Digital Displacement

Re-inventing Embodied Practice Online During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Nailing Jell-O to the Wall: Digital Displacement and a Pivot Toward Healing-Centered Engagement

Kathryn Dawson

We need to be human with each other, and [we] need others to see [us] as human. This is the only way that our movements for justice will evolve, when we collectively turn inward to heal our hearts and soothe our souls. It's not an easy dance, but it's a worthy one.
—(Ginwright, *2022*, p. 23)

Introduction

We were a mess. I was a mess. Four weeks into my virtual, graduate-level Drama-based Pedagogy course at the University of Texas at Austin and the combined digital displacement of first-time online teaching, coupled with the ongoing racial justice reckoning in the United States, a global

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pandemic, and a terrible recent winter storm, had brought us all to the brink. It was the morning of my first Zoom class, after a mandatory, multi-day university shut down due to Winter Storm Uri. As I sat amongst the candle stumps, scarves, and jugs of portable water scattered across my home, I wondered: What did we need as a learning community in this moment? I knew my struggles as a middle-class, white, cis-hetero, female professor were different than the issues faced by my graduate students. However, we all shared the collective trauma of the storm. Could our online teaching and learning environment be a place to apprehend our feelings of displacement from socio-political, health, and weather precarity? Could we find a way to build capacity for comfort in the mess (Law, 2004)? And if so, how to do it?

In this chapter, I reflect on my performance of online teaching and learning during the spring of 2021 as a way to move toward healing-centered engagement in my work. As defined by educational justice scholar Shawn Ginwright (2016, 2018), healing-centered engagement is asset driven, focusing on culture and identity through restorative, collective action. Healing-centered engagement is political rather than clinical; it is always done with the goal of a promising future for all. It is work that engenders 'healing' not only with/in participants but also with/in the facilitator.

To make sense of my spring 2021 online performance I use a reflective practitioner approach (Taylor, 1996).[1] I do this to understand why the disorientation that I experienced challenged my sense of self and worldview as an educator (Valde & Kornetsky, 2002). I use the American expression 'nail Jell-O to the wall'[2] to characterize the deep sense of futility I felt as an educator as I struggled to grasp success from a situation that felt slippery and unstable. I use Ginwright's healing-centered theory

[1] In this chapter, I share students' experiences only through generalized descriptions from my notes, outside of Instructional Review Board approvals. I do this to focus the effort on my "self-transforming self or fourth order consciousness" (Canty, 2014, p. 17). I acknowledge the limits this choice imposes on the objective verity of this chapter.

[2] The expression 'nail jelly to the wall' was first used by Theodore Rooselvelt in a 1921 speech about his difficulties getting an agreement with Columbia regarding Panama (see article from the April 8, 1912, Tacoma (WA) *Daily News*, pg. 7, col. 3: "Colonel Couldn't Nail Jelly To The Wall" for more information).

to make sense of my disorienting dilemma, even as I recognize that my memory from the time is also subjective and epistemologically 'jiggly' in substance and form.

In the following sections, I first locate the online teaching and learning performance of my Drama-based Pedagogy (DBP) course within a "dense" and "thick" set of material conditions and socio-political events (Mackey, 2020, p. 558) during the spring of 2021. I use Mackey's (2020) offering of anatopia, "a disrupted place, one that is immanently changing and insecure" whose "precariousness of place [can be] conjoined positively with a forming of place" (p. 546), to think of my first semester of teaching online as a bounded performance shaped by the "extended present" of socio-political and climate struggle (Mackey, 2020, p. 558). Here, I also extend from Sally Mackey's (2020) description of "performing place as anatopic practice" (p. 547) as I construct a performance assemblage of gelatinous efforts, pulled from course artifacts and ephemera and my sixteen weeks of teaching notes. Then, I use Ginwright's (2022) healing-centered pivot theory as a theoretical touchstone[3] to explore four key areas of disorientation from my practice. I conclude each pivot with reflection on how the digital displacement of 2021 continues to inform my teaching across subsequent semesters. In doing so, I work to reclaim my disorientation as moves toward healing-centered learning and pedagogical transformation born from the productive precarity of anatopic performance.

