

Exploring the Potential of Comic Improvisation as a Means of Understanding Generative Dialogue

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education
in the
Faculty of Education

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Summer 2015

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Abstract

This study explored comic improvisation as a lens for improving competencies in generative dialogue. Comic improvisation involves spontaneous unscripted scenes created in a cooperative process in which an actor works with suggestions from an audience. Generative dialogue is a term coined by Otto Scharmer that refers to the suspending our preconceptions to allow new thoughts and ideas to be co-generated during a dialogue. This study explores the experiences of seven participants in regard to the development of their understanding and learning about dialogue after completing a series of five comic improvisation workshops. I specifically explore their experiences in terms of being in the holy insecurity, being responsive, practicing suspension, and coming to new ideas or understandings.

The research entailed a qualitative case study. Participants initially participated in paired dialogues followed by a semi structured interview. After participating in five comic improvisation workshops, they completed another semi-structured interview and a focus group to describe their experiences. The data also included the videotaped comic improvisation classes, transcribed audiotapes of the dialogues and anecdotal field notes.

The data revealed that participants found connections between the competencies used in comic improvisation and those used in dialogue. They also believed they increased their awareness and ability to be in the holy insecurity, to be responsive, to practice suspension and to create something new in the comic improvisation sessions. The participants reported that increased awareness of these competencies helped them with dialogue; however, they noted difficulties in applying these competencies to their dialogues. Other thematic categories that emerged from the data included comic improvisation as energized play, the constraints of time, structural differences, embodied knowing and the necessity of disagreement in generative dialogue. The findings suggest participants perceived that they were better able to think about and explore their ability to dialogue generatively through participation in the comic improvisation workshops. Current uses of comic improvisation as a training tool in areas such as business and psychotherapy are discussed as well as possible curriculum development considerations. The study shows a promising pathway for further exploration and research of comic improvisation as a training strategy for generative dialogue.

Keywords: comic improvisation; generative dialogue; applied improvisation; dialogue

Dedication

To all of us who still remember to play and how silliness originates from a blissful blessing. To the participants of this study who came to play with me all those Saturday mornings: a blessing it certainly was.

Acknowledgements

First I would like to acknowledge my committee. Thanks to my supervisor Dr. Allan MacKinnon for his positive encouragement. Thanks also go out to Dr. Milt McClaren, who climbed aboard my thesis ship and sailed that last circumnavigation with me, and Dr. David Kaufman who consistently shared my excitement for comic improvisation. I must extend my deep appreciation to Dr. Charles Scott who sparked my interest in dialogue and then returned on a white horse to save the day.

I want to thank my husband Brian who put up with a distracted wife for three years and patiently listened as I prattled on and on about my work. Your belief and support never faltered and always sustained me. I also want to thank my son Finn who not only gave up his mother but also his access to the computer for three years as mommy did her schoolwork.

I want to acknowledge my Aunt Eva whose sweet positive support gave me courage and strength. A special thanks to my parents Lis and Rex Farrell: my mom who told me to try jumping over the moon and not to worry about that little dog laughing and my dad who taught to stubbornly go after what you want. It is all just an egg and spoon race, Daddy, I just needed to focus on not dropping that egg while I put one step in front of the other.

Finally I want to acknowledge my brilliant editor Kim MacDonald who spent all those Sundays editing my work even though she was working more than full time. Kim rode the roller coaster of frustration and elation with me every step of the way. I couldn't have done this without you, Kim. You are the dearest friend.

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Glossary

Being responsive	to be acutely aware of another and see them as emerging while being attentive and listening to what is actually being said
Comic Improvisation	an umbrella term referring to unscripted spontaneous scenes that are built on audiences suggestions and are acted generally for entertainment (Seeham, 2001). Includes: Improv, improv-comedy, and Theatresports
Dialogue	a term used to describe not just conversation but a conversation focused on intentionally increasing understanding, addressing problems, and questioning our thoughts and actions (Romney, 2005)
Generative Dialogue	a term used to describe dialogue that is rule revealing, where all parties suspend judgement and in the relationship co-generate new understandings or ideas (Gunnlingson, 2004)
Player	an actor in comic improvisation

Suspension	a term used in dialogue to describe being in a meta-cognitive state of heightened awareness of ones' thoughts, judgements and preconceptions and separate from them (Jones, 2007)
The Holy Insecurity	a term used in dialogue to describe the ability to be truly present in a moment where the current and next moments are emerging and unknown ((Buber, 1948)
Yes and...	a comic improvisation term used to describe “actively listening to what the other actor is saying/ <i>offering</i> , and then building off of that idea with his/her own idea/ <i>offer</i> ” (Harding, 2004, p. 211).

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Statement of the Problem

This is a dissertation about dialogue, its importance, and how one learns to carry out dialogue effectively. The problem of the study is how we might think about dialogue in order to improve our capacity for dialogue. William Isaacs (1999) boldly stated in his book *Dialogue: The Art of Thinking Together* that we can face neither “the challenges of today nor the promise of our future without the ability to think together” (p. 6). According to Isaacs, most political, corporate and community leaders struggle with this inability of thinking together (1999). This is a widespread and serious problem. Isaacs saw dialogue as an opportunity to create the collective intelligence necessary for a democratic society to thrive (Isaacs, 1999). Dialogue is not just conversation; rather, it is a conversation focused on intentionally increasing understanding, addressing problems and questioning our thoughts and actions (Romeny, 2005). It is a conversation that goes beyond mere conversation as it engages the heart, the mind as well as our spirit. Dialogue is a shared inquiry; it is a way of thinking, reflecting and truly being together to promote understanding (Isaacs, 1999).

David Bohm, a seminal writer on dialogue, proposed that through dialogue we can “change our collective thought processes and find solutions to problems without being led by our assumptions”(as cited in Gryn, 2003, p. 94). Dialogue is focused on

relationship building and exploring and as well as understanding differences. As we live in an age of increasing globalization that often includes increasing fragmentation (Romney, 2005), developing competencies for relational dialogue has never been more critical. Dialogue is essential as “an increasingly diverse and conflicted world calls us to collaborate with one another to survive and share the planet. ... All kinds of individuals and groups need to come together and talk about the controversial matters that affect our survival and progress” (Romney, 2005, p.1). Dialogue allows us to build relationships and understanding. It is a respectful way to explore our differences and have difficult conversations.

True relational dialogue, however, is a complex set of competencies that has to be learned (Gunnlaugson, 2007; McNamee & Shotter, 2004). How can we develop this important competency? Developing the ability to dialogue is difficult. It requires moving into the unknown, suspending one’s preconceived ideas and being authentically responsive. As Issacs stated, dialogue is “a powerful way of harnessing collective intelligence and inquiry, a potential breakthrough in the way human beings might govern themselves and an innovative alternative approach to producing coordinated action among collective” (as cited in Romney, 2005, p.12). To tap into the potential of dialogue, we need to engage people in developing the important skills necessary for true dialogue.

How can we engage people in the difficult task of developing the awareness and competencies necessary for these dialogues? Many years ago I was involved in a comic improvisation troupe. Comic improvisation is something I am continually drawn back to; its fun and excitement attract me. I believe that comic improvisation requires the same competencies that are important for dialogue: moving into the unknown, suspending one’s own preconceived ideas, and being authentically responsive. Comic

improvisation, like dialogue, also co-generates a new creation. Comic improvisation is noted for its wide appeal and accessibility (Engelberts, 2004). Dialogue is very important but difficult to learn while comic improvisation is appealing and accessible. Comic improvisation takes place in a context of make-believe where anything is possible. It is energized play (Engelberts, 2004). Although both dialogue and comic improvisation require specific competency development, comic improvisation provides an environment of play and silliness in which to do so. This is its appeal. This study explores possible relationships between comic improvisation and generative dialogue. If generative dialogue and comic improvisation share some of the same competencies, could comic improvisation be used to increase our understanding of competencies for generative dialogue? Comic improvisation was developed in the late 1960's as an accessible form of theatre that would appeal to the general population. Conventional forms of theatre are typically performed in a proscenium arch theatre space with elaborate sets, props and costumes. There is a clear divide between the audience and performers. In contrast, comic improvisation can be performed in unconventional spaces and requires no sets, props or costumes. The audience interacts with the performers. It is "designed to attract the average person to the world of theatre" (Vera & Crossan, 2004, p. 731). Comic improvisation now has international wide spread popularity as an unconventional theatre form (Engelberts, 2004). Recently, training in comic improvisation has been used as a tool in business in order to develop competencies in dealing with change, increasing adaptability and responsiveness and minimizing hierarchy (Vera & Crossan, 2004). The business world "is increasingly embracing improvisation as a management development technique" (Moshavi, 2001, p. 447). The use of comic improvisation to skill build in business and organizational leadership has recently received such attention that practitioners have formed an

Applied Improvisation Network (www.appliedimprov.com). Comic improvisation has been recognized as having potential as “a formative instrument in communication and social relations” (Engelberts, 2004, p. 167). Taking this into consideration, can it then be applied to assist in developing competencies for dialogue?

1.2. The Purpose of this Study

The purpose of my research was to explore the potential of comic improvisation training workshops as a means to develop enhanced understanding about dialogue and as a new approach for developing the competencies for engaging in generative dialogue. This is an exploratory, conceptual study grounded in the practical work of the comic improvisation workshops as a way of viewing, illustrating and describing ideas about dialogue.

I have very intentionally used the term competencies as opposed to skills for this study. According to the American National Research Council in the study *Education for Life and Work: Developing Transferable Knowledge and Skills in the 21st Century*, deep learning is the “process through which an individual becomes capable of taking what was learned in one situation and applying it to new situations” (2012, p.3). This study examines competencies explored in comic improvisation that are then applied to dialogue, a process by which participants may be pushed into deep learning. Skills that go beyond being specific to one domain of knowledge and are understood deeply so they can be transferred to another domain of knowledge are termed competencies (National Research Council, 2012, p.3). In using the term competency, I do not want to reduce generative dialogue to simply a set of learned

competencies. When one opens ones heart and mind to dialogue there is a shift in consciousness: a shift in our very way of being in the world (Gunnlaughson, 2007). This shift in consciousness is a heightened state of awareness that allows us to connect in relationship to a larger sphere outside ourselves (Scharmer & Kauefer, 2013). To attain this state of being, however, there is a required set of competencies that need to be developed.

I will be referring to these competencies as essetnail embodied understandings that straddle two domains of knowledge or learning environments: comic improvisation and generative dialogue. The framework of comic improvisation does differ from that of generative dialogue so the application and context of the competencies being explored differs as well. In Chapter 6 section 6.1, I will also explicitly compare how the dialogue competencies, although essentially the same, do have some subtle differences when applied in comic improvisation and dialogue.

The specific competencies being explored are:

- Moving into the holy insecurity – the unknown in-between place
- Heightened meta awareness with suspension: being aware of your thoughts, preconceptions and judgments without allowing them to block new understandings
- Turning to the other and being responsive and seeing the other person as emerging and whole
- Co-generating and creating new understandings or ideas.

I believe that comic improvisation is an excellent vehicle for exploring and developing competencies for dialogue because it evokes interest and is accessible. Engelberts (2004) called comic improvisation a theatrical phenomenon that is immensely popular, has a wide appeal and is gaining international acceptance. During my years of performing comic improvisation and teaching drama, I became aware of the attraction that comic improvisation had. High school students would leave other classes to join in my class to be a part of these activities. When I was performing comic improvisation in coffee shops, people would walk in off the street as they felt and heard the charged atmosphere and laughter. Improvisation is accessible, transferable and universal “because the elements upon which actors improvise are the same ones available in their everyday lives ... speech, gestures and movement” (Vera & Crossan, 2004, p. 728). Although becoming skilled at performing comic improvisation for entertainment takes rehearsal and expertise, participating and experiencing it does not.

If comic improvisation has commonalities to dialogue, then could training in comic improvisation be used to help develop an understanding of some of the characteristics of generative dialogue? Could comic improvisation be used to provide an embodied knowing of these competencies? Talking and acting are actions that are embodied rather than purely cognitive ways of understanding (Cunliffe, 2002). If comic improvisation parallels characteristics of dialogue, then could one come to know the embodied feeling in comic improvisation and then recognise it in generative dialogue? Can this recognition of an embodied knowing be used to develop the competencies for generative dialogue? These questions are certainly worthy of some examination. I believe that comic improvisation could be a wonderful and accessible vehicle to gain a greater awareness and understanding of the competencies for dialogue and could

possibly be used as a tool for training. The research conducted for this thesis was intended as a means of examining and exploring the validity of this belief.

This study will interest educators and practitioners involved in exploring competencies required in relational and generative dialogue. Business, political, community leaders and policy makers who perceive the need to cooperatively co-generate solutions to problems will also find this work valuable (Isaacs, 1999). I believe that anyone involved in active citizenship towards problem solving and bridging understanding could benefit from an increased understanding of and ability to dialogue.

1.3. Defining the Terms

I will further discuss the concepts central to my research in my literature review (Chapter 2). At this point, I will supply working definitions of the terms that I have used in the study.

