, beyond students self-reporting, as having been strictly a quantitative study with a need for qualitative research to understand the relationship between creativity and future Pruetipibultham and Mclean lives. Stevenson et al. (n.d.) also noted a lack of qualitative research in this area while stressing the potential benefits arts education programs present to the challenges young adults will face in the 21st century.

Professional development. Maples (2007) and Lobman (2005) described benefits to educators of incorporating theatrical improvisation into the classroom; however, that involves professional development. Many educators lack the confidence to improvise within their classrooms (Jacobs, 2011; Sawyer, 2004a). Jacobs argued that all educators act and improvise when they teach. Sawyer argued against transmission teaching and for collaborative teaching as seen in theatrical improvisation groups. These observations

present an area for future research: theatrical improvisation and professional educator

training. Further research in theatrical improvisation would broaden the knowledge base

of teachers at any level of education (K–12 or higher education).

Organizational Improvisation

In searching for literature on improvisation and learning, I found articles

beginning in the late 1990s, which focused on improvisation, both theatrical and non-

theatrical, in organizations. Scholarly works with a nontheatrical basis from the 2000s

begin with discussions of ideas such as product development (Miner et al., 2001) and

move toward understanding the phenomenon for artificial intelligence (AI) studies

(Magerko et al., 2009). Other scholars (Gesell, 2005; Pruetipibultham & Mclean, 2010;

Sawyer, 2000) investigated theatrical improvisation and theatre training methodology.

Both lines of investigation noted more positive influences to performance and community

building than negative ones.

Theatre arts training might offer the greatest potential as a strategy for

organizational well-being (Senge et al., 2012). Through theatre arts training, people

internalize systemic operations that might result in behavioral changes that increase the

overall functioning of an organization (Pruetipibultham & Mclean, 2010). This concept

of operation adheres to Moreno's (2008) idea of a social atom reacting in unison. Miner

et al. (2001) reported on the learning outcomes of improvisation; Adler (2006) noted that

many business schools began including arts-based courses into the business curriculum in

the early 2000s.

Nontheatrical improvisation and organizations. Miner et al. (2001) performed a field study to investigate if and how people in organizations learn through improvisation. While the improvisation observed in the Miner et al. (2009) study was not theatrical, the basic tenets of nontheatrical improvisation remain the same. However, research on organizational improvisation follows a framework that resembles one of musical jazz rather than one of theatrical acting, thus representing a gap in the literature with regard to theatrical improvisation (Vendelø, 2009). Although separated by eight years, Vendelø noted the same benefits to organizations as did Miner et al. (2001) regarding innovation and problem solving. Negative aspects of incorporating improvisation with organizations could include a propensity to assume that solutions devised through improvisation will work in any situation (Vendelø, 2009). Vendelø described the difficulties in studying organizational improvisation as needing to be able to quantify the phenomenon, "bring stopwatches and copies of the written score of standard of activity being performed" (p. 453). Thus, many recent researchers used a quantitative approach to study organizational improvisation that left a lack of qualitative research in the field. Miner et al. noted that future research should also include other forms of improvisation to expand the effects on things such as social competency and leadership development.

Theatrical improvisation in organizational development. In addition to studies of organizational improvisation, studies have been performed (Crossan, 2005) and theoretical articles written of theatrical improvisation with organizations (Crooks, 2007; Sawyer, 2000). Crossan investigated improvisation for organizations in the late 1990s;

however, in those studies Crossan focused on the collaborative aspect of improvisation as seen in theatrical improvisation (Vera & Crossan, 2005). Sawyer (2000) added to the knowledge base connecting the fields of organizational learning and theatrical improvisation. From studies such as those performed by Crossan and Sawyer, improvisational training for businesses has developed in hopes of improving corporate team performance (Gesell, 2005). While studies from the late 1990s to mid-2000s have shifted a focus toward changes in the business world, none of the reviewed researchers indicated the transferability of their findings to education. The findings and theoretical arguments presented here of theatrical improvisation, as a strategy for education and workplace training, present compelling arguments for further investigation in different populations. In a similar vein, researchers examined the influences of play and education. Scholars and research experienced similar hurtles as theatrical improvisation scholars.

Play and Education

The ancient Greeks and Romans not only took play seriously but also used play as a basis for their education. Roman poet, Ovid (Burgess, 2014), noted that humans reveal their culture through their play. Following that thought, the ancient cultures revolved around the pursuit of a higher mental state, the arts, and physical fitness. After the Industrial Revolution, U.S. educational practice changed, and, so too, the spirit of play changed. Schools became arenas for grade competition with pursuits of arts and leisure pushed to the side. Researchers and scholars have noted the connections between play and the development of culture and person (Lobman, 2003; Statler, Heracleous, & Jacobs, 2011). Although few scholars argued against play in education, the role play

holds in current educational practices remains unclear.

The paradox and necessity of serious play. To understand the juxtaposition of the two words—serious play—each word needs consideration on its own. As with theatrical improvisation, playing exists under certain rules or conditions. Play scholars argued that for play to happen it must be voluntary, not real, unconnected with a material interest, timeless in nature, and fun (Brown, 2010; Caillois, 1958; Huizinga, 1950). Furthermore, Huizinga described that activities could have the spirit of play without totally conforming to all the rules. Statler et al. (2011) described the intentional practice of play for purpose as *serious play.* Using the play spectrum as defined by Caillois (1958), made the concept of serious play easier to understand. At one end of the spectrum lies free play, or *paidia,* at the other end structured play, or *ludus.* Placing activities with the spirit of play on the play continuum toward the *ludus* end, best describes serious play. Some play scholars would argue that play can be serious, but not all activities called serious play constitutes play (Brown, 2010).

Play scholars, philosophers, and scientists agree on the importance and features of play (Burghardt, 2010; Statler et al., 2011). Disagreement lies in the value and understanding of play and education held by educational stakeholders (Burghardt, 2010; Miller, 2010). Some say the opposite of play is work (Burghardt, 2010). Others (Brown, 2010; Sutton Smith, 2001) argued that the opposite of play is *not play*. Following the logic held by most educational stakeholders, students should play outside of school and should work in school on serious studies. Contrary to this idea, school is not children's work (Bodrova, 2003; Gray, 2013). Furthermore, no reason exists why education has to

lack fun.

Elements of play in education. Huizinga (1950) argued that all human activities exemplify some, if not multiple, elements of play. These elements shape and create a culture, and without a balance of these elements, cultural decay occurs (Caillois, 1958). In this section, I provide an overview of the elements of play in in relation to the reviewed literature.

Agôn and alea. Most of the current educational practice exhibits the spirit of competitive play or *agôn*. Take, for example, the name of the last national education initiative: Race to the Top. Not only are students competing, so too are the educators and institutions to better themselves against some scale. While seeming quite different, *agôn* and *alea* are often mistaken. Chance can play a larger role in a competitive activity than suspected. The skills to master a challenge might exist; however, something as unpredictable as the weather could affect the outcome of the challenge. After-school sports, represent a good example of actual *agôn,* rather than just the spirit of play.

Video and computer games that simulate battle and fighting fall under the heading of *agôn*. Since 2002, many educational institutions, both K–12 and colleges, have pursued the use of electronic game for education or practical applications; in 2002 Pelling coined the term, *gamification,* for this activity (Jakubowski, 2014). Some researchers consider electronic games involving fighting to be violent and to affect players in a negative manner (Colwell & Payne, 2000; Gentile, Lynch, Linder, & Walsh, 2004). Colwell and Payne, and Gentile et al. performed quantitative studies in which both sets of researchers identified correlations between video games and qualities identified in the

studies as negative. However, the negative qualities included lack of free and family time and not what they hypothesized (increased anger and aggression). Although Burghardt (2010) argued that the consequences to different types of play are unknown, other researchers (Colwell & Payne, 2000; Gentile et al., 2004) argued that electronic games of competition have negative consequences and have no place in education. Although the discussion of gaming veers slightly off topic, by asking participants about their perspectives of their activities, I hoped to provide further insight into how educational stakeholders viewed play at the collegiate level. Afterschool sports still hold a place in education, but slowly educators are using of *agôn* as their instructional method and not just a strategy. Many educational institutions and business have incorporated gamification in the curriculum and training.

Huizinga (1950) and Caillois (1958) described the negative effects of too much *agôn* as societal corruption in the form of cheating and the disintegration of structure. While *alea* exists outside learning environments, and the spirit of *alea* could happen in any activity, I could find few articles describing or investigating *alea* in education (Burnard, 2002; Resnick & Wilensky, 1998). Resnick and Wilensky used the teaching strategy of role-playing to engage their high school students in probabilistic thinking. In this article, the spirit of play used in instruction was mimicry, but the content was *alea*. Resnick and Wilensky described the influences of the role-playing and not of chance. Resnick and Wilensky noted a greater degree of retention, synthesis, and engagement in the subject than through lecture style instruction.

Caillois (1958) gave the example of gambling as *alea.* The negative connotation

of the example, may have influenced a gap in the research. I contend that chance play can and does happen in education, in the form of arts education and specifically theatrical improvisation and does not have to be negative. As noted in the discussion on theatrical improvisation, the unscripted nature of the art form gives it the propensity toward chance. Scholars and researchers (Gesell, 2005; Lobman, 2003; Sawyer & DeZutter, 2009) argued that theatrical improvisation fosters creativity with the adherence of the rules (acceptance, trust, and presence). Themes of creativity development resulting from unscripted art emerged from the data connecting chance and creativity development. Furthermore, the findings indicated a potential need for more *alea* in higher education as a rationale for the existence of extracurricular activity theatrical improvisation groups.

Ilinx. I had similar findings for *ilinx* in the literature as I did for *alea*. I concluded dizzying play, *ilinx*, lacked significant research in the field of education due to its negative connotations. Huizinga (1950) and Caillois (1958) both noted signs of corruption of *ilinx* to be drug usage and depression. Following that concept, several scholars and researcher across many fields and disciplines noted an increase in depression and drug usage with today's young people (de Man & Leduc, 1995; Ellis et al., 2012; Gray, 2012; Martin et al., 2005). Gray (2012) argued that children need not only play, but also free, unstructured play as a means of combating depression and creating positive learning environments.

Mimicry. Pretend play happens a great deal across curriculum as a teaching strategy in the form of role-playing (Ferguson, 2011; Frederking, 2005; Resta & Laferrière, 2007). I discuss role-playing and pretend play in this section more as an

educational strategy and in more depth as acting for the purpose of art work further in the paper. In reviewing the literature, researchers and scholars appear to have accepted the practice of serious play in the form of role-playing (Statler et al., 2011). Developmental psychologist Piaget (1962) attributed many cognitive benefits to children's development through pretend play. Humans possess the ability think *as if,* use those pretend experiences to further their learning, and still cognitively understand pretend experiences as unreal (Nichols & Stich, 2000). Understanding this concept opens worlds of opportunities for experiential learning, which physical school environments cannot provide.

In gamification where the intended goal of the game is purposeful, role-playing happens virtually in make believe worlds. Resta and Laferrière (2007) presented a meta-analysis of studies that supported the use of technology with collaborative learning in higher education. As the technologies have increased so too have the possible venues for learning. Consequently, researchers provided findings supporting the positive benefits role-playing has for students in higher education (Resta & Laferrière, 2007). Pirius and Creel (2010) performed a qualitative case study in which they studied the culture, gender, and identity of their students as these concepts evolved over a semester of playing *World of Worldcraft* (a computer fantasy based role-playing game). In a case study using another role-playing software called *Second Life,* Ferguson (2011) observed collaborative learning occurring between the educator and the students. Pirius and Creel (2010) noted that collaborative and distributive learning occurred with their participants; moreover, the knowledge the participants gained was not static. While role-playing can happen without

computer technology, Anderson (2011) noted that computers provide educators with the potential for distributive learning. Anderson (2011) used the term *crowd sourcing* for distributive learning or operations through technology. Both instructional strategies offer opportunities that can replace or augment transmission style instruction in a manner that might be more engaging to students.

Distributive, cooperative, and collaborative learning also factor in live action role-play (Cossa, 2006; Frederking, 2005; Ross & Tomlinson, 2010). Frederking (2005) performed a longitudinal study over a period of 6 years. Though experimental in design, Frederking noted a limitation to the study as not being purely experimental because he could not control all the variables. However, Frederking reported significant statistical data supporting the effectiveness of role-playing with a high school U.S. government course as it related to higher exam scores and student evaluations. Pässilä et al. (2012) and Doerr-Stevens, Beach, and Boeser (2011) demonstrated how role-playing using theatre based strategies within the classroom fostered collective action for positive social change.

In the field of education, researchers investigated role-playing with regard teaching and learning strategies. Within the field of psychology, live action role-playing falls under the headings of sociodrama and borders on psychodrama; Moreno (2008) intended psychodrama for therapeutic purposes. In the game and leisure field, live action role-play is known as LARPing. As an artistic medium, role-playing is acting. The study of role-playing has evolved over the last decade as well as a call for a coalescing of the knowledge from the various fields and disciplines (Hitchens & Drachen, 2008). In

looking at the term, role-play, the word, *play,* should still be noted. Although one trend to make education more fun includes *gamifying* education, it should not be at the expense of the fun that is a basic tenet of play.

Improvisation as play. In thinking of the paradox of seriousness and play, the bias of ludophobia appears to exist in theatre arts education for improvisation, as it often considered not serious theatre. Although shows such as *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* and *Saturday Night Live* are purely improvisational or are rooted in improvisation, no improvisational actor has won a significant award (for example a Tony or Emmy). The cultural value placed on theatrical improvisation in the adult world trickles through to the educational world. While Sawyer (2000, 2004a, 2004b) and others (Crooks, 2007; Meyer, 2006; Nigh, 2013) argued for the importance of improvisational training, most of the authors and researchers argued for improvisation as a teaching tool and not as an art form itself (Berk & Trieber, 2009; Cossa, 2006; Kraus, 2008; Lenz et al., 2010). In many ways, the difference in approaches and praxis follow the educational argument of process versus product. Sawyer (2004a) made the argument that in theatrical improvisation the process and the product are the same. In training and performing theatrical improvisation, actors have fun (Myer, 2006; Sawyer and DeZutter, 2009), having fun should not negate the educational value the art work might foster.

Around the world, people play at theatrical improvisation. In the early 1980s, Johnstone evolved the improvisational format his company worked on into a mock competition format called Theatresports. Teams of improvisers play theatre games against each other for points. In this way, I see three elements of play coming together:

agôn, *alea*, and mimicry. Theatresports still happen all over the world in high schools, community groups, and colleges ("International Theatresports Institute," n.d.). Todd created another example of improvisation currently played: *Improv Everywhere* ("Improv everywhere," n.d.). In this format, Todd crowd sources performers as an improvisational flashmob the purpose of making people laugh. Perhaps, improvisational acting experiences such as these last two examples help to balance the play elements in a heavily competitive society. In performing a phenomenological study, I gained insight into what motivates, excites, and justifies why college students participate in extracurricular activity improvisation. I give the balance of play elements as one possible concept.

Flow and Education

Reviewing the concept of flow, I noted people experience the greatest intrinsic rewards when their skills match the challenges presented to them (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). When this condition occurs, people have the greatest likelihood to not only enjoy themselves but also stretch their capabilities and build their self-confidence (Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989). In this way, people process, change, and report higher overall levels of satisfaction (Csikszentmihalyi & LaFevre, 1989). Although Csikszentmihalyi (1997) alluded to potential beneficial factors (leadership, creativity, and motivation) that relate to flow, no researchers have conducted studies to explore the influence flow experiences have on the development of emerging adults. In the field of education, researchers seek to uncover the elusive nature of ideas such as motivation and engagement in schools. Following the concept of flow, where skill and challenge match, I

reviewed the current and seminal research of flow to education. In one such seminal study, Csikszentmihalyi and LeFevre (1989) described flow from the field of leisure research. This idea ties back to the ancient Greek and Roman philosophy of education being a method to pursue leisure studies where leisure provides the greatest source of life rewarding experiences (Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989; Huizinga, 1950) and adds positive support to serious play in education at all age levels.

Flow for students. In recent years, the higher levels of apathy and disengagement in education correlate with school dropout (Ainley et al., 2008; Schmidt, 2010; Senge, 2012; Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Shneider, & Shernoff, 2003). To investigate this phenomenon, Shernoff et al. (2003) performed a quantitative study in which they investigated how students spent their time in high school and under which conditions they reported engagement with the curriculum. While the researchers reported many limitations (i.e., students self-reporting, discrepancies between those who reported and those who did not, and failure to take into account teacher development levels), Shernoff et al. reported that the potential for flow in students to be greatest when the classroom activities foster positive emotions and are challenging and relevant to the students. Of interest, Shernoff et al. not only described transmission instruction as not conducive to flow, but also a method slow to change. In 2015, this observation holds true, and transmission instruction is used in many classrooms (particularly in higher education) across the country (Sawyer, 2004b; Senge, 2012).

Shernoff et al. (2003) noted that while teaching strategies, such as collaborative learning, offer a high level of engagement and potential for flow experiences, participants

in their study reported experiencing flow during individual classroom work. Csikszentmihalyi (1991) noted that flow could happen individually or in groups, but the intrinsic reward is self-actualized. To answer the question of which flow experience is better, alone or with others, Walker (2010) performed a three-part qualitative study. With respect to education, I stress the importance of Walker's study in that generally students learn in groups. Walker (2010) termed flow experienced in a group of people as social flow. With the findings from the study, Walker supported the hypothesis that operating as a team enhanced the joy the participants felt during flow. I see this information as relevant to education, but also to theatrical improvisers in educational environments who practice and perform as a team.

Flow for educators. The question of whether or not people experience more joy from individual flow or social flow could be included in the serious play paradox discussion. Classes or groups where many members experience flow could provide greater motivation and engagement. As a social atom, classrooms work together for both teacher and students (Moreno, 2008). However, as described in the literature, transmission instruction with educator-led learning exists in most classrooms (DeZutter, 2008). Bakker (2005) studied potential crossover effects of music teachers' flow experiences and flow experiences of their students. Bakker sought to answer the research question: if music teachers in a Dutch music school experience flow, do their students also experience flow? Answering this question would have added to the knowledge base for social flow and flow in education. However, Bakker (2005) examined variables that described job satisfaction and not flow experiences in the classroom. Bakker underpinned

this study on emotional contagion theory and suspected that flow could be contagious. However, Bakker reported data that described flow outside the classroom and not as it occurred within a single experience. The inclusive report still leaves a gap in the knowledge base as to what influence members of a group with different levels of involvement have over the flow experiences of the other members. Future research in this area would determine the amount, if any, of influence educators' flow experiences have in relation to student flow experiences. Research on social flow will also add to the general knowledge base of enjoyment in school and, therefore, possible positive benefits of increased engagement and motivation.

Flow and extracurricular activities. Some of the literature presented studies that investigated arts education within the curriculum (Goldstein & Winner, 2012); however, the majority of arts education has been pushed to extracurricular or entirely out of school and into community based programs (Stevenson et al., n.d.). A growing movement exists that argues for the benefits of extracurricular activities as part of a well-rounded or complete education (Senge, 2012). Foubert and Urbanski (2006) showed that participation in clubs and organizations had a positive influence on the development of prosocial skills. Furthermore, higher education staff tended to valorize those students who participated (Foubert & Urbanski, 2006). Although the researchers performed this study over eight years ago, current researchers and educational stakeholders use the measure that Foubert and Urbanski (2006) used to evaluate student development (SDTLI) in higher education today, thus adding relevance Foubert and Urbanski's study. Stevenson and Clegg (n.d.) argued that students who participated in extracurricular

activities oriented themselves toward their future lives more than those who did not participate in extracurricular activities did. This idea or participation in non-academic activities speaks to the goal of education as being something that prepares students for their future. Academic classes alone may not provide a complete training adequately to prepare young adults for their future.

  Surplus psychic energy. As of 2010, humans expended close to three trillion hours a year on leisure activities (Ross & Tomlinson, 2010). Before the digital age, many people spent their free time watching television or using their time passively in other ways (McGonigal, 2012; Ross & Tomlinson, 2010). As video gaming grew in popularity, so too did the expenditure of free time playing interactive games and entertainment (McGonigal, 2011). In *Reality is Broken*, McGonigal (2011) argued that many people lack feelings they experience in real life that they experience in game or virtual worlds, making the real world increasingly less attractive and gaming more attractive. Gentile et al. (2004) argued that video games present a problem to society. Contradictorily, Ross and Tomlinson (2010) argued for the strategy of turning tasks into games —*gamifying* leisure time activities to promote social good. Within the context of electronic gaming, Ross and Tomlinson noted limitations for using this cognitive surplus as being wealth and access to technology. However, as noted earlier, in many ways Boal, Moreno, and Fox used psychic or cognitive surplus in the form of applied theatre for decades (Blatner & Wiener, 2007). The significant similarity between the two leisure activities or gaming and improvisational theatre lies in the fun.

  This brings me back to flow, where optimal enjoyment happens when skills meet

challenge. Watching television cannot produce a state of flow the way playing can

(Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989). While these arguments would seem to advocate for

infusing work with the spirit of play or serious play, Csikszentmihalyi and LeFevre

(1989) noted social conventions dissuaded people from enjoying their work where the

researchers noted the participants reported their greatest number of flow experiences.

Csikszentmihalyi and LeFevre (1989) conjectured that the lack of flow they observed in

their participants free time indicated that the participants did not know how to organize

and optimize leisure. Fostering optimal leisure activities and instructing young adults

how to channel their psychic surplus could produce positive social good on the societal

level.

  Optimizing leisure for flow. When speaking of flow, like other scholars, I speak

in terms of degrees. People only experience true flow a few times in their lifetime;

however, flow like experiences in which people achieve some intrinsic reward can

happen several times a day (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Teng (2011) posed several

hypotheses concerning the traits and characteristics of people who experience some

degree of flow. Of particular interest to my proposed study, Teng (2011) positively

supported the hypotheses that self-directedness negatively related to flow. While self-

starters and people who like to work individually can experience flow, higher degrees,

and occurrences of flow occur in social or group flow (Teng, 2011; Walker 2010).

Nonacademic or extracurricular activities that occur as groups may foster skills that help

young adults to be engaged and motivated in whatever endeavors they chose. Although

scholars and researchers discussed different aspects of what I have presented in this

review, within the scope of my research I could not find any research investigating the phenomenon, which I investigated. In the next section, I discuss different approaches researchers took within the literature and describe why I feel a phenomenological approach was the best fit for this study.