Locating an Online Teaching and Learning Performance

This reflective practitioner account considers events which occurred between January and May 2021, during the Spring semester at the University of Texas at Austin in the United States. Western calendar dates

[3] See Trainor and Graue, 2013, for more about how to use theoretical touchstones in qualitative research.

and colonized geographic location[4] offer one kind of boundary for my reflection on my teaching performance. I acknowledge that my account of details from this "particular period" is selective and shared "outside that period of residing" (Mackey, 2020, p. 556). I note, first, the contextual factors that contributed to the "*precarity* of place" and digital displacement within my teaching performance (Mackey, 2020, p. 558, emphasis in original).

The Place and Time

The negative impact of the global pandemic on public education in the United States has been well documented and cannot be detangled from the complex socio-political climate of the time (Levinson & Markovits, 2022). In January 2021, the United States had over 25 million confirmed COVID-19 cases (Schwartz, 2021) with over 400,000 related deaths (Cohen, 2021). At this time, US life was shaped by ongoing racial justice reckoning and global protest against police brutality and systemic racism, sparked by the murder of George Floyd and many other Black, Indigenous, and People of Color by police.

In addition, Americans faced the ongoing complexity of national politics. The January 6th insurrection in the US Capitol by supporters of former President Donald Trump was followed by a second impeachment trial of former President Trump. In my conservative-led state of Texas, the politicization of the new COVID-19 vaccines roll-out and mask mandates in businesses and schools, along with new bans on gender affirming care for trans youth and women's reproductive rights, made many Americans like myself swing from rage to despondency.

As a public, research-focused university, the University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin) is accountable to the Texas State Legislature and the Texas state governor, Greg Abbott, whose Republican politics are often at

[4] I acknowledge that I work and live on the Indigenous lands of Turtle Island, the ancestral name for what now is called North America. Moreover, I acknowledge the Alabama-Coushatta, Caddo, Carrizo/Comecrudo, Coahuiltecan, Comanche, Kickapoo, Lipan Apache, Tonkawa and Ysleta Del Sur Pueblo, and all the American Indian and Indigenous Peoples and communities who have been or have become a part of these lands and territories in Texas (https://diversity.utexas.edu/land-acknowledgement/).

odds with the progressive leadership of the city of Austin and its flagship university, UT Austin. For example, in March 2021 Governor Abbott issued an order ending the statewide mask mandate allowing all businesses to open at 100% capacity (Office of the Texas Governor, 2021), despite rising COVID-19 cases and many state hospitals being at COVID capacity. The order also "prohibited the penalization of people not wearing face coverings." Despite the Governor's orders, in spring 2021 UT Austin conducted the entire semester's teaching and meetings online; in-person activities were rarely allowed and they always required extensive permissions and mask requirements.

In January of 2021, my family of four began our tenth month in modified lockdown. My teenage children struggled with online school, while my husband and I conducted our work lives from our home offices. We were cranky, stressed, and deeply aware of our great privilege to be employed and comfortably housed during a time of tremendous economic and health instability. In February 2021, the devastating Winter Storm Uri hit Texas. The accumulated impact on a state wholly unprepared for extreme winter weather caused an electricity supply crisis that forced millions across Texas to endure days without electrical power and heat. In Austin, every source of power was compromised by the storms. Without heat, water pipes in Austin homes and businesses froze and burst. Our home was in a lucky spot on the local power grid and remained (mostly) with power. Consequently, during the storm we housed four friends, plus their dog and three cats, whose power and water were out for seven days.