1.3.1. Dialogue

Nicholas Burbules described the term dialogue as follows: “broadly defined ... as the dynamic of speaking and listening to each other” (as cited by Sinha, 2010, p. 149). For my purposes, the term dialogue will not simply apply to any conversation. I will be using the term based on the work of Otto Scharmer, who describes four levels of conversation. The first level is talking nice, which is defined as polite conversation that is cautious and rule re-enacting; the second is talking tough, which is defined as expressing a polarized view that takes the form of arguing and debating; the third level is reflective dialogue, which is based on inquiry where one becomes aware of his/her position and is open to exploring the ideas of others; the final level is generative

dialogue, where parties co-create new meanings, knowledge and ideas (Gunnlaugson, 2007). Relational dialogue occurs when we suspend our own biases, judgements and preconceptions and authentically listen to and share with the other person or people. This is a requirement for reflective dialogue (Gunnlaugson, 2007) Generative dialogue occurs when we are engaged in relational dialogue that is also co-generating new ideas or understandings (Gunnlaugson, 2007, p. 43). To generatively dialogue, one needs to go deeply into the present moment while sensing all that surrounds one. “In this state, listening originates outside the world of our preconceived notions” (Scharmer & Kauefer, 2013, p.20). Generative dialogue lets go of past ways of thinking and opens us up to emerging possibilities (Scharmer, 2009). In this study, my use of the term dialogue could be seen as referring to generative dialogue. I will use the term dialogue specifically as a “focused conversation, engaged in intentionally with the goal of increasing understanding, addressing problems, and questioning thoughts or actions” (Romney, 2005, p. 2). My use of the term generative dialogue will refer to moving past simply opening our mind and heart to understanding to a place where the unknown is embraced and new ideas and understandings are co-created.

1.3.2. Comic improvisation

Comic improvisation is a form of theatre where the actors are creating the dialogue and action in real time in front of a participating audience (Moshavi, 2001). Comic improvisation has external structures imposed by a particular game and audience suggestions as well as internal structures which in turn provide the guiding principles and competencies for all comic improvisation (Moshavi, 2001). Improvisation actor Amy Seham described “improv-comedy [as] a form of unscripted performance that uses audience suggestions to initiate or shape scenes or plays created spontaneously and

cooperatively according to agreed-upon rules or game structures in the presence of an audience-frequently resulting in comedy” (2001, p. xvii). For the purpose of my research, I include improv-comedy, improv, and Theatresports under the umbrella of comic improvisation. I did not, for the purposes of this research, include forms that have preplanned or scripted scenes or characters even if the dialogue is improvised. I am also specifically exploring improvisation intended for comedy. Although theatrical improvisation can be used for a variety of purposes such as drama therapy, psychodrama, playback theater or forum theater (Shem-Tov, 2011), I am specifically exploring improvisation where the goal is amusement and entertainment.

1.3.3. **The Holy Insecurity**

The holy insecurity is a term generally associated with a seminal contributor in the area of dialogue, Martin Buber. Being in the holy insecurity is to be present in the moment with no preconceptions or ideas of what will come next. Being in the holy insecurity is being present in a moment where the present moment is described as “the unforeseeable, every changing and ever new situations” (Buber, 1948, p. 24). In comic improvisation, “improvisers learn to be comfortable with the unexpected without learning prescriptive formulas. [Dialoguers] seek to comfortably and confidently navigate the unpredictable twists and turns of dialogue” (Balachandra, Bordone, Menkel-Meadow, Ringstrom, & Sarath, 2005).

Being in the holy insecurity is also related to Scharmer’s idea of *presencing*. He described presencing as stopping to “lean into that space of the unknown, [to] lean into that which wants to emerge” (2013, p. 29). Leaning into our emerging future is leaning from what is to what can be. It is leaning away from the known into the unknown to see

the possibilities. “It requires us to *suspend* our judgments, *redirect* our attention, *let go* of the past, *lean into the future* that wants to emerge through us, and *let it come*” (Scharmer & Kauefer, 2013, p.30). This ability to be in that unplanned, unknowing place is the common competency that I refer to as being in the holy insecurity in this study.

1.3.4. **Responsive**

Being responsive is concerned with relationships. Both dialogue and comic improvisation are done with other people. Being responsive is to be acutely aware of another and to see him/her as emerging as opposed to being static. Buber (1948) termed this as an element of the ‘I-Thou’ relationship as oppose to an ‘I-It’ relationship. If one is responsive to another, one does not anticipate or assume the reactions or perceptions of another, but instead, hangs in uncertainty for the next response open to all possibilities. Littlebird (2001) wrote of the importance of listening in the Pueblo Oral Tradition and his Grandfather instructions: “you can hear but no one can make you listen. That is why I have to teach you” (p. 15). True listening requires discipline; it is a learnt competency. Generative communication creates an atmosphere for building relationships with trust (Isaac, 1996; Scharmer, 2007). Being responsive is being open to accepting and responding to the ideas of others and being open to shift ideas and perceptions. In comic improvisation, this is being attuned to and accepting each offer by “focusing on the collective, on the purpose, and on being in the moment” (Yanow, 2001, p. 59).

1.3.5. **Suspension**

Suspension is being aware of your preconceptions, ideas and judgements without letting them block new understandings. In dialogue, suspension requires us to become aware of our own thoughts, judgments and opinions and then to separate slightly from them and hold them up for examination (Jones, 2007). Scharmer advocated for separating from the past by suspending it, and the ability to suspend the past comes from being acutely aware of the present moment in generative dialogue (Scharmer, 2009). In comic improvisation, it is necessary for a player to be aware of his/her own ideas and yet stay present “in the moment, attuned to what [his/her] teammate is saying and doing, rather than focusing on [him/herself] and what other people are thinking about [him/her]” (Yanow, 2001, p. 59). Although comic improvisation does not require a player to really analyze his/her judgements and preconceptions, it does require the recognition and holding back of ideas in order to be present for the other players. This is a form of suspension.

1.3.6. **Creation Out of the Blue**

McNamee and Shotter used the term *creation out of the blue* to describe the “special kind of first time creativity” (2004, p. 94) found in dialogue. This term refers to moving out of the planned or known to embrace unpredictable possibilities (McNamee & Shotter, 2004). This term also relates to the co-generation of new ideas and understandings that can result in dialogue.

1.3.7. **Yes and...**

“Yes and ...” is a concept central to performing comic improvisation. It refers to accepting other players’ ideas and then adding to them. “Improv actors communicate using a concept called Yes, and: active listening to what the other actor is saying/offering, and then building off of that idea with his/her own idea/offer” (Harding, 204, p. 211).

1.4. **Research Questions**

Can comic improvisation be used as an embodied experience that informs and creates awareness of some of the competencies for generative dialogue?

Sub Questions

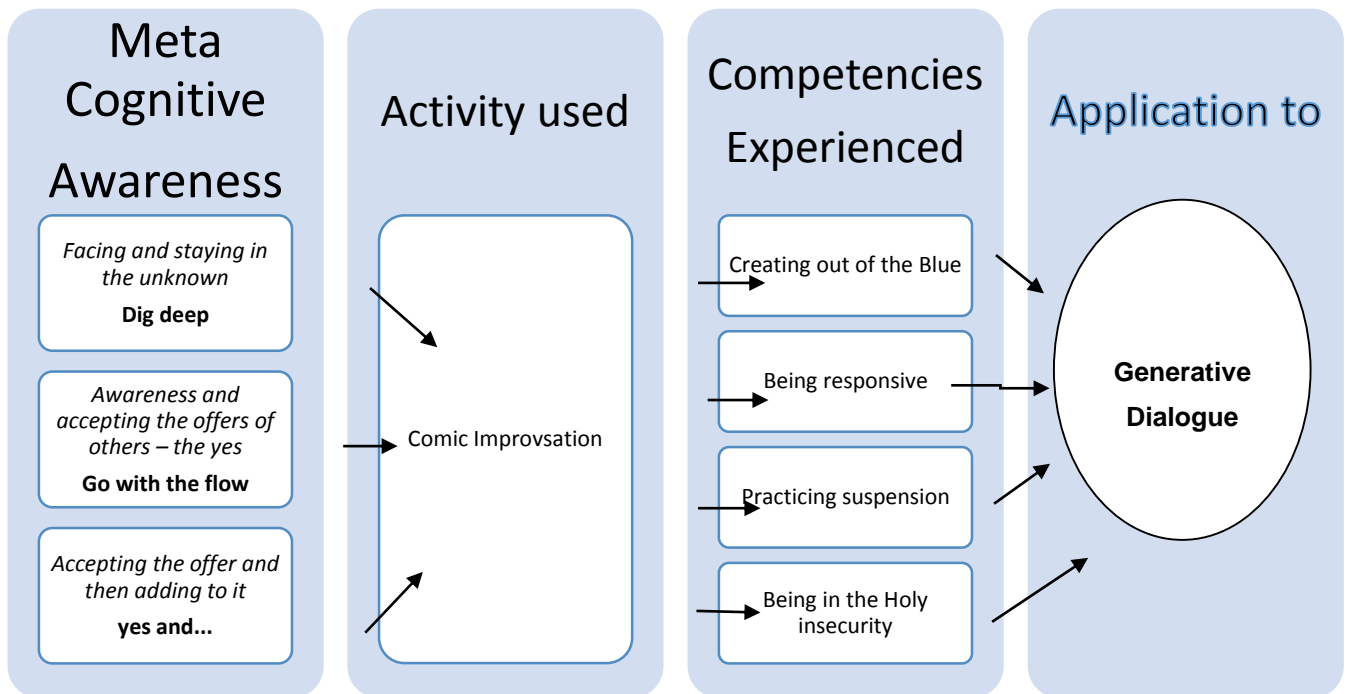
- How do participants describe the experience of the comic improvisation workshops?
- How do participants describe the post comic improvisational workshop dialogue?
- How do participants perceive the experience of dialoguing before and after the comic improvisation workshops?
- Do participants perceive connections between the competencies learned for comic improvisation and those necessary for generative dialogue?

- Do participants perceive the experience of learning comic improvisational as affecting their ability to do generative dialogue?

1.5. Structure of the Study

My study had three discrete parts. Initially, participants were introduced to the nature of the study and the competencies being investigated. They then participated in paired dialogues and individual interviews. The participants next participated in five comic improvisations workshops. During the final session, participants participated again in paired dialogues, interviews and a focus group. Figure 1-1 below conceptually maps the study.

Figure 1-1: Conceptual Map of the Study.



Being metacognitive is to be consciously aware of what you are thinking. As much as comic improvisation is spontaneous, players need to be aware of the skills that they are actively engaging in and developing. For example, when actors are developing a comic improvisational scene, they must be aware of the necessity of accepting each other's offers. If actors simply went with the first idea that occurred to them, they would not be responding to the other actors and the scene would not progress. Similarly in dialogue, one cannot simply monologue every thought that occurs. Vandergrift, Goh and Mareschal (2006), referred to this as metacognition in action, which "enables an individual to orchestrate different mental processes during problem solving" (p. 433). During an activity or while in action, an individual is aware of procedures and strategies for accomplishing his/her goals (Vandergrift, Goh & Mareschal, 2006). My goal in the comic improvisation training was to have the participants develop a metacognitive awareness of digging deep, going with the flow and being in the yes and while they participated in the comic improvisational work. From this experience or experiential learning, participants should be able to increase their awareness and understanding of the competencies of creating out of the blue, being responsive, practicing suspension and being in the holy insecurity. My study explored how workshop training in comic improvisation affected the participant's perceived awareness and understanding of these competencies for application to generative dialogue.

1.6. Research Paradigm and Philosophical Framework

I locate myself, and this study, in the paradigm of constructivism. My understanding of reality is that reality is not absolute; there is no one reality but multiple

understandings of reality. “Constructivists assume a world in which universal, absolute realities are unknowable, and the objects of inquiry are individual perspectives or constructions of reality” (Hatch, 2002, p.14). As a constructivist, I also believe that our reality is constructed and that the knower and responder co-create their understandings of reality. My epistemological understanding connects logically to this. I see knowledge as being co-constructed. “Constructivism's central idea is that human knowledge is constructed, that learners build new knowledge upon the foundation of previous learning” (Kanselaar, 2002, p.1). This also influences how I see the nature of generative dialogue and comic improvisation. Participants build and add to each other’s ideas and understandings and co-construct reality. “Although knowledge in one sense is personal and individual, the learners construct their knowledge through their interaction with the physical world, collaboratively in social settings and in cultural and linguistic environments” (Baker, McGaw, & Peterson, 2007, p. 3). Having a constructivist epistemology also affects me as researcher. I see the research process as being a set of co-constructed understandings between the participants and myself, rather than me, as researcher, distancing myself to objectively note and report observations. As Hatch (2002) noted, “it is through mutual engagement that researchers and respondents construct the subjective reality” (p. 15).

I would further locate myself as a social constructionist. This perspective is closely associated with many contemporary theories, most notably the developmental theories of Vygotsky, Bruner, and Bandura's social cognitive theory (Kim, 2001). Social constructionism also supports the idea of multiple constructed realities, but these cognitive capacities and realities are socially and culturally constructed through human activity. Individuals create meaning through their interactions with each other and the

environment in which they live (Kim, 2001). This philosophy or paradigm helps shape my research. The purpose and rationale for the research is further enriched by the importance of dialogue because it helps shape our reality. Qualitative research also “focuses on interpreting and understanding a social construction of meaning in a natural setting” (Merriam, 2012, p. 347). The interaction of the participants and the environment helps shape reality. This is the nature of producing the knowledge of my study. Therefore, the thick description located in qualitative research is necessary.

1.7. Situating Myself as Researcher

Qualitative research requires researchers to objectively identify how they are subjective rather than attempting to be objective. “The capacities to be reflexive [are] to keep track of one’s influence on a setting, to bracket one’s biases, and to monitor one’s emotional responses” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). I have endeavoured to speak to my positionality around the work throughout my study and in the data analysis to provide transparency. What follows is a brief background of me in the context of the work.