Literature Review Related to Methodologies

In the previous section of the literature review, I described how the various theoretical articles and studies shaped the proposed research. In this section, I focus on the different methodologies and approaches in preparation for Chapter 3 where I describe my methodological choice. Because of the various fields and domains (education, arts, business, and psychology) encompassing the different concepts (flow, cognition, development, creativity, and social skills), researchers took many different methodological approaches. In the older studies, researchers (Bakker, 2005; Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989; Milgram, 2003; Shernoff et al., 2003) predominantly chose a quantitative approach. Furthermore, in all the studies where researchers examined flow (Teng, 2011; Walker; 2010), they did so using a quantitative approach. In more recent studies (Joos, 2012; Magerko et al., 2009; Stevenson, 2011) and in areas where group dynamics held importance (DeZutter, 2008; Nigh, 2013; Sawyer & DeZutter, 2009), researchers chose a qualitative approach. Leisure and extracurricular activity researchers approached their investigations both quantitatively (Foubert & Urbanski, 2006; Graham & Donaldson, 1999) and qualitatively (Kataoka & Vandell, 2013; Stevenson & Clegg, 2011). Only few of researchers mentioned in this review used a

mixed methodology (Ainley et al., 2008; De Backer et al., 2012; Koutsoupidou &

Hargreaves, 2009).

Quantitative Methodologies from the Literature

Based on the research questions in which researchers sought to quantify

phenomena (theatrical improvisation, flow activities, and extracurricular activities) and

address correlations between variables (acting, improvisation, empathy, creativity, and

flow), researchers from the reviewed literature took a quantitative approach using pre-

existing instruments (Foubert & Urbanski, 2006; Goldstein & Winner, 2012; Smith,

Koppes, & Vodanovich, 2012). Choosing to approach investigations quantitatively, these

researchers presented findings based on degrees, measures, and amounts. Overall, the

strengths of the quantitative approaches lie in the scales and instruments the researchers

used.

Csikszentmihalyi performed several quantitative studies in which he examined

and measured flow. The tool that many, including Csikszentmihalyi, used to collect flow

data was the Experience Sampling Method or ESM (Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989;

Shernoff et al., 2003; Shernoff, 2010). To obtain data, participants wore electronic pagers

that the researchers programmed to beep at irregular intervals throughout the day

(depending on the study). When the pager went off, participants wrote in journals and

took a brief Likert-type survey reporting on their flow conditions. As flow is an

experiential, albeit ephemeral condition, immediacy of data validates the ESM. While I

sought to understand if flow could be a factor in theatrical improvisation, stopping that

activity to have participants report their feelings would have invasively stopped the art work and changed the nature of the experience.

To measure flow and determine the potential for a crossover between teachers and students, Bakker (2005) used the Work reLated Flow scale or WOLF (as cited in Bakker, 2005). The WOLF allows respondents to report in three areas that Bakker determined constitute the principles of flow at work: (a) absorption, (b) work enjoyment, and (c) intrinsic work motivation. Smith et al. (2012) also used the WOLF to measure flow in the workplace. Researchers who used the WOLF repeatedly checked the reliability of the scale prior to its use. In these studies, Bakker and Smith et al. collected data after the experiences. Not to interrupt the actors in my study, the WOLF could have been adapted to determine if the improvisers experienced flow; however, this implied admittance to the concept when the questions asked sought to determine what the participants made of the experience and not to superimpose a pre-existing theme.

Using three interrelated studies, Walker (2010) examined whether people experience a greater degree of enjoyment from social flow or individual flow. With each study, Walker built upon the findings from the prior and focused the investigation based on limitations the researcher observed. In the first study, the participants ($n = 95$) self-reported experiences and flow levels. Walker determined that participants might have completely different tasks on which they reported. Thus in the second study, Walker controlled the activities having the subjects ($n = 30$) all play paddleball alone and together. This time, Walker questioned whether working as a team influenced flow. For the third study, Walker had the participants ($n = 48$) working interdependently. In the

final study, the participants reported a state of flow with the most enjoyability. In many

ways, the first two studies resembled pilot tests. While Walker reported on all three

studies, the researcher reported on different measures, participants, and activities that

made the findings difficult to determine in terms of reliability and validity.

Teng (2011) approached an investigation to discover the antecedents or precursor

personality traits for individuals who experience flow during computer gaming using a

modified version of the TCI-240. Teng stated that the TCI-240 took a long time to

administer. Therefore, the researcher used the TCI-56 scale citing previous researchers

(Adan, Serra-Grabulosa, Caci, & Natale, 2009 as cited in Teng, 2011) who demonstrated

the reliability of the scale. Teng invited the participants ($n = 372$) to use online gaming

sites and included the incentive of gift certificates through lottery. Of the literature

reviewed for this study, Teng represented a small number of researchers who described

their sampling procedure and ethical concerns. In addition, Teng thoroughly reported the

methods, displayed results, and discussed findings of the study. Although not

generalizable beyond the online gaming context, Teng provided compelling insight on the

relationship of flow and character traits. Teng noted a gap in the research of personality

and online gaming. Researchers, who investigated flow (Bakker, 2010; Teng, 2011), play

(Foubert & Urbanski, 2006), and improvisation (Koutsoupidou, 2005) addressed one or

two of the concepts, not together and not regarding education.

A few other researchers used different quantitative instruments, which I could

have used in my study (Foubert & Urbanski, 2006, Shernoff et al., 2003). One such

instrument included the Student Development Task and Lifestyle Inventory (SDTLI).

Shernoff et al. assessed the student engagement through the lens of flow ($n = 526$) using secondary data from the Sloan Study of Youth and Social Development (SSYSD). The strength of Shernoff et al.'s study included the large, diverse sample of high school students. The weakness lies in the age of the data and the study. Upon further investigation, I could not find an updated data set of the SSYSD. Shernoff et al. reported findings that pointed to student disengagement in school came from their sense of a lack of meaning and challenge found in teacher initiated instruction. The researchers' analysis added to the knowledge base supporting educational reform away from transmission instruction to a more collaborative learning environment.

In a few of the studies of arts education, the researchers approached the investigations experimentally (Goldstein & Winner, 2012; Koutsoupidou 2005). Koutsoupidou investigated the value and status music teachers gave to teaching musical improvisation through the teachers' practices and perceptions of value of improvisation to education. Although Koutsoupidou studied primary level music educators ($N = 62$) in England, the findings from ANOVA hold significance to all arts education that have an element of improvisation. The survey revealed that primary educators believe that improvisation has positive effects not only on children's musical development but also on creative development. Koutsoupidou reported that a large percentage of the participants (76%) used musical improvisation in various ways; however, the researcher did not detail the differing usages employed by the participants. Although these educators implied an understood value of the art work, less than a third of the participants used some form of improvisation on their own initiative and not as mandated by some curriculum. The

perceptions and practices of educators' attitudes toward improvisation training are under

investigated (Koutsoupidou, 2005). While it is unclear whether Koutsoupidou's findings

could be transferable to other arts educators in other countries, the researcher presented

data that could serve as a springboard for future research in improvisational education.

Goldstein and Winner (2012) performed a quasi-experimental study to determine

whether developmental differences in empathy exist and, if so, how much for students

who participate in acting training. To investigate this, Goldstein and Winner conducted

two congruent studies in an art school conducting pre and post-tests, which included

several pre-existing measures (*Faux Pas, Strange Stories, Reading the Mind in the Eyes,*

Index of Empathy for Children, and Wechsler Intelligence Scale Fourth Edition, as cited

in Goldstein and Winner, 2012). In both studies, Goldstein and Winner examined two

afterschool groups: a visual arts group ($n = 35$ elementary and $n = 24$ high school) and an

acting group ($n = 40$ elementary school and $n = 28$ high school). The researchers

described these limitations to the study: nonrandom selection of participants and outdated

video material for theory of the mind (TOM) post-tests. Because both the elementary

group and high school groups trained in improvisational acting rather than scripted

acting, the findings could indicate a potential influence of improvisational acting toward

development of empathy and TOM. Again, while the approach and methodology of

Goldstein and Winner added to the overall picture of my investigation, their findings

represented a specific aspect of the themes that emerged from the data in my study.

Mixed Methodologies from the Literature

Of the many studies I reviewed, only two groups of researchers (Ainley et al., 2008; Koutsoupidou & Hargreaves, 2009) took a mixed method approach. Ainley et al. argued that while studying the levels and degrees of flow that high school students ($n = 35$) experienced, the quality of flow as perceived by high school students ($n = 10$) represents a more robust picture of the phenomenon. Koutsoupidou and Hargreaves took a different approach. These researchers performed a quasi-experimental study with pre- and post-tests and intervention; however, they analyzed data qualitatively and presented them quantitatively. Although Koutsoupidou and Hargreaves studied creativity development as a positive correlative of musical improvisation training, the line of study continued the discussion of arts education advocacy within the curriculum. De Backer et al. (2012) approached their research questions using mixed methods because the researchers wanted to know how arts education related to creativity and how the art teachers perceived sustainability for their programs. Similarly, I could have employed mixed method approach incorporating empirical quantitative and qualitative data to investigate theatrical improvisation at the higher education level; however, this did not quite address the research question with which I used to determine how students made meaning of the experiences not quantify them.

Qualitative Methodologies from the Literature

While researchers from the literature investigated flow using quantitative approaches, those researchers who studied group dynamics (theatrical improvisation) used qualitative approaches (DeZutter, 2008; Myer, 2006; Sawyer, 2003). Using a

reliable measure allowed quantitative researchers to investigate phenomenon statically and quantifiably. Because both flow and improvisation happen dynamically and can be interrupted (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), reflections of the experience as data would appear to be strengths to this approach.

Although other researchers who performed various case studies cited in this review described inherent value of improvisation to the development of social and cognitive capacities, scarce few investigated theatrical improvisation as a lived experience. Art and the personal experience of creating it and viewing it defy the removal of the person from the reporting of the experience. As seen in qualitative studies (DeZutter, 2008; Lobman, 2003; Nigh, 2006; Stevenson, 2011), anecdotal reports of experiences in make-believe worlds can provide insights into the phenomenon of value that statistical reporting could not.

Action research. Sanguinetti et al. (2005) and Koukounaras-Liagis (2011) approached their investigation through action research in hopes of influencing future practice of adult educators. Miles et al. (2014) described action research as studies in which researchers and participants work together in the investigative process. Sanguinetti et al. (2005) investigated the pedagogy of generic skills for adults. As part of the discussion on the goals and purpose of education, Sanguinetti et al. argued that no difference exists between child pedagogy and adult pedagogy. Sanguinetti et al. offered the following operational definition of pedagogy: "Pedagogy is about the processes and dynamics of teaching and learning, including purposes, methods, multiple literacies, relationships, strategies, management, physical environments, power relations and social

contexts involving learning" (p. 275). Using this definition and data from the participants, the researchers, who were also the participants, suggested that pedagogy in any context involves more than teacher-initiated instruction; moreover, learning of generic skill depends on the dynamic nature of pedagogy (Sanguinetti et al. 2005). The researchers constructed the definition based on prior theory; the creation of this definition added to the scholarly knowledge of pedagogy and is a strength of the study. A weakness of this study lies in the research approach and the ethical considerations that the researchers/participants benefit in some way that may unduly influence the outcome of the study.

In a similar manner, because of the action research approach, Koukounaras-Liagis (2011) presented arguments in support of employing TiE as an educational strategy to influence students' perception of cultural diversity. Although the goal of action research appears legitimate, Hammersley (2002) argued that combining the two factors of action research (research and political or social action) poses a threat to either the inquiry or the action that true isomorphism cannot exist between the two factors. Thus, Koukounaras-Liagis offered strong support for inclusion of theatre arts programs as a means for social education; however, the findings from the study represent an editorial stance rather than an empirical one.

Case studies. Sawyer and DeZutter (2009) examined the group dynamics of DeZutter's afterschool theatrical improvisation group. The group consisted of 13 students age 11–17. While an ethical concern over the relationship of participants and the researcher weakened the study, having Sawyer, who is considered a pioneer in the field

of theatrical improvisation research (Myer, 2006), strengthened the reliability of the study. Sawyer and DeZutter argued that to study theatrical improvisation, they needed to focus on observable interactions rather than more traditional data collection such as interviews. Data collection in the form of interviews would have given the researchers an incomplete picture. Sawyer and DeZutter video recorded performances and rehearsals and used interaction analysis, which included using the computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), Transana. Sawyer and DeZutter identified two types of dramatic structure that the participants cocreated. Of relevance to my study, Sawyer and DeZutter reported on the collaborative emergence that can happen in afterschool adolescent, theatrical improvisation group.

Magerko et al. (2009) also studied theatrical improvisation using a case study approach. Using arguments similar to those presented by Sawyer and DeZutter (2009), Magerko et al. collected data through video recordings and analyzed these data using the CAQDAS, Anvil. Magerko et al. performed what they termed *reflective analysis* through which the participants ($n = 7$), who were professional theatrical improvisers with varying levels of expertise, worked with the researchers reviewing the recordings and analyzing data. The researchers noted a limitation to this analysis as the action of reflection itself, but argued that cognitive instruments (ESM) employed during the improvisation would have invasively stopped the activity. Magerko et al. argued that theatrical improvisers inherently self-reflect as part of their art work. Although I considered using this type of data collection and analysis, I agreed with Magerko et al. who noted that they sought to

understand the action of improvisation; instead, I gleaned meaning from the improvisers' experiences.

Stevenson and Clegg (2011) added to the knowledge base of what value college students in the United Kingdom give to the extracurricular activities in which they participated, and how the subjects ($n = 61$) derived from a larger purposive sample ($n = 640$) felt this participation might influence their future lives. The information Stevenson and Clegg reported represented a large diverse demographic of college students; however, the extracurricular activities varied between students, and the researchers made no distinction between the various types of extracurricular activities (work, art, or athletic). In comparison, Reilly (2009) studied two high school aged males who participated in extracurricular activities (community service and competitive gaming) to determine whether and how the extracurricular activities influenced the participants' intentions for life choices. In both of these case studies (Reilly, 2009; Stevenson & Clegg, 2011), the participants reported rationales for doing extracurricular activities as challenging, motivating, community building, fun, and future orienting. Stevenson and Clegg presented the idea of temporality, which Reilly did not. Some participants reported doing an extracurricular activity as potentially benefitting them in the future; other reported doing the extracurricular activity for the intrinsic rewards they experienced at the time of the activity. The two participants in the Reilly study reported similarly. With the diversity of the activities, it would be interesting to see if one type of activity promoted a specific temporality or rationale for participating in a specific extracurricular activity. A present temporality based on intrinsic rewards could be an indicator of flow.

Older case studies (Lobman, 2003; Miner et al., 2001) added to the bigger picture of the study of improvisation; moreover, they marked the decline of investigation in this field of study. Current research on improvisation tends more toward music education (Koutsoupidou & Hargreaves, 2009) and artificial intelligence design (Magerko et al., 2009). Methodologically, the case study approaches aligned with the researchers' questions but did not influence the design of my study because the researchers investigated specific cases that did not inform my study.

From the current literature, two researchers (Joos, 2011; Stevenson, 2011) performed qualitative studies (grounded theory and ethnography, respectively). Joos noted the negative perception Western culture holds for improvisation. Because of the lack of planning in improvisation, often, pragmatic rational thinkers hesitate to leave future outcomes to chance. This negative perception of improvisation echoes what Caillois (1958) noted about *alea* and the place the element of chance holds for a culture. Joos used action theory to ground his investigation of theatrical improvisation. Although scholars of action theory research argued for a step-by-step process to explain action (Joos, 2011), Joos presented evidence that theatrical improvisers act with a moment to moment flow-like dynamic that could be advantageous to social development and goals. Through observation and analysis, Joos reported that improvisers employ several modes of action. Furthermore, Joos argued for future researchers to interview improvisers to supply data from the participants' point of view, which was the intent of the present study.

Stevenson (2011) ethnographically studied an afterschool youth performing arts company in California to determine if youth arts could serve as a catalyst for social change. Although Stevenson reported that participants ($n = 18$) experienced not only social but also personal change as influenced by their participation in the company, the findings may not be generalizable because the sampled performing arts group focused on social issues. A performance group without such a focus might not attain the same results. To gain insight on whether improvisers without a social change goal focus experience similar outcomes as Stevenson's participants, I examined an improvisation group that only focused on improvisation for entertainment.

Phenomenological studies. Although researchers who performed case studies, ethnographies, and grounded theory research extended the knowledge in specific areas, the approaches taken still lack the perspective I sought on the shared lived experience. Phenomenological studies provide information about the experiences from the inside (van Manen, 1990). Five of the researchers (Burnard, 2002; Myer, 2006; Nigh, 2006; Treff, 2008; Tuisku, 2010) from the reviewed literature, who performed a phenomenology study, investigated, either tangentially or directly, theatre arts training or improvisation. Of least relevance to my study, Treff investigated graduate students' perceptions of participation training. In the training program, Treff noted the students learned through improvisational theatre and role-playing. Treff found the participants reported increased confidence and self-reflective ability. Similarly, the participants ($n = 18$) in Burnard's (2002) study, a musical improvisation group, described value to the collective creativity that occurred during improvisation and an increase in confidence in their ability to

interact and perform. Both of these studies (Burnard, 2002; Treff, 2008) occurred more than 5 years ago, but the voices of the participants still resonate today in terms of the potential educational value improvisation has for all ages.

Nigh (2006) and Tuisku (2010) performed phenomenological studies with theatre arts students: Nigh in Canada, Tuisku in Finland. While neither of these researchers examined improvisation directly, both underpinned their studies on the theory that theatre arts education provides collaborative learning environments, which when incorporated as Nigh and Tuisku observed, could potentially change educational practice (Nigh, 2006; Tuisku, 2010). With data triangulation, member checks, and third party review, Nigh and Tuisku guarded against threats to validity. Through a phenomenological investigation, Nigh and Tuisku had participants aid in the meaning making of the experiences.

Meyer (2006) performed a phenomenological study, which closely resembled this study. In answering the research question, "What do adult learners experience learning improvisation?" Meyer studied adult learners of theatrical improvisation ($N = 9$) who, except for the researcher who included herself as a participant, had no prior training. Meyer filled a gap in the literature by addressing adult learners and educational engagement and social competency described by improvisers as observed in previous research with younger students. Meyer used a five-part reflective strategy for analyzing data. Furthermore, Meyer argued that the participants of the study were coresearchers invested in making meaning of their experiences with Meyer. The researcher drew upon three concepts as the framework for the study: (a) organizational improvisation, (b) theatrical improvisation, and (c) adult experiential learning. Although I used some of

these concepts I have addressed in this literature review, I widened the scope to include the concepts play and flow. With the current study, the participants belonged to an extracurricular activity, not a class as in the Meyer study, and most had prior training in theatrical improvisation. I hope to extend the knowledge beyond training of theatrical improvisation to its practice and lend insight on how college students make meaning of their development through improvisation.

Summary

As Hitchen and Drachen (2008) noted about the study of role-playing (of which I consider theatrical improvisation to be a part), the study of improvisation needs a pooling of knowledge and consensus of terminology and implications. Instead of gaps, I view the literature as several threads that need knitting together to bridge research from different fields to coalesce the knowledge. The first thread lies in improvisational acting. The majority of the current research implicates the benefits of improvisational acting training for business and the understanding of cognitive processes for artificial intelligence (Magerko et al., 2009; O'Neill, Piplica, Fuller, & Magerko, 2011). Although some researchers have explored the role of improvisational acting in K–12 setting and for teacher development, I could find little current research, qualitative or quantitative that focused on students in higher education. Another thread lies in the study of leisure and extracurricular activities where students have a greater opportunity to play. Research, albeit outdated, shows potential benefits of extracurricular activities or student organizations as demonstrated through quantitative investigations (Foubert & Urbanski, 2006; Milgram, 2003). The investigations that researchers performed focused on many

different types of activities but not improvisational acting. Except for the Teng and Smith et al.'s studies of flow, scholarly work on the concept of flow stopped in the early 2000s and presented researchers with yet another gap. Although speaking only of flow, Smith et al. (2012) stated, "A steady incorporation of multidisciplinary study can only help to advance general knowledge" (p. 195). Through a wide compilation of fields and disciplines, I hoped to have a better insight on what to anticipate from the participants of my study as they describe what being in a collegiate improvisational group meant to them and their perceptions of their development.

Throughout the review of the literature, I have attempted to describe instances when researchers have discussed contradictory evidence or negative influences of one the concepts with which I have framed my research (Miner et al., 2001; Smith et al., 2012). For the most part, the researchers agreed and presented findings that suggest the importance improvisation holds for people of all ages in terms of their social, psychological, and cognitive development and well-being. Prior to data collection, I could only conjecture at my own findings. In Chapter 5, I interpret the findings of my study in relation to the literature reviewed in this section. Before that, in the next chapter, I present my methodological choices and describe the strategies that led me those findings.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

In Chapter 3, extending from research and scholarly discussions presented in the literature review, I describe and support the study's research design. In hopes of connecting several complex concepts to provide insight on how theatrical improvisation helps students make meaning of their ongoing development, a phenomenological approach was used to glean rich and thick descriptions from the perspective of the members of an improvisation group. This chapter contains a discussion of my personal experience and biases and a description of the sampling techniques, recruitment procedures, data collection tools, and plans for data analysis. Through analyzing and reporting on these descriptions, I will add to the knowledge base to inform higher education practice. In addition, this chapter includes a disclosure of ethical issues and issues of trustworthiness. Furthermore, I incorporated the Institutional Review Board (IRB) documents for both my institution and the participants' institution as necessary.

Research Design and Rationale

In this section of Chapter 3, I restate my research question, describe research design, and provide rationales for choosing an interpretive phenomenological approach to help answer my research question. As previously mentioned in Chapter 1, the research question changed with the inclusion of performance to the experiences. In Chapter 4, I describe the changes to the research question. In this section, I justify why I chose a phenomenological design over other approaches that were considered.

Research Question Revisited

Through carefully analyzing the literature and theoretical assumptions in Chapter 2, it appears that arts experiences both within the curriculum and outside of the curriculum could fulfill the goals of education for holistic development. However, the research falls short of providing an understanding of the phenomenon from the perspective of the college student. With this investigation, I intended to collect, analyze, and report on data to fill the gap in the literature and address the research question.

Research question: How have experiences with theatrical improvisation training, practice, and performance helped college students make meaning of their ongoing development?

The intention of the inquiry focused less on how the students were and more on how they perceived themselves becoming. With this intentionality, I tried to present information that represents a reflexive interpretation of the shared improvisational group experiences as art in higher education.