During this time, the physical university, though closed due to COVID-19 restrictions, opened facilities to shelter students, faculty, and staff who needed access to heat, power, and water. As the multi-day weather event continued, interstate trucking ground to a halt due to icy road conditions and food became scarce at grocery stores and restaurants. All virtual work, including at public schools and universities, was paused during the week-long winter storm. Our homes, which had "the positive qualities of permanent place (a sense of belonging … familiarity, even security)" during the COVID-19 lockdown, suddenly became hostile as the instability of heat, light, water, and food caused the "transient disruption" of place (Mackey, 2020, p. 482). At least 210 deaths were directly

attributed to the storm according to the Department of State Health Services.[5]

After the temperatures increased, the snow/ice melted, and power, water, and food began to be restored across the city, I tried to figure out how to restart my online teaching. I was advised by the administration to avoid further strain on students and myself. An email from my university department chair the day before online classes resumed reminded me to 'take it easy' and to remember how much difficulty everyone was managing. Faculty were told to do less and support more. I knew the "geopolitical turbulence" of complex and shifting events created a need for "fluid and liquid mobility" in my teaching performance (Mackey, 2020, p. 546). I just didn't know how to do it.

The Course and the Learning Community

TD383P Drama-Based Pedagogy (DBP) is a first-year graduate student course, which is part of the core for the Master of Fine Arts graduate degree emphasis in Drama and Theatre for Youth and Communities (DTYC) at UT Austin. In spring 2021, student enrollment in DBP included graduate students from the DTYC and Dance program and the College of Education.[6] During various activities and assignments across our course, my students named their diverse social group memberships, which include Black, White, trans, cis, queer, straight, abled, disabled, non-binary, female, and male identity locations. Rassman Menakem (2017) states that "no matter what we look like, if we were born and raised in America, white-body supremacy and our adaptations to it are in our blood. Our very bodies house the unhealed dissonance and trauma of our ancestors" (p.10). Certainly, the accumulated complexity and oppression felt from global and local events in the United States impacted each

[5] https://comptroller.texas.gov/economy/fiscal-notes/2021/oct/winter-storm-impact.php#:~:text=As%20mentioned%2C%20210%20people%20perished,conditions%20complicated%20by%20the%20storm.

[6] Drama-based Pedagogy caps enrollment from across the Theatre and Dance department and the College of Education at nine students to support in-class facilitation and fieldwork supervision requirements within the course. During the Spring 2021 semester, six students were enrolled in the course.

individual in our DBP learning community despite our differentiated levels of privilege or marginalization.

Drama-based pedagogy (DBP) uses active and dramatic approaches to engage learners in embodied, affective, and creative practices to increase engagement and access to academic learning (Dawson & Kiger Lee, 2018). The benefits of drama-based learning experiences for all learners are grounded in the connection between embodied learning, creativity, socio-emotional development, and cognition (Anderson, 2012; Dawson & Kiger Lee, 2018; Edmiston, 2014). In general, arts and drama-based pedagogies use the body as part of a tool kit for learning in combination with imagination and aesthetic experience (Franks et al., 2014; Greene, 1995). The course explores the relationship between drama pedagogy and social justice in education, including theories of socio-constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978; Wilhelm, 2002), critical pedagogy (Freire, 1996; hooks, 1995), culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b), anti-oppression education (Kumashiro, 2000), and disability justice (Sins Invalid, 2019).

The main goal of the sixteen-week course is to explore how to design learning through drama that is "participatory, inclusive and affirming of human agency and human capacities for working collaboratively to make [positive social] change" (Bell, 2007, pp. 1–2). The course objectives for DBP include the exploration of intersections between drama pedagogy and critical theories and the careful consideration of context and participant/facilitator identity in the design, facilitation, revision, and evaluation of a series of drama-based sessions in the field with a community partner. To meet these goals, I use multiple scaffolded units based on the socio-constructivist premise of "show me, help me, let me" (Wilhelm, 2002). Each unit is shaped by an essential question and includes modeling of drama-based pedagogy strategies by the professor, portions of drama pedagogy texts and articles from the field of education,[7] and an opportunity for students to explore their new learning through drama-based pedagogy learning design and facilitation.