I first became interested in this work during a class, *Dialogue: a Relational Approach to Learning*, taught by Dr. Susie O’Neil and Dr. Charles Scott at Simon Fraser University. When, on February 17, 2012, Dr. Scott described the holy insecurity as an “emergent, unfolding, unpredictable place where dialogue happens,” the hairs on the back of my neck stood up because I recognized this place; I had been there. I had an embodied response connected to this memory. It was about 20 years ago, and I was about to perform in my first comic improvisation show. As I had stood backstage waiting to step onto the stage without a script, I was about to step into the holy insecurity. This

connection between the idea of being in the holy insecurity in order to have generative dialogue and my embodied memory of being in the holy insecurity to perform comic improvisation profoundly struck me.

I was new to the study of dialogue, but as we continued to explore dialogue, I continued to see parallels and similarities with comic improvisation. These parallels eventually became the competencies that I explored in this study. It is important to note that my process for identifying these competencies came directly through relating my experience in comic improvisation to dialogue in my course work. I did not identify them from comparing research in comic improvisation to research in dialogue but rather had a series of 'ah ha' moments deeply grounded in my experience. Eventually, I developed a short class presentation on these observations that later became a conference presentation and gradually became my dissertation. I continued to feel a strong emotional connection to the parallels that I first saw in my dialogue class. I began to wonder whether other people would find the same connection if they too had the experience of comic improvisation.

My background in comic improvisation spans decades but has not been constant. I was introduced to comic improvisation as a high school drama student. These short exposures were presented simply as fun drama games. Eventually, I became a high school drama teacher but did not receive any training in comic improvisation. In my drama methods training, there were elements of improvisation in role-playing but not structured comic improvisational games or exercises. As a drama teacher, I included comic improvisational games as part of my curriculum. These were done as warm ups or rewards at the end of class. I mimicked what I had experienced as a student.

In the 1990's, I joined a comic improvisational troupe called the *Impromaniacs* in Victoria and remained a player for three years. This is where I received most of my training and experience in comic improvisation. A few years after moving to Nanaimo, I taught courses in comic improvisation through Community Education and performed in Improv shows a number of times in coffeehouses and at Vancouver Island University. Prior to this study, I had not been seriously involved in comic improvisation for a decade. I teach performing arts method courses at Vancouver Island University but rarely use comic improvisation except as a warm up, introductory game or played as a reward at the end of a class or unit. Comic improvisation creates excitement, noise and laughter when I bring it into the classroom. I find myself being drawn in and lose my role of teacher as I play with my students.

In evaluations as a teacher, I am frequently described as enthusiastic. I definitely brought this aspect of my personality into my study. Although I attempted to provide an environment where the connections between comic improvisation and generative dialogue were merely being explored, my excitement around the connections would have been apparent to my participants. I have also built a career on sharing an enjoyment of and appreciation for the power of the arts. I am an arts educator and see the arts as a cross curricular strategy for teaching.

1.8. Identifying the Participants

As this study concerned itself with the experience of transferring competencies from comic improvisation to dialogue, the participants were really at the centre of the research. Although contextualized by the research in the field and structured by my

methods, the data comes from the mouths of the participants; it is their experience as described by them. It is quite a risk to try comic improvisation and having that risk documented was very brave. There were originally ten participants who began this study. Two left early due to illness and one was unable to be present for the final dialogue so was withdrawn from the study. The participants that did not complete are noteworthy as they coloured the experience with their participation. I have included a complete list of participants and background information in Appendix C. I had only one female participant who was able to commit to the time frame for this study, but she was, unfortunately, unable to complete. This left me with an all-male participant group. The fact that I only had male participants in my study is definitely noteworthy. I will discuss this further in the Assumptions and Limitations of the Study section below.

As the participants were generally recruited from the Vancouver Island University Community; it is not surprising that they all had some post-secondary education. The age groups were almost discrete: two students and an IT worker who were under 35 years of age, and two firmly into their later work life and two retired participants. None of the participants were busy with young children. This is not surprising as the study required a time commitment of seven Saturdays. All of the participants were inexperienced with comic improvisation and were all keen to try. I will describe each individually. For the purposes of this study, I have given each participant a pseudonym. I will attempt to give a general sense of each of the participants without taking too many liberties.

Bob is an open and enthusiastic person. He had found out about the study from his wife who works at Vancouver Island University. As quoted later in the study, he found improvisation very energising and compared it to opening presents on Christmas

morning. Bob was also a very physical actor who had no problem wrestling bulls on the rugged floor of our workshop space. He has a history of work in human services and currently coordinates programs for literacy. Bob is in the over 45 age group. He chose to participate in the study to develop skills and to have fun.

Hank was the only participant who was recruited from the poster at the seniors centre. He is over sixty, retired, and had previously taught English in Asia. Hank frequently engages in University community events and lectures. Hank likes to question and was motivated by curiosity. He reported only ever having one line in a play in high school but at the end of the study, he remembered also taking a workshop on method acting in his 20's. His dedication to establishing setting was a wonderful focused endeavour that had me believing we were in a flower shop or at the end of the rainbow. He reported wanting to take the class for amusement.

Jess is an information technologist who works at Vancouver Island University. He is under 40. He had no theatre experience and participated to gain some skills and experience in acting. Jess has an interesting sense of humour and kept us entertained while figuring out our inner Serengeti animal. He has a quick wit and an incredible sense of irony but truly let go of trying to be clever in order to be responsive and invest in the work.

Murray is an English as a second language teacher at Vancouver Island University. He is over 45 and has a great deal of multi-cultural experiences both here and abroad. Murray brought with him a deep understanding of language and communication. Murray had a minor in theatre from many years ago. He was thoughtful and quiet in discussions but brought huge presence on stage.

Mark is an education student in his early thirties. He is passionate about social justice and fascinated by the idea of play. During the study he was completing a practicum at an elementary school. Murray describes his background in theatre as “zilch.” His reason for participating in the study was simply because he thought he would like it. His gentle engagement and authentic risk taking were welcomed.

Greg is a recently retired mental health worker in his mid-sixties. He found out about the study through his wife who works at Vancouver Island University. Greg had always wanted to try comedy and brought serious dedication to the workshops. He had done some amateur theatre and had great stage presence. He also had a sense of understanding and curiosity about the academic nature of the study.

Sam was the youngest participant; he was under 25. He is a business student. From the first day of orientation, Sam was intrigued by the possible applications of the skills building to business. This brought a very interesting voice to our reflections. He had no previous experience in theatre. He brought an intense energy to the work.

I am also going to include Matt in these descriptions. He attended all the sessions except the last and his influence in the workshop experience for the other participants is significant. Matt is a faculty member at Vancouver Island University in the music department and is in his early sixties. Although he had no experience in theatre or comic improvisation, he did have experience in jazz improvisation. His awareness of rhythm, sound and improvisation was a great gift for the group; it was a pity that he became ill during that last week of the study.

1.9. Assumptions and Limitations

The number of participants is small and the data generated do not lend themselves to statistical generalisations. The participants joined the study in order to experience comic improvisation, so they came with biases surrounding the experience of the comic improvisation training. They were expecting to take risks and have fun. Seven randomly chosen participants may not have found the experience as pleasurable. I have endeavoured to supply thick description and contextualize the study (Creswell, 2003).

Coming from a constructivist paradigm, I saw myself as researcher and my participants as co-constructing our meaning and reality. Together, the participants and I were constructing our understanding and exploring new ways of thinking. I was not objective or distant and the data and interpretations of the data were often subjective and intersubjective not objective. As this was a bounded case study, I did not follow the participants outside the experience of the study as defined by the seven Saturday sessions. Much of my data were their truths at a moment of time without follow up.

I anticipated a connection between the competencies used in comic improvisation and those used in generative dialogue. Although this study was designed to explore whether those connections exist, I must reveal that I had a bias in this regard. Based on my previous experience teaching comic improvisation courses, I also entered the study with some expectations. I presumed that participants would enjoy the comic improvisation workshops. I also expected that they would progress through the workshops developing and increasing their competencies at a rate I had previously seen

in comic improvisation courses. I also assumed that participants would engage in the final dialogues in the manner similar to the comic improvisation scenes. I presumed that after the comic improvisation training, participants would plunge into the holy insecurity and grapple with the assigned topics for the final dialogues.

The fact that the recruitment for my study resulted in an all-male participant group is worth further discussion. I would describe this as a limitation in the study. There was only one woman who was able to commit to participating in the study, and due to illness, she was unable to complete the study. The predominating male interest in participating in this study is a complex issue, and it is beyond the scope of my research to determine the reason for this. I would like to note, however, that this mirrors the male dominance in comic improvisation itself. Love (2008) stated that, for professional comic improvisation performers, “the ratio of men to women is probably ten to one” (p. 40). Auslander, 1997, in an article on the gender politics of stand-up comedy states that “a humorous women is seen as a threat to male sexual dominance” (p.110). Another example of this male domination in comedy was also noted by Kibber (2004) in a study examining gender differences on A & E’s *An Evening at the Improv*. “Although a female comedian may appear on *Evening at the Improv*, she will most likely be surrounded by four male comedians on the bill Many episodes [of *Evening at the Improv*], in fact, feature no women on stage at all” (Kibber, p. 45). Mimi Gonzalaz, a stand-up comedian, advised female comedians to expect decimation from male comics and club owners. She also noted that the life style of being on the road is not conducive to building relationship and is difficult for women (2007, p. 16). Seham (2001) in her book, *Whose Improv Is It Anyway? Beyond Second City*, narrated her experiences as a professional comic improviser. She referred to the world of comic improvisation as a

boys club, noting that one only has to tune into the popular show *Whose Line is it Anyways* to see a predominately male cast. She also went on to describe how even if a woman did have an opportunity to perform in comic improvisation, she would often be reduced to the stereotypical roles such as the dumb blonde or the nag. Seham also described how men generally take the lead and control the scenes, reducing woman to supporting roles in this male dominated genre (2001). “The comic community in general has long been perceived as inherently masculine ... and has systematically excluded women” (Deveau, 2012, p. 410). Kotthoff (2006) suggested that there are reasons for this exclusion. “It [is] not regarded as well-behaved for women to play the clown and fool around” (Kotthoff, 2006, p. 5). Comedy is associated with subjects lewd and sexual in nature (Lowe, 2007). Comedy also embraces exaggeration and often has a very physical element. Finney (1994) suggested that societal norms seek to control or restrict women’s physical expression and movements. “Comedy plays with the distortion of the body, and grimaces distort the face. All this [is] incompatible with a societal politics of femininity, which requires women to be pretty, modest, and decent” (Kotthoff, 2006, p. 5). Auslander agrees and remarks that “women are encouraged to exhibit response behaviours such as smiling and laughing as opposed to the more dominant or aggressive act of making a joke” (Auslander, 1997, p. 110))

Comedy is also seen as a vehicle for questioning authority. Comedy “can produce circumstances within the context of performance that run counter to the social norm, circumstances in which women may find a sense of empowerment” (Auslander, 1997, p.114) It often defies convention and societal norms (Kotthoff, 2006). This view on the subversive potentials of laughter is well founded. Bakhtin (1968) argued that laughter is anything but mere mirth. “He saw ‘carnival’ and laughter within a general

anthropology as a valid expression of an anti-authoritarian attitude towards the world as a whole, a permanent opposition to the power structures, for example, of church and society” (Kotloff, 2006, p. 10). Kotloff (2006) went on to suggest that defying social norms is less acceptable for women than men. Deveau, when discussing improvised comedy, identified the central debate of “whether humour functions oppressively, as a reinforcement of the status quo and a perpetuation of hierarchy or subversively, as a means of waging popular critiques of dominant social forces and inverting discursive control” (2011, p. 148). Comedy, which allows the unspoken to be spoken and invites marginalized voices to be heard, can also be seen as marginalizing when looking at gender. It can be seen as a paradox as “comedy simultaneously offers the patriarchal diminishment of women and the potential for empowerment” (Auslander, p.117).

Another repercussion of the all-male participant group is the limitation it brings to my results. Would the experience of dialogue been different for women participants? There have been numerous studies dealing with gender differences in communication. However, it is not in the scope of this paper to do a thorough overview of all the research; rather, I will simply touch on a few points of consideration relevant to my research. It is a common perception, or misconception, that men talk more than woman (Basow, 2008; Leaper & Ayres, 2007; Wang & Ji, 2014). In the research I reviewed, this does not appear to be the case. “Men tend to talk more than women, at least under some circumstances” (Basow, 2008. p.16). Men tend to talk more than women on impersonal subjects, in mixed groups and during disagreements (Basow, 2008; Wang & Ji, 2014). There seems to be evidence that indicates that men talk less in all male groups than in mixed groups (Basow, 2008; Wang & Ji, 2014). Would my male

participants have been better able to dialogue if there had been women in the participant group?

Leaper and Ayres (2007) in a comprehensive meta-analytic review of research on gender differences in adult speech, specifically differentiated between *assertive speech*, using words to achieve a goal or advance one's personal position, and *affiliative speech*, using words to connect with others and expressing agreement, understanding, support or acknowledgement. Leaper and Ayres (2007) found, in their meta-analytic review, that men use assertive speech significantly more than women and that women use affiliative speech more than men. Tannen (1994) argued that woman tend to have a more intimate and inclusive approach to communication. Basow (2008) found that "woman appear to care about what others think and tend to have a more tentative style of communication often seeking approval" (p. 15). Because I am measuring the ability to be responsive, the above mentioned research indicates that there could be a gender difference at play in this ability. The gender of the participants, similar to the educational level of the participants, would always be a factor that would influence results. My research design a qualitative case study does not allow for these differences to be mediated or explored. A larger quantitative study would lend itself better to exploring these areas.

