• Paper / Proposal Title:
Safe Rehearsal Space: A Hospitable Classroom Environment

• Author(s) Name:
Kelly Aliano, Dongshin Chang

• University or Company Affiliation:
Kelly Aliano, Long Island University--Post Campus
Dongshin Chang, City University of New York, Hunter College

• Abstract (300 words):
As instructors of academic theatre courses, we discuss theatre course content in ways that will eventually lead to critical reading, writing, and thinking in the students. We strive to empower them and cultivate agency in them. To achieve that goal, we observe the importance of, among others, building a hospitable classroom environment. In this paper, we investigate the ways in which we build such an environment by engaging the theatrical conceptual framework of rehearsal. This is a concept and practice that aims to provide a safe space for experiments, focuses on process rather than the final product, and welcomes student voices and ideas.

In order to achieve these goals under the rehearsal concept, we complicate the conventional notions of classroom dynamic, recognizing that students perform as much, if not more, than instructors. Therefore, as teachers, we need to be attentive and responsive receivers of student ideas, playing the role of active audience. This vision creates a dialogic classroom environment, allowing for discussion between everyone present. To ensure this atmosphere of conversation, we have experimented with the logistics of our classroom spaces. We have found that focus is best maintained when students and the instructor sit together in a circle, as opposed to the instructor standing and talking to the students. This allows each voice to be equally valued during discussion. We also contemplate the importance of classroom comfort, considering the effect of
temperature, lighting, and other factors on the student experience. In such a built learning environment, rather than teaching our students what to think, we guide them as to how critical thinking happens and to inspire them to think for themselves.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):
Kelly I. Aliano received her PhD from the City University of NY Graduate Center. She is the author of Theatre of the Ridiculous: A Critical History (McFarland, 2018). She has presented at numerous conferences in the field of video game studies. She regularly collaborates with Dongshin Chang from CUNY Hunter about writing pedagogy in theatre courses; they published a chapter in New Directions in Teaching Theatre Arts (2018) on the subject as well as an article on low-stakes writing for Theatre Topics. She currently teaches at Long Island University’s Post Campus in the Department of Theatre, Dance, and Arts Management.