[7] Readings in the course work to de-center whiteness and cis-hetero-patriarchy, through the inclusion of BIPOC, queer, and female/non-binary authors.

In the first unit of the course, students design and facilitate an in-class drama-based learning experience that explores a set of progressive and critical theory readings from education and drama-in-education. Students then facilitate a multi-strategy drama-pedagogy learning experience in class during the second unit that explores a social justice-themed narrative text in alignment with Texas public education standards (including arts, non-arts, and/or social-emotional criteria). The semester concludes with students placed at a local K-12 or arts organization fieldwork site for the third unit where they design, lead, and assess a multi-day learning experience in partnership with local educators. Each assignment prioritizes reflective and reflexive learning. Students revise facilitation plans and write short essays after each of the three main teaching units. I give regular feedback across the course, but revised work is the only major material that I grade during the semester.

Like many Texas educators during the turbulent online spring 2021 semester, I remade the syllabus for DBP six times. As I stumbled through digital displacement, I extended deadlines for all assignment revisions, I changed our fieldwork project to include a group work option and eliminated the requirement that students observe each other in the field, and I simplified final project deliverables with more pathways toward completion.

Teaching DBP in Spring 2021: A Jiggly Assemblage of Memory, Notes, and Artifact

We began Drama-based Pedagogy online in spring 2021 by establishing a set of classroom agreements. I invited students to individually offer responses to the prompt: "To learn effectively in this course and community this semester, I need ….". We then mapped our ideas together on a virtual jamboard to anchor our sense-making through visual images and text which we could move around and map as part of our dialogic meaning-making process. Meaning-making describes the process by which ideas or concepts feel more finalized and steadier (Aukerman, 2013). Although people are always trying to make sense of interactions

internally and individually, in dialogic meaning-making, the sense-making process is made visible as an intentional, shared process between learners and educators (Dawson & Kiger Lee, 2018).

Our classroom agreement offered early evidence of our shared acknowledgments of the unique circumstances and needs for 'effective learning' in our new digital learning anatopia. Students had a strong desire to embrace the moment through an ethic of care. They encouraged pets to join our Zoom frames alongside reminders that we accept each other 'where we are at' on any given day. Students also suggested that the course focus more on exploration and relationship exchange than pure content consumption. I reflected on this request in my week one post-teaching notes as I scribbled:

> Have I over-booked our days? When I teach in person, I know how to go deep into something and make other cuts on the fly, all based on the feel of the room. How will I 'feel' the energy and interest online? (Dawson Teaching Notes, 1/20/21)

From the onset, the displacement of bodies, the loss of voice timbre, and my struggle to nimbly improvise and respond as an online facilitator were discomforting. There were numerous mitigating factors that shaped the quality of student engagement during the digital displacement of DBP in 2021. Although most students had their cameras on during the first few weeks of class, after the winter storm (which occurred during the fourth week of class) dislocation, internet issues and exhaustion caused many students to turn their cameras off. My notes from our exploration of image work strategies in our fifth week include:

> The worry and fatigue from the storm drained everyone's tank. No one has the energy to bring their full selves to class. We are all so disconnected right now. I feel like I continually get scared of moving so we just go back to the jamboard or the chat instead. (Dawson Teaching Notes, 2/20/21)

The COVID-19 vaccine also became readily available during the semester. This was a cause for celebration and challenge. My students and I all had significant, negative physical reactions to each of the vaccine

doses, which further blocked our bodily capacity for affective response (Massumi, 2002) in our online world.

> I note a growing sense of insecurity and panic in my written class reflections during weeks five through seven. Where I typically draw energy from the dynamic exchange and collective emergence (Sawyer, 2011) of ideas with my students, I see myself floundering, repeatedly, in the insecurity of missed moments and an inability to "dig our community out" from a growing sense of disengagement and struggle across the group. (Dawson Teaching Notes, 2/22/22)

I offered a mid-semester anonymous survey to students. They shared frank feedback regarding a need for more embodied exploration and play. I realized that closed cameras, and my rush through material, meant I may have missed drama's capacity to be a restorative practice (Ewing, 2019; Harwood, 2011). I decided to find more moments for us to imagine, feel, and create within each class.