Research Design

In the tradition of phenomenological research, two approaches (descriptive and interpretive) appeared as the main, but not only, choices for investigating a lived experience (Vagle, Hughes, & Durbin, 2009). Descriptive phenomenology stems from Husserl's work and interpretive from Heidegger's work (Vagle et al., 2009). While the core of the tradition remains as a way to seek meaning in experiences, the changes to the tradition lie in the intentionality of the meaning and the relationship of the researcher to the study (Finlay, 2008; Nyström & Dahlberg, 2001; Vagle et al., 2009). To study how

theatrical improvisation helped students make meaning of their ongoing development, I took an interpretive phenomenological approach because of how I viewed the intentionality of the meaning making and my relationship with the research.

I considered two other approaches: grounded theory and case study. As I describe in the section on the role of the researcher, I have a background in theatre. I have subjective ideas of theories surrounding theatrical improvisation. Because little theory has been ascribed to this form of acting, part of me wanted to add to the knowledge base; however, I also wanted to merge the multiple theories into one. However, it became apparent that past experiences drove that goal and would, in fact, be counterproductive for a study of arts education. Early in the process, I planned a case study, which examined another aspect of this phenomenon. Several members of the local improvisational groups were also education students or educators. At first, I considered studying their improvisational training in relation to their philosophies and strategies as educators. This idea became unwieldy; I could not describe the context that bound the participants. Furthermore, it became apparent that it would be difficult get the participants who fit this criteria. In choosing to examine the group as a whole from their perspective, the investigation felt more realistic and authentic. Rather than examine specific bits and pieces of the experience, my study tried to create meaning and provide insight through guiding the participants in self-reflection. Upon closer examination and understanding of the tradition of phenomenological studies, I realized I was part of my own investigation as a participant in the meaning making.

In reviewing the differences between descriptive, transcendental, and interpretive,

hermeneutic phenomenological studies, bridling my prior knowledge rather than bracketing it, made this study more interpretive in design. Vagle (2014) noted that, in a planning a phenomenological study, the researcher's personal experiences and subjectivity influence the inquiry. Being a theatre arts teacher and improviser influenced my conceptual framework. In fact, simply choosing an area of interest indicated that I had not taken a neutral or detached stance as bracketing would suggest (Vagle et al., 2009). The goal throughout this study was to balance this objectivity and subjectivity. I believe an interpretive phenomenological study presented the best approach in this situation; it allowed me to investigate a topic, which was close to me, but through the experiences of others of which I have had no part. Through the reflexive data collection and analysis of an interpretive phenomenological approach, I hoped to immerse, incubate, illuminate, explain, reflect, and synthesize the experiences to determine how students made sense of their experiences through theatrical improvisation (Vagle, 2014). Van Manen (1990) argued that phenomenological studies draw social scientists because the methodology allows researchers to foster their qualitative research skills (e.g., ethical sensitivity, interpretation, and thoughtfulness. With this in mind, this type of phenomenological study not only aligned with a topic nebulous and capricious as theatrical improvisation but also reflected on my ongoing development as a qualitative researcher.

Role of the Researcher

I saw my role as the investigator to guide my participants, as well as myself, through of the process of making meaning of the shared lived experience (Nyström & Dahlberg, 2001; Vagle, 2014; van Manen, 2014). Van Manen argued researchers could

never truly know what their participants think because the researchers will always filter the information through their own perceptions and experiences. Instead of removing myself by phenomenological reduction or bracketing, I took a bridled approach where I acknowledged my experiences and strove to keep those preconceptions in check throughout the process (Nyström & Dahlberg, 2001). Vagle et al. (2009) divided bridling into three areas: positional, textual, and constitutive. Through bridling, I became part of the investigation, balancing between containing my past and allowing myself to react and reflect on the data as potential pathways to insight in an ongoing dance (Finlay, 2008).

I offer this brief history of my prior experiences to describe my positional bridling for this study. In 2013, I worked with members from the proposed group. In 2013, as a theatre arts teacher in the same state, I took my K–12 students to see a performance of this group. Furthermore, two alumni members of the group taught a workshop for my students in the spring of 2013. I have a tangential relationship with the group. At the time of data collection, some members knew me and knew that I was a theatre arts educator and doctoral student, but I had in no way been a member of the group. As I did not have any personal or professional connection with nor was I an instructor at the college, I did not foresee any conflict of interest, ethical concerns, or undue influence to this research. For data collection, I conducted two individual interviews and a focus group with the participants of the group who volunteered. Because data took the form of feeling, beliefs, and anecdotal reports, all of which could be highly personal, I strove for the strictest levels of confidentiality and privacy throughout the investigation.

Methodology

Nyström and Dahlberg (2001), Finlay (2008), and Vagle et al. (2009) argued that phenomenological researchers follow less of a method for their investigation and more of a process. Although the conceptual framework and literature review presented in Chapter 2 came from my prior assumptions, I understood that throughout the process of this study, I needed to remain open to all the possibilities that might present themselves to me and retain a degree of skepticism. In this section, I describe the steps of the process including participant selection, use of instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, and ethical procedures.

Participant Selection Logic

In creating a sample for qualitative research, Maxwell (2013) suggested researchers consider relationship to and selection of the participants. These two components guide qualitative researchers to select a sample that aligns the data collection and analysis with the research question. After submitting the prospectus for my study, I found the designing process to be nonlinear. I had an idea for area of my research; I wanted to study an improvisation group at the collegiate level. Of two groups near my geographical location of the mid-Atlantic region of the United States, one at a traditional 4-year institution and one at a community college, the community college group was my first choice for reasons described in the following sections. I understood that future factors would continue to influence the design of my research. With the next sections of this paper, I describe the methods to select my participants.

Sampling. To address the research question, I used purposive and criterion sampling. The criteria for participation in this study follow:

- current student or alumni of the community college;

- over the age of 18;

- participated in the rehearsals or practices for at least one semester length period of time; and

- performed with the group.

The experiences under investigation required participants to have training in theatrical improvisation. Within 20 miles of my location, at the time of data collection, two groups had the qualities under investigation. One group was at the main campus of a state institution; the other was located at a community college. The group at the community college was my first choice and was approached first. Had circumstances occurred that made it impossible for me to perform my study at the community college, I would have filed a change of procedures form to the appropriate Institutional Review Boards (IRBs), and the other institution would be approached if approved. Guided by the assumption that students in community colleges tend to have a less homogenous population regarding demographics (e.g., age, backgrounds, and socioeconomic status) than traditional 4-year institutions, any analysis of the community college group experience could help to limit threats to validity caused by demographical limitations. In addition, with the theory of emerging adults as a possible factor, a community college environment provided access to individuals fitting that developmental age range (i.e., 18-29). In recruiting the sample, I first sought approval from the Walden University IRB and from the institutional review

board of the community college. Once the institutions granted the approval, I contacted the group to invite them to participate in the study. A draft of the recruitment letter is included as Appendix A of this document.

        Procedure for participant recruitment. At the chosen community college, a student organization for theatrical improvisation rehearses and performs on a regular basis. For this study, I used a pseudonym for the group, The Society. At the time of data collection, The Society consisted of approximately 10-20 active members including current students and alumni interested in theatrical improvisation. Participation in the community college group is voluntary and nonrestrictive in that there is no audition requirement for the group. However, should a group member wish to participate in a performance, the group requires them have to attended four out of five rehearsals leading up to the performance. All participants of this study were older than age 18; again, participation was voluntary. For this study, I collected data from seven members who were current students or alumni. Seven participants fell within the proposed range of six to eight participants to represent viability. Fewer participants could have caused me to under represent or generalize the participants' experiences as Miles et al. (2014) stated might occur. In sampling only one or two of the members of this group, I might have misrepresented the words of the few. In a potentially rich collaborative experience, I could have missed different members' experiences through under representation. Collecting data in the form of interviews from the entire group would have proved overwhelming, particularly for a novice researcher, and was confined to those who wished to be included (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

The Society has a private group page on Facebook. Initial contact was made with the person who managed the group through the messaging function of that platform. Once given permission from both institutional review boards, I recruited participants of the group in a similar manner using the private messaging function to avoid any pressure the participants might have experienced through public discourse. In the message (see Appendix D), I asked for participants who met the criteria of being with the group for more than one semester as a student and having performed with the group to respond through my Facebook messaging email or my personal email. In addition, as I wished to gain insight on how this experience interplayed with a college education, I proposed the one-semester membership criteria. While performance was not a prerequisite of the group, a portion of the group did perform. Because of the nature of the art form, the activity of performing plays an important factor in the overall experience. I recruited those members who had performed. I addressed any confusion or ambiguity of the criteria for the study through verbal or written correspondence. The invitation to participate lasted for one week, by which time the seven volunteered. While I proposed random selection if more viable people volunteered, this proved unnecessary. The participants self-reported they met the criteria for the study. Because the participants volunteered over 3 hours of their free time, I offered each participant a $5 Amazon gift certificate as a thank you for their participation. Furthermore, I provided all stakeholders (including the participants) with a one to two page summary of my findings.

Instrumentation or Data Sources

Returning to the three rules of theatrical improvisation (trust, acceptance, and presence), I saw these rules also applying me as a qualitative researcher. As the researcher, I needed to establish an environment of trust between the participants and myself. I built this trust with transparency of the study and thorough description of the participants' rights. I adhered to the rule of acceptance in taking any information the participants gave without judgment or preconceived ideas. Together, the participants and I collaboratively made meaning of the lived experience together through hermeneutic circles of inquiry. Throughout the interview and focus group sessions, I followed the rule of presence. Marcel (1971) supported the presence of a caring relationship as a critical factor to phenomenological studies:

> When I say that a being is granted to me as a presence...this means that I am unable to treat him as if he were merely placed in front of me; between him and me there arises a relationship which surpasses my awareness of him; he is not only before me, he is also with me. (pp. 24–26)

Together, researcher and participants generate the data and interpret the meaning (Laverty, 2003).

As part of a small subset of college students and alumni who spent their surplus psychic and physical energy practicing and performing theatrical improvisation outside of their formal collegiate curriculum, these students shed insights to inform educational practice and policies. These insights speak to the relationship of arts education to a general education curriculum, as well as, extracurricular activities' support and value. In

creating a well-rounded college environment in which emerging adults can learn and develop different life skills beyond those learned in an academic classroom (Arnett, 2000), the larger community can see the external benefits of positive social change with these young adults entering the workforce.

In obtaining data for a phenomenological study, van Manen (2014) argued that while ordinary qualitative data collection tools (e.g., interview, observations, and participation) could be borrowed from different methodologies, the aim should be different in that data should be prereflective. Moustakas (1994) presented a slightly contrasting argument in favor of reflective data collection in which the researcher guides the reflection of the participants. Lavarty (2003) argued that differences between the two major types of phenomenological inquiry (descriptive and interpretive) lie not in the data collection procedures, but in the role of the researcher, analysis, and issues of credibility. Vagle et al. (2009) described a similar approach using a bridling attitude toward the data collection and interpretation. For the purposes of this study, as the researcher, I collected data through individual interviews and focus group, as well as taking field notes and keeping a data log. Because of the nature of the study and phenomenological approach, no previous researcher has created an exact instrument that I could have used in this inquiry. To help me determine whether the interview questions supported the research question and to check that not too many of my own assumptions were in the protocols (Appendix E), I consulted an expert with prior collegiate improvisation experiences to review the interview questions. As an additional measure, I contacted Dr. Chang, a phenomenological researcher and clinical psychologist. Chang (2008) had created an

interview schedule for his dissertation. Chang's interview schedule resembled a flow chart in that the answers the participants gave to the initial question informed follow-up questions. While many phenomenological researchers (i.e., Vagle [2014], van Manen [2014], and Dahlberg [2008]) noted that the number of sessions *depends,* and the researcher should remain open to possible changes, I proposed three data collection sessions for this study in hopes of data saturation. The three sessions helped me achieve the goal of saturation.

Procedures for Participation and Data Collection

To ensure that I protected the confidentiality of the participants, I obtained informed consent from each participant in the form a signed letter or email (Appendix B). With this letter, I introduced the study, described the rights and responsibilities of both the researcher and the participants, articulated the voluntary nature of participation, gave information about payment, and disclosed potential risks and benefits. I also described privacy issues (including but not limited to use of pseudonyms, storage of data, and potential use of a third party transcriber), and provided my contact information. Should any participants who signed the informed consent form chosen to withdraw from the study at any time, I would have thanked the participants for their time without consequences or pressure to continue the study. However, all the participants followed through the entire research process. I asked that each volunteer participate in three data gathering session of 60 to 90 minutes each session. Throughout the study, I took every measure to safeguard the participants without undue influence. In addition to recording the sessions visually and audibly, I took field notes during each session as a way to

record my impressions and begin analysis.

Initial interview. I conducted the initial interview at the college in rooms provided me by the student affairs department. As a neutral location, the interview sites helped me to place the participant at ease and build trust (van Manen, 2014). I encouraged the participants to speak freely (Baxter Magolda, 1992) and leave time for silences between speaking (van Manen, 2014). In Baxter Magolda's interview protocol of a study, the interview questions included questions about the experience with which she avoided structuring to the responses. Miles et al. (2014) argued for little instrumentation in qualitative research immersed in the context of the phenomenon. Furthermore, Vagle (2014) argued that unstructured interviews, although typical in phenomenological studies, prove daunting to novice researchers who might be included to equate unstructured with no parameters and that a degree of improvisation on the part of the interviewer is necessary. Upon reading Vagle's thoughts, I reflected on the intertwined nature of myself as the researcher and subject matter. Therefore, I bridled my improvisational skills and was reflexive to the participants. With the initial interview questions, I opened the dialogue with the participants and began to have them begin their own inquiry into what the phenomenon meant to them.

Initially, I intended to treat all of the protocols as scripts. Jacob and Furgerson (2012) argued that a scripted interview helps to prevent researchers from interjecting their own personal biases. Instead, Nyström and Dahlberg (2001) presented a compelling argument for unstructured reflexive interviewing more in alignment with the research question. However, unstructured does not mean lacking structure. The opening and

closing of the protocols were scripted and read to maintain consistency through the data collection process. With semistructured questions focused on the phenomenon, I guided the participants and allowed them to lead me to a level of understanding. Vagle (2014) and Finlay (2008) both discussed observation as part of the interview process. For the initial and follow-up individual interviews, I collected audio recordings of the session using two handheld audio recorders. For the focus group session, I included video recordings of the focus group session. I recognized the need to react to bodily communications that the participants might display individually or between members during the focus group session. In addition, after the focus group session, I reviewed the video recording to observe my own reactions throughout the sessions to reflect on my own interactions with the data as they presented it.

In the introduction of each session, I reviewed the study and the informed consent, obtained permission from the participants to record the session or determine an alternative recording strategy, and described the participants' time commitment for the session. No participant requested not to be recorded. Upon completing the session of approximately 90 minutes, I asked for clarification on items of which I was unclear, debriefed the participant, provided my contact information, gathered information to schedule the focus group session and follow-up interviews (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Immediately following the initial interview session, I began data analysis through data logs and reflective field notes as described in a later section. In addition, I emailed copies of the transcriptions and performed a member checks on any analysis I had performed after each data collection session.

Focus group. In the initial interview, I created a trust between the participants of the study and myself. Bradbury-Jones et al. (2009) argued that focus groups, while counterintuitive to a phenomenological approach, prove a valuable data collection tool when investigating group dynamics. Using my reflections and preliminary analysis of the initial interviews to inform the focus group questions, I gained insights on the phenomenon from a group perspective. With a focus group, Dinkins (2005) suggested a Socratic-hermeneutic approach where understanding occurs through shared inquiry. Again, upon further reading, I remained open to the phenomenon; therefore, with the questions for the focus group I asked the participants to elaborate or extend things they discussed in the initial interviews. After receiving permission from the college, I conducted the focus group in the rehearsal space typically used by The Society. All participants who had volunteered to participate in the study were invited to participate in the focus group. Because this group of people worked and played together on a regular basis and the nature of their experience was based in performance, I video recorded the group, with permission, to capture any non-verbal communication that occurred between the members. As the set-up for most focus groups involves a ring of chairs, I positioned the camera behind myself (the focus group leader). Shortly into the focus group, the camcorder failed. I continued recording the session on my cell phone, which I had next to me as a back-up recording device. The back-up device allowed me to capture the visual data and continue with the focus group

Magerko et al. (2009) video recorded professional improvisers and played back clips to the participants for reflective analysis. Sawyer (2006) described improvisers as

collaborative creators. In this session, I intended to co-investigate the experiences through dialogues and discussions. As before in the initial interview, I read the introduction and closure from the protocol. In this session, I asked the group members to be silence and put away their cell phones for the following 60–90 minutes. In this way, I followed the rules of improvisation by presenting a point of concentration and asking the participants to be present. After the group session, I scheduled the final individual interviews with the participants.

Follow-up interview. I performed one additional individual interview with each participant after I conducted the initial interview and the focus group. Again, in hopes of exploring all avenues of exploration from the perspective of the participants, I used the follow-up interview session to elaborate or extend data gathered from the previous session. I read the introduction to the sessions from the scripted portion of the protocol. The session was audio recorded on a handheld digital device with a secondary device as a back-up measure. For the 60–90 minute interview sessions, I focused on the protocol's semistructured questions; however, as I was interested in the concept of collective creativity, I referred to observations from the focus group session to obtain reflective analysis from the participant. To close the interview, I read from the scripted portion of the protocol and debriefed the participants.

In the final interview, I described how grateful I was for the participants' cooperation during the data collection process. In addition, I informed them that I might need to ask more questions and that I would continue to provide them with transcripts and analysis to confirm what I will be reporting is an accurate representation of them.

Once again, I described the potential benefits to the field, school, student association, and them personally that could manifest from the study. Following the final interview, I reviewed and clarified my notes, completed the data log (Appendix G), and began post collection data analysis.

   Data analysis. Analysis begins and ends with the researcher interacting with the participants and the data they provide. Throughout the data collection process, I started the analysis process as soon as the session had concluded. Data in the form of field notes and data logs indicated certain themes, which I began to identify shortly after the conclusion of each data collection session. The interviews and focus group sessions were transcribed by a third party transcriber, I include a signed letter from the third party transcriber stating intent to protect the confidentiality of the participants with my IRB application (Appendix H). I reviewed each transcript by listening to the recordings while reading along with the text. I sent the corrected documents, which I also scrubbed for confidentiality, to the participants and then began hand coding the data. I did not use a CAQDAS to help me manage or code any of the data. Instead I followed an ad hoc hermeneutic approach to the analysis, during the data collection process I returned to the participants to aid in cocreating the meaning behind these data. Second cycle coding occurred after major themes and patterns emerged. In this way, I fractured these data, breaking them apart and reassembling for different meanings. At this point in the study, I bridled textually. As the possibilities of the meanings were indefinite, I did not contextualize all of these data into preconceived areas. The emerging themes indicated the type of second cycle coding. Analysis continued in this manner until a rich, thick

description of the participants' experiences developed into meaningful units that helped

me lead me to the findings I present in Chapter 4 and interpret in Chapter 5.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Van Manen (2014) described issues of validity and trustworthiness in a

phenomenological study as problematic when assessed through methods applied to other

methodological approaches. Instead of focusing on the factual, phenomenological

researchers should focus on the existential. The trustworthiness of a phenomenological

study should lie in the originality of the interpretations of data and the insights the

researcher provides to the reader in a scholarly manner (van Manen, 2014). To this point,

van Manen offered four questions with which to check the validity of a

phenomenological study:

- is the study based on a valid phenomenological question;

- is the analysis performed on experientially descriptive accounts and transcripts;

- is the study rooted in primary and scholarly phenomenological literature; and

- does the study avoid legitimating itself with validation criteria derived from

  sources that are concerned with non-phenomenological methodologies (pp. 350-

  351)?

In this study, I sought insight into the shared lived experience of community

college improvisers. At the heart of the research question lies the question, "What has this

experience been like for these artists with regard to their ongoing development?" I did not

seek causality or influences because of a particular location, time, or type of person. I

avoided collecting data that contained personal beliefs or opinions. I focused on the

participants' reflections of the experiences (what happened, not what they believed happened). As detailed in the literature review and noted throughout Chapter 3, I designed the study as it emerged from the gaps in the literature as informed by phenomenological theorists such as van Manen, Vagle, and Finlay. Finally, I adhered to issues of ethical concerns, saturation of data, and repeatability within the context of a phenomenological design.

Credibility

To address credibility of the study, first, with three sessions, I was in prolonged contact with the participants. Second, I examined and analyzed multiple types of data from the interviews, focus groups, and field notes. Third, I continued individual interviews and a focus group using a hermeneutic circle of inquiry until data saturation. Using this strategy required reflexivity by the researcher to react to what the participants described with openness and trust. Another strategy for guarding against internal threats to validity involved considering alternative or opposing hypotheses. Because the study followed a phenomenological approach, no hypothesis existed. In accordance with the proposed approach, I guarded against this threat to internal validity by inquiring of the participants for concepts I had not considered. I asked if they believed their participation in the group had had negative influences. None of the participants reported negative influences. Furthermore, The Society represented a voluntary leisure group; the participants would not have been members had they not enjoyed the activity. Finally, I checked with the participants prior to documenting the analyses to confirm that I had accurately reported what they have experienced and described.

To guard against threats to external validity, data were collected in a hermeneutic circle of inquiry until, together, the participants and the researcher created thick, rich descriptions. Throughout this process, I left myself, as the researcher, open to alternative possibilities of which I had not considered. As the purpose of the study, I sought to discern how members of a theatrical improvisation group perceived their experiences helped them make meaning of their ongoing development. I bridled my personal experiences rather than contain or reduce them. Further inquiries described experiences from different participants with varying degrees of practice and membership to The Society.

As no coresearcher was involved and because this study was part of a dissertation, I depended on faculty guidance for objectivity to the analyses and confirmability of the reporting. In addition to the aforementioned strategies, I followed Maxwell's (2013) validity checklist. Because I used a phenomenological study, the information I generated was specific to the group and site and, therefore, not generalizable. However, future researchers should find this study repeatable. While the usage of these strategies does not guarantee validity, consciously guarding against threats increased the credibility of the findings.