1.10. Structure of the Dissertation

I have introduced the nature of the study, guiding questions and key terms as well as my rationale for the research in this first chapter. In the second chapter, I will explore further the background and main contributors in the field of generative dialogue

and comic improvisation. I want to show a clear progression in the theoretical development for both generative dialogue and comic improvisation that contribute to my current understanding. I also want to reveal how psychotherapy and the world of business have been using comic improvisation to assist and train people in relationship and interpersonal skills as well as adapting to new and emerging market demands and how this relates to my study. In Chapter Three, I will explain the study methodology. This will include thick description, the tools and instruments used as well as the process and my rationale for my choice of methodology. In Chapter Four, I will include a description of the comic improvisation workshops and my pedagogical choices in constructing them. In Chapter Five I will analyze my data and present the themes that emerged from the data collected. Finally in Chapter Six, I will offer my thoughts, conclusions and the implications of the study, and provide recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will be providing some background on both dialogue and comic improvisation. I will also identify seminal contributors for each area that frequently appeared in my review of the literature pertaining to my study. I will further describe and define conceptually some of the major understandings of my study based on the literature. I want to tie common features together that provided the theoretical foundation for this study. I will also provide a more thorough examination of the theories of Scharmer and Gunnlaugson specifically concerning generative dialogue as well as a more comprehensive review of the use of comic improvisation as a training tool.

Several methods were used to search for applicable literature for this review. The assigned readings from my course *EDUC 908 Dialogue: A Relational Approach to Learning* provided a good beginning. I continued with online searches, using Google Scholar, Google, and the Simon Fraser University and Vancouver Island University Library search tools. I was able to generate lists of professional books, peer-reviewed journal articles, websites, online publications, and unpublished graduate studies related to the topics of this research. I used general terms, such as dialogue and improvisation, as well as, key terms, such as comic improvisation and generative dialogue, for the online searches. In addition, I used specific recognized scholars in the field such as Martin Buber, Otto Scharmer and William Isaacs. Books and peer-reviewed articles written by academic scholars addressing the specific topics of this study were also

reviewed. I was able to ladder from specific research and articles referenced in these works to further inform my work. Further, I explored less academic sources such as websites and popular literature.

In trying to establish a foundation for the emergence of the work, a few of the references are fairly old, most notably Buber's *Between Man and Man*, first published in English in 1947 (although his essay on dialogue in that volume dates back to 1929) and Dezseran's *The Student Actor's Handbook: Theatre Games and Exercises* published in 1975. These are intentionally included to show the derivation and inspiration of many current ideas and practices. I have also included numerous references to Bahktin's work which was published in English thirty years ago, although written many years before that; the essays of *The Dialogic Imagination* (Bahktin, 1981) were written in the 1930s and 1940s. As Bahktin is a seminal contributor to dialogue and is an important theoretical contributor for this study, my aim was to tie the work more closely to a primary source. With these exceptions, preference was given to research published in the last ten years and the majority of the literature review is consistent with this preference. In general, the scholarly work considered in this review was selected for its relevance to the purpose, questions and hypotheses inherent in this research study. As noted later in this chapter, academic writing on comic improvisation is severely lacking. Because of this, I have included some unconventional sources such as handbooks, websites, and an autobiography to provide some background information for this study. These sources, however, do not make up the bulk of the literature review and are simply to enhance the description of comic improvisation and its current uses in educational thought and organizational training.

2.2. Background

2.2.1. Roots of Dialogue

Where does the study of dialogue begin? This is a difficult question. Early humans very likely communicated with each other in various forms although development of a spoken language is usually associated with the development of Homo sapiens, or modern humans. Early language might be seen as including dialogue; however, emergent language likely did not entail a conscious, cognitive understanding of the idea, structure or purpose of dialogue. The development of an understanding of the process of dialogue is generally limited to what has been recorded in written form and that evidence takes us to Ancient Greece.

The word dialogue comes from the Greek *dia* – meaning through and *logos* – meaning the word (Isaacs, 1999, p. 19). “As stated in the Book of John in the *New Testament*: In the beginning was *logos* (the word), the truth is that in all related to human development and experience, in the beginning was dialogue” (Kazepides, 2012, p. 914) or meaning through the word. In its most ancient meaning, however, *logos* meant to gather together and in this usage *logos* could mean relationship (Isaacs, 1999). Thus, the quote from the Book of John could be interpreted as follows: “in the beginning was the relationship” (Isaacs, 1999, p. 19). Dialogue is a conversation where people think together in relationship. Dialogue gives meaning to the word through relationship. These are ideas that are still explored in research on dialogue today and will be further explored in my research.

Also, from Ancient Greece there is evidence that both Socrates and Plato concerned themselves with the nature of dialogue (Kazepides, 2012, p. 914). These writings “are important because they are the origin or point of departure for almost all considerations of dialogue” (Romney, 2005, p. 3). Through Plato’s writing, the construct and purpose of dialogue was a main focus. Plato was exploring the Socratic Method devised by his teacher Socrates. “The idea behind the Socratic approach to dialogue is that a guided process of inquiry will secure a grasp of knowledge that is not dependent on the status of authority or tradition” (Burbules, 2006, p. 107). The Socratic Method aims to teach critical thinking and is based on using logic to strive towards absolute truth. A Socratic dialogue is a popular form of the Socratic Method. Although there is a prescribed method, the conversation is meant to be a dialogue rather than a formal debate. Participants in a Socratic dialogue attempt to understand each other and come together. However, this method is also concerned with proving “rhetorical prowess and skill and takes the form of verbal jousting” (Romney, 2005, p. 3). This does not mean that “a Socratic dialogue is primarily a matter of defending one’s own beliefs while criticizing what others believe; the essence [or goal] is to become clear” (Karlsson, 2001, p. 214). The Socratic dialogue tries to inform and illuminate by critical deconstruction. The Socratic Method is currently still being used and “many people still consider Plato’s ideas the absolute word on dialogue” (Romney, 2005, p. 3).

Socrates used questioning to allow participants to gain a better or clearer understanding of the matter being discussed or to get closer to the truth. The Socratic Method begins with a claim. “Once the claim is understood by all, a counter example is put forward to challenge the claim” (Hlinak, 2014). The discussion continues until the original claim is proven to be true or false. “The Socratic method may be used in all

disciplines, but has come to dominate legal education at the expense of virtually all other pedagogical tools” (Hlinak, 2014, p. 4). Although my use of the term dialogue shares the goal of insight and knowledge produced by coming together (Karlsson, 2001, p. 214), the Socratic Method of dialogue is more prescribed and is a more critical examination and deconstruction of a specific understanding than my use of dialogue for this study.

“Two basic devices of the Socratic dialogue were the *syncrisis* and the *anacrisis*. Syncrisis is to juxtaposition various points of view on a specific object. This was seen as very important in the Socratic dialogue (Bakhtin, 1984). Anacrisis is to elicit a thorough expression of the other person’s opinion (Bakhtin, 1984). “Socrates was a great master of the anacrisis: he knew how to force people to speak, to clothe in discourse their dim but stubbornly preconceived ideas” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 110). A Socratic dialogue encourages cross-examination and through this examination contradictions can be revealed so new truths can be discovered (Sullivan et al., 2009). Bakhtin, who I will discuss in greater detail in this study, sees the Socratic dialogues as a free exchange where authoritarian ways of thinking are over thrown. “Socrates makes people collide in a quarrel which familiarises contact” (Sullivan et al., 2009, p. 329). Bahktin likens this to an exchange free of hierarchies that has the environment of a medieval carnival.

The atmosphere of carnival is down-to-earth and includes humour. An example of this can be seen in *The Symposium* where an alcohol fuelled discussion that includes a series of speeches around the nature of love takes place (Sullivan et al., 2009). It is in this environment that the cross examination, syncrisis and the anacrisis questioning, takes place. “Socrates, more than any other participant, often uses a series of lowly comparisons and irony (reduced laughter) to make his points (Sullivan et al. 2009, p. 329). This can certainly be seen when Socrates refers to himself as a mid-wife

attending the messy birth of the truth (Bakhtin, 1984). Plato's portrayal of Socrates shifts in his later dialogues. The free flowing questions and arguments are replaced with a delivery of ready-made truths. This genre of the Socratic dialogue is claimed by Bakhtin (1984) to have been adopted by institutions (Bakhtin, 1984) and is a form of the Socratic dialogue that delivers irrefutable truths rather than seeking to discover new ones.

Generative dialogue is different from Socratic dialogue in that it accepts and explores rather than refutes and compares, and it is more closely aligned with the earlier form of Socratic dialogue that seeks a truth not yet known.

Although not recorded in writing, another manifestation of dialogue can be found in the Coast Salish Oratory Tradition. This methodology has been handed down through the Sto-lo tradition of study from a people who can trace their culture back 8,000 years. Lee Maracle (2013) has used a spiral in her conceptual mapping of this process of study and discourse. The following description of the process is based on an article published by Maracle in 2007.

A group gathers together to study a phenomena or subject. In the first round of discussion, each member identifies their perspective or biases concerning the matter of study. Maracle (2007) stated that "when studying a subject, we first face our attitudes, our beliefs, and our agendas. We face the filters through which our specific cultural and personal origins affect clear and clean vision" (p. 59). The second cycle of discussion consists of describing what is seen and known about the subject. "The third round articulates the being/phenomenon's interaction, its relations with other beings [such as] water, flora, fauna, human, stars, night, day, etc."(p. 66). In the fourth round or cycle of discussion, the articulation of the characteristics of the subject or phenomena under study takes place. "Then follows a discussion about what was cherished and hidden,

but is now seen in the light of our different perspectives, from our separate, and now shared, observations” (p. 66).

In addition to a very specific structure, these oratory studies have guidelines. There is no debate or disagreement but an acknowledgement and embracing of difference. “We assume that individuals have different viewpoints; in fact, the more variance in viewpoints, the better. There is no arguing or challenging someone’s viewpoint” (Maracle, 2007, p. 57). This acceptance and inclusion of different viewpoints shares qualities of what I have identified as being responsive. The Oratory Tradition described here is a collective collaborate process “where personal agendas must be articulated and set aside” (p. 57). I see this as very similar to the requirement of suspension required in dialogue explored in my study. Maracle also referred to the necessity for humility and the “experience [of] the discomfort of the unknown” (p. 57). Here, I am reminded of the holy insecurity that is necessitated by Buber (1948) where, in dialogue, we must be comfortable in “the unforeseeable [and] ever changing” (Buber, 1948, p. 24) moment. For the purposes of this study, I am not going to do a complete comparison of generative dialogue and the Coast Salish Oratory Tradition, but I want to reference some similarities of this ancient methodology of study. I also want to suggest that there are many forms and understandings of dialogue and some have been marginalized or possibly lost all together as they were not recorded and do not come from the dominant Western tradition.

Another form of dialogue that also resembles generative dialogue as used in this study is the more recently conceived Intergroup Dialogue. Intergroup Dialogue is a group model developed by the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor (Rozas, 2004). It not only has the guiding principles of generative dialogue but also has a structured form that

is facilitated. This model of Intergroup Dialogue has four stages: forming and building relationships, exploring differences and commonalities of experience, exploring and dialoguing hot topics, and action planning and alliance building. The dialogues are facilitated and occur in set two hour periods and are based on the principles of sustained communication, consciousness-raising, and the bridging of differences (Rozas, 2004). The Michigan Model of Intergroup Dialogue has been used and adapted as a technique used by many organizations and has served many purposes.

Many university programs, courses and events such as The Centre for Education, Law and Society at Simon Fraser University, and the Intergroup Dialogue Program at New York University, have adapted this method. Non-profit organizations use Intergroup Dialogue to promote engagement in public issues and government organizations use Intergroup Dialogue to foster understanding and navigate conflict. Dessel, Rogge and Garlington (2006) provide a definition of “*Intergroup Dialogue* as a peace building tool: a process designed to involve individuals and groups in an exploration of societal issues about which views differ” (p. 304). This is remarkably similar to the Coast Salish Oratory Tradition, which “is capable of sparking and moving people toward social transformation, dissolving inequities, eradicating dangerous assumptions, and altering oppressive conditions” (Maracle, 2007, p. 56). It is interesting to note that the form of the now popular and wide spread Intergroup Dialogue has similarities to this far more ancient form of discourse. I am not suggesting the current form of Intergroup Dialogue has direct connection or was modeled after the Coast Salish Oratory Tradition. However, I am suggesting that there are enduring principles underlying forms of discourse that strive for holistic understanding, social justice and inclusion, and these common forms and guidelines naturally emerge.

2.2.2. Roots of Comic Improvisation

Like dialogue, the idea of comic improvisation has a fragmented beginning that is difficult to trace. "Clowns and mimes might have been the first professional improvisers" (Crossan & Vera, 2004, p. 730). The actual word comedy comes from the Greek *Komoidia*. In looking at comedy in Ancient Greece, Aristotle identified it as one of the four genres of literature in his work *Poetics* written in 335 BCE. Aristotle also traced its origins to the Phallic Processions that were often connected with the Dionysian celebrations. These were frequently lewd in nature. Aristotle claimed that comedy was not treated seriously as it was the light treatment of the base and ugly. Aristophanes was the most well know ancient comic playwright. Eleven of his comedies have survived and are still being performed. These comedies are, however, based on earlier *satyr* plays. These plays have been lost to us but were habitually described as obscene in nature (Lowe, 2007, p.2). This form of Greek comedy is commonly referred to as Old Comedy. In 486 BCE, *Komoidia* was granted its own competition in the Athenian Festival of Dionysia. Comedy was growing as a complex popular arts form with specific characteristics (Lowe, 2007).