My teaching notes from the ninth week of the semester describe my attempts to re-set the course:

> Less was more today. Tried to really focus on doing a few drama strategies effectively which *seemed* to get a few more students engaged which is good. But are they actually learning enough to do this work in this super limited capacity online? (Dawson Teaching Notes, 3/25/21)

More drama activities increased the quality of interpersonal engagement in our online space. For the first time, I felt some flow in my teaching (Csikszentmihalyi, 2013), as we began to rediscover imagination and story in our work together. I wondered how I could maintain this positive momentum as we moved into our final fieldwork unit.

Facilitating fieldwork online in spring 2021 required that I alter the assignment. In the past, each student had their own site and autonomy to develop a fieldwork experience that met their unique interests and excitements. In 2021, one student entered the course with a fieldwork site already in place; another was excited to work with a close friend of mine, the only K-12 teacher who I could find that was willing to open their online classroom at this complex time. With no other classroom placements available, I finally found a student-led equity project where we

could partner with a group of high school students and adult supporters to explore racial justice solutions for our public high schools. It was an exciting opportunity but required all four students to compromise and work quickly together on a plan. To complicate the situation, all students, grouped or not, were struggling to complete any work outside of class. I wrote about the growing sense of apathy in class during the 11th week of the semester:

> Everyone is so tired. No one seems to have any energy left to give to classes. And, I get it, I'm exhausted too. (Dawson Teaching Notes, 4/10/21)

I decided to revise the syllabus again. I swapped out two weeks of rotating class 'lab time,' where students were required to pilot parts of their learning design for critical friend feedback, with open work sessions. For two weeks we met on Zoom and then moved quickly into break-out rooms for unstructured work time. Students appreciated the flexibility. However, I struggled to understand how to navigate the extended displacement of the Zoom break-out room where I could not see social cues and assess the exchange of energy occurring in group work to know when to join or when it might be best to let work unfold without interruption.

Students completed their fieldwork and we ended the course with two sessions of reflection. Reviewing jamboards and my own notes from these final classes, I saw multiple references to the way time shaped our performance of teaching and learning online. Students discussed lost class days, shifted assignments, and our collective struggle to manage time effectively when leading DBP strategies on Zoom with each other and in fieldwork. They commented on the complexity they felt in building trusting relationships with facilitation partners in class and community partners for fieldwork.

The responses made me think about what types of care, shared language, and relational practice are required for effective group work in a digital space, especially during a time of multiple ecological, social, and personal crises. What opportunities had we missed to form "interdependent human relations as a platform from which to enunciate broader conceptions of justice" (Thompson, 2020, pp. 41–42). Alongside feelings

of frustration, students reflected on the productive benefit of collaboration and partnerships in fieldwork, including ruminations on what each of the students in their session might have taken away from the experience.

In our last course activity, I asked students to offer final reflections on the semester using visual images and text on a jamboard. Dewhurst (2018) states that "the arts can surface ideas that we can't easily talk about by making them visual and outside ourselves" (pp. 34–35). On the jamboard, students ruminated on how the course might have been different if we had a physical space for class. They noted the importance of working with actual humans on real questions/practices that matter outside our Zoom room. They observed that fieldwork helped to increase their understanding of the course content; they also noted how surprised they were to find that DBP worked with so many different types of participants.

The Spring 2021 semester came to a close. I moved on to summer work and play as the pandemic dragged on. Eventually, I began to sort through my digital displacement experience. I searched for a way to make sense of my multiple disorientations. I knew I needed to move from an egocentric perspective (Debold, 2002) and use my experience as a place of learning.