Ethical Procedures

Angen (2000) argued for two considerations for validation in qualitative research: substantive and ethical. Concerns for ethical validation include clearly answering any underlying assumptions or positions the researcher may have (Creswell, 2007). To address the ethical validation concern, I report my findings in a credible, authentic, and

critical (of both self and study) manner as described by Creswell (2007). Beyond personal biases or agendas, ethical concerns include adherence to the Belmont Principles regarding guidelines when researching human participants (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978).

Confidentiality. As true anonymity was not a possibility for this study, I adhered to strict levels of confidentiality. The participants for the study were more than 18 years of age, and treated as autonomous agents. All participants had the right to withdraw at any time throughout the process without penalty. As mentioned earlier, I changed both the improvisation group and the members to pseudonyms in this document. Real names were included in my personal data log as a means to contact the participants and were stored on my password protected computer. As a reference point, I indicated the mid-Atlantic region of the United States as the location for the college.

Other ethical concerns. Throughout Chapter 3, I addressed many ethical concerns. To review, for data collection, I adhered to IRB requirements or recommendations. After I received consent from the college to conduct a study with a student activity group on the campus, I informed prospective participants about all aspects of the study including potential benefits and risks. Prior to any data collection, the participants signed informed consent forms. All participants were adults (over the age of 18) and had the legal capacity to provide their consent. Data were stored on the researcher's personal computer and backed up on a hard drive; both of which were password protected. I obtained approval from the IRBs to hire a third party transcriber. The individual participants received transcriptions of their recorded interviews. The

group received transcriptions of the audio recording of the focus group. I conducted a final individual interview with each participant to reach saturation. Furthermore, member checks were performed after analysis to help validate the analysis. All participants and the college received a one to two page summary of the findings.

Summary

I began this chapter by rationalizing my choice of research design as a phenomenological investigation of extracurricular college improvisation from the perspective of the participants. The research question shows the direction of the investigation as informed from the literature review. Using a bridled attitude of my understanding of the phenomenon, I described my understanding of my experiences being just that—mine. Together through hermeneutic inquiry, the participants and I discovered the meaning their participation held for them (Dinkins, 2005; Laverty, 2003; van Manen, 2014; Vagle, 2014). In this chapter, I also described and justified the procedures for sampling, participant selection, data collection, and data analysis. I addressed threats to both internal and external validity and credibility as described by Creswell (2007) and Maxwell (2013). Throughout Chapter 3, ethical concerns and procedures were described. This chapter concluded with a review and extension of those issues.

In Chapter 4, I present the details and summary of the findings. From the data collection process and data analysis, I present thick, rich descriptions of the phenomenon of theatrical improvisation at a community college from the perspective of the students. This study will add to the literature and inform higher education practices of creating

well-rounded learning environments in which emerging adults can learn and develop

different life skills beyond those learned in an academic classroom.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and describe the lived experience of improvisational acting training, practice, and performances for college students who participated in an improvisation group at the time of data collection. As extracurricular activities and credit classes, theatrical improvisation exists at many higher education institutions. The mission statements of both the research site college and the student activities department note goals of fostering well-rounded individuals prepared for life outside after college. To provide students with opportunities to achieve these goals, it is important to understand the complexities of students' activities in the classroom or as extracurricular activities. Research in the perceptions of students' ongoing development is essential for higher education institutions in creation, implementation, evaluation, and support of programs. Chapter 4 begins with a brief review of the research question and follows with the details of the research (e.g., setting, demographics, data collection, data interpretation, evidence of trustworthiness, and results). Descriptions presented by the participants led to themes that evolved the phenomenon from fun leisure activity to an activity with serious influences on multiple aspects of their lives. Finally, I summarize this phenomenological study to provide a robust picture of the perceptions college theatrical improvisers have of their development through their shared experiences.

Research Question

One research question guided the design and methodology for this study, which initially did not include performance experiences; however, during the data collection process, it became apparent that the original question needed a slight adjustment. The research question with the addition follows:

Research question: How have experiences with theatrical improvisation training and practice helped college students make meaning of their ongoing development?

From this question, I crafted interview questions to describe the experiences, prompt reflection, and develop meaning with the participants (Kvale, 1996). During the data collection phase of the study, all the participants provided data pertaining not only to training and practice but also to performance. While I should have noted an importance of performance to an art form reliant on an audience, such as theatrical improvisation, I did not initially. Early in the interpretation process, I felt it necessary to include performance in the research question. Through the reflective analysis process after the first individual interviews, I amended the focus group and each individual participant protocol to align with the research question.

Setting

The research setting was a community college in an urban region of the mid-Atlantic region of the United States hereafter referred to as *the college*. The college offers certificates, associate degrees, and letters of recognition, continuing education, and extracurricular activities. This college is open not only to students in those programs but also to community members. The college holds as its mission that learning is central. Its

philosophy is that students have the time resources and opportunities to develop their interests, discover their talents, and foster their potential for a satisfying, stimulating engagement with society. To aid in this mission and philosophy, the department of student engagement lends its own mission to foster engagement in and outside of the classroom. Furthermore, the department of student affairs provides learning opportunities outside the classroom. The department of student engagement aids in the college philosophy that fosters well-rounded individuals engaged not only at the college but also in society. At the time of data collection, the seven participants attended or had attended the college as students. However, while one participant, Fox (pseudonym) met the criteria of having attended the college, during his time of enrollment, no improvisation group existed. In keeping with the research question and focusing on perceived development during college years, data collected from Fox were only included when current student participants noted an experience that included Fox.

The theatrical improvisation group, The Society (pseudonym), falls under the student engagement department of the college. The Society is one of many student-organized groups offered by the college. The college provides the groups meeting space and aids with organizational activities (e.g., planning meetings, recruitment, and budgets). The Society elects two officers each year whose responsibilities include interfacing with the student engagement department and attending monthly meetings. In addition, each group is required to have a staff sponsor who provides oversight for the club's activities. The Society has existed in different forms for approximately 6 years. Originally, one participant, Donnie (pseudonym), founded an improvisation group as part

of the theatre department under a different name. This group dissolved after Donnie graduated. Another participant reformed The Society, as the group exists to date.

Demographics

The Society is open to students, alumni, and community members. The participants reported having as many as 20 members in the group over the past few years and as few as 4 members. The Society has had different organizational structures over the years and experienced organizational difficulties because of varying levels of training and the desire to perform during the data collection period. While the group is not exclusive, the senior members felt that a certain level of training and experience with the craft were required for performance. I was unaware of these sentiments when I created my sample criteria. As the sample criteria for the study, volunteers needed to have been with The Society for a semester, be or have been students at the college, and performed with the group. All of the participants confirmed they met the criteria. From The Society, seven members volunteered to take part in the study. Table 1 displays the demographics and participant characteristics pertinent to this study. At the time of the study, no female members were in the group. All the participants identified themselves as White males. The participants ranged in age from 20 to 29 with the exception of one (see Table 1). Two of the participants were current students in associate's degree programs. Three of the participants graduated with associate's degrees. Two participants attended some classes but did not complete any degree or certification program at the college.

Table 1

Participant Characteristics and Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Years with group	Relationship to college	Years since leaving college as student	Prior training
Flynn	Male	20	2	Current Associate degree student	n/a	High school
Freddy	Male	23	5	Current Associate degree student	n/a	No
Briscoe	Male	23	5 or 6	Alumnus Associate degree	.5	High school
Caine	Male	23	5	Alumnus Associate degree	2	High school
Donnie	Male	29	4	Alumnus Associate degree	9	No
Lester	Male	24	6	Alumnus some classes	2	High School
Fox	Male	"really old"	One semester	Alumnus some classes/member of community	No answer	Midwest Improv school

Fox was the first participant interviewed. Although he is an alumnus of the

college, when he attended, no improvisational group existed. As a member of the

community, Fox saw a notice for The Society on a local improv listserv and joined the

group in the Fall 2014 semester. Fox trained in a midwest metropolitan improvisation

school with theatrical improvisation legends. Fox described his age as "really old." At the

time of data collection, he practiced and performed with the group regularly. Again,

although Fox met the sample criteria, information he provided was only used where I

determined his experiences fit the phenomenon of development during college life of others in the study.

Following is the background information for the remaining six participants. Pseudonyms were used for all participants. At the time of data collection:

- Flynn was 20 years old, was pursing an associate's degree in design at the college, and was first exposed to improvisation in high school where another member of The Society sometimes taught improvisation;

- Lester was 24 years old; had joined The Society in 2009, graduated from the college with an associate's degree, and had some prior training in high school;

- Briscoe was a 23-year-old alumnus, graduated from the college with an associate' degree, and had prior training in high school;

- Freddy was 23 years old, a current student seeking an associate's degree from the college, and only trained with The Society;

- Caine was 23 years old, graduated from the college with an associate's degree in transfer studies with a focus in biology, and had first experienced improvisation in high school but was not part of the high school performance team; and

- Donnie was 29 years old, had founded the first improvisation group at the college while taking theatre classes, described himself as self-taught initially with no prior training or experience, and did not graduate from the college but pursued an acting career and additional theatre training at another university.

The participants reported some of the characteristics and demographics (e.g., prior training, years with the group and relationship to college) in their initial interviews. They

were further questioned about these characteristics during the following sessions. Other demographics (e.g., age and race) were obtained later in the data collection process and served as reference points for reflection and areas for organizational development. The next section describes the data collection strategies and procedures used with the participants.

Data Collection

Data collection followed procedures described in Chapter 3 with only a minor change to include the potential of remote interviews. The steps for data collection included recruitment, consent, initial individual interviews, a focus group, and a final individual interview. As noted in Chapter 3, phenomenological researchers (e.g., Vagle [2014], van Manen [2014], and Dahlberg [2008]) often found no standard regarding the number of sessions required for saturation; however, I found three sessions provided me with rich data to meet saturation. The participants' descriptions of and relationships with their experiences evolved throughout the sessions, as did their relationship with me as the researcher. Unlike in the analysis phase during which Vagle argued the researcher should take a whole-part-whole approach, during the data collection phase I took a part-whole-part approach. The initial and final interviews were one-on-one; the second session was a focus group with all seven participants present. In this section, I describe the data collection procedures I followed and note when I varied from my original proposal.

Recruitment

Upon receiving IRB approval both from Walden University and the research site college, I approached the student activities department at the college. The director of

student affairs acted as a liaison between the college, the Society, and me. After posting

the recruitment letter (Appendix B) regarding face-to-face interviews on the group's

Facebook page for one week with no response, I submitted a change in procedures form

to request conducting interviews remotely. My concerns included time constraints that

might prevent group members from volunteering for what could be 6 hours of interviews

and discussions. If the participants did not have to meet me but could do the interviews

from home, I felt the study might be more feasible for them. While I received approval to

conduct interviews remotely via Skype or phone, I did not have to use this approach. As I

waited for IRB approval for the change in procedure, I went to The Society's practice

session and passed out my recruitment letter in person, presented my study, and answered

questions anyone had on the study. Seven members contacted me after that to volunteer.

After confirming that the volunteers met the sample criteria, I secured a signed informed

consent form (Appendix D) from all seven volunteers. It was not until the initial

interview that I realized that Fox met the sample criteria but no improvisation group

existed during his attendance. As soon as I had seven participants, I contacted my liaison

at student affairs and reserved rooms at the college for the first interview session and the

focus group.

The Initial Interview

The college provided me with two classrooms from 10 am to 7 pm in which I

could conduct the initial interviews. I divided these days in to 2-hour blocks. Through

emails, in which I blind copied the participants from each other; I coordinated and

scheduled the interviews over the 2 days. The initial interviews took place in early March

2015, and all seven members participated. I attempted to make the participants comfortable. Because the rooms were classrooms, the furniture was not conducive to long periods of sitting. However, in one instance, Donnie referenced the chair to illustrate how he felt improvisation helped him focus. "I can let go of the selfish needs that I have right now . . . like when I am thinking about this (improvisation) I am not thinking that this chair sucks, and this chair sucks . . . but I am not thinking about that." All the initial interviews lasted at least one hour. I recorded the sessions with a handheld digital recorder, my laptop, and my iPad. The handheld recorder lost battery power after the second interview and was not used afterwards. The interviews were recorded using the software *Garageband* on my laptop and were converted to Mp3 files. In addition, I used a Livescribe pen and my iPad to record the interviews and take notes. After each interview, I backed up the file onto my portable hard drive and emailed it directly to my transcriptionist who had signed a letter of confidentiality.

The initial interview protocol introduction and closure were read verbatim from the protocol (Appendix E) to ensure the participants understood the voluntary nature of the study. These procedures also opened avenues for them to contact me or officials connected with the study should they have concerns. After reading the scripted material, I began each interview following the questions on the protocol. Quite soon into the process, I realized that I was not only collecting data but beginning the interpretation of these data as well. According to Kvale (1996), six steps of interpretation exist in qualitative research:

1. Subjects describe the phenomenon.

2. Subjects discover relationships during interviews.

3. Interviewer condenses and interprets during the interview.

4. Researcher further interprets interview through transcription.

5. With follow-up interviews and probing questions, the researcher looks for connections and meaning units from preceding sessions.

6. Researcher extends the continuum.

During the initial interviews, the participants quickly varied in their responses, which led me to ask probing and extending questions. Not all the participants had the exact same questions asked of them in the same order. The initial interviews served to engage the participants with their experiences and the research, and to begin the interpretation of data provided. While the interviews were being transcribed, I scheduled the focus group session, which happened approximately three weeks after the initial interviews.

The Focus Group

As I was collecting data, analysis and interpretation had begun with the initial interviews (Kvale, 1996). The focus group took place on a Friday evening 2 hours before The Society's rehearsal time. By setting the group at that time and day, I was able to have all seven members participate. The room in which I conducted the focus group was a small auditorium/lecture hall provided to me by the college for that evening. It is the same room where The Society had performed shows for audiences and would be performing the following week. I had received the transcripts back from the participants

with few changes 4 days prior to the focus group. I added questions to the original protocol (Appendix E) to follow up on some things that were said in the individual interviews. The audio quality of the initial recordings was poor because of the use of the internal microphones on the laptop computer. I purchased an omnidirectional microphone for the subsequent sessions. I set up the chairs in a semicircle facing the seating section of the room with the microphone in the center of the semicircle. In addition, I placed my iPad in the center as a back-up audio recording device and paired it with my Livescribe pen as I took notes. A video camera was set over my shoulder as I faced the semicircle. I had scheduled 2 hours for the focus group and knew that I had to allow 10 minutes for the group to move to another building for their rehearsal.

As the members gathered, I described transcription challenges of multiple voices, and asked that they try to speak one at a time as much as possible. Lester had bought a pair of fluffy pink socks for Caine whose feet were wet from working outside in the rain all day. Freddy mentioned it would be nice to have a talking stick to speak one at a time. Lester grabbed the socks back from Caine and threw them at Freddy. "How about 'talking socks'? If you have the socks, then you can talk," Lester said. The group nodded in agreement. Donnie was running late, so we began without him. I was reading the introduction as Donnie entered. I began the first question and mentioned to Donnie that I wanted everyone to try and speak one at a time. Freddy threw the socks at Donnie and told him they were talking socks, and if you had the socks, you could talk.

Donnie laughed, "Talking socks? Really?!? Come on guys, we're an improv group." To which another group member also mentioned a bit of surprise, and the group

laughed. However, after the laughter died down, Donnie who held the socks began answering the first question. The socks progressed around the circle throughout the entire session, and the convention of holding the socks allowed the person to speak uninterrupted. In the results section of this chapter, I will discuss the passing of the talking socks in more detail. Shortly into the focus group session, the video camera malfunctioned. I pulled my cell phone out of my pocket and recorded on that device. While the cell phone recording was not originally planned for, the recording provided rich visual data, which audio recording alone would have missed.

While I followed the protocol to extend data from the previous session, I also sought clarification from the group as a whole. Some of the participants described what they did as art and some as a craft. I asked them to discuss this as a group. In addition, I asked about their perceptions of their experiences as an outlet versus therapy. Along with the other questions on the protocol, I asked them to tell me in front of the others what they thought was the plural noun for The Society and gave a list of all the nouns they used in the initial interview (e.g., group, troupe, troop, club, or team). The overall tone for the focus group highlighted the bonds and relationships the participants described in the initial interviews and appeared to strengthen these bonds more in the process. The participants left for their rehearsal as a "synergy of improvisers" (plural noun provided by Fox in his final interview).

The Final Interviews

The final data collection session occurred approximately 2 weeks following the focus group session. Once again, the college provided me with rooms where I could

conduct the interviews. The participants signed up for 90 minutes over a 2-day period. The transcriptionist sent me the text version of the focus group, which I reviewed, corrected, and sent to the participants for review prior to the final interviews. From the initial interview and focus group data, I formulated additional questions for the final interviews. Between the time of the focus group and the final interviews, Donnie, Lester, Fox, Freddy, Briscoe, and Caine had a performance. Flynn attended the performance but did not perform. As in prior sessions, I followed the protocol (Appendix E) and added questions when I needed clarification or extension on some things that were previously mentioned. All of the participants commented on the recent performance without prompting. None of the interviews lasted the entire 90-minute time allotment. The participants made various statements. Freddy said, "I can't think of anything else without repeating myself." In this way, I argue saturation was achieved. As an additional assurance to saturation, I found consistency across all the interviews and focus group. The same audio recording methods were used for the final interview as in the initial interviews and the focus group session. Upon completion of each interview, the files were converted to MP3 files. They were then emailed to the transcriber.

Summary of Data Collection

The strategies, methods, and protocols presented in Chapter 3 served as effective guides for the data collection of this study. As anticipated, I relied on my skills of presence, acceptance, and trust throughout the sessions and improvised when needed (i.e., video recorder failure, talking socks strategy, and amended protocol questions). Phenomenological research relies on thick, rich descriptions of the shared experiences,

which require reflection and inspection of the participants' memories. As the interviewer, I was obligated to maintain a level of professionalism while at the same time presenting myself as a sympathetic and welcoming ear. Through the data collection period, all the participants expressed gratitude for the study and my interest in their group. Interpretation of the phenomenon of experiences with theatrical improvisation at a community college began with the participants' descriptions of those experiences. Throughout the data collections sessions, the participants' reflections and the researcher's reflexivity and acceptance of data led to the development of four major themes. I describe the process I used to evoke these themes and present the codes, which led me to the themes.

Data Analysis

Kvale (1996) suggested a six-step strategy to interpretation as one way for qualitative researchers to analyze their data. In addition, Kvale argued for an ad hoc or eclectic approach to interpretation. Using an ad hoc approach, four themes emerged from the data. In this section, I present my interpretation methods, the codes that emerged, from the data, and the themes that evolved from the codes. Using quotations from the participants to emphasize the importance of the code or theme, the essence of what theatrical improvisation has meant to the participants emerges. This section concludes with discrepancies and transitions into the section on trustworthiness of the study.

Method

While I followed the six-step strategy as presented by Kvale (1996), I also used other methods (i.e., bridling, of inquiry, and postreflective journaling) in an ad hoc

manner to arrive at the four major themes. Analysis began with the first interview

question and continued through to the final interviews. After data collection, I condensed

and interpreted data in search of codes and emerging themes. The following is a

chronological organization of my analysis process.

   During the data collection sessions. As described earlier, while the interviews

happened I was already interpreting data by bridling my own experiences yet letting my

prior knowledge guide the order of the questions and the use of probing or follow-up

questions. During the sessions, I took notes. These notes consisted of my impressions,

things that surprised me, things that stood out for me, notable body language, and the

tone of the participants. The notes paired with my Livescribe pen and created a podcast.

The Livescribe podcast enabled me to look at my notes and listen to the recordings.

Later, I used the podcasts in this manner when I reviewed the transcripts. Contact

summary forms (Appendix F) were completed after each session for each participant and

the focus group. The contact summary forms became a vehicle for postsession reflection

on the sessions. Together, the notes and the contact summary forms, aided my

interpretation of the transcripts, which can be limited when used as the sole object of

analysis (Kvale, 1996).

   Transcripts of the spoken interviews into written text happened immediately after

the interviews and focus group. Both IRBs approved the use of a third party transcriber.

The style of transcription was verbatim except for profanity. The transcriber used ellipses

to indicate long pauses and comas to indicate short pauses. I received the transcripts as

Word documents. I reviewed the documents substituting the appropriate pseudonyms,

removing location references, and fixing misspellings and wrong word insertions. The revised transcripts were emailed to the appropriate participant for additional corrections, clarifications, and additional thoughts. The review of the transcripts by the participants helped to ensure reliability and validity of the data. Concurrent to the participants' review, I listened to the podcasts while I followed along with my notes and looked for emphasis and other things that the text alone lacked. I made notes of laughter, hesitance, and accents; I marked the beats of the interviews. In acting, a beat is described as a complete thought. Sometimes the beats followed the questions. Sometimes, there were separate beats within the responses. In this way, I became aware of the emotional nuances of data. Analysis that happened during the data collection period led to amended questions in following sessions and areas for further inquiry. For the focus group, instead of listening to the podcast and following with my notes, I watched the video recording and followed with my notes. The video recording showed nonverbal communication that occurred between the participants. These communications were then included into the collective data. Through review, reflection, and revision on my part and the participants' part, I hoped the participants would begin to bring their own interpretations to light, and I would remain open to new perspectives, as well.

I reviewed the initial interview transcripts for codes. In each transcript, I greyed out what I felt was extraneous to the research question. Prior experiences and training as well as performance experiences fell into this category. During this process, I made the decision to change the research question to add performance as part of the shared experience, due primarily to emphasis and frequency of its mention in the initial

interviews. Quotes that directly addressed the research question were pulled out of the transcripts and loosely arranged by areas of development (i.e., social, mental, physical, and personal). However, these were just preliminary categories. As I prepared for the focus group, I formed questions based on the emerging ideas, which focused on the participants' perceptions of the art or the craft of improvisation and about its role in their college education. Through the process of revision of and reflection on the data, I began a hermeneutic approach of analysis—interacting with the experiences described by the participants while bridling my pre-understanding. The inclusion of a post intentional phenomenological inquiry, which included the participants' reflective analysis, created the difference between a classical hermeneutic circle of inquiry and an ad hoc approach (Kvale, 1996; Vagle, 2014). Figure 1 illustrates this hermeneutic strategy combined with an ad hoc approach.
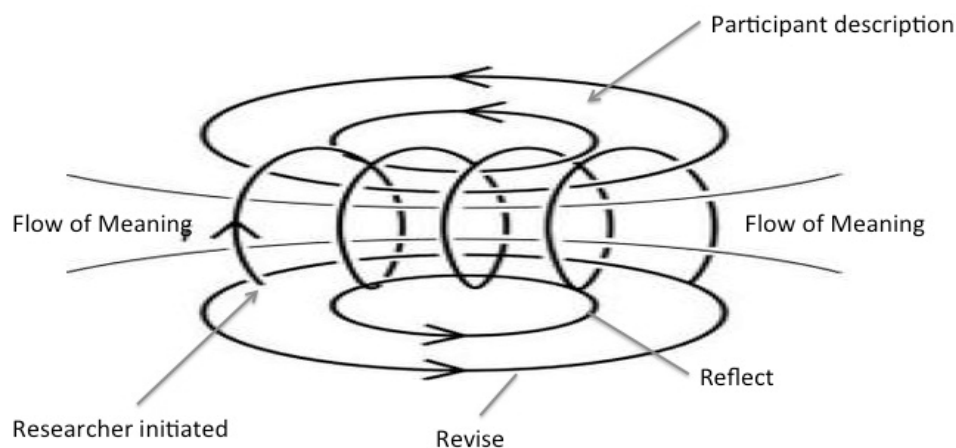
Figure 1. Loops of analysis: Hermeneutic interpretation and ad hoc analysis.