After 320 BCE, a new form of comedy began to rise in popularity termed *New Comedy*. Contrary to the exaggerated coarse burlesque nature of the comedy of Aristophanes with larger than life stereotypical characters such as the buffoon and the braggart imposter, comedy began to focus on portraying ordinary people and their private domestic problems (Shaw, 2010). The absurdity and fantasy of the Old Comedy was abandoned for realistic situations and characters that spoke and acted as they would in real life. It was at this time, as in centuries to follow, scripted. When the

Romans conquered Greece, they embraced much of their culture and religion. Roman comedy retained the Dionysian cult and the “costume of Greek comedy, complete with short vest, tights and phallus in place” (Leep, 2004, p. 5). Familiar plots with stereotypical roles were used, and the dialogue was created through improvisation. The scandalous nature of these productions made them less acceptable as Christianity rose to power. Roman comedy, like many forms of theatre, was thrust to the margins.

With the advent of the Renaissance came a resurgence of theatre in the West. “A common Western historical connection to comic improvisation is the *commedia dell’arte* of the Italian Renaissance” (Engelberts, 2004, p. 163). *Commedia dell’arte* has a number of common traits with modern comic improvisation. It was a method of improvisational performance that did not rely on a script. It did, however, have “a set of reference guides or printed rules of play” (Buckley, 2009, p. 259). Like modern comic improvisation, it was spontaneous, but there were certain guidelines like the rules of a game in comic improvisation that must be followed. *Commedia dell’arte* was an “unscripted tale on the fly, building action and incident from a skeletal template or a familiar premise” (Buckley, 2009, p.253). The dialogue was not scripted or preplanned (Sawyer, 2004). However, these performances are different from the definition of comic improvisation used in my research as the plot and characters were planned and rehearsed. This type of improvisation is more closely linked to modern sketch comedy (Leep, 2004). The *commedia dell’arte* performances were improvisations within an overall plot structure known as a scenario. The unscripted improvisational nature of the dialogue and the necessity of cooperation among players are common to both forms. Another important common trait in both comic improvisation and *commedia dell’arte* is the necessity of being spontaneously responsive to the other actors. As Ewald (2005)

noted, in commedia dell'arte “not only must the actor know his character and the scene, but he must be able to read the other characters as well; the excitement of commedia dell'arte was in the improvisational nature of the performance” (p. 115).

As commedia dell'arte is commonly linked as a precursor to modern comic improvisation, I will include a more detailed description of the form. Commedia dell'arte was based on Greek and Roman Theatre and reached its height in Italy between the 1560's and the 1650's, continuing until about 1775 (Schmitt, 2004). It was professionally and publicly improvised on temporary outdoor platforms, using simple costumes; it was often performed in market places or wherever a crowd would gather (Rublin, 1994). Similar to Theatresports, commedia dell'arte invited the jeering and cheering of the crowd. Commedia dell'arte was made up of stock characters such as young lovers, clever servants, and lecherous old men well known to the audience. They moved through familiar, predetermined scenarios such as a young wife deceiving an old husband or clever servants managing inept masters (Ewald, 2005). The plots, or scenarios, were also well known and rehearsed by the performers. These scenarios consisted of five to ten pages of a plot summary and a description of the setting along with a list of characters, properties, costumes and stage directions (Schmitt, 2004, p. 59). Acrobatics and music were also incorporated into the performance. Included in the scenarios were well rehearsed comic business called *lazzo*. These were “discrete independent, comic and repeatable activities that guaranteed laughs for participants” (Schmitt, 2004, p. 60). The *lazzo* were not generally critical to the plot and similar to our modern notion of a gag or prank. An example could be a character filling a bucket without a bottom unaware that the contents are falling through, or one character

removing a chair in full view of the audience so that when another character goes to sit he or she will fall down.

The stock characters in commedia dell'arte are similar to modern stereotypes that are recognizable to the audience. A modern equivalent would be a dumb blonde who might play different roles but is essentially always the same character. Included in the cast of characters was the *zanni*. The term *zanni* refers to clowns. The *zanni* were lower status characters usually played as servants. A common convention was that the longer the nose of a character's mask the less intelligent the character was (Rublin, 1994). Scenarios commonly had a least two *zanni*. One *zanni* was always smarter than the other, and they drove the action of the plot (Rublin, 1994). Unlike modern day stereotypes, these stock characters had specific names and characteristics. Brighella, for example, was a *zanni* who was slightly higher in status and often appeared as an inn keeper or head servant. Because he has risen up in the world, he was higher status than a character like Arlecchino, or Harlequin, an innocent but foolish servant. There were also higher status stock characters such as Pantalone. Pantalone was an older high status merchant and the master of Arlecchino. He was depicted as a scrawny greedy lecherous man. His daughter was Innamorata or Prima Donna. She was young, attractive and a little conservative. Her servant, Colombina (a *zanni*), was the love interest of Arlecchino. There was also Dottore, a verbose and ignorant doctor, who was a high status braggart and generally depicted as obese. These characters did not always appear precisely the same, much like the example of the dumb blonde who can appear as a secretary, farmer's daughter or nurse. Similarly, these commedia dell'arte stock characters could slightly alter depending on the scenario. As previously noted, Brighella could be an inn keep or a head servant. The specific details of Pantalone, for

example, might vary, but he would always be portrayed as a greedy lustful old man. He was “a figure of all that we associate with age, avariciousness, and impotent lust” (Buckley, 2009, p. 256). “The stock characters derived from the *commedia dell’arte* characters can still be seen in many modern plays as well as modern sit coms: “the lecherous old man, young lovers, conniving or bumbling servants” (Leep, 2004, p. 9).

The construct of the *zanni* can also be linked to the archetype of the trickster or jester. An archetype is a term generally attributed to Carl Jung, a psychologist, who in the early 1900’s described various prototypes that were part of a universal collective unconscious (Beecher, 1987; Stefanova, 2012). This is not to say that specific archetypes themselves did not exist long before Jung but that he simply framed the definition as it is currently used.

Comedy is connected to the archetype of the trickster (Garrison, 2009; Stefanova, 2012). The trickster is a common character in Indigenous North American mythology and often appears as a raven, crow, coyote or mink (Garrison, 2009; Stephanevao, 2012; Vizenor, 1990). These myths have been passed down “for thousands of years through an oral tradition and are often “wild and comic rather than tragic and representational” (Vizenor, 2009, p. 279). The character of the trickster is a mischievous innocent driven by a hunger who strives “to take the bait while slipping the trap” (Garrison, 2009, p.67). Tricksters do not operate within the normal confines of a culture; they “break rules, violate laws, and rewrite regulations” (Garrison, 2009, p.67). The trickster represents the outlaw and pleasure seeker (Beecher, 1987). Although often seen as comical and foolish, the archetype of trickster serves a serious purpose. When *logos* or the organized systems of conventions, regulations and laws begin to oppress us “then it is time for trickster, and when trickster threatens to collapse all into

chaos, we need the logos” (Garrison, 2009, p. 69). This is a never-ending ongoing necessary cycle. “The critical recognition is that we need both catabolic energy and we need the limits of the living logos” (Garrison, 2009, p. 69). “This archetype is about the carnival, about the turning upside down [of society and culture]” (Stephanevao, 2012, p. 77). This turning upside down is a creative force that allows society to respond, realign and recreate our structures and identities (Garrison, 2009).

The archetype of the trickster is not only found in North American Indigenous mythology but transcends cultures. “He is Krishna among the Hindu, Monkey among many Chinese, and Myrddin among the Celts. Among the Greeks and within the tradition of Western thought, he is the god Hermes and Dionysus” (Garrison, 2009, p. 70). The archetype of the trickster can also be seen in the Scandinavian figure Loki and the African Zandi (Beecher, 1987, p. 8). As we move through time, the trickster remains as Rabelais’ Panurge, Shakespeare’s Puck and the French allegorical character Red Fox. Today we can see the trickster appear in such forms as Woody Wood Pecker, Bugs Bunny and in Jim Carey’s *The Mask*. The trickster is always with us. He is Homer Simpson accidentally stopping the nuclear power plant from blowing up by dropping his doughnut. The trickster pushes the envelope, breaks the rules and “carries out some of the profoundest cultural work possible” (Garrison, 2009, p. 67).

Currently, in North American, popular culture sketch comedy is becoming an increasingly prevalent form of comedy. This can be seen by the recent establishment of such TV networks as Comedy Central and AXS TV (Umpstead, 2014). Beginning in the 1970’s, there was a wave of sketch comedy shows such as *The Carol Burnette Show*, *Monty Python’s Flying Circus*, *Saturday Night Live* and *Kids in the Hall*. The recent appearance and popularity of shows such as *Key and Peele*, *the Daily Show*, *The Rick*

Mercer Report, and *Inside Amy Schumer* “are harking back to a genre that had its heyday in the late 1980’s” (Umpstead, 2014, p. 14). Sketch comedy could more accurately be called improvisation based as opposed to true improvisation (Engelberts, 2004). The sketches themselves are devised or created through a process of improvisation “but the actual performance in this kind of theatre is nearly always a shaped product that reaches a final and more or less fixed form before it is presented to the audience” (Engelberts, 2004, p.158). There are elements of improvisation in sketch comedy as there are no fixed scripted lines but, similar to *commedia ‘del arte*, the plot and characters are previously constructed and known to the performers.

Sketch comedy has also seen a rise in popularity on YouTube. Debruge (2010) noted that a popular sketch comedy show can bring in 7 million viewers while a popular comedy sketch on YouTube can have 44 million viewers. The advent of YouTube and social media is influencing sketch comedy and comedy in general. Sketches are shorter and must immediately catch the attention of the viewer. Putting something out on the web is much less of a commitment than buying time on a television show so it is risked more frequently (Debruge, 2010). Social media seems to have initiated a phenomena of quick wide spread popularity that is quickly over and forgotten (Debruge, 2010). As can be seen in the rise of sketch comedy and the embracing of comedy on the World Wide Web, comedy is still an important element of our culture and is shifting and emerging.

2.3. Seminal Contributors

2.3.1. Seminal Contributors of dialogue

There are numerous scholars associated with dialogue, but in my review of the literature, there are a few who seem to be central contributors to the foundations of current research pertaining to my work. I have endeavoured to list them and provide a brief insight into their work.

The first scholar is Martin Buber. “It is Martin Buber whose influence on modern thinking about dialogue overshadows almost all others” (Isaacs, 2001, p. 713). Buber was an Austrian Jewish existential philosopher. He left Germany as the Nazis were gaining power in 1938 and settled in Jerusalem where he continued his work as a writer and university professor. He is often referred to as the philosopher of dialogue (Guilherme & Morgan, 2011, p. 110). For Buber, “the fundamental of human existence is man with man, person communicating with person” (Johannesen, 2009, p. 153). “He placed dialogue at the heart of human communication and existence” (Johannesen, 2009, p.153). Buber saw dialogue as a way of increasing understanding, building relationship, and resolving conflict (Guilherme & Morgan, 2011, p. 111).

A central idea of Buber’s is the concept of relationship. He saw dialogue as a way for people to have real relationships and exchange ideas (Isaacs, 2001, p. 713). He defines two types of being with respect to relationship: I-It and I-Thou. The I-It relationship sees the other person, animal, plant, or thing as a static object. In this relationship, we can have our needs met and exchange information, but this relationship

is also limited and vulnerable to exploitation (Itzhaky & Hertzanu-Laty, 2008, p. 21) because the other person is seen as two dimensional and not fully realised. The I-Thou relationship, in contrast, is seeing the other person as emerging and whole; there is mutual respect and care in this relationship (Itzhaky & Hertzanu-Laty, 2008). When seeing the other person as Thou, one “accept[s] the other as a whole, unique and separate being without judgement” (Itzhaky & Hertzanu-Laty, 2008, p. 21). Buber believed that when we delved into true understanding, we are creating a moment God – who lives in each moment. “In such a way, out of the givers of the signs, the speakers of the words is real life out of the moment Gods there arise for us a single identity the Lord of the voice, the One” (Buber, 1947/2002, p. 18). Dialogue taken to its inevitable end would unite us with God and each other. In fact, for Buber, when we unite with each other, we are uniting with God (Buber, 1947/2002).

According to Buber (1948/2002), if are deeply in a moment of true dialogue God is revealed. This is an element of presence. Being in the moment also means that we do not fill the moment or consider the next moment but must rest in that moment and be open to what is to come (Scott, 2011). This is being in the holy insecurity, where we must still our fear, quiet our mind and open our heart for whatever is present or comes next (Buber, 1948/2002).

Buber’s foremost contributions to dialogue are his books *I and Thou* (1923) and *Between Man and Man* (1947), both of which are based the thinking he did emerging out of the Hasidic tradition. Both of these books have been translated from German and have a number of editions. His writing is quite dense due to his ontological orientation, but his ideas are central and pervasive throughout the study of dialogue. His

explanation of the relational nature of dialogue, and his concepts of the I-It relationship versus the I-Thou relationship has influenced many scholars that followed in this field.