A Pivot Toward Healing

Transformative learning requires more than the simple gain of new knowledge; it requires a change in perspective, "a shift of consciousness," the result of rendering particular frames of reference, assumptions, and expectations as problematic (O'Sullivan, 2002, p. 18). As I reflect on online teaching, I see how my discomfort with the messy social reality (Law, 2004) of 2021 fed an increasing "sense of urgency," "either/or thinking," and "perfectionist" teaching goals (Jones & Okun, 2001). I was mired in what Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun (2001) refer to as white supremacy culture, a set of norms and standards which are damaging to both people of color and to white people.

As a facilitator of justice-focused learning communities, I try to address trauma and its effects from a political and historical stance, as something

experienced relationally within and around events, discourses, and contexts (Zembylas, 2007). I want to understand how I can ease and facilitate belonging in alignment with Mackey's proposal that despite their precarity, anatopic places can be forged or made "more pleasurable […] because of a density of creative and enjoyable experiences" (p. 558). I understand pleasure is bound up in liberation and satisfaction (brown, 2017). I want to be able to find joy even in mess.

Shawn Ginwright states that healing is core to social justice and social change. He argues that facilitators of justice-focused practice need to move away from "'what happened to you' to 'what's right with you'" in an effort to support "those exposed to trauma as agents in the creation of their own well-being rather than victims of traumatic events" (Ginwright, 2018). Healing-centered engagement is at the heart of Ginwright's 2022 book *The Four Pivots*, where he offers key tenets for healing-centered leadership: awareness, connection, vision, and presence.

Next, I use Ginwright's four healing-centered pivots to make sense of spring 2021 as an anatopic practice. I then briefly discuss how these discoveries continue to transform my teaching in the same course across subsequent semesters.

Pivot One: Awareness

Ginwright's (2022) first pivot notes that facilitators of justice-based practice may find it easier to "identify a problem or solution than it is to explore our inner vulnerability" (p. 29). We hide behind theory and words (what Ginwright calls a *lens*) rather than engage in self-reflection about our discomfort. I concur. I see now that my choice to lecture more and embody less in the first half of the semester was problematic. Lecturing felt safe. Talking and putting forward ideas about ourselves and the mess of the world in our body did not. However, when I limited the body and its capacity for affect (Nguyen & Larson, 2015) from learning during digital displacement, things did not improve. We simply lost the body's power to sense, feel, create, respond, and imagine possibility.

My response to the jiggly precariousness of my teaching "prevent[ed] us from not only knowing each other, but also fully knowing ourselves"

(Dewhurst, 2018, p. xxix). To solve an over-emphasis on *lens*, Ginwright (2022) suggests social justice facilitators pivot toward a *mirror* relationship with themselves and with others. He argues for "a more intentional practice of self-reflection and exploration of who we are as individuals and how we contribute to the world we wish to create" (p.15). Reflection, he suggests, is central to social change and is inextricably bound to our healing and well-being (p. 36).

When I returned to in-person teaching of DBP in the next semester, I expanded my first course unit to include more reflection about self and positionality. Specifically, I *used* the drama strategies to reflect upon and share our positionality, core values, and goals for the course, based on our individual funds of knowledge (González & Moll, 2002) and cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). I also cut some educational theory days and replaced the time with more embodied exploration and reflection. Ginwright (2022) reminds me that we can only begin to renew our sense of possibility "when we foster a collective imagination that resources communal wisdom that embraces both imagination and engagement, empathy and power, reflection and action" (p. 17). I found that the increased embodied play and time to develop our positionality increased everyone's ability to be vulnerable as we forged new connections with each other and the course material.

I still have days where I struggle to turn from lens to mirror in the DBP course. What if we don't cover all the reading material? Will students lose out if we spend the extra time on that embodied personal reflection strategy? It's an ongoing jiggly juggle. But, bell hooks (2003) cautions me that schools "are structured in ways that dehumanize, that lead [students] away from the spirit of community in which they long to live their lives" (p. 48) and so I work to remain aware and open to where the group wants to go.