Although I initiated the interpretation of the shared experiences and revised the questions as guided by reflection, I asked the participants to revise and reflect on their answers as well. In this way, analysis followed a hermeneutic circle as described by Gadamer (as cited in Nyström & Dahlberg, 2001). More coding and theme development led to more questions based on my interpretations. These questions and partial analysis formed the basis of the final interview protocols, which I tailored for each participant (including initially designed protocol questions submitted in the proposal). Kvale (1996) argued for self-correcting interviews such as the ones I performed. The final interviews not only provided the participants opportunities to comment on my analysis and make corrections, but also extend their thoughts on their experiences. Following Kvale's sixth step of analysis, I sought to extend the continuum of the participants' experiences by asking questions during the final interview about new insights about the experiences and about any influence this research had on their continued experiences. Throughout the data collection process, both the researcher and the improvisers had participated in the interpretation and analysis of the data. Although I continued to check with the participants after data had been collected, development of the themes solidified and emerged after the data collection sessions concluded.

Coding and theme development. Reviewing the transcripts and notes from all the sessions and the visual data from the focus group, I generated over 100 code words and phrases to represent significant statements, emotions, and common stories told by the participants. These codes were placed on index cards, which I sorted loosely into categories. During the data collection process, I first sorted them into developmental

themes but found this limiting and not suited to the research question. As I rearranged the piles of codes, I followed what I heard from the participants as a process experience rather than a resulting product. In this way, the themes discovered in this study follow the participants' processes of learning, training, and performing theatrical improvisation at college in a semichronological organization. These four themes provided the richest possible description of the participants' experiences.

Themes

Four themes emerged from collected data. The first theme includes the attraction and the initial experiences the participants had that drew them to this group. The second theme represents the skills, abilities, and qualities the participants felt they needed and developed through their experiences with improvisation. The third theme represents the transfer of the skills and qualities that the participants gained through their improvisational experiences to their lives outside of the group. The fourth and last theme, addressed the participants' sense of future for themselves, the group, and improvisational theatre in a college environment. All four themes are introduced in this section.

The Hook. The first theme focused on the identification by the participants of their choice to join The Society, what drew them to the activity, and why they were drawn. The participants provided most of the information that became this theme in the initial interview when I asked them to tell me about their experiences in general and how long they had been with the group. Freddy described improvisation as an "onion" that requires a person to peel back layers to understand and appreciate it better. All of the participants described the attraction to the group as looking for a fun activity. Prior

experiences with the group or improvisation in general were also included in this theme. The codes identified in this initial theme include *fun*, *leisure*, *outlet*, *prior experiences*, *friends*, and *training*. As the first onion layer, the participants described their initial perceptions of the group on a very general, almost superficial level, which evolved as they reflected on their responses.

The Craft. The second theme evolved because of asking the participants to describe their self-perceptions of their improvisational skill levels and descriptions of scenes or games that were memorable to them. Through training, practice, and performance of theatrical improvisation the participants identified skills, qualities, and abilities they developed for their craft. With the peeling of this layer of the improvisational onion, the participants identified specific development of themselves that helped them be better theatrical improvisers. The codes for this theme included *skills*, *abilities*, and *qualities* with respective sub-codes of *patience*, *trust*, and *supportive*. I identified more subcodes, which I describe in more detail in the results section of this chapter.

The Rewards and Applications. The third theme I identified grew from further self-inspection by the participants. Within this theme, lay some of my prior experiences with theatrical improvisation and was the area during the data collection sessions that I closely bridled so as not to influence the participants. In this theme, the participants spoke of what they felt were the rewards or downsides from their experiences and their applications of their knowledge of the craft to their worlds outside The Society. The codes for this theme were directional such as to school, to work, to social life, and to

person. In this theme of ideas, the participants began describing the seriousness and importance of their experiences as they identified the influences their experiences had on their development, thus pealing back another layer.

The Continuance. The fourth theme of ideas I identified from collected data described the future for the participants, the group, and theatrical improvisation at college. Ideas described in this theme emerged primarily from the focus group session when the participants had the opportunity to discuss and reflect together. While the participants identified they do this well, as an improvisational group, they only did so following some scenes or performances. In this theme, the participants described surprise at mutual sentiments within the group and began the discussion of the future of the group and its role at the college. Codes in this theme included *internal changes to The Society's organizational structure*, *relationship to the college*, *validation*, and *continued experiences*. All the participants came to the study with their individual feelings of their experiences, which they reported evolved over the course of the study. By the end of the data collection session, all the participants described having been changed through their self-reflection and reflection on their experiences with The Society. With this theme of Continuance, I describe the participants' thoughts on their future experiences.

Discrepancies

The experiences and feelings described by the participants of this study provide insight into a phenomenon, for which I could find little research and none in the context that I sampled. While Briscoe described one of the abilities of the improvisers as having "group mind" (a hive-like mentality in which all members think as a group), not all of the

participants were in agreement in their responses to some of the questions. However, as Briscoe noted, I found disagreement to be a rare occurrence and the participants to be group minded. Outlier statements or ideas that did not fit into a specific theme prompted me to revise my initial themes and research question. The first discrepancy came from Lester who remarked that he did not care whether or not he performed. This comment fell not only outside what the other participants stated but also outside of Lester's actions in that he always performed with the group if he could. His statement spoke more toward providing others with the opportunity to perform because he had already experienced performance and wanting others to experience it.

The second discrepancy came from Caine. After hearing other members discuss the club aspect of the group versus offering improvisation as a credit class, Caine adamantly stated he did not believe improvisation should be a class where a teacher grades by determining who is funnier than another or anything situation that adds more pressure to academic life. Caine was more in favor of the group continuing as a club, open to the community, and all-inclusive with no audition or tryout aspect for membership. A discrepancy I noted for myself included the idea of rules, which I discussed in the conceptual framework. While some of the participants mentioned "guidelines" and a few others brought up the "yes, and" rule, mostly the participants skirted the concept of rules that I thought would be more apparent. Within the theme of Continuance, many of the older members of the group expressed a concern about the structure of the group, its relationship to the college, and its lack of relationship with the theatre department all of which I had only tangentially considered. Fox presented a

discrepant case in that he was a member of The Society, but not a student at the college during his membership in the group. Data Fox provided could be used in future reports or research to describe the inclusion of community members to extracurricular college programs. No previous research has provided information from the perspective of the student or alumni on their experiences with theatrical improvisation in a college environment. In the next section, I provide evidence of trustworthiness of the information discovered in this study, which supports my claims of adding to the knowledge base and substantiate the phenomenon as experienced by the improvisers.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

In Chapter 3, I described strategies I planned to employ throughout the study to provide evidence of trustworthiness. Under the strategies, I cited van Manen's (2014) approach in which the researcher seeks to discover what happened in the experiences not what the participants felt or believed happened. During the data collection process, it became harder for me to discern between what happened and what the participants perceived to have happened. As with the post intentional phenomenological approach of bridling, Vagle (2014) argued that the participants' reflections cannot be reduced or bracketed from the actual experiences and the perceptions, and beliefs become part of the experiences. Vagle (2014) and Dahlberg (2006) further argued this does not decrease the trustworthiness of a study but rather adds to the thick, rich descriptions that are colored and textured in their remembrance. Beyond that change, I implemented and adhered to the strategies as described in Chapter 3 and reviewed in this next section.

Credibility

To ascertain a high level of credibility, I proposed three strategies for this study. The first was prolonged contact with the participants. The second was analysis of multiple data sources. The third was hermeneutical circle of inquiry until saturation of data was achieved. As previously described, I followed all three of the strategies laid out in Chapter 3. A slight change occurred with the hermeneutical circle of inquiry, which I also described, with the adoption of an ad hoc approach to analysis, which included reflective analysis. Additional reflective analysis steps described by Kvale (1996) augmented the hermeneutic circle of inquiry and led to saturation of data earlier than anticipated. Prolonged contact with the participants provided me with content-rich, thick descriptions and interpretations of the participants' experiences, which Miles et al. (2014) noted lend evidence of credibility. Analyses of multiple data sources as well as confirmation of analyses by the participants further provide evidence of credibility. Finally, hermeneutical circle of inquiry using the strategy of reflecting and revising enabled me to identify areas of uncertainty and to make clarifications when necessary until I had reached a level of saturation with the data.

Dependability

To address the underlying issue of dependability, Miles et al. (2014) argued researchers should address the question of whether or not the research had been conducted with reasonable care. As this was my first attempt at qualitative research, I relied heavily on the guidance of my chair and methodology faculty. While the single research question may appear simplistic, as I peeled the layers of the participants'

experiences, the simplicity of the research question and my bridled approach allowed the

participants to fill the spaces with their experiences and interpretations. The findings

showed meaningful parallelisms between data, indicative of the consistency of the study

and the methodology (Miles et al., 2014). I did not use a coresearcher; I depended on my

faculty for help with coding and analysis, data quality checks, and other issues of

integrity and quality.

Confirmability

As previously mentioned, I bridled my own knowledge and past experiences as

they guided me, but did not let them drive the inquiry or determine the analysis. In this

way, while I framed the research from my past knowledge, I took a position of neutrality

as the researcher in attempts to minimize my biases (Vagle et al., 2009). I defined the

concept of bridling as defined in Chapter 1. I used this approach throughout the research

in creating the conceptual framework, in creating the research design, in collecting the

data, and in analyzing the data to reach my conclusions in Chapter 5. Kvale (1996)

argued that validity of a qualitative study depends on the quality of the craftsmanship and

the credibility of the researcher. Miles et al. (2014) included several other steps to

ascertain confirmability (i.e., adherence to described methodology, a record of the

methods used, and data retention for reanalysis by others). Throughout the research

process, I have carefully described my methodology, so that other researchers could

follow my methods or my methods could be audited if necessary (Lincoln & Guba as

cited in Miles et al., 2014). Should other researchers wish, these data will be saved for 5

years at which time they will be deleted from my personal computer and hard drive.

However, future requests for data would need to be approved by all the participants and associated intuitional review boards.

Transferability

The information from this study should in no way be considered as generalizable to all extracurricular activities in higher education but could be transferable to similar application of theatrical improvisation in learning environments. The Society is unique in many ways in that it is not staff or faculty organized and is not associated with the college's theatre department. Many of the participants reported knowing of or participating in other improvisational groups at other institutions; however, they also reported the structure of the other groups were unlike The Society's. The themes of the Hook, the Craft, and the Applications are congruent with findings and theories noted in the conceptual framework. The concept of flow illustrates this study's transferability. All of the participants described experiencing a flow-like state at some point. These descriptions confirmed my assumption and could lead to further investigations on the perceived benefits of flow in an educational environment. The findings from this study also confirmed similar aspects of theatrical improvisation Meyers (2006) described in her study on adults who learned improvisation. Overall, the participants' descriptions of their perceptions of their development through improvisation give readers the potential create their own avenues for transferability of the findings. These interpretations will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. The participants had much to say. In the next section, I connect what they said with the themes to illustrate and describe these shared experiences.

Results

Seven members of The Society, an extracurricular activity theatrical improvisational group at a community college in the mid-Atlantic region, volunteered to be interviewed and participate in a focus group. Two of the participants identified as current students, three as graduates with an associate degree from the college, and two as alumni who had completed some classes at the college. Of the seven, only one of the participants did not attend the school when The Society existed but was a now a community member. As the research question addressed the experiences with improvisation while a student at the college level, this participant's data were only included in this study when data involved or influenced the two participants who were current students. In this section, I present an in-depth summary of the four themes and provide illustrative statements from the participants to help explain the emergent themes. An outline of the themes appears as Appendix I.

The Hook

Through reporting the results of the first theme, The Hook, I describe how the participants came to be part of the group. Of these data, the information about how the participants began their experiences with The Society proved to be the most distant yet distinct memory for all the participants. As an extracurricular activity, The Society represented an activity and space away from academics and other outside pressures they experienced at the college. Notably, the experiences of joining The Society were more often than not contrasted with negative experiences and perceptions of activities of outside the group (i.e., work, partying, and school). Most of the participants reported that

what initially drew them to The Society changed as their experiences with the group progressed.

Prior experience/exposure. One of the first codes to emerge from collected data concerned prior exposure or experiences with theatrical improvisation. Many of the participants grew up watching the television show, *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* They mentioned it as factoring into their desire to join an improv group. As a rationale for forming the original improvisation group, Donnie stated, "We really wanted to have an improv…like a place we could go and learn about this art of improv, and I had never done it before. I just saw *Whose Line* and really wanted to do it." Freddy remembered being drawn to the group after recognizing a fellow student who was a group member and making the connection to the television show.

> I grew up with the show, *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* I have always been curious about it. I hadn't been exposed to it in any theater groups or anything like improv before where I grew up. I realized that one of the cast members was in one of my classes so I approached him and said, "Hey, I saw the show, and it was great." He said if I enjoyed it, I should come out to the club sometime.

Lester echoed Donnie's and Freddy's remembrances of the television show, "We loved, even as a kid, loved the show, *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* I wanted to be just like them; I thought it was funny." As an outside, older observer, Fox noted that improvisation did not exist while he was at the college. Fox expressed surprise and pleasure at the accessibility of theatrical improvisation at the college today and credited the television show for making improvisation more mainstream. Three other participants (Briscoe,

Caine, and Flynn) had learned theatrical improvisation in high school and were looking to reconnect to the art form to improve their improvisational skills and for fun.

Inviting and inclusive. As previously mentioned, The Society has no audition process to limit membership. Caine reported negative feelings toward improvisation from his high school years. In high school, the group was "competitive," and Caine did not make that team although he auditioned several times. Unlike his high school experiences, Caine's expressed relief and a sense of welcoming from the members of The Society that he now employs with new members of The Society. "We never turn someone down and say, 'You cannot be here.' We welcome everyone." Freddy experienced the same openness to join when the fellow classmate invited him to come to the club after Freddy complimented him.

Friendship. Beyond the openness of the group, strong strands of friendship wove through all of the participants (except Fox) descriptions of the group's appeal. Many of the participants had been friends or knew each other from high school or prior to joining the group. All of the participants reported a sense of friendship with all members of the group. When questioned to which came first, the friendship or the group, a few of the participants noted the friendship was first, and a few said their friendships evolved from their experiences. Joining the group to be with friends seemed to be less of an attractor and more of what has kept the group going.

Leisure/recreation. Counter to my stereotypical idea of how college-aged men would choose to spend their Friday evenings, the participants described "eagerness,"

"anticipation," and "can't wait 'til Friday" feelings for meeting to do improvisation. As Flynn stated, "I am just really, really into improv."

As an older member of the group, Lester mentioned the partying aspect of college, and why he preferred his time with the improvisation group. "I feel fulfilled afterwards. I have done the partying thing. It is fun at the time, but you just feel like crap afterwards. But with improv you can't wait till next Friday."

For all of the participants, their experiences with the group began with feelings of looking for fun and an outlet or escape from other experiences in their lives. As a diversion or a means to laugh, the participants felt their shared experiences rounded out their lives and gave them a place to laugh, play, and bond as have been noted in other leisure and recreational activities. Donnie mentioned he looked forwarded to doing improvisation every Friday and not to anything else that was "not improv."

Fun. The participants described "fun" as the predominant draw to the group mentioned by the participants. Whether they described it as "acting goofy" or "addicted to laughing" or simply "playing," all the participants joined the group in search of fun. Donnie described it as adult play aspect of improvisation.

> I realized that it's so much more fun for me to play with someone than to play by myself, and I think it's also beyond being human…. I think it's the closest you get to being a kid again…. It's the same process children do . . . it's just that now you understand all the underpinnings of why it works . . . like I don't think it's any different from what we do on stage than what small children do with action figures or when they put on a cape or anything like that.

Outlet. I placed the subcode of outlet in this section; however, while the participants overwhelmingly described the group as such, few mentioned it as what attracted them to the group. Most of the data supported the idea that their experiences became an outlet, an escape, and bordered on therapeutic. Those participants (Briscoe, Flynn, and Caine) with prior improvisational experience did link their attraction to the group with ideas of doing so as an outlet. As part of his inclusive philosophy toward the group, Caine stated:

> It's an outlet. It's therapeutic. It's anything you want to call it whoever is in there. It's different for everyone for their reasons, so if there is someone that just needs that outlet, and they don't have anywhere to go….We just want them to come to improv, to help them out. It'll help with the troupe; it will help them out…. It's a win, win every situation.

The Craft

In this section, I describe the theme of the Craft that emerged as the participants described their involvement with the art of improvisation. The participants identified many skills, abilities, and qualities that they attributed to their experiences. The ideas between art and art work, process and product, and art and craft are woven throughout this section and are inseparable. The participants described the development of the following attributes through the holistic set of experiences. While I report specific instances, as identified by the participants, it is the relationship of the instances to the larger picture, which helped the participants make the identifications and connections. I divided this section into three areas to differentiate between skills (which can be learned),

abilities (which can be practiced), and qualities (which can be fostered). This is done within the context of the shared experiences of the participants.

Skills. The participants identified these skills as needed to be good at improvisation. They recognized them in themselves and in other members of the group. The realization of these skills emerged from stories the participants told of memorable scenes or games that they had played. Further recognition and identification of what the participants thought made a good improviser came from the focus group session and reflection between the data collection sessions.

Presence. The participants had many terms for experiences, which I coded as presence. For example, the participants described presence as both "focus" and as "in the moment." How much the improvisers committed to or developed this skill led to their feelings of success in their craft. In many instances, the participants noted the realization of having presence as a transformative moment. Freddy described presence as attunement to what is happening on stage and tuning out what was happening off stage.

> It really happens like an epiphany. It happens to all of us even from the beginning. Our big "Ah, ha!" moments come from performance in and onstage. We just reach this level of awareness, and we're able to build off of it onstage…We get this optimal idea of the beats and what needs to be added. It happens more and more frequently. You get better at it every time you do it, you reach a new checkpoint in your abilities, and you widen sort of this tree branch system of skills whether it be pantomime or leading the scene or listening very carefully and just being able to focus. Focus is really critical and the ability to really almost

become meditative…only listening to what's happening on stage and then not paying attention to what's happening in the audience. That's the big key to becoming a good improviser. It's really a school of fish-like understanding of your other improvisers, of your fellow improvisers, rather than just trying to make the laugh.

Freddy described the skill of focusing as something that group members learn early in the training process and that the more they practice the better they get at it. Flynn described being in the moment as a being in a "purely reactionary state…being emerged in the energy of the people around you." Like Freddy, Flynn argued that being able to get to this "state" (or skill level) took practice. Flynn also noted that failing to achieve presence and that the awareness presence presents were instructive parts of the process of improvisation.

Self-awareness. All of the participants reported self-awareness as a predominant skill needed for improvisation. Furthermore, the improvisers touched on different aspects of self-awareness (i.e., emotional, physical, and mental). A couple of the participants reflected on being shy and even scared to get up in front of others and perform. While shyness might appear counter indicative for a performer, the awareness of this aspect of themselves helped them become better at improvisation. Flynn described learning self-awareness as the acceptance of failure. He said the recognition of knowing about himself helped him become a better improviser.

At first just getting more comfortable failing in front of people, I felt like it can be like really, really scary, really threatening. When you don't have the confidence

and you are not 100% sure in your ability to not make the same mistake or to not make other mistakes in the future. I know I had some anxiety when I first started improvising. It could be terrifying when I would like go up (on stage) I'd shut down a little bit and then just go on autopilot. Maybe I would say something or do something, and it wouldn't make any sense. It wouldn't make for a good scene… It would be kind of the exact wrong thing to do, but I've noticed it… when you have people in the scene that help you justify and take that mistake…together you can turn it in into like a strength.

Learning to be self-aware through improvisation was easier for some of the participants because of the nature of the art form. The Society practices and performs short form improvisation, similar to the games and scenes performed on *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* The scenes run only a few minutes, are generally humorous, and when completed the improvisers move on to the next game. Many of the participants noted that it was easier to be vulnerable and learn about their mistakes and successes in this medium. Several of the participants mentioned "laughing off" bad scenes and simply moving on to the next. Laughter and the knowledge that failures are not catastrophic, aid in the process of becoming more self-aware. Freddy described one of his moments of self-awareness during a performance of a game in which the audience voted him to be scene "winner."

I went through the scene, and I really was carried by adrenaline. But adrenaline wouldn't take you very far in that game because you have to be mindful of everything else that has to happen in the scene. And I hit that I hit that magic

balance of adrenaline and focus of what was going on, what I need to do. It was really the moment that I realized that I had potential in improv and that improv really made me happy because if it's developmental qualities.

Listening/watching. All the participants described the skill of listening as something they learned through their experiences with improvisation. Donnie said improvisers need to have listening skills:

The basic skill of improv is listening. I notice that after doing improv I really listen and that I want to hear someone. It makes me pay attention; it helps me stay within the moment…I am not thinking what I am doing an hour from now, or 3 days from now. I am thinking of right now and what's happening.

Donnie addressed the interconnectedness of the skills the participants identified as needed for improvisation. Lester identified listening as one of his strengths.

Freddy added watching, which I included as part of this theme because of the physical and presentational nature of this art form. The participants demonstrated their watching skills during the focus group session. Using the convention of the "talking socks," the participants moved the discussion physically as well as orally. Often a participant would ask for the opportunity to speak through gesture or eye contact. Sometimes a group member directed the conversation by throwing the socks at another member. Had any member not been fully watching or listening throughout the session, the socks would have dropped, been missed, or hit someone. However, this never happened during that session. I was able to observe how the group functioned using skills they had identified in the initial interview session. Again, the three skills identified in this

theme represent only ones that the participants reported and are not indicative of all the skills or are the only ones that might be developed through improvisation.