Mikhail Bakhtin's work is currently becoming increasingly important to dialogue as an area of scholarship. He was a Russian philosopher and playwright. Although now recognized as a foremost intellectual force of the 20th century, he spent much of his career in obscurity as he was at odds with the Leninist and Stalinist regime of the Soviet Union (Baxter, 2004, p. 108). Bakhtin believed that to live is to dialogue and that we only know ourselves by revealing ourselves to others (Baxter, 2004, p. 109). According to Bakhtin, our view of ourselves is formulated through relationship with others. To truly dialogue, it is necessary for "participants [to] fuse their perspectives to some extent while sustaining the uniqueness of their individual perspectives" (p. 114). Bakhtin saw dialogue as the "interplay of utterances [that] takes the interactants to places unforeseeable at the beginning of a conversation and in unscripted ways" (p. 117). He also saw the building of relational dialogues as a series of disclosures that built a defining of self. This is different from a revealing of self because revealing suggests a static already formed identity (Baxter, 2004). The act of dialogue is the act of becoming ourselves. Bakhtin brings forward some interesting ideas of competing tensions that are present simultaneously in dialogue. There is a force towards the *centripetal*, pushing dialogue towards a homogenous unity, while at the same time a *centrifugal* decentralizing force recognizing differences in situated meanings. The centripetal force strives for common meaning and understanding "working toward concrete verbal and ideological unification and centralization, which develop in vital connection with the processes of sociopolitical and cultural centralization" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 270). This centripetal force of striving for a common meaning is countered by the centrifugal force

of the localized meaning and understanding. “Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. The processes of centralization and decentralization, of unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 272). This bears resemblance to the centralizing force of logos and the opposing force of chaos described in the creative force of the trickster. Comedy and dialogue can both be seen as tools for breaking the conventional hegemonic forces to allow for responsiveness and cultural change.

Connected with this idea of the centripetal unifying force and the centrifugal decentralizing force is Bakhtin’s (1981) idea of the *heteroglossia*, or the multiplicity of social languages that act as a decentralizing force on language. Heteroglossia recognizes the fact that language comes with a history and cultural forces that effect meaning and usage. “Heteroglossia is the social and cultural influences on language that erode the unitary monologue” (p. 272). As long as language is in use, its heteroglossia will continue to widen and deepen.

Another interesting concept is Bakhtin’s (1984) idea of *polyphony*. Polyphony is actually a musical term used to describe when two or more independent melodies are played simultaneously. This is in opposition to a *monophony* where there is one dominant melody. Bakhtin used polyphony to refer to “a simultaneously present and consecutively uttered plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness” (p. 382). Each voice is independent but is also part of the whole. As both dialogue and comic improvisation have an aspect of bringing forward previously marginalized voices, this is an interesting connection.

A central concept I will be exploring in my research is Bakhtin's idea of carnival. Carnival is the reversal of roles where there is no power structure or consequences. It is a unified suspension of social norms: a distinct moment of chaos and creativity. Shields and Edwards (2005) described Bakhtin's carnival as a time when all members of a community participate in "shedding their inhibitions and ignoring the established order and structures, all are liberated, able to come face to face with one another in dialogic relation with another without fear of censor and reprisal – for roles rules and authority are temporarily set aside." (p. 149). Most of us can relate to the idea in carnival when we have one of those glorious moments when social order is upside down. The freedom is heady. I think comic improvisation, in many ways, lives in carnival. The play has no script, the division between actor and audience is peeled away, and the impossible is believed. Bakhtin described carnival as "a pageant without a stage and without a division into performers and spectators In the carnival everyone is an active participant, everyone communes in the carnival act" (as cited in Shields & Edwards, 2005, p. 150). It is extraordinary how closely this resembles a comic improvisational show. Bakhtin also saw carnival as a possibility for more.

Carnival is one way to facilitate dialogue because it can change structures, cultures and realities just enough to permit those who have been marginalized to move to the centre stage (however temporarily); it mutes those who have power and permits those who have been less dominant to speak ... it opens us up to new relationships new modes of interrelationships. (Shields & Edwards, 2005, p. 146)

This is an intriguing possibility. Carnival, according to Bakhtin, was a "dialogical context that champions liberation and freedom" (Sullivan, 2007, p. 118).

Bakhtin was a prolific writer who lived a long life. He has far too many publications to list here. His best-known work is *The Dialogical Imagination* (1992). A central idea surrounding his work is that of dialogism. Dialogism is often used in literature to describe how works of literature are responses to other works of literature. Bakhtin, however, brought this concept to a deeper and wider level. All ideas and interactions are responses. We live in a dynamic relational emerging co-construction of reality. The dynamics of the dialogical self sees the necessity of the self-and-other relationship (Sullivan, 2007). According to Bakhtin, we are given form by the world as we give form to the world (Sullivan, 2007).

Another major figure of dialogue is David Bohm. He was best known as an American physicist who was a protégé of Albert Einstein and Robert Oppenheimer. Bohm faced hardships during the era of McCarthyism and was forced to leave the USA. Beginning in the 1960's, Bohm had a 25 year relationship with Jiddu Krishnamurti, a great spiritual and philosophical leader from India. These remarkable dialogues have been recorded and published (Krishnamurti & Bohm 1999). Bohm eventually became a professor of Theoretical Physics in London (Gryn, 2003). Although these two orientations may initially seem contradictory, Bohm believed that everything is related to the way you observe it; therefore, he saw a relationship between perception and relativity. Bohm believed that science was concerned with discovering truth and dialogue was concerned with sharing meaning, but by constructing the shared meaning, dialogue often arrives at truth (Bohm, 1996, p.12). Bohm believed that by interpreting the universe we are creating it (Weber, 1990). Although Bohm was a physicist, his work on dialogue is extremely important and provides foundational principles for current work

in the area. Bohm proposed that “to have true dialogue it is necessary to suspend our assumptions, so we neither carry them out nor suppress them” (Bohm, 1996, p. 6).

He advocated four principles for dialogue. The first principle was participation in dialogue towards and understanding of the intrinsic whole. The second consisted of striving to produce a coherence of ideas by exploring our differences and working toward that coherence. Awareness of our thoughts, feelings, and preconceptions during the dialogue comprised the third principle. Accepting the enfoldment of reoccurring ideas that repeatedly come into our consciousness from the implicit to the explicit made up the last principle (Jones, 2000). Bohm’s principles of dialogue are becoming increasingly popular, especially for strategies towards implementing dialogue (Cayer, 2005). This is where he really has made a profound influence in the field.

Bohm co-developed a form of dialogue called the Bohmian Dialogue that he outlined in an essay with Donald Factor and Peter Garrett (1991). This form is sometimes simply called dialogue. It is a form of free association conducted in groups of 10 to 40, with no predefined purpose in mind besides mutual understanding and exploration of human thought. It aims to allow participants, in a disciplined fashion, to examine their preconceptions, prejudices and patterns of thought. It takes a few hours and requires the group members to suspend their thoughts while they explore and think together collectively (Bohm, 1989). Bohm (1989) believed that dialogue should not be confused with discussion, lecture, discourse or debate that work towards a specific goal; rather, dialogue must be a free space for something new to happen. Dialogue is collective learning can take place and an increased sense of harmony, fellowship and creativity can arise (Bohm, Factor and Garrett 1991). Bohmian Dialogue shares these characteristic with generative dialogue. Isaacs (1999) has taken Bohm’s work and given

it direct practical application. He is the director of the dialogue project at Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Organizational Learning Centre.

Isaacs believed that "dialogue is a centre without sides" (p. 19). I see this as a fusing together of ideas that erases the opposition and polarization that is found in debate. It also goes further than simply trying to understand different points of view as the centre actually fuses the ideas. Isaacs has four key practices of dialogue: listening, respecting, suspending and voicing. The practice of listening, as described by Jones (2000), consists of listening deeply and putting dialogue in the context of the whole. It is related to Bohm's principle of participation where context is explored and respected and all pieces are part of the intrinsic whole. The intention for participating in the dialogue is to explore differences and create a common centred whole understanding of the subject matter. Another of Isaac's practices is respecting. This is associated with Bohm's principle of coherence, suspending and being aware of one's preconceptions and judgements without letting them block new understandings. "Isaacs advocates allowing and respecting the polarisation that appears in groups, without trying to fix it or come to agreement" (Jones, 2000, p.4). Suspension, another practice of dialogue according to Isaac, is the revealing of thoughts, opinions and judgements to oneself and, when constructive, to others. This is connected to Bohm's principle of awareness and the ability to use one's authentic voice in expressing oneself with deep awareness. The final dialogue practice of Isaac's is voicing. Voicing is deliberating choosing what is being expressed. It requires a dual focus on what is being said as well as what is going on internally. Voicing is related to Bohm's principle of enfoldment. Enfoldment is the awareness of the explicate and implicate order where the focus is not only on the thought but where the thought arises (Jones, 2000).

Isaacs (1999) saw dialogue as an “intervention to form the nature of interactions” (Isaacs, 1999, p. 2) and developed guidelines towards implementation of these practices. He wrote *Dialogue: The Art of Thinking Together— A Pioneering Approach to Communication in Business and in Life*. In this book, he asserted that a major problem we have in all aspects of society is that we have lost the ability to think together, and he suggested that we develop a practical set of tools toward this endeavour (Isaacs, 1999). Isaacs advocated for larger group dialogues to develop collective thought (Junes, 2000). Although he references social justice issues, his primary focus seems to be business.

Another more recent figure to contribute to the field of dialogue is Nicholas Burbules. Burbules has worked in the Department of Education Policy, Organization and Leadership at the University of Illinois since 1989. His most recent work centers on Ubiquitous Learning, which examines the emergence of the anytime, anywhere learning potential made possible by the increasing use of handheld and portable devices, along with wireless networking. In 2000, Burbules co-authored a book called *Watch IT: The Promise and Risk of Informational Technology for Education* with Thomas Callister. Burbules concerns himself with dialogue as a pedagogy and is particularly interested in applying dialogue to teaching and the field of education. He roots his practice in the constructivism of John Dewey and the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire. However, he uses these theories to inform his work not define it. For example, although respectful of Friere’s contribution of moving away from an oppressive monological approach to teaching, Burbules strongly cautions against embracing one best pedagogical approach even one, like Friere’s with progressive intention (Burbules, 2006). Although he has written many books and hundreds of articles, his most frequently mentioned work in my research is *Dialogue in Teaching: Theory and Practice* (1993).

Burbules identifies four types of dialogue: inquiry, instruction, conversation, and debate (Burbules, 1993). Similarly Bohm distinguishes between discussion, lecture and debate (1989) and Scharmer distinguishes between the four levels of dialogue. Burbules sees different forms of dialogue as having different purposes that are suited to different situations (Burbules, 2006). Providing information and instructions, for example, is not better or worse than a more inclusive divergent form of dialogue but is simply better suited to a different purpose and situation. In this book, Burbules (1993) recommends the interaction of at least two distinct spectrums to characterize these different forms of dialogue. They include the degree to which an interchange is critical or inclusive, and the degree to which the investigation is intended to be convergent (upon a single answer) or divergent (allowing for multiple conclusions). This is an interesting measure that appears in others' work in the field. There is a movement to inclusive divergence in Bohm's idea of dialogue as collective understanding (Bohm, Factor and Garrett 1991), Issacs' idea of dialogue as a centre without sides and Scharmer's idea of generative dialogue moving us from the ego individualized system to the eco connected in relationship to all.

I believe that Burbules contribution to dialogue is extremely important and as an educator appreciate his pedagogical focus. He encourages educators to become increasingly aware of their communication and be reflective of the purpose and consequence of the dialogue forms used. His work concerning the advent of technology and anytime communication (Burbules, 2000,2006) will only increase in importance and continue to emerge as technology progresses. As technology continually creates new forms of communication, it is important that we challenge and extend our view of

dialogue and hold up our theoretical understandings against these new forms. I believe Burbules' work does and will continue to inform future research.

Charles Otto Scharmer's work is central to the concept of generative dialogue explored in this study. Scharmer holds a Ph.D. in economics and management from Witten-Herdecke University in Germany. Scharmer was inspired by the collapse of the Berlin Wall, which he saw as evidence of transformative change. He is currently a senior lecturer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and is the founding chair of the Presencing Institute. Scharmer introduced the concept of presencing, which is learning from the emerging future, in his books *Theory U: Leading from the Future as it Emerges* (2007) and *Presence* (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski and Flowers, 2004).

Scharmer (2007) argued that transformative change should be the tool used in solving organizational communities' challenges and is necessary for businesses and organizations to remain current and competitive as well as for individuals in those organizations to thrive. Scharmer advocates for holistic learning through generative dialogue and *presencing*. "Presencing is a blended word combining *sensing* (feeling the future possibility) and *presence* (the state of being in the current moment)" (Scharmer & Kauefer, 2013, p. 19).

Scharmer sees organizations as living systems that are constantly changing. Theory U is a specific methodology for leading change in organizations. Theory U is a process that allows organizations to learn, shift, change and adapt. In order to do this, one must be present with an open mind, open heart and open will (Scharmer, 2013). In his new book, *Leading from the Emerging Future: From Ego-system to Eco-system Economies* (2013), Scharmer links mindfulness and the transformation of business,

society and self. Like Isaac (1999), Scharmer takes his theory and methodologies to very practical applications. He sees the evolution of economy as the evolution of consciousness and relationship as the method of achieving this evolution. He advocates for the co-creation of systemic capacity built through relationship to transform current economic systems from an ego-system driven by the concerns and intentions of our small ego self to an eco-system awareness that cares about the well-being of all, including oneself (Scharmer, 2013, p. 2).