Pivot Two: Connection

Ginwright's second pivot focuses on the move from transactional to transformative relationships which are based in a strong sense of belonging. Belonging, he argues, is "a mutual exchange of care, compassion, and

courage that binds people together in a way that says you matter" (Ginwright, 2022, p. 94). In drama education contexts, ensemble is often described as a sense of belonging, community, or relatedness among peers (Anderman, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2000). To build ensemble, we started the Spring 2021 semester online course with classroom agreements.

As described earlier, our jamboard classroom agreements revealed a strong commitment to individual care, which Ginwright (2022) describes as care focused on ourselves and personal needs, intermixed with interpersonal care which is focused on care for others (pp. 122–123). Care requires systemic support. When Winter Storm Uri, the worst winter storm in Texas in almost a century, revealed painful gaps in the "social contract" of the Texas government's institutional care, what Ginwright describes as our "collective commitment to the well-being of one another" (p. 125), I worked to provide institutional care in the government's place. I housed friends and animals for multiple days during the storm. I delivered homemade soup and cookies to all my students. I drove over a field of ice to help a student check on burst pipes and water damage when they were stuck outside the city. I found months of temporary housing for another student when they could no longer live in their apartment. And I worried, constantly, that I wasn't doing enough.

In my unending efforts to *care more* during the extended time of digital displacement, I began to wildly overcompensate. I made short videos of encouragement for my students. I sent long emails. And, since there was often little response to my overtures in the echo chamber of our semester-long Zoom home, I felt compelled to send even more communication. The result was that my relationship with my learning community became micro-managed and transactional, rather than transformational. I needed to better cultivate trust, empathy, and listening across our full community. I needed to create more opportunities to build connections that leverage our shared humanity for collective care and compassion for each other. What students got instead was a five-paragraph course announcement and a cup of soup.

As I continue to revise the DBP course, I have discovered that a productive way to establish mutual, empathetic care in my classroom is to share my own challenges and needs. In the fall of 2022, as I taught a model climate justice drama lesson, I noticed that our improvised

interrogation of a key character responsible for an environmental disaster became overly comedic and simplistic. I ruminated on the teaching afterwards. I decided to bring my concerns to the group. They empathetically responded with their own concerns. We re-worked the lesson together using the same reflective protocols that I ask students to use with their own learning design revision in the course.

Freire (1996) calls on teachers and students to support one another "to become 'beings for themselves'" (p. 85). I find that by building transformational relationships with my students, based in a shared commitment to learn with and from each other, we increase connection and belonging in our learning community.

Pivot Three: Vision

The outcome of my transactional choices during the digital displacement of online teaching and learning was that a significant portion of my time was spent focused on students' problems and how I could fix them. We adopted a scarcity mindset which led to shared fixation on what we had lost through virtual learning. Ginwright (2022) talks about "the psychic cost of scarcity and zero-sum thinking" (p. 18) during times of significant challenges. He notes that when individuals working toward social justice feel "only oppressed" they limit their "collective vision and possible future" (p. 177). He argues for facilitators and participants to increase and expand their "vision"—to move "from problem to possibility" when faced with complexity.

This pivot toward possibility was particularly difficult for me to navigate as I struggled to find anatopia within digital displacement. As someone who works from asset- and possibility-focused theories of change and practice, my inability to generate joy and hope online with students during the spring of 2021 was discouraging. Certainly, the build-up of profound personal, local, and global crises during spring 2021 caused real problems. And I wonder if the transactional, lens-based approach that I used to 'fix' problems made me miss seeds of possibility that were always present in our anatopic performance online.

My practice of drama-based pedagogy was developed through partnerships with students and teachers who want to use drama to increase justice, equity, inclusion, and belonging in their classroom. In my ongoing teaching of DBP, I work to further guide each learning unit through social justice goals. With less explicit trauma in our bodies and hearts, it becomes easier to see ourselves as change agents. And I find it easier to hear each question as an invitation for shared investigation, not a challenge for me to solve.