Abilities. The participants reported that while all people may have the capacity to be patient, to trust, and to be creative; through their experiences with The Society, they have practiced these skills and improved them through the process of their craft. All of the participants thought anyone could do theatrical improvisation. They all also recognized areas for improvement in themselves and others to do the art form better. In this subcode, I developed a sense that the participants had an ideal of a good improvisational performer and that abilities (i.e., patience, trust, and creativity) factored into the participants' evaluations of themselves and others.

Patience. Most of the participants described early experiences with the group as "adrenaline" or "endorphin" rushes. The key word in these descriptions was "rushes" indicating quickness without thought. Lester argued that although those moments were fun and exhilarating that over time, he learned to wait and listen instead of rushing into a scene or pushing his agenda.

> I used to force myself as quick as possible, and I realized how unrealistic it is. Cause in real life, you are silent, you are a listening to people, you are thinking about what I am saying, you're reacting, even a head nod, you are actively listening. That is how people talk, you are not trying to interrupt me, you're registering in your brain. So, I thought about that, I should bring it in to improv and make it more real. When it is real, it's more relatable. When it's more relatable, to me, it's funnier.

Patience on the part of the improviser limits the chaos and keeps the scenes moving forward. To be patient, the participants noted that they had to improve their skills of listening and being self-aware.

Trust. Similarly to the other skills and abilities, the ability to trust has many layers and implications. The improvisers described the need to trust themselves to have the skills and patience to not only help the scenes but to make them better. After recognizing the ability to trust their own skills, the participants identified trusting their troupe mates as an important ability.

> You definitely have to have trust. This is something that can play on a lot of people insecurities, not just like …not just being able to trust someone in a scene to help you develop the scene, but trust them not to throw you under the bus. It is a team effort to make the scene work, and a lot of times the hardest thing to get over is the need to make sure you have a good joke. You want to be able to trust the person to be flexible, to play to their strengths, but also to try on things that they are not as strong with. Because they know that if they falter in this regard, you're there to help them. That's the coolest part about it (improvisation), you're all working together, to make this scene work, it's not just one person's responsibility. So trust is super important.

Donnie described the ability to trust his troupe mates by using a Marine saying, "Welcome to the suck." The idea behind the saying is that no matter how bad the situation might be, the group trusts they will not only get through it together, but the outcome might be better for the challenge. In the focus group, Donnie gave this example:

"We actually have a game, *Dr. Hands*, where somebody else is your hands (from behind the person speaking) and usually involves food. During rehearsal, we did this. Freddy shot. Was it make-up? He shot something up your nose (Lester's)?"

"It was paint," interjected Lester, laughing.

Donnie continued:

Completely up Lester's nose… that's the most uncomfortable physical game. The other person can't see…the other person is just trying to mess with you. But having to trust no matter what …if they will kill you?…but then, I think it's more interesting.

The group laughed in acknowledgement and recognition to this remembrance.

While Donnie jokingly mentioned that the scene might "kill you," the group knew and trusted that no one would ever let a situation get that far. The bonds and friendships that the participants described framed their knowledge of their fellow improvisers. The participants described their troupe mates' strengths and weaknesses and how they used them in the scenes. Along with the making friendships comes the ability to trust and, as Briscoe noted, not to be "thrown under the bus."

Creativity. Similarly to many of the subcodes identified, the participants described the ability of creativity in many different ways (i.e., inventive, innovative, funny, quick thinking, and artful). Briscoe noted that he enjoyed being around others who shared his sense of humor and fun. Lester reported that he needed his Fridays with improvisation as a "creative outlet." All of the participants agreed that everyone has the capacity to be creative, and improvisation not only provided the opportunity to learn creativity but also

the outlet to share it. Freddy gave the analogy of muscles; that they need to be flexed and

exercised to be effective. Every Friday night, this group of individuals "flexes" their

creative muscles in hopes of becoming better at the process of improvisation.

Qualities. The participants identified attributes of a person (i.e. supportive,

selfless, and confident), which make them better at improvisation. Furthermore, the

participants described that the more improvisational experiences (positive or negative),

the greater the positive growth in these qualities, and the better they felt they became at

improvisation. The participants recognized these qualities in themselves and in their

teammates. The qualities of supportive, selfless, and confident were often described in

the same statement and addressed the social nature of this art form.

Supportive and selfless*.* I mentioned earlier that most of the rules I identified in

Chapter 2 from the literature were not equality identified by the participants in this study.

One rule they did state frequently was making the other people on stage look good. In the

following quote, Donnie described the relationship of selflessness to the art of

improvisation:

> You start to forget about you, and it becomes this very selfless art. And it's weird
>
> because usually art is almost by nature selfish…I want to produce something that
>
> makes people feel this…or expresses this idea I have, or this is mine, and this is
>
> how I feel…. and I feel this (improvisation) is almost different because it's
>
> entirely wrapped in being social and I think your strength as an improviser is so
>
> much wrapped up on how well you can communicate with someone.

The improvisers described a delicate balance between challenging their fellow troupe mates and supporting them. In challenging each other, they argued they became more creative and, often, funnier. However, the only way they could challenge each other was to give focus of the scenes over to their fellow actors and support them through the challenge.

Confident. "I was super shy," said Lester, "still am a little bit." Lester spoke about his early days with the group when he doubted his abilities at improvisation. He reflected that he took laughter as a measure of his ability. However, as he developed his skills, he felt he no longer needed to "go for the laugh." As one of the younger members of the group, Flynn described himself as shy and lacking self-confidence. While Flynn noted that his experiences in high school helped raised his self-confidence, at the college level he noted that he felt that he still had room for improvement in this area. Flynn spoke in admiration of some of his troupe mates who had more experience than he had, and that while he felt confident in his abilities, he also noted that confidence required continual work.

The Rewards and Applications

The predominance of life applications meaning-making that emerged from the data was remarkable. While intuitively and experientially I had made the connections for myself, the importance the participants placed on the transferability of theatrical improvisation to life outside the activity surprised me. Donnie said it simply and best in the following statement: "Everything that I ever needed, I learned in improv." Donnie was not alone in this thought. All of the participants reflected on development they

attributed to their experiences with improvisation and gave applications for things they learned through their craft to many aspects of their lives.

To person. Of the skills, qualities, and abilities that the participants identified and I wove into the theme of the Craft, the improvisers described how they felt they had changed or developed personally. Flynn reported that his experiences helped shape who he was as a person. Confidence, Flynn felt as an improviser, influenced how he felt about himself outside of the group.

> The kind of confidence…I didn't know I had… the kind of ability I didn't, I wasn't fully aware of. I guess I just have become a little bit more confident, a little bit more spontaneous as a result of thinking more deeply on this (improvisation).

All of the other participants reported similar experiences (i.e., awareness of confidence, listening skills, and collaboration) and applications to their personal development. Freddy added memory rehabilitation to rewards that he felt he gained from being with the group. Head surgery had damaged Freddy's short-term memory. Freddy remembered practices where he worked on rehabilitating his memory skills. Freddy mentioned how he believed that theatrical improvisation would be helpful to anyone who might be suffering from memory problems (i.e., Alzheimer's disease or dementia) or for "growing brains like students" too. Other members of the troupe also thought that improvisation training would be good for any age.

During the focus group the participants discussed whether they believed their experiences were an outlet or therapeutic. Most of them said it could be both. Because the

material for the scenes was unscripted and created spontaneously by the improviser, the participants described how that process could border on therapy. Lester described his experiences as the reward of emotional outlet and a form of therapy:

> I feel like it's definitely an outlet, because if I don't do improv for a week I feel like my brain is congested with all this like creative energy. I need to get it out, or I'm going to explode and be very upset…(but also) everything we do in the scene is drawn from like experiences we've had…We know, in that sense, it's kind of therapeutic because if we have a scene ...like a relationship we've had, we are drawing from what we know. So in that sense it can be therapeutic, you're making fun of things that you have experienced so it's becoming lighthearted and hopefully maybe it helps you cope with things better.

Briscoe, Donnie, and Caine also described how they escaped the cares of the day when they came to improvisation practice. The participants used the word "addictive" to describe their feelings towards their experiences.

Although none of the participants had heard of Csikszentmihalyi's theory of flow, all of them described it using different terminology. The feelings of "being addicted to improv" came when the participants described the feelings of joy and happiness after what they deemed a successful scene, practice, or performance. Briscoe stated,

> It is almost an out of body experience. As far as, you are in the moment, and the moment is great. And you're able to guide it, but there is this sense that the scene has a natural progression not defined. You're able to kinda let yourself go in the scene, and that I think when it's probably the best.

They all described how challenging the craft is and how rewarding. Achieving that balance, those feelings of "the synchronicity," "harmony," and of a "good scene" kept the participants wanting more.

To social life. Donnie noted that many people who have not done improvisation lack the self-awareness that can develop from improvisation. Donnie identified the lack of self-awareness as a societal flaw.

> It (improvisation) helps me to actually connect with the other person across from me in a not superficial way. Whereas in other times, before I started doing this, I felt like I started conversations because I needed something, or I just wanted to say something myself. I feel like my conversations are less selfish because I feel like I surrender to everything that is happening around me more than I have in the past. I think less about me and more of what is happening and accepting it for what it is. Because that is what you do as improvisers.

Many of the participants conjectured that if more people had the improvisational skills they identified, the world might be a better place.

The friendships that the participants have created while in this group were described as much more than casual acquaintances that they felt they made outside of the group. A bond exists between them through their experiences. Many of the participants described liking their troupe mates and "hanging out" with them outside of practice or performance, but trusting, supporting, and caring for them "like family." Through pushing past what they felt were their faults and vulnerabilities, the participants described making connections that have only strengthened over time.

To school. While attending college and participating in the group, both Caine and Briscoe used their time with group as motivation. Both recognized that they did not feel that their academics skills were strong and further described some of their academic classes as drudgery. Briscoe used his improvisational skills within the class to make the content "more fun." Caine used improv practice as a reward at the end of the week for going to all of his classes and doing the required work. Lester and Freddy described learning improvisation as being superior to learning public speaking as a means to develop social skills. Lester had taken a public speaking class concurrently to being in the group; the professor of the class excused him from the final examination. Lester attributed that to his improv training and not to what he had learned in the class. All of the participants argued that their experiences helped them make more creative and fun answers to problems in and out of the realm of academia.

To work. Some of the participants worked while in college. Some of them work now as alumni. All of them saw applications of their improvisational skill to a work environment. The idea of the skills use in a job interview came up a few times. The analogy some of the participants made in this instance was the high pressure of a performance situation where "you want the audience to like you" and need to come up with quick appropriate responses. Now in the workforce, Briscoe uses the same strategy of using his improv skills to make his work more enjoyable as he did with his college classes. Donnie reiterated the importance of the good communication skills he learned through improv to work situations. Of the seven participants, only Donnie pursued a

career in the entertainment field; however, all of them mentioned that they believed theatrical improvisation helped them in their work in fields outside of theatre.

The Continuance

All seven participants were passionate about the group. Just like their scenes, the future of the group and the role each member holds or will hold are unscripted and changeable. The participants recognized the tenuous existence of the group due to its structure and the relationship with the college. Some of the participants did not know how long they would continue with the group, but were happy to be with it for "the now." All of the participants had ideas on what they felt they needed to keep the group going as it was at the time of the study, and the role theatrical improvisation should have at the college level.

Internal changes to The Society's organizational structure. The participants described the several incarnations of the group over the 9-year period since Donnie first formed an improv group at the college. As a club, the benefits include inclusiveness and non-threatening aura of "goofy fun." However, the participants noted performance as an important factor to this art and further acknowledged a need for training prior to performance. Some participants described this incongruity of openness to everyone yet not everyone having the capacity to perform as being an underlying worry for the group falling apart. One participant described the problem this way:

> Imagine having this kinda thing (a situation where a person requires skill level to
>
> perform) for like a football team. Say, anyone can come in and play on the team
>
> with you, but you are going to want to develop the people who you have on the

team already to make sure that they work better. I do think that is a better way for performance; however, I love the club thing too cause I love being able to bring in people from all over…I think it is cool to get people excited and find an outlet for it and discover it.

The senior members of the group continued to discuss the problem and planned to make changes to the club structure in the future to accommodate a club-like environment, but also, a performance troupe.

Relationship to the college. Two of the participants of this study held leadership roles in accordance with requirement of having a club at the college. These participants described what they identified were the benefits and downsides of the relationship with the student affairs department at the college. Benefits included weekly, free rehearsal space and several performance dates and spaces over the school year also free. Unlike other clubs at the college, the participants noted that they did not require a budget to operate; the participants felt they required little oversight from the college. However, to maintain their club status, a member of The Society is required to attend a monthly meeting, which the participants reported was difficult to do. General sentiment between all the participants was that the group was well-liked by the college community. After one of their performances, the participants reflected they should have done more advertising as they recognized that performances also attracted new members to the group.

When I asked about The Society's relationship to the theatre department, the participants gave short and negative responses. One improviser said, "They (the theatre

department) think we're not an art, and we make fart jokes…and I have heard that exact thing repeatedly that we make bathroom humor, and that's all we are." The theatre department at the college does not teach theatrical improvisation, and several alumni members noted this to be true at the 4-year institutions they transferred to after receiving their associate's degree from the college. All of the participants argued that if not an entire class, at least a portion of an acting class offered at the college should cover theatrical improvisation. The sense that others in theatre regarded the improvisers' art as inferior by others was mentioned in both the interviews and the focus group. Nonetheless, the participants reported the rewards they perceived from their improvisational experiences with pride and passion that belied simply "making fart jokes." Donnie said, "I think people need to view it (theatrical improvisation) as the art, as the beautiful, wonderful, scary, dirty, gross, awesome art that it is."

     Validation. Understanding the conflicts, such as organizational challenges and outside perceptions on the art, led to feelings of validation by the participants. In the final interview that followed the focus group, all the participants described how listening to the other members talk about their craft helped them in several ways. Some mentioned that they thought they were the only ones who felt about improvisation and The Society as they did. Some mentioned feeling more connected through their shared passion. Some thought they were the only ones who saw past the humor and goofiness to the seriousness and aesthetics of improvisational theatre. According to Lester,

     It's good that this art form stays alive for people… They can just do it whenever

          they feel like doing it. You don't need anything. It's free; all you need is a space.

You can do improv anywhere. It is good for you developmentally, for your brain.

It's good socially. If you have that fear being in front of people, it's good for you.

It helps you vent out ideas. It is a great stress reliever; you get to laugh. If you

laugh a lot, I heard you live longer, which is good or bad, depending on how you

look at it. I think it is good. It's super important; it's super important.

Continued experiences. All of the participants appreciated the community, club

aspect of the group. All the participants commented on the benefits they perceived from

Fox's membership to the group. As a community member with prior theatrical

improvisation experience, the participants described learning new techniques and scenes

only added positively their experiences. Alumni members expressed appreciation in

being able to have a place to practice and perform their art. Again, not only is

improvisation nonexistent in many colleges, it is restricted to students or even only to

theatre students. As long as the members can adhere to the requirements set forth by the

college, The Society can continue. What organizational structure The Society takes in the

future has yet to be determined. The participants reminisced about members who had

moved away, graduated, and left. Often when they did so, they spoke fondly of the

former members and gave a sense of missing them. The participants recognized that

someday they would no longer be with the group, but that their experiences will be with

them forever. For now, come Friday evening at 7 pm, the participants look forward to

some serious fun.

Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed the research question and followed with the details of the phenomenological study (i.e., setting, demographics, data collection, data interpretation, evidence of trustworthiness, and results). In the results section, I presented my analysis of the data I collected with four themes, in which I interpreted as what attracted the participants to The Society, the skills they developed for their craft, the rewards, applications of those skills, and the continuance of the participants' experiences as they moved forward in life from college. The participants provided me with thick, rich data that switched from being passionate of their art to down right silly in a blink of an eye. In addressing the question of how have the participants' experiences with theatrical improvisation helped them make meaning of their ongoing development, the improvisers stressed their experiences as essential to their college experiences and their relationship to the college, as well as essential to the formation of their personal identities. In Chapter 5, I will interpret the findings within the conceptual framework and in comparison to literature review I provided in Chapter 2. Limitations to the study will be described. Based on the interpretations of the findings, I will present recommendations for future practice and performance opportunities at the college level. Finally, implications of positive social change on future campuses will be explored as resulting from the study.

Chapter 5: Interpretations, Recommendations, and Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and to describe the lived experience of improvisational acting training, practice, and performance of community college students and alumni who participated in an extracurricular activity improvisation group. I asked students and alumni to describe their experiences joining the group, interacting with the group, their perceptions on their sense of competency with improvisation as influenced by their experiences, and the role their experiences had on their college experiences and ongoing development. Insights into the complex experiences had by theatrical improvisers at a community college campus are necessary to aid stakeholders (i.e., students, faculty, student affairs personnel, and policy makers) in promoting, creating, and implementing a holistic educational program.

Through responses to interview and focus group questions, the participants expressed a variety of ways in which they felt their development had been influenced by their experiences with theatrical improvisation while attending a community college in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. These responses highlighted the importance of having an active and open venue for theatrical improvisation on future campuses and supportive college organizations, such as student affairs, for student development and community building. Two of the participants were current students. Four of the participants were alumni (three with associate degrees) who choose to return to the college to rejoin the group. One participant had been a student at the college years prior to the existence of the group but returned to the college community to join the

improvisation group. While all the participants' descriptions of their experiences varied

slightly, saturation of data occurred, and four major themes emerged that addressed the

research question.

The participants described a heightened awareness of their development through

the reflective nature of the phenomenological approach. The themes that emerged took a

semichronological order. The Hook described experiences with what drew the

participants to the group and theatrical improvisation. In the Craft, the participants

identified skills and qualities required of an improviser. The theme of the Rewards and

Application consisted of perceptions by the participants of their use of their identified

skills outside of the group. The fourth theme, the Continuance, addressed future ideas on

the participants and their relationship to the group, future ideas of the group, and the

continued relationship with the college. I chose to present the findings as the

aforementioned themes rather than as a descriptive narrative as other phenomenologists

sometimes choose to do. While the stories told by the participants in the interviews were

full of passion, humor, and insight, I felt the presentation of the results thematically better

described the essence of the collective experiences of the participants.

In this chapter, I discuss the interpretations of the findings in connection to

conceptual framework developed in Chapter 2 as well as in connection with the prior

research and scholarly writings detailed in the literature review. Following the

interpretation of the findings, I discuss the limitations to the study and make

recommendations for future research as indicated by the limitations as well as the

strengths. From this study, implications for positive social change include the need for

continued and enlightened college support to provide opportunities for creative outlets, such as theatrical improvisation, for students and community members.

Interpretation of the Findings

For this qualitative post intentional phenomenological study, I recruited seven volunteers from a theatrical improvisation group that met, practiced, and performed most Friday evenings at a community college. At the time of the study, the group, The Society (pseudonym), operated as an extracurricular activity or club and consisted of students, alumni, and members of the local community. The participants (all male) shared their experiences with The Society in relationship to the research question and the methodological approach. Each participant was interviewed twice individually and collectively in a focus group. Each session began with the same question in which I asked them to tell me as much as they could about their experiences with the group. Through the process of bridling my own experiences with theatrical improvisation, I used my skills as an improviser as I interviewed the participants. Follow-up questions addressed ideas that each participant had and did not follow a protocol script. In this way, the data represent a collective interpretation that emerged into the four themes. A description of the findings as they relate to (e.g., confirm, contradict, or extend) the conceptual framework and the literature review follows.

Comparison of Themes to Conceptual Framework

The participants' responses to the interview questions provided insights as to why they chose to join not only an extracurricular activity at the community college, why they chose a theatrical improvisation group, what they perceived they developed as skills, and

why they continued their participation in the group. During the interviews, all of the improvisers likened improvisation to playing and their scenes to games. The characteristics of the improvisational activities as described by the participants met the characteristics of play as described by Huizinga (1950). While the participants provided examples of other leisure activities that could have done while in attendance at college, they also described the need of a creative outlet and a place to just relax and have fun, which they could not find in their credit classes. Some of the students had had previous training from high school; some had been exposed through television shows, and one had seen the group in performance. All the participants described their initial attraction as searching for a fun activity to do. The attraction of improvisation's noncompetitive (*alea*), role-playing (mimicry) nature connects with concept of balance of play elements as theorized by Caillois (1958). One participant specifically noted the lack of an audition process for admittance to the group provided a major draw for him. These findings may only be associated with this study in that The Society did not have an audition process or competitive aspect as other improvisational groups might. Identification of improvisation as play by the participants lends credence to the connections I make of theatrical improvisation and pursuit of leisure activities to balance a college experience.

As a theatrical improvisation group that practiced and performed short form improvisation, the participants commonly described the skills and abilities they developed and wished to develop more as improvisers. Throughout the interviews and the focus group, participants gave examples of trust, presence, self-awareness, selflessness, support, and confidence. Although described with different terminology, these skills are

the same as ones identified by the founders of theatrical improvisation (Spolin, 1987; Johnstone, 1987). Several participants described common experiences with the unscripted nature of improvisation and the underlying guidelines and structure of each game. Through their ongoing development as improvisers, the participants described greater understanding and appreciation of themselves and their craft.

As the participants reflected on their experiences, they presented a common description of a state of flow as theorized by Csikszentmihalyi (1991). Reviewing the concept, Csikszentmihalyi argued that flow occurs when the participants' skill levels match the challenge presented to them. As the participants described the development of their improvisational skills they also included descriptions of that echoed those of flow. With joy and happiness as a by-product of flow, those who have experienced it seek to do so again in an almost addictive manner (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). All of the participants expressed joy and happiness because of their experiences as well as a commitment to practicing and improving their craft regularly. The findings show that in an improvisational group, such as The Society, improvisers have the capacity to attain a flow-like state. Furthermore, the attainment of this state contributed to continued group membership.