2.3.2. Seminal Contributors of Comic Improvisation

Although comic improvisation as we know it today is a fairly recent construction, it too has had its forerunners. Comic improvisation's most recent incarnation comes from improvised theatre and Theatresports games. The founders of modern comic improvisation are Viola Spolin and Keith Johnstone.

Viola Spolin is the acknowledged progenitor of the movement toward the improvisational instruction called theatre games (Dezseran, 1975; Diamond & Lefkoff, 1992; Seham, 2001; Vera & Crossan, 2004). She created an approach to teach acting by engaging students through a series of games using improvisation (Vera & Crossan, 2004). These games were process driven and initially used by Spolin to teach students acting. Spolin, however, had a greater vision than simply teaching acting skills. "Her improvisational games encouraged personal growth, increased creativity and were accessible to all" (Diamond & Lefkoff, 1992, p. 3). She did not originally design these improvisational games for performance. Spolin was "devoted to improvisation's spirit and psychological release of human potential" (Seham, 2001, p. 7). She linked

spontaneity and group connections to feelings of spirituality and belonging. She taught improvisation toward transformation to embrace the unknown and build trust. She believed that by linking to one another we could link to larger universal truths (Seham, 2001). These games gained in popularity. She has published numerous books such as *Improvisation for the Theatre: a Handbook for Teachers and Directors*, which was originally published in 1962 as well as *Theatre Games for the Classroom* (1982). These are still considered foundational texts for improvisation and teaching acting and drama (Diamond & Lefkoff, 1992).

Two other important contributors to comic improvisation are Paul Sills (Voila Spolin's son), and David Sheppard who founded a comic improvisation troupe in Chicago called the Compass Players. This troupe later led to the formation of the famous Second City Company. Sheppard, wanted political community theatre that would fight oppression through dialogical interaction between actors and real people while Sills was interested in both the spiritual and political as long as it produced authentic art (Seham, 2001). In exploring the underlying goals of Spolin and Sheppard, some themes common to dialogue come forward: the building of relationship, the search for universal truth and the possibility of societal change.

Second City incorporated comic improvisation and also went on to develop sketch comedy. This form uses the adaptation of improvisational forms in rehearsal to eventually create a scripted piece and is defined as sketch-based Improv. This is not a form that I will explore for purposes of this study as it moves out of purely spontaneous improvisation into a scripted plan.

The other commonly cited creator of modern comic improvisation is Keith Johnstone. He began his work at the Court Royal Theatre in London. As a director, he began to explore methods of encouraging actors to become more spontaneous in their work. He became fascinated by pro wrestling bouts he saw performed in cinemas (Johnstone, 1999). Johnstone declares in his book *Impro for Storytellers* (1999) that “Theatresports was inspired by pro-wrestling, a family entertainment where Terrible Turks mangled defrocked Priests while mums and dads yelled insults, and grannies staggered forward waving their handbags” (Johnstone, 1999, p.1). Johnstone saw pro-wrestling as the working man’s theatre and loved the spontaneity, excitement and audience participation that was created by it (Johnstone, 1999). He founded the Theatre Machine which was a troupe of actors that toured Europe and North America performing improvisational exercises (Johnstone, 1999). He eventually became a professor at the University of Calgary in the 1970’s. He continued to make theatre less pretentious and more accessible by “combining the qualities of sports and theatre and thus creating Theatresports in 1977” (Vera & Crossan, 2004, p. 731). He founded Loose Moose Theatre in Calgary in a converted cattle auction house (Johnstone, 1999). From this amateur theatre came many of the well-known Canadian comedians that went on to write and perform for TV in shows such as *Saturday Night Live* and *Roseanne*.

Johnstone’s ideas on spontaneity became well known with the publication of his book, *Impro: Improvisational Theatre* (1979), which is still used by many as a handbook for acting and was highly influential in the development of Theatresports (Leep, 2004). He also published *Impro for Storytellers: Theatresports and the Art of Making It Happen* (1999), which is a practical guide for Theatresports and has been translated into five languages. Theatresports is a very specific form of comic improvisation with judges and

scored points. Improvised theatre games and Theatresports evolved simultaneously often merging and borrowing from one another and growing in popularity from the 1950's to the present day. I am specifically choosing to use the term comic improvisation as a term because it is the most popular and inclusive reference. Improvised theatre games and Theatresports are not mutually exclusive; thus, they can both be seen as forms of comic improvisation (Engelberts, 2004, p. 159).

It is impossible to conceive of today's world of sketch comedy, *Daily Show*- style news satire, or comedy mega-celebrity without measuring the impact of Del Close" (Scott, 2008, p. 1098). Del Close worked the Compass Players in the 1950's (Scott, 2008). In 1963, he formed a troupe called *The Committee* where he developed a new form of comic improvisation called The Harold or long form. The long form is spontaneously devised improvisation based on a suggestion from the audience. It is, however, far more complex than the short form theatre games usually associated with comic improvisation. In the 1970's, Del Close was the director of *Second City Chicago* and its satellite in Toronto. He mentored young comedians like John Belushi and Bill Murray (Love, 2008; Scott, 2008). He began using comic improvisation as a method of devising comedy sketches as opposed to simply a performance form (Scott, 2008). In the 1980's and 1990's, Del Close headed the *ImprovOlympic*, which produced comedians like Chris Farley, Amy Poehler, Stephen Colbert, and Tina Fey (Scott, 2008). Del Close died in 1999 and has left a legacy through the numerous comedians he trained and influenced. He explored comic improvisation as a "mode of performance and actor training [and] has arguably had as much of an influence on ... acting in the last century as the work of Stanislavski or Strasberg" (Scott, 2008, p. 1011).

2.4. Conceptual Containers

2.4.1. Describing Comic Improvisation

As referenced previously, there are a number of forms that comic improvisation takes. For the purposes of this study, I am referring to the short form of comic improvisation that includes games or scenes that can be done in competition, as in Theatresports, or simply as performance, as in Improv. The Harold or long form of comic improvisation is also spontaneously devised improvisation based on a suggestion from the audience. It is, however, far more complex than the short form theatre games usually associated with comic improvisation. A long form improvisation has an external structure that may vary from troupe to troupe. Generally there is an opening based on an audience suggestion. This is followed by three scenes that are loosely related to the opening. Then, a high energy comic improvisational game is played followed by three more scenes that further develop what has occurred before hand. Afterward, there is one more game followed by a final three scenes. These final scenes tie in and connect all the other scenes and end in a musical finale. “Long form's influence can be seen in everything from TV shows such as *The Office* to the films of Christopher Guest and Judd Apatow” (Love, 2008, p. 41). This form of comic improvisation is extremely complicated and provides a real challenge for skilled experienced improvisers as it demands a deeper development of characters, relationships and plot. Although the long form of comic improvisation includes the characteristics I will be describing below, I will not be exploring this form of comic improvisation for the purposes of this study.

Comic improvisation consists of a set of competencies or principles that are applied to a number of constructs or games. There is a “solid set of guidelines that makes improvisation work” (Hough, 2011, p. 17) and these competencies or guidelines are practiced through rehearsals. People are often surprised that comic improvisational actors have rehearsals. In fact, Hough (2011) believed “improvisers are the most over rehearsed people in the performance industry” (p. 147). The dialogue and scenes that are seen in a comic improvisation are spontaneous, but the structure of rules used are not. “What professional actors do to be better improvisers is to learn techniques, games, and principles that help them to focus on the moment and to embrace the moment of collective creation” (Vera & Crossan, 2004, p. 736).

Although comic improvisation is spontaneous, it is guided by internal and external components. The external structure involves the particular game or exercise being played as well as the audience suggestions and is known to both audience and actors (Moshavi, 2001). (Moshavi, 2001). For a performance, generally, there is a host who acts as a liaison between the audience and actors and directs the action, making the external structure known to all. The “internal structure [of comic improvisation] is composed of rules consistent across scenes and are usually only known to the actors” (Moshav, 2001, p. 439). I refer to these as the guiding principles or rules of improvisation. These are the invisible rules that allow the creation to happen. These principles or rules are articulated differently in different venues and troupes, but I believe that they have some common conceptual underpinnings.

“An improvisational game is an exercise with a set number of conditions that the actors must follow” (Balachandra, Bordone, Menkel-Meadow, Ringstrom, & Sarath, 2005, p. 427) these are the external structures I referred to above. For example, in the

alphabet game, each line of dialogue must start with the next letter in the alphabet. In another game, each character has a secret obsession that must be guessed by the other players. There are literally hundreds of games that can be played (Improvisation encyclopedia, 2007). In comic improvisation games, the host also elicits audience suggestions that the actors must incorporate into the scene/game. “When the audience suggests a topic, they expect to see that topic played out by the actors. If the actors do not perform the suggestion, the audience may feel let down and dissatisfied” (Balachandra, et al., 2005, p. 430). These suggestions can take many forms such as a setting, problem, profession, character, object or any combination of these. The format of the game is generally known to the performers. Although the suggestions and the scene being performed are new, the rules of the game are known and are usually practiced by the performers. In Theatresports, there is also the added element of judges and scoring, but this is not necessary for all forms of comic improvisation.

The internal structures of comic improvisation are the guiding principles that are shared only with the players. As mentioned before, these guiding principles are expressed different ways by different troupes. What follows are some specific examples of how these internal structures are articulated as well as the common elements that tie them together.

For many years, I was part of a comic improvisation performance troupe in Victoria, BC called the Impromaniacs. I have also taught comic improvisation classes for adults. In both these contexts, I used three rules: go big or go home, dig deep and go with the flow. The first rule, go big or go home, is simply the element of exaggeration common in comedy and theatre in general. Everything should be larger than life. The second rule, dig deep, is more complex. This is where the actor faces the void and hits

a blank. It is a moment of uncertainty. In improvisation, all preconceived plans or ideas are pushed away and initially there is nothing with which to replace it. Actors have to face this void. Dig deep refers to waiting for the emergence of an idea in that moment. If actors dig deep, the idea will come. The last rule is a critical one. Go with the flow is about being responsive. Actors must accept and respond to each other's ideas or offers as oppose to continuing on with their own plan or idea. By going with the flow they are truly engaging, responding and interacting with the other person's offer that has manifested itself organically in the scene. This requires being acutely aware of your fellow actors and their offers.

In comparison to my rules of comic improvisation, Moshavi has four different rules of engagement: refrain from judging you own and other's ideas, actively listen, think without criteria, and never deny: always accept (2011, p. 149). Gagnon and colleagues offer three other rules: "being in the moment, whole listening, and focusing on the other" (Gagnon et al., 2012, p. 306). Importantly, whole listening is providing an open space for other's ideas. Hough, trained at Sills and Shephard's Second City, has three rules for the comic improvisation that she uses in her training for business organizations: build a yes space, use building blocks (add to the yes), and team equity or responsibility (2011). Koppet, in her book on using comic improvisation to train managers, has three rules: make your partner look good, be spontaneous, and say yes and...(2001). I could continue sharing various versions of the rules for comic improvisation, but I think I have established some patterns. The common principles that come forward, even when these are articulated differently, often merge into each other. The idea of being responsive and accepting of the other players' offers or ideas is central to all the rules or guidelines.

A frequently used term in comic improvisation is yes and.... ((Balachandra et al., 2005; Diamond & Lefkoff, 1992; Harding, 2004; Hough, 2011; Johnstone, 1982; Koppet, 2001; Moshavi,, 2001; Naphtaly,2011; Seham, 2001). This term refers to “actively listening to what the other actor is saying/offering, and then building off of that idea with his/her own idea/offer” (Harding, 2004, p. 211). No matter how this is articulated in guidelines, this concept is central to the art of comic improvisation. The yes and ... is the recognition and then the acceptance of others ideas. In my rules, I call it going with the flow. “Not listening to each other, ignoring nonverbal cues, and pushing individual agendas — [is] in effect saying ‘No’ or ‘Yes, *but*” rather than ‘Yes, *and*’— [and] could result in the scene never progressing” (Harding, 2004, p. 211). This is often referred to as blocking. The and, in the yes and..., is building off the ideas of others in order to progress the scene. Comic improvisational actors “learn to recognize the information, accept the offer, and then build on it to create a scene (Balachandra et al., 2005, p. 239). This principle or competency is central to comic improvisation and many of the manifestation or versions of rules are simply articulating how to enact this competency. Although sometimes stated differently, the common elements for comic improvisation are: heightened awareness, letting go of a plan to allow something to emerge and being responsive and accepting the offers of the other players.

2.4.2. Describing Dialogue

As previously stated, the use of dialogue in this study goes behind ordinary conversation. True dialogue is conversation that transcend conversation. Dialogue “is talk that reaches beyond mere information transmission, or instruction, or command, or even exchange. It is talk that carries us to new places, talk that constitutes change, and

talk that creates and transforms realities” (Poulos, p. 2008, p. 118). Like comic improvisation, there are many interpretations of rules or guidelines for practicing dialogue. The principles used to create dialogue, as in comic improvisation, are important (Dessel & Rogg, 2008, p. 201). There have been enormous amounts of research done on dialogue and my intention is to simply identify some common themes rather than give a comprehensive overview. One frequently mentioned principle of dialogue is Bohm’s attention based practice of suspension (Gunnlaugson, 2007). Suspension requires us to become aware of our own thoughts, judgments and opinions and then slightly separate from them and hold them up for others to examine (Jones, 2007, p.4).