In her book *Art on My Mind*, hooks (1995) extolls the healing and transformative power of the arts:

> It occurred to me then that if one could make people lose touch with their capacity to create, lose sight of their will and their power to make art, then the work of subjugation, of colonization is complete. Such work can be undone only by acts of concrete reclamation. (p. xv)

The move from problem to possibility needs to be a daily act of reclamation for all. Where do we see only mess? How can we stay open? What can we learn? Some days feel more possible than others. I also realize that I need rest and care for myself so I have the energy and space to dream possible futures with others.

Pivot Four: Presence

Ginwright's (2022) final pivot is a call for facilitators to think about presence and ways to "move from hustle to flow" (p. 18). Here, he invites facilitators to acknowledge their addiction to the capitalist, white supremist culture of "frenzy" and outputs and to make a decision to commit to healing and the choice to "be well" (p. 18). I must admit that I never truly found my 'flow' in the digital displacement of online teaching and learning. I did eventually learn to plan fewer activities and to go deep into topics instead of wide. I learned to use a blank Google slide deck for group work during break-out sessions so I could virtually track students' work and *see* progression without interrupting the conversation. I taught myself to effectively cut-and-paste doc links into the chat to smoothly

make transitions. But none of these technical moves felt like 'flow.' I remained hungry for the rich constructivist sense-making of past DBP teaching experiences where students develop language and growth through dialogue with their teachers, their peers, and the environment (Vygotsky, 1978).

During the last few weeks of the Spring 2021 semester, I finally began to divest from the hustle of what we should do. I let go of some assignments. I stopped sending long emails. And I re-committed to learning through our bodies in every class session. Slowly we began to find some joy, play, and possibility together.

Returning to in-person teaching was restorative. I returned to "disciplined improvisation" in my classroom. Once again, I had the capacity to invoke, apply, and adapt activities and routines while I taught in response to students' just-in-time learning needs and construction of knowledge (Sawyer, 2013, p. 13). Most delightful was a return to moments of *collective emergence* in my teaching of DBP. I found the improvised interplay between students, and student and teacher, that I could lead in person—where the results of the discussion are not pre-determined and are fully dependent on the unique mix of individuals participating (Sawyer, 2011)—absolutely thrilling. More flow gives me joy.

Conclusion

Ginwright (2022) notes that "When we cultivate insight, we gain the ability to go both wide and deep, understand the past and envision the future, work on the inside and on the outside, and dance between individual change and social transformation" (p. 49). Making sense of my jiggly, wiggly, Jell-O dilemmas during online teaching helped me understand the anatopic performance possibilities within the digital displacement of spring 2021. The "means and conditions" of my disorientation provided insight into how the "environments and events of knowledge in the making exist" in my DBP teaching labor, which "began to open a new world of pedagogical possibility" (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 3).

Through anatopic reclamation, I begin to see what was missing, what needed amplification, and what worked in my course and its facilitation.

I find that cultivating more awareness, connection, vision, and presence in my classroom gives me tools to re-imagine teaching and learning care in my practice. I continue to build on this "enhanced sense of crafted intent" (Thompson, 2020, p. 31) focused on embodied and communal discovery and exchange, as I move forward. I often wonder how I would manage another full semester of DBP online teaching. Perhaps, I would be and feel more effective? Or perhaps not. Our world remains a complex, jiggly, wiggly place, impossible to pin down, like Jell-O on a wall. Although the global pandemic has mostly faded, my home state of Texas continues to careen toward more socio-political and environmental disaster zones.

Sally Mackey (2020) reminds me that the "*precarity* of place with [in our] changed and disrupted lives" will remain (p. 558, original emphasis). I feel a marked pull to meet the inevitable anatopias of tomorrow with an increased capacity to seek trust, wholeness, and healing as I turn with others toward possibility. Together, we can change ourselves to change the world, one pivot at a time.

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