Because of improvising and playing improvisational theatre games, the participants described their experiences of learning their craft and transferring their skills and abilities to other areas of their lives. These findings confirm both Brown's (2010) concepts of process learning through play and Huizinga's (1950) theory that play and culture are inextricably linked. During the focus group, the improvisers discussed the

perceptions of their craft and the interwoven nature of the process and products of their craft. In addition, in the focus group, the participants displayed their bonds with each other and described themselves with words such as t*eam*, *troupe*, *society*, and *band*. The participants' awareness of their organizational difficulties and the need of the group to change spoke to their awareness of the larger community. Their desire to share their craft not only through performance but also in practices echoed Huizinga's theories of culture and play that play embodies what it is to be human and make connections with each other. These findings support the need to have opportunities on campuses to play as young adults who are on the cusp of entering their future lives. In accordance with the findings, the participants described their experiences as they reflected on their identity development as emerging adults at community college. The period of emerging adulthood occurs between the ages 18 and 29 and can be a highly volatile period in life prior to adulthood (Arnett, 2000). In the interviews, all but one of the participants described changes in their lives during their attendance at the college but also described their experiences with The Society as providing an outlet away from other life stressors. The findings would suggest that colleges continue to reach more emerging adult students and to provide outlets similar to theatrical improvisation in the form of extracurricular activities.

Comparison to Empirical Literature

In Chapter 2, I noted the lack of current empirical literature relevant to my conceptual framework (later than 2010) and a dearth of literature, beyond theoretical articles, on the subject of theatrical improvisation at the collegiate level. In some of the

more seminal studies, prior researchers of play, flow, and theatrical improvisation approached their investigation quantitatively (Bakker, 2005; Csikszentmihalyi & Lefevre, 1989; Shernoff, et al. 2003). With this study, I chose a qualitative phenomenological approach to gain insights on the essence of the shared experiences of college theatrical improvisers. Through the thick, rich descriptions the participants provided, the concepts with which I framed the study came to the surface and emerged as themes with few surprise discrepancies. These themes validate previously quantified observations of the concepts in various fields and disciplines with their shared experiences with The Society.

Experiences with play. Within the study of play, many researchers and scholars have argued that play benefits learning in areas of not only curriculum content but also social competence and personal skills (Bergen, 2002; Dewey, 1910; Nichols & Stich, 2000; Piaget, 1962; Rasmussen & Gürgens, 2006). This study extends the focus in prior research of benefits of play to young children in education. The findings from this study suggested that play holds relevance for emerging adults in community college as well. All the participants related their initial attraction to The Society as looking for something fun to do. Not all the participants had had prior training or experience beyond having seen a performance. These findings suggest that community college students seek outlets in the form of play and extend previously conducted research on play opportunities in education to older students (Brown, 2010; Burghardt, 2010; & Statler et al., 2011). Furthermore, as the levels of stress for college students increase (Eagan, 2015) and at the time of the study, no women participated in The Society; I hope that more women are findings suitable play at college to combat stress.

The concept of theatrical improvisation as play pervaded the participants' descriptions of their experiences. As a result, within the context of The Society, the participants could not distinguish between playing and acting; they did not feel they played at acting. The participants' craft of theatrical improvisation was inseparable from play. In addition, the participants provided many examples of way they felt they had developed aspects of their identities, their social skills, and their outlooks on life through the development of their craft. These descriptions further confirm the paradox of serious play and its value to education as identified by Gray (2013) and Miller (2010).

In describing their perceived developments, the improvisers noted the nonthreating environment The Society provided for them to achieve skills such as self-awareness, listening, and presence. The perceived skills development aligns with previous research on play (Lobman, 2003; Statler et al., 2011) and improvisational theatre (Crooks, 2007; Meyer, 2006; Nigh, 2013; Sawyer 2000, 2004a, 2004b). The inclusive and inviting nature of the group described by participants speaks to the club-like structure of The Society, and not of an improvisational group that requires an audition or of a graded improvisation class.

Experiences with improvisation. In learning and practicing the craft of theatrical improvisation with The Society, the participants described areas of development (e.g., skills, abilities, and qualities), which emerged into the theme of The Craft. Similar to the participants in Meyer's (2006) study, the participants of this study noted great changes in their abilities as improvisers because of their practice and training. In reflecting on their experiences from different scenes or performances, the participants identified the skills of

listening, presence, and self-awareness as required of a successful improviser. Improvisational founders, Spolin (1987) and Johnstone (1987), stressed these skills in slightly different ways (e.g., point of concentration and focus). The findings from this study confirmed Nigh's (2013) findings of the development by middle school students of self-awareness and presence through improvisational theatre training and games and extended the development to college-aged students.

The students and alumni of this study described moments of awareness in changes to the development of abilities through their experiences. While all participants described their abilities slightly differently, they agreed on the abilities of patience, trust, and creativity. Gesell (2005) and Zaunbrecher (2012) argued for rules and structure to theatrical improvisation as a means to provide greater opportunity for the development of creative thought. Only two of the seven participants described their activities to have rules beyond "making your scene partner(s) look good." While the participants confirmed the existence of a "yes, and…" rule, they argued they felt they could say "no" as long as they adhered to helping out their scene partner(s). Structure for the participants came in the form of game structure; each game played by The Society had a distinct structure. All of the participants acknowledged that while improvisational acting is unscripted, it is not chaotic. The participants responses contradicted the importance that Gesell (2005) stressed on the "yes, and" rule. However, the participants felt their abilities of patience, trust, and creativity helped them achieve successful scenes more so than the simple adherence to the "yes, and" rule. Building upon the work of Gesell and Zaunbrecher, I found that the perceptions by the improvisers of placing the focus on their scene

partner(s) as more instrumental in the development of not only good improvisers but also empathetic individuals.

As the third area to development the participants identified in their interviews, improvisers require the development of the qualities of support, selflessness, and confidence. The participants remembered joining The Society with differing levels or degrees of all three qualities and described how their experiences with The Society helped them build and strengthen these qualities. The participants illustrated the first two qualities of supportive and self-less repeatedly in describing an instance when they made their scene mates "look better." Through the acts of support and selflessness, the participants noted their levels of confidence in their improvisational skills increased. From a psychological standpoint, Weiner (1999) and Moreno (2008) argued that trusting the process of an activity also added to an increased level of confidence. While the participants described their experiences as building and increasing, they noted an acceptance of failure as necessary to the process of learning their craft.

As the participants became more self-aware and less fearful through the process of learning, training, and performing theatrical improvisation, they described strong bonds with their fellow improvisers. The participants' increased comfort with each other moved them from observers of each other to comrades who consciously chose to make themselves vulnerable in hopes of a better scene. Through the participants' descriptions of support and selflessness and well as descriptions of attaining what Briscoe described as "group mind," the improvisers noted their development of empathy skills within their craft. These findings confirm Goldstein and Winner's (2012) supposition that students

older than the high school students in their study might have greater capacity for empathy development. All of the participants described feeling as a team rather than as a group of individuals and felt connected through their knowledge of each other's strengths and weaknesses. Moreno (2008) described such a group as a social atom. Studies on sociotheatre and psychodrama provided insights on improvisational applications to social skills building in nontheatrical settings (Adler, 2006; Goldstein & Winner, 2012; Miner et al., 2001; Taylor, 2002).

Not only did the students and alumni describe what they perceived as skills, abilities, and qualities they developed for their craft, they also extrapolated their experiential gains as improvisers and applied them to their awareness of their ongoing development. Much of the empirical literature on theatrical improvisation focused on the application of theatrical improvisation to education (Berk & Trieber, 2009; Lobman, Sawyer, 2000, 2000a, 2000b), to creativity training (Sawyer & DeZutter, 2009), and to social skills development (Koukounaras-Liagis, 2011). The findings from this study help confirm the benefits described as gained through the application of improvisational strategies. Furthermore, the findings extend the knowledge of perceived benefits gained through theatrical improvisation skills to the developmental aspects the participants identified and applied to their own lives.

The participants described uses of their improvisational skills in nontheatrical situations in the theme, the Rewards and Application. One participant noted that his experiences with The Society had influenced his life so much that he believed he learned everything he needed to learn in life from theatrical improvisation. A few other

participants suggested the use of improvisational theatre games as tools and strategies for learning in the classroom as they did when they were students. These suggestions confirmed and extended findings from studies that included theatre games such as the ones played by The Society to educational situations for increased motivation and engagement in the curriculum (Hvenegaard et al., 2008; Kataoka & Vandell, 2013; Maples, 2007; Stevenson, 2011).

Interview findings suggested all the participants felt that through their experiences with improvisation they exercised and continued to develop cognitively. Skills identification, such as problem solving, adaptability, and memory, as noted by Miner et al. (2001) in their study of organizational learning and musical improvisation with adults, extended the knowledge of cognitive development to include the perceived influences theatrical improvisation. One participant's comment that he used his experiences with improvisation to rehabilitate his short-term memory confirmed perceived mental benefits of practicing theatrical improvisation. Other participants' comments of applying their improvisational skills of thinking under pressure and listening to interviewing for a job showed insight into the participants' self-perceptions and identification of transferrable knowledge gained from their experiences.

In describing how the participants' evolution of why they chose to join The Society and why they continued to participate, many vacillated between describing the activity as an escape, and an outlet, or therapy. Lobman (2003) and Statler et al. (2011) noted connections between role-play and personal development. The findings from this study confirm the connections and extend the knowledge to include theatrical

improvisation as a form of role-play. Through the participants' descriptions of role-playing some of their life experiences in practice or performances, the participants expressed ways they felt their experiences fostered their empathy and social awareness. Goldstein and Winner (2012) noted quantifiable gains of acting students' empathy scores in correlation to their training. While I present the findings from this study from the perspective of students, the rich, thick descriptions of connectedness and a sense of synergy between the participants confirm Goldstein and Winner's findings. Furthermore, the trust and camaraderie the participants felt provided them with a safe space in their college environment to express their feelings and problem solve using outside experiences as material for their unscripted craft. One participant's description of a need for a creative outlet and a place to laugh highlighted the juxtaposition and paradox of the serious fun The Society and the college provided the students.

Experiences with flow. Many of the participants recognized a point in their experiences when they shifted their perceptions of the activity from weekly sessions when they could play improv games to a focus on creating a successful improvisational troupe, which could perform in front of an audience. Their intrinsic rewards achieved through flow (i.e., increased confidence, motivation, and happiness) confirmed the rewards Csikszentmihalyi and LeFevre (1989) found in their seminal study of flow in leisure activities and extended the knowledge from their study to the leisure activity of theatrical improvisation at college. Flow, as a dynamic state, changes as the skills and challenges change (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). As the participants in this study improved their improvisational skills, they needed the challenges to increase for them to continue to

experience the intrinsic rewards they described. Interpreting the experiences of the participants through a lens of flow provided insight on the organizational stress some of the participants described as they became aware of the need for increased challenges such as performance. In the theme of the Continuance, the participants described how they wanted their experiences to continue for as long as possible and for the challenge to continue. However, the participants also understood the place The Society held as an extracurricular activity for beginners and dabblers looking for a fun activity.

All of the participants expressed a desire to recruit more members with whom to share their love of theatrical improvisation. One participant said he could not think of one person who could not benefit from learning theatrical improvisation. All of the participants described how their experiences influenced the development of identity. The findings from this study of increased awareness of identity through flow experiences confirmed Teng's (2011) findings of character traits associated with flow of high school computer gamers. In confirmation of the findings of Foubert and Urbanski (2006), the participants described their development of competence, social skills, and self-awareness as influenced from their extracurricular college experiences with The Society. Similar to the inseparable nature of play and theatrical improvisation, the findings suggest the concept of flow is inextricably linked to play and theatrical improvisation within the context of this study.

In pursuit of happiness at a community college, the participants described looking for "fun," for "a place to laugh," and to "be goofy." All the participants noted one person could do theatrical improvisation alone, but that they experienced a greater sense of not

only enjoyment but also accomplishment when they worked together. The finding that

participants in this study felt group scenes more fulfilling confirmed Walker's (2010)

findings of social flow as more enjoyable and more intense than individual flow. In

addition, the participants' adherence to "making their scene partner look good" confirmed

Sawyer's (1999, 2004b) findings of the concept of collaborative emergence by

professional improvisers and high school students (respectively) with those described by

the amateur college improvisers of this study. With their descriptions of collective

creativity, the participants from this study also described the creation of tight bonds

within the group. All the participants acknowledged that The Society not only helped

them create friendships but also increased their awareness of the larger college

community. These findings confirmed prior research findings of involvement in

extracurricular activities at the college level, which found that extracurricular activities

foster psychosocial and cognitive development and lead toward increased autonomy as

part of a holistic education (Foubert & Urbanski, 2006; Graham & Donaldson, 1999).

Summary of Interpretation of Findings

Through the thick, rich descriptions the participants in the study provided on their

experiences with theatrical improvisation as an extracurricular activities at a community

college, four themes (the Hook, the Craft, the Rewards and Applications, and the

Continuance) emerged from collected data. As anticipated, I found strong connections of

the findings to the concepts of theatrical improvisation, play, and flow. Furthermore, the

participants described their experiences without separating the concepts of play or flow

from their experiences with theatrical improvisation. In this way, the findings extend

findings from other studies that examined similar play activities (Doerr-Stevens, Beach, & Boeser, 2011) and flow activities (Shernoff, 2010) to theatrical improvisational activities. The findings from this study do not confirm findings from studies that investigated computer play activities, which provided negative behavioral correlatives (Colwell & Payne, 2000; Gentile et al., 2004).

Findings that stood out for me included the sense by the participants that they had evolved through their experiences and through that evolution sought continued growth. The participants' desire for artistic and personal growth created a struggle between their initial perceptions of a fun outlet activity and emerging commitment of seriousness to the practice of their craft. While findings of prior researchers suggested areas of develop that result from improvisation (i.e., social skills, identity, and cognitive) and the paradox of serious fun that can happen in an educational environment, the participants from this study went further describing their experiences with craft of theatrical improvisation as life changing. The participants expressed a hope for validation of and increased interest in their craft as art as well as play. The participants' passionate descriptions of their experiences resonated with and often shook my bridled understanding of the art. Through sharing their experiences, participants described increased awareness of the influences those experiences have had on their college lives and the importance of continued and future opportunities at college for others.

Limitations to the Study

As previously described, trustworthiness in phenomenological studies requires researchers reign in or bridle their prior knowledge and experiences with the subject

matter so as not to influence the findings. Throughout the dissertation process, I bridled

my knowledge experiences of theatrical improvisation with reasonable care. Still, limits

to this study existed. I predicted some of the weaknesses to the credibility in designing

the study. Some of the weaknesses to credibility presented themselves procedurally

during the data collection and analysis phase of the research.

Weaknesses to this study included threats to credibility. As a theatre arts educator,

my personal biases lie toward the advocacy end of the arts curriculum. In Chapter 1, I

noted that Maxwell (2013) warned that threats to credibility could be both substantive

and ethical validation. In Chapter 4, both types of validation were detailed along with the

care given to minimize my biases. Chapter 3 provided strategies to guard against threats

during the procedural portion of the study. These strategies included seeking negative

hypotheses, sample size, and interview strategies. During the research process, different

limitations arose that I had not predicted.

Although the sample size ($n = 7$) fell within the predicted range between six and

eight, the size still limits the credibility of this study. However, I compensated this

weakness by performing two in depth individual interviews with each participants as well

as a focus group session where the participants could respond and discuss ideas as a

group. Another limit to the study, which made the findings less generalizable, was the

homogeneity of the participants (all males who identified as White). All the seven

participants met the sampling criteria; however, only two of them were enrolled in the

college at the time of the study. The rest responded retrospectively, not on their current

experiences, but when they were students. This further limits the study to students and

alumni a specific improvisational group at a particular community college in the mid-Atlantic region. All of the participants had also performed with the group, which while a criterion for the study sample, was not representative of all members of The Society.

Finally, while I scripted and read the interview protocol openings and closing verbatim, I conducted the interviews in an informal conversation style. The strength of this strategy included flexibility and spontaneity with each participant for richer, deeper meaning (Patton, 2002). The weaknesses included the possibility by the researcher to influence the participant; participants did not have exactly the same questions asked of them. The strategy of informal opened ended interviews further makes the findings of the study specific to these participants and this study as a whole. While elements of this study have plausible confirmability with prior findings as previously described in the interpretation section, the experiences described by the participants cannot be generalized beyond the context of the study.

Recommendations

I explored the shared experiences of seven collegiate theatrical improvisers as they learned, practiced, and performed in an extracurricular activity improvisation group at a community college. The participating synergy of improvisers included two students enrolled in associate's degree programs, three alumni who graduated with associate's degrees, and two alumni who had taken some classes at the college but not graduated; all of the participants were male. Replication of this study with similar experiences of theatrical improvisation at college but with a more diverse sample population would strengthen the findings of this study and make them more transferrable.

The Society functions as an extracurricular activity under student and alumni governance. The participants provided ideas and rationales for greater inclusion of theatrical improvisational activities in higher education because of their reflection of their own developmental gains. Future researchers could also strengthen the findings of this study by examining other theatrical improvisational groups on different higher education campuses with different organizational structure such as those under the purview of college theatre departments to compare theatrical improvisation experiences with different organizational structures. Findings from research where theatrical improvisation has been experienced in a classroom environment rather than as a club could further add to the understanding of influences of the craft to education.

The participants in this study argued they believed theatrical improvisation could benefit a person of any age. Although the findings from this study indicated that age of the emerging adult factored into the perceived developmental gains, the findings related to the phenomenon may be transferrable to high school or older adult learners. Future researchers might replicate this study within different age level learning environments. Additional phenomenological inquiry with different age groups could add insights into life-long learning and the value of such experiences.

Using the conceptual framework of this study as a springboard, future researchers could examine different activities that adhere to a specific concept (e.g., improvisation and flow). Phenomenological studies into other arts with improvisational experiences (i.e. instrumental jazz music, dance, or painting) at the college level would reveal more about the phenomenon of improvisation. Along a similar strategy, researchers with a focus on

flow activities could investigate other flow extracurricular activities at college campuses to extend the findings from this study.

Finally, variations on the research design would add to the findings from this study or yield different findings. A quantitative survey of multiple college campuses could reveal more about theatrical improvisational opportunities for college students across the country to see if and how other institutions support the activity. A longitudinal study similar to Foubert and Urbanski's (2006) but specifically examining theatrical improvisers over the course of their college careers would reveal similar findings of psychosocial development. While great changes to the research design of this study would require greater leaps of faith in confirming my findings, even small changes such a different sample could strengthen the findings and, therefore, the implications of this study.

Implications

Because of the research findings, several areas appear where positive social change could happen. This study impacted individuals and groups within the context of this study. The participants through the descriptions of their experiences expressed feelings of change. The improvisational group, The Society, could change its role and structure at the college. The student affairs department and other college faculty and staff could witness positive social change in the form of increased student engagement. With this study, I also offer implications to the methodology and theory for the purposes of eliciting positive social change. Finally, in this section, based on my research, I make recommendations for changes to practice of the college with regard to student activities

and potentially adult education in the hopes greater student engagement, motivation, and development within the context of the study.

Impacts

With this interpretive phenomenological study, I committed to investigating the essence (van Manen, 2014) and temporal manifestations (Vagle, 2014) theatrical improvisational experiences held for seven community college students and alumni as they reflected on their ongoing development. As a result, my research impacted the participants and the improvisation group with potential impact to the college and the larger community. Implications of the improvisers' choice to train, practice, and perform their craft as an extracurricular activity at a community college support such opportunities for student engagement and satisfaction.

Impact for the participants. All of the participants expressed an eagerness to volunteer for this study and share their experiences with me. In Chapter 4, findings from the study described increased self-awareness of the participants concerning themselves, their craft, and their experiences with The Society. Through the participants' reflections, all of them described an increased appreciation for their troupe mates, and the role their experiences have had on their lives both in and out of college. The implications of positive social change for the participants lie in this increased self-awareness as well as their applications of their perceptions to other areas of their lives.

Impact for The Society. As the participants reflected on the aspects of The Society that attracted them to the group and on their perceptions of wanting to perform their craft, many of the participants reported increased insights into how The Society or if

The Society should change its organizational structure. As an extracurricular activity, participants saw the group as an open, noncompetitive opportunity outside of their academic curriculum. However, through their reflections on their experiences, many of the participants expressed the desire to perform while at the same time acknowledging performance requires a certain level of training that not everyone in the group possessed. In addition to the performance aspect of The Society, a few participants described a lack of satisfaction with the requirements the student affairs department applied to all extracurricular activities. Positive social change for The Society would include a reorganization of the group to fit the needs of all group members for increased opportunities, increased membership, and increased energy for outreach.

Impact for the research site. The descriptions of the experiences speak to the awareness of the student affairs department and the college of what The Society provided and continues to provide students and community members. As previously mentioned, while all the participants expressed a sense of gratitude to the college for providing those experiences, a few participants perceived a lack of understanding by the college community of what The Society did, and how it functioned. The few participants with negative feelings argued that not all groups under the auspices of the department of student affairs should be treated the same way or conform to the same standards. At the college in this study, there existed no connection between The Society and the theatre department. Implications for positive social change at the college include increased awareness of both the positive and negative aspects of a theatrical improvisation group on the campus as a club or in connection to the academic program.

Impact for the larger community. Spolin (1987), Boal (2002), and Fox (1994) argued that theatrical improvisation helps to build community. In the context of this study as an extracurricular activity on a community campus, any community member (not just students) could join The Society. Five of the participants in this study practiced, trained, and performed with The Society as alumni. The positive social change implications of open enrollment in student activities include an increased awareness of the college in general, which could in turn promote enrollment. Two of the alumni participants considered re-enrolling in classes to complete their associate's degrees. Performances by The Society provided another opportunity for community building on the campus. The participants described how they have acquired an audience following over the years. These performances bring community members to the campus who may not have come otherwise, thus increasing the scope of the college and providing the community with low cost entertainment. As a side note, the performing members of The Society donate their performance proceeds to charitable organizations.

Implications for Methodology and Theoretical Concepts

The connections to the theoretical concepts and the findings that emerged from this research focus should, understandably, interest researchers and practitioners of theatrical improvisation, play, and flow. Regardless of their perceptions of competency in the craft, the choice faithfully to practice and train Friday evenings speaks to the intrinsic rewards the participants described with their experiential accounts. My choice to investigate the experiences of these improvisers using an interpretive phenomenological design aligned with the research question, which sought to gain insights on the

participants shared experiences. The phenomenological design allowed me better to understand that the meaning of experiences do not reside in a single point or at a single instance in time, but rather result as a process and an evolution, which continue to influence the participants. Finally, the findings from this study imply that the practice by researchers of bridling permits them to balance objectivity and subjectivity while minimizing threats to credibility.

Recommendations for Practice

The participants provided me with many ideas of how colleges could include more theatrical improvisation opportunities on their campuses. As a result of the participants' belief that everyone could benefit from learning theatrical improvisation, these suggestions included adult education classes in the craft, academic classes in conjunction with the theatre or communications department, and turning The Society into a performing troupe and a workshop group. Furthermore the participants indicated that inclusion on future campuses of noncompetitive play (such as improvisation) rather than more competitive play (such as organized team sports) might help student activities departments on college campuses gain support from educational stakeholders based on the perceived positive influences on student development. The desire of the participants to share their experiences with me and the readers of this study speaks to their understanding of the role their experiences have had on their ongoing to development while outwardly presenting their experiences as "just being goofy."

Reflections

In the conclusion to Chapter 1, I described phenomenological research as both *work of the heart* and *inherently messy (*Chang, 2010). My interconnection to the subject matter of the study as well as my desire to understand other improvisers' perceptions of their experiences made both those aspects of phenomenological research a reality for me. Through the process of bridling my knowledge and experiences, I noticed a change in myself. While I did not think I allowed my experiences and thoughts to enter any aspect of the data collection sessions, they did so in a way I had not anticipated. Instead of coloring or directing the responses, I listened and thought of how to capture the participants' responses in the best possible way. In essence, I practiced good improvisational skills. In that regard, I too adhered to the improvisational rule of making your scene partner look good.

The paradox of wanting to have fun and understand the importance of their play presented the participants with a desire for validation. After the initial interview, when I gained their trust, the participants eagerly shared with me. Sometimes, long after the recording stopped, the participants shared about thoughts on how to advertise for an upcoming show, future recruitment ideas, or even preferred versions of Dungeons and Dragons. However, during the interviews and focus group proper, the participants focused on the questions related to the research. Following the focus group, the participants described having had "the best practice" because of discussing their experiences as a group. The participants acknowledged that increased reflection and group discussion could only increase the potential for group growth. In the final

interview, the participants expressed pleasant surprise of their troupe mates' feelings and thoughts on the group. In the end, the participants extended me an open invitation to join The Society. Whether due to their perceptions of improvisational skills or as one participant said as he walked out the door, "Besides we need girls," I felt I had given them a sense of validation for their serious fun.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine, interpret, and illustrate the meaning theatrical improvisation as an extracurricular activity holds for the members of a community college group. Using my prior experiences and knowledge of the subject, I framed the study with concepts of play and development, theatrical improvisation, and the theory of flow. The literature that I reviewed lacked significant insight into the concepts as experienced in higher education and the perceptions of the craft by students that trained and performed theatrical improvisation in college. While the literature indicated potential benefits of play, flow, and theatrical improvisation, no research had taken a phenomenological approach to connect the concepts and findings to shared lived experiences of college theatrical improvisers. The findings of this study confirmed the development of cognitive skills, social skills, and personal identity because of their experiences with theatrical improvisation as described by the participants in this study.

While only one of the participants attributed his experiences to his choice of career, all the participants described ways in which they felt their experiences positively influenced their lives. Additional awareness is needed by the stakeholders of the college as the practices and policies to facilitate the organizational struggles felt by the

participants of the study. Furthermore, although goals of the college and student affairs department include life learning and holistic development, the findings from this study describe how this group helps the college met those goals. Steps should be taken to acknowledge the work of the members of student groups, such as The Society, and raise perceptions on the value of the activity to the community at large. The participants stressed the importance of their training and performances as essential to their overall satisfaction with the college. As competition for enrollment between community colleges increases, institutions that provide multiple opportunities for creative outlets and group play that foster holistic learning could attract more students.

The improvisers in this study expressed pride, satisfaction, and a commitment in their craft as well as deep bonds with their troupe mates. The Society provided the students with a place to laugh and share that laugh with others in a nonthreatening, inviting, playful place during their college experience. For some of the participants, the bonds pulled them back to the college and continued to influence their lives. The improviser expressed a renewed commitment to provide more opportunities to share their experiences with others as they became more aware of impact those experiences had had with them. The improvisers' commitments along with the recommendations from this study could provide future college students increased opportunities to learn, grow, and have fun doing so. To achieve positive social change simply adding the elements of fun and laughter would enrich more lives.

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Appendix A: Caillois's Table

Table I. Classification of Games

	AGÔN (Competition)	ALEA (Chance)	MIMICRY (Simulation)	ILINX (Vertigo)
PAIDIA ↑ Tumult Agitation Immoderate laughter Kite-flying Solitaire Patience Crossword puzzles **LUDUS** ↓	Racing Wrestling } not Etc. } regulated Athletics Boxing, Billiards Fencing, Checkers Football, Chess Contests, Sports in general	Counting-out rhymes Heads or tails Betting Roulette Simple, complex, and continuing lotteries*	Children's initiations Games of illusion Tag, Arms Masks, Disguises Theater Spectacles in general	Children "whirling" Horseback riding Swinging Waltzing Volador Traveling carnivals Skiing Mountain climbing Tightrope walking

N.B. In each vertical column games are classified in such an order that the *paidia* element is constantly decreasing while the *ludus* element is ever increasing.

* A simple lottery consists of the one basic drawing. In a complex lottery there are many possible combinations. A continuing lottery (e.g. Irish Sweepstakes) is one consisting of two or more stages, the winner of the first stage being granted the opportunity to participate in a second lottery. [From correspondence with Caillois. M.B.]

Note. Adapted *from Man, Play, and Games by Roger Caillois*. Copyright 1958 by Librairie Gallimard, English translation copyright 1961 by the Free Press of Glencoe, Inc. Used with permission of the University of Illinois Press.

Appendix B: Draft of Letter/Message of Recruitment

Dear Member of the Society,

My name is Ruth Yamamoto, and I am a doctoral student from the Richard W. Riley School of Education at Walden University. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about what meaning members of a theatrical improvisation group hold for the extracurricular activity as it relates to their college education. I am interested in recruitment members of the Society (18 years old or older) who have been with the group for at least one semester and have performed with the group. If you feel you are eligible and are interested in participating, please contact me through the private function of the groups' Facebook page or directly to my personal email. I obtained your contact information from The Society's group organizer and along with permission to post on the groups' Facebook page.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will asked to meet at least three times (twice for individual interviews and once for a focus group) each session will last 60-90 minutes. All sessions will be audio recorded. The focus group session will also be recorded visually. Those recordings will be transcribed and analyzed by me. Additionally, I will ask you to review a summary of the sessions as a means of verifying my interpretations of your information. The findings from the study can potentially reinforce the need for additional and continued support for extracurricular arts programs at colleges. As a measure of thanks, each participant will receive a $5 Amazon gift certificate. My project is not funded by any outside source and will be used to complete my doctoral studies. Remember, your participation is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you would like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email or contact me at xxxx@waldenu.edu or xxx-xxx-xxxx (cell).

I am seeking 6-8 participants; I will select according to the criteria. Selection will be done on a first come basis. This invitation will be open for one week (ending date *to be added*). After that time I will randomly select from members who responded if who meet the criteria. If more than eight members who meet the criteria wish to be part of the study, I will ask that they remain as back-ups should a participant wish to quit.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Ruth Yamamoto

Appendix C: Draft Research Site Permission Form

XYZ College
3333 Main Street
Metropolis, USA 83725

Date

Please note that Ms. Ruth Yamamoto, Walden University Doctoral Student, has the permission of the XYZ College to conduct research at our facility for her study, "The Perceived Influences of Improvisational Acting on Community College Students."

Ms. Yamamoto will recruit students through the student organization's social network page through private messaging. Her plan is to conduct three data collection sessions of 60-90 minutes (two individual interviews and one focus group). The individual interviews may take place a public location on campus; the focus group will be conducted in the rehearsal space assigned to The Society. Ms. Yamamoto's on-site research activities will be finished by July 1, 2015.

Ms. Yamamoto has agreed not to enter any of our buildings or restrooms or interfere with the flow of pedestrians or vehicles during class hours. Students will not be allowed time from their class times to participate in the study. Ms. Yamamoto has also agreed to provide to my office a copy of any aggregate results.

If there are any questions, please contact my office.

Signed,

XXXX, President

Appendix D: Draft of Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study of the shared experiences of members of a theatrical improvisation group at a community college. The researcher invites members of the student organized improvisation group who have been with the group for at least one full semester and have performed with the group to be in the study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Ruth Yamamoto, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to determine and describe the meaning the shared experience of participating in a theatrical improvisation group holds for the participants.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:
- •   ____Participate in at least three sessions (two individual interviews and one focus group) of approximately 60-90 minutes. The additional sessions will only be scheduled as needed to clarify and extending information from the previous sessions.

Here are some sample questions:
Tell about experiences with improv during your time with The Society (pseudonym).

Tell me about what influences these experiences have had on your development as a student or as an individual in general.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at XXXX college will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as possible stress or fatigue due to time taken away from normal activities. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

Potential benefits of the study include insights into the experiences of participating in the theatrical improvisation group that positively influence future life expectations and decisions.

Payment:
As thanks for their participation in the study, each participant will receive a $5 gift certificate from Amazon.com to be given upon participation completion. All participants will be given a gift card whether they complete the study or not. Early termination will have no effect. Additionally, each participant will be given a 1 to 2 page summary of the findings upon completion of the investigation.

Privacy:
Any information you provide will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will used for both participants and research site. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure on the researcher's personal computer and hard drive both with password protection. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:
You may ask any questions you have now. Or email (xxx@xxx.com) if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via cell phone or email If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is xxx-xxx-xxxx. Walden University's approval number for this study is 01-22-15-0257166**I** and it expires on January, 21, 2016

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep. (for face-to-face research)

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By replying to this email with the words, "I consent", or by printing out the document, signing, and returning it to the researcher I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Only include the signature section below if using paper consent forms.

Printed Name of Participant	
Date of consent	
Participant's Signature	
Researcher's Signature	

Appendix E: Protocols

Initial Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to share your ideas with me about your theatrical improv experiences with the student group at college. I will be recording the interview with digital audio equipment, as well as taking notes. If you have objection to being recorded, please tell me now, and I will only take notes. All names will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used in the transcripts and reports. All data will be stored on my personal computer and hard drive for at least 5 years at which time I will delete the recorded material. I will be conducting open-ended questions in the hopes that you will feel comfortable enough to interject any ideas or thoughts you may have as we discuss different aspects.

For background purposes:
How long have you been (were you) a member of the group? What is your connection to the college: are you a current student, past student, or other? If other, please tell me how you heard about the group and became a member?

Tell me as much as possible about your experiences with improv here at the college, such as practices, performances, or anything that comes to mind.

Follow-up questions will happen after the interviewees have exhausted the experiences they wish to share at this time.
Additional questions will address areas of development (i.e., personal, academic, or social) not initially detailed.

Describe your sense of competence in improvising. How do feel you are at improv? In what ways do you feel competent or what areas do you feel you need work?

How has your sense of yourself as a student or learner changed since you joined The Society? How did improvisation contribute to this?

How has your sense of yourself in general developed since improvising with the group? How did improvisation contribute to this?

Tell me about any specific instances during practice or performance when recognized a

moment of change in you.

Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your experience with The Society?

    Closure: Thank you so much for your time and willingness to share your experiences with me. I will be sending you a transcription of the interview for you to review. I will be referring back to things you mentioned today in our next session. Additionally, I will check with you throughout the analysis process to verify my observations, interpretations, and conclusions. As you recall, your identity will be keep confidential; however, in the focus group you will be with the other participants. If you need, to contact me for any reason my contact information is on the bottom of the consent form you signed earlier. Would you like that information again? I will contact you to schedule the focus group and follow-up interview.

Focus Group Protocol

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to share your ideas with me about your theatrical improv experiences with the student group at college. I will be recording the focus group session with digital audio/visual equipment, as well as taking notes. If you have objection to being recorded visually, please tell me now, and I will arrange the recording devices to capture only audio. At any point during the session, you may ask to edit the recording or withdraw your approval to be visually recorded. All names will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used in the transcripts and reports. Visual data will be deleted after transcription and analysis. No images will be used in any reports. All other data will be stored on my personal computer and hard drive for at least 5 years at which time I will delete the recorded material. I will be conducting open-ended questions in the hopes that you will feel comfortable enough to interject any ideas or thoughts you may have as we discuss different aspects.

1. Since the last time we talked, what things have you reflected on or wanted to discuss more about your experiences with improv?

2. While we are in a group setting, I want to review some of the things I heard from the individual interviews and have you reflect on them and discuss them as a group.

3. What stands out, puzzles you, or surprises you about your group experience?

4. What are your thoughts on improv in a college education should it be part of the curriculum or as an extracurricular activity such as it is here? Why?

5. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your experience with The Society?

    Closure: Thank you so much for your time and willingness to share your experiences with me. I ask that you keep the information from this session confidential. I will be sending you a transcription of the interview for you to review. I will refer to things that were discussed today in our final interview. As you recall, your identity will be keep confidential. Additionally, I will check with you throughout the analysis process to verify my observations, interpretations, and conclusions. If you need, to contact me for any reason my contact information is on the bottom of the consent form you signed earlier. Would you like that information again? In, In addition will contact you to schedule a follow-up interview.

Follow-up Interview Protocol

Introduction: Thank you, again, for agreeing to share your ideas with me about your theatrical improv experiences with the student group at college. I will be recording the interview with digital audio equipment, as well as taking notes. If you have objection to being recorded, please tell me now, and I will only take notes. All names will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used in the transcripts and reports. All data will be stored on my personal computer and hard drive for at least 5 years at which time I will delete the recorded material. I will be conducting open-ended questions in the hopes that you will feel comfortable enough to interject any ideas or thoughts you may have as we discuss different aspects.

1. Since the last time we spoke have you had any more thoughts on your experiences that you can tell me about?

2. Given what you have shared about your experiences (should be able to reference from transcripts) what elements of improv do feel have contributed to your development to adulthood?

3. The Society is a student organization here at the college, what suggestions or improvements would you make about improv on campus if you could?

4. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your experience with The Society?

Closure: Thank you so much for your time and willingness to share your experiences with me. As you recall, your identity will be keep confidential. If you need, to contact me for any reason my contact information is on the bottom of the consent form you signed earlier. Would you like that information again? I will be sending you a transcription of the interview. I will continue check with you throughout the analysis process to verify my observations, interpretations, and conclusions. In addition, I will contact you should I need clarification on something we discussed and to verify that I am representing what you have said to your satisfaction.

Appendix F: Contact Summary Form

Contact: Site:
Visit: Contact date:
Phone: Today's date:
Email:

1.   What were the main issues or themes that struck you in this contact?

2.   Summarize the information that you got (or failed to get) on each of
the target questions.

3.   Anything else that struck you as salient, interesting, illuminating or
important in this contact?

4.   What new (or remaining) target questions do you have in considering
the next contact with this participant?

5.   Were there any external factors that affected the contact?

6.   Overall impression of contact and/or describe the relationship.

Adapted from Miles et al. (2014)

Appendix G: Draft Data Log Form

	Participant 1				
Interview 1					
Focus Group					
Interview 2					
Email Response					
Contact					
Transcript					
Member check					

Appendix H: Draft Release Form for Transcribers

Principal Investigator: Ruth Yamamoto
Department: Richard Riley School of Education, Walden University
Project Title:

I understand that as a transcriber working for Ruth Yamamoto with the research related interviews we conduct and record, I am required to maintain and protect the confidentiality of the information divulged by participants of the interviews. I agree not to disclose the information gathered during the interviews to anyone other than the principal investigator. I agree also not to disclose the identities and information about the identities of individuals who participate in the interviews.

My signature confirms that I will abide to this agreement, and that I will preserve the confidentiality of all proceedings, information gathered and transcribed, as well as the identities of participants in the interviews.

Transcriber Signature   Date

Appendix I: Themes, Meaning Units, and Significant Statements

Research Question: How have experiences with theatrical improvisation training, practice, and performance helped students make meaning of their ongoing development?

Themes	Meaning units	Participant Examples or Significant statements
The Hook-joining a theatrical improvisation group at college	Leisure/recreation Fun Friends Prior experience/exposure Outlet Inviting	We were just teaching ourselves stuff, I didn't know any stuff, we were just kinda being funny which I know you are not supposed to try and be funny but I wish I had known that back then but basically we loved even as a kid, loved the show, *Whose Line Is It Anyway?*, I wanted to be like them, I thought it was funny. (Lester) I grew up with the show, *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* I have always been curious about it. I hadn't been exposed to it in any theater groups or anything like improv before where I grew up…and I realized that one of the cast members was in one of my classes so I approached him and said, "Hey I saw the show and it was great." He said, "That's great. You should come out to the club sometime." (Freddy) We never turn someone down and said you cannot

		be here, we welcome everyone… as we talk about in the group focus… it's an outlet, it's therapeutic, it's anything you want to call it whoever is in there, it's different for everyone for their reasons, so if there is someone that just needs that outlet, and they don't have anywhere to go…we just want them to come to improv, to help them out, it'll help with the troupe, it will help them out ….it's a win win every situation so that's just the way it is… (Caine)
		… I think it's, I think it's the closest you get to being a kid again.. it feels like, because you're… It's the same process children do… it's just that now you understand all the underpinnings of why it works… like I don't think it's any different from what we do on stage than what small children do with action figures or when they put on a cape or anything like that. Donnie
		it really taught me how to play someone else…and then it's like a skill we all know as kids how to play but I think that learning that you can play better
		I feel like the people who do come to the shows and

		support us, they take us seriously in that sense but in order to take us seriously they still also have to have kind of an understanding that we are trying to make them laugh so it's being serious about being goofy, if that makes any sense…(Caine)
		It makes it sound really depressing, but it's not, it makes my life worth living…It's my creative outlet. I get to come here and do my crazy thing, and no one judges me. (Lester)
The Craft- lived experiences of improvising at college	Skills- presence, self-awareness, listening Abilities-patience, trust, creativity Qualities-supportive, self-less, confident	At first just getting more comfortable failing in front of the same people can be like really, really scary, really threatening when you don't have the confidence and you are not 100% sure in your ability to not make the same mistake or to not make other mistakes in the future. I know I had like some social anxiety when I first started improvising, and it could be terrifying when I would like go up like shut down a little bit and then just go on autopilot and maybe I would say something or do something and it wouldn't make any sense, it wouldn't 't make for a good scene… it would be kind of the exact wrong

		thing to do, but I've noticed it… when you have people in the same scene that help justify and bring that in and take that mistake and turn it in into like a strength then that builds up actually a great deal of confidence I noticed in myself (Flynn)

It teaches you how to cooperate with someone to a point where they could be going in a wrong direction and you don't care. Because you think that whole time you're going to wrong direction, but as long as we're in the wrong direction together then we're okay. I think that there is a bond that you make with people that you don't experience other places.□(Donnie)

it's one of the few things where it doesn't matter how it turns out because you're creating, how you created it is the creation and it's literally brain to stage and it's one of the few times you actually see your thoughts become embodied instantaneously and so when I think of art I think of ..I slaved over this and I edited this and this is my final product and the craft I think it's just…this is my work in progress, I hope |

		you like it (Donnie)
The Rewards/Application-transferability of the craft to life	To school- academic To social life- friends, communicating To work To person -Flow, happiness, "therapeutic" qualities	It was very central to the way my character developed as a person. (Flynn, 18) As far as academics, I can say that it helped me a little bit in the ways that it just kept me going…I had to keep my grades up to keep going. It was more or less motivation that helped me ask the questions I needed. It helped me to become a little less shy and ask the teachers questions. (Caine) Everything that I ever needed, I learned in improv. (Donnie) Its good that this art form stays alive for people with short attention spans like me….(laughs) because they can just do it whenever they feel like doing it. You don't need anything. It's free; all you need is a space. You can do improv anywhere. It is good for you developmentally, for your brain. It's good socially. If you have that fear being in front of people, it's good for you. It helps you vent out ideas. It is a great stress reliever; you get to laugh. If you laugh a lot, I heard you live longer, which is good or bad (depending on

		how you look at it). <u>I</u> think it is good. It's super important; it's super important. (Lester)
		What it really comes down to is performing the skills you learn in practice in a high pressure situation, such as show so in the show you have to deal with people watching you, hoping that they are having a good time, hoping that they are not critiquing you in a negative manner, so you can kinda relate that to once again, job interviews, at anything you are doing outside, where its important that you maintain the skills you learned in practice, it is a combination of both in my opinion. (Caine)
		It's both I guess there's times like ideally you want to leave your emotional problems at the door with improv I know myself I have had trouble with that sometimes because I mean improv in itself is a very personal thing you're really putting yourself out there on stage and a lot of times it can actually be good to get emotional and pour yourself into it and sometimes that…..for me every Friday, I'm excited because if I had a crappy

		week, I'm able to kind of pour that into the scene and be able to make something better from it and it does feel therapeutic I think that having an outlet for your emotions is a type of therapy really (Briscoe)
The Continuance-the future for the participants, the group, and improvisation at the college	Internal changes to organization Changes to relationship with college Validation Continued experiences	We did in the beginning as a matter of fact and we kinda had trouble with finding performance space at the very beginning…three years ago or so…and we did have a bit of difficulty from the theater department and like I said…the differences in theater are such that a lot of Shakespearean trained actors just are not interested in improv or performing it for one reason or the other, they think that their craft is superior and there is a not a lot of intermingling, but otherwise everybody generally likes us and sees the value in us and enjoys what we do even though they don't try (Freddy) We just need to form a better alliance with the drama department to reach into a different demographics but the demographics themselves, it's also just a function of chance or the way things

		turned out more than we originally had three or four females on the troupe and just much more varied group and different people graduated and different people have moved away and different people have gone off and formed their own troupes in other schools and that's really what's at play…. that is the running gag that were all white males now because we used to be much more varied but we're the only ones really stuck within the 15-20 mile range so we are really looking to reach out into the community of the college to pull in more varied groups so that everybody could benefit. (Freddy)
		We've never been really close with the theater department. I've never seen it this way before apparently it's common in colleges, this weird divide between theater department and improv…I don't get it… (Brisoce)
		I think this research sparked motivation to change it for the better and definitely remember that I left the group discussion way excited, more excited than I have been for improv just being able to talk about everyone's

		experience with it …getting into the mind of how people view improv… like it got me excited about it. Because I mean I love improv no matter what…this group on campus has been a love hate kinda thing and I think just talking about it, what really got us into it, how we see it, it started back up that just being passionate about it in general…so I remember just have a great practice after that group interview. Just having, you know, being excited going in and having fun with that. It makes me want to work harder with it… (Briscoe) Have the club because I think the credit class it's great but we also need the freedom to just have fun in the club were you not being graded. (Fox)