Presenting is a quality of dialogue previously discussed in Scharmer’s work. Presenting describes the way each participant is truly in the moment and is allowing new meanings to emerge from a range of ways of knowing rather than being restricted by prior knowledge and thought patterns (Gunnlaugson, 2007). *Responsivity* or relational responsibility is another frequently referred to trait in dialogue. McNamee and Shotter (2004) have described this as “being aware of what is actually being said and happening by moving into the present and being attentive” (p. 94). Relational response forms of understanding also invite “seeing connections and relations within a living currently emerging whole created from different fragmentary parts rather than a representational reference cognitively constructed” (McNamee & Shotter, 2004, p. 100).

True dialogue is emerging and constructing new understandings and ideas rather than representing and describing a static idea. This is not a standardized complete paraphrase of dialogical principles. Rather, I want to make the point that although dialogue (like comic improvisation) appears spontaneous and always new, it has specific

constructs and principles that guide it. To effectively execute both comic improvisation and dialogue, there is a necessary set of competencies in order to adhere to these constructs and principles.

2.4.3. **Generative Dialogue**

I am choosing to refer to dialogue as generative dialogue for the purpose of my study. In examining dialogue, there are a number of paradigms that qualify types of dialogue. As previously mentioned, Bohm (1996) defined three types of discourse. The first is everyday conversation, which is spontaneous and ordinary aimed at making and maintaining social contact. The second is discussion, which is the sharing information and opinions aimed at deciding how things should be. The third is dialogue, which is a sharing of understandings and meaning aimed at learning (as cited in Karlsson, 2001, p. 212). Buber (1961) also defined three types of dialogue: technical dialogue, debate and genuine dialogue. Technical dialogue is comprised of parallel monologues without a focus on the other or listening. In debate, people state their opinions, theories and evidence aimed at negotiation or making a decision. Burbules identified “at least four types of dialogue: inquiry, instruction, conversation, and debate” (2006, p. 112). Inquiry addresses a question or problem and moves to resolution; instruction is teacher lead and moves to inform. Conversation is open ended and seeks to increase understanding. Debate is antagonistic and clarifies opposing points of view (Burbules, 1993).

I am choosing to use the term generative dialogue because it best includes the competencies that I am hoping to build in comic improvisation. Generative dialogue could be seen by Bohm as dialogue to share ideas and learn, by Buber as genuine

dialogue and by Burbules as dialogue for inquiry. Other researchers do not necessarily use the term generative dialogue. Some refer to relational dialogue and some simply use the term dialogue. This is often preceded by a description or definition. In the research selected for this study, I am only selecting research where the reference to dialogue refers to dialogue in which there is a suspending of biases, judgements and preconceptions and authentically listening. These are all is characteristic of Scharmer’s reflective dialogue (see figure 2-1). Generative dialogue includes all these characteristics along with the goal of creating new understandings that allow us to connect to and construct emerging realities (Scharmer, 2007). Scharmer’s model includes four categories of dialogue: polite discussion (talking nice), debate (talking tough), reflective dialogue and forms of collective intelligence (generative dialogue) (Gunnlaugson, 2007, p.45). As seen in the Figure 2-1, each type of dialogue has specific traits and purposes.

Re-enacting Patterns of the Past	
Talking Nice	Talking Tough
Cautious and polite Listening while projecting and inferring Holding back thinking Avoiding the undiscussables Rule Re-enacting	Debate / clash Listening while Loading identifying with own point of view Seeing the other as target Rule revealing
Reflective Dialogue	Generative dialogue
Inquiry I can change my point of view Listening with empathy the other is you Rule reflecting	Presencing Time slows down Boundaries collapse Listening form your future self Rule generating
Enacting Emerging Futures	

Figure 2-1: Otto Scharmer's 4 Levels of Conversation (Scharmer, 2003)

The idea of presencing and rule generating, as opposed to rule revealing, re-enacting or reflecting, best captures my description of dialogue used in this study (Gunnlaugson, 2007).

These forms of dialogue are not mutually exclusive and are built upon one another with each serving a purpose. Talking nice is a form of information sharing and initial relationship building. It also allows rules to be re-enacted and cause a level of comfort. It lacks authenticity and necessitates the holding back of feelings and thoughts that may not conform or may disrupt. Talking tough or debate allows feelings and thoughts to be revealed. Individuals in this form of dialogue, however, risk becoming polarized or stuck in their view, perspective or opinion (Gunnlaugson, 2007). Reflective dialogue requires self-awareness and the practice of suspension. Suspension of one's judgments requires learning to bracket one's views and embrace competing perspectives as important partial illuminations of the larger gestalt of the group subject or issue appears (Gunnlaugson, 2007). I have included suspension as a necessary ability to engage in generative dialogue although in Scharmer's model it is located in reflective dialogue. I see reflective dialogue as a necessary component of generative dialogue. Reflective dialogue is "a context in which learners can safely discover and inquire into one another's assumptions" (Gunnlaugson, 2007, p. 139). In order to truly engage in generative dialogue one must be open to shifts and other points of view in order not to re-enact past patterns but generate new ideas and understanding. Moving from reflective to generative dialogue "involves a discontinuous shift from suspending one's thoughts to *presencing* or redirecting one's attention towards the emerging source of self-transcending knowledge" (Gunnlaugson, 2007, p.48). Presencing allows the past to be suspended, barriers to be removed and for the co-creation of emerging realities to begin (Scharmer, 2009).

2.5. Common Traits

Both comic improvisation and generative dialogue are spontaneous and emerging. As previously outlined, this does not mean they just happen. There are underlying principles and conditions necessary for both to occur. Poulos (2008) compared dialogue to improvised dance when he stated:

Dialogue is like open, unchoreographed dancing: You may know just some basic moves—or you may, in fact, be well trained and highly skilled. But the creative or transformative energy that is dialogue is, in its essence, unruly, unpredictable, extraordinary, and deeply entwined with both the desires and the actions of the dancers. Once you begin the dance—and really surrender to it—you never really know where on the dance floor you will end up. (p. 118)

Although Poulos is not specifically writing about comic improvisation, the above comparison can also be applied to the unpredictable creative nature of comic improvisation, which is located in specific constructs, understandings and demands specific skills.

As I described in Chapter One, I am experienced as a participant, director and teacher of comic improvisation. In looking at connections between comic improvisation and dialogue, I began in my understanding of the competencies for comic improvisation and connected them to my new exploration of dialogue. The first connection I made that began my research was the necessity of being in the holy insecurity for both comic improvisation and dialogue. I then explored dialogue to look for further connections that

also resonated with my understanding of comic improvisation. I will now discuss some of the similarities between comic improvisation and generative dialogue.

2.5.1. **Creating a Special Space**

Creating a common space is not a competency but a condition necessary for both comic improvisation and generative dialogue. A special space must be formed where these activities can happen. Nicholson stated that “creative spaces are those in which people feel safe enough to take risks and to allow themselves and others to experience vulnerability” (Gallegher & Service, 2010, p. 251). Turner suggested in his book *Anthropology of the Arts* that, “the arts can engender a liminoid space where true creativity can begin” (as cited in O’Brien & Donlan, 2008, p. 10).

In reference to dialogue, Shields and Edwards (2005) used Burbules’ term ‘a third space’ to describe the place where people can come together without the usual power structures and rules. The third space is not only a physical space but also an emotional, intellectual and spiritual space (Shields & Edwards, 2005). Burbules (2006) also stated that the third place is a place of conflict and for creative misunderstandings where risky problematized moments can take place. I believe a place where we suspend our usual ways to allow special things to occur must be designated for both comic improvisation and generative dialogue. Issacs referred to this space as “a deliberate space for different points of view ... so they become part of the whole; this allows space for new understanding” (as cited in Jones, 2007, p. 4). For this to happen in both generative dialogue and comic improvisation, we must see and accept the other. If I step out on stage claiming to be an alien with magic powers, the audience and my

fellow actors will suspend their disbelief and accept this; and I, as actor, trust this to happen. Similarly when I share a thought in dialogue, I trust that my idea will be heard and accepted. Dialogue is “action grounded in trust and absolute regard for the other” (Shields & Edwards, 2005, p. 57). The response that creates both these special spaces, according to Buber, “is only a matter of accepting” (1947/2002, p. 12).

2.5.2. **Being Responsive to the Other**

A competency common to both generative dialogue and comic improvisation is the ability to be responsive to other people. This is related to the dialogical principle of relational responsibility. As Larry Littlebird (2001) wrote in his book *Hunting Sacred Everything Listens* “life will come into correct relationship when a person will respectfully listen” (p. 15). This is referred to by Martin Buber as the I-thou relationship as opposed to the I-it relationship. I believe that seeing others as ‘it’ simply means that we have fixed our understanding of them. This is when another person becomes a static, two dimensional object: we categorize people and give them a fixed identity. At this moment, we have made their identity static and have entered the I-it relationship. When in the I-It relationship, we project our static understanding onto the other person. We have a preconceived idea of what they mean and where their discussion is heading. We also anticipate and prepare what we are going to say. In comic improvisation, the I-it relationship can be seen as not going with the flow or saying yes and accepting. For example, if I enter a scene as a prison guard and assume another actor will be the prisoner, with certain characteristics, then the other actor is static to me; I am not allowing them to emerge.

In contrast, the I-thou relationship is when we see the other person as emerging and dynamic; in comic improvisation it is being responsive. In an I-thou relationship, we engage with but not define the other in any limited ways (Baxter, 2004, p. 111). In referring back to my former example, I enter the scene as a prison guard but make no assumptions of the other actor. He/she may be a prisoner but they could also be a lion tamer. In comic improvisation, actors step onto the stage without a plan or a script. The scene is developed by responding to the other actors. Actors suspend themselves in the moment and create the action by accepting whatever offer is made. I am referring to my comic improvisation rule of going with the flow; this is about responsiveness. This is often referred to as yes and ... (Moshavi, 2001). An offer is made by one actor and accepted (yes) and then added to (and). By going with the flow, actors are truly engaging, responding and interacting with each other's offers or ideas. "Actively listening, reading each other's cues and actively building on each other's contributions" (Harding, 2004, p. 211) is how an improvised scene is built. Because of the necessity for active listening and responsiveness, Engelberts believed comic improvisation can be a tool to build interpersonal skills and human interaction (2004). Comic improvisation necessitates seeing the other actor as emerging or, as Buber would state, as Thou. Gagnon, Vough, and Nickerson (2012) described a "skill developed in improvisational theatre is 'focusing on the other,' be it an individual or a team of individuals. Improvisers develop a remarkable degree of empathic competence, a mutual orientation to one another's unfolding" (p. 306). Both dialogue and comic improvisation necessitate the ability to be aware of and respond to the other.

Dialogue, like comic improvisation, is a relational response form of understanding (McNamee & Shotter, 2004, p. 94). In generative dialogue, one should not assume that

people from certain backgrounds necessarily have certain beliefs or experiences. It is necessary to move past this fixed understanding and attentive and open to whatever ideas are actually coming forward and being shared. In generative dialogue, people work with another in relationship to make sense and create meaning. Engelberts (2004) spoke of actors working together in improvisation as “being welded into one creature” (p. 164). This quality or characteristic is also found in dialogue. “In creative dialogue we move away from the individualistic planned communication with an intended outcome to a spontaneous responsive collective dialogue that emerges in meaning” (McNamee & Shotter, 2004,p, 93). The feature of saying yes and ... in comic improvisation can also be found in dialogue. If we apply this feature to Gunnlaugson’s four levels of conversation (2007), the *yes* is a trait of reflective dialogue and the *and* lends itself to generative dialogue. Thoughts and meanings are not assumed, rather they are explored. Flows of dialogue are not anticipated but emerge in the moment.

2.5.3. Practicing Suspension

Suspension is to be aware of thoughts and judgements and separate from them rather than identify with them. We are usually aware of what we are thinking but suspension requires a metacognitive awareness in order to hold back those thoughts to allow in new possibilities. Issacs (1999) saw the essence of dialogue as allowing a flow of meaning to emerge. In order to have this flow of meaning to emerge in the moment of the dialogue, preconceptions of meaning must be suspended and held back to inform but not dictate the meaning in the current moment. Bohm (1996) described this as being aware of a thought as it is arising but not immediately identify with it. Issac (1999)

referred to this as recognising our thoughts but putting them to one side so we can continue to listen without resistance.

There is a similar metacognitive awareness in comic improvisation. Thoughts and ideas must arise but not be immediately identified with and brought forward. Harding describes how in comic improvisation, “pushing individual agendas can result in a scene never progressing (2004, p. 211). It is important to bring forward new ideas in comic improvisation, but these ideas must forward the action and be done in a responsive manner. Simply “forcing your own ideas leads to an unsatisfying scene and [does] relationship damage” (Harding, 2004, p. 212). The ability to be aware but to suspend thoughts and judgements is a competency required for both dialogue and comic improvisation.

2.5.4. Being in a State of Heightened Awareness

Being in heightened awareness is also not a competency but a state common to both comic improvisation and generative dialogue. Improvisational actors must be in a state of heightened awareness to be able to notice the offerings of the other actors (Harding, 2004). There must be an increased consciousness, which requires a great deal of focus and concentration. “Increasing listening and awareness skills, is less about sensing more things, and more about sensing things more consciously” (Koppett, 2001, p. 53). For example, in a scene where the other player points and says “I see a bird” we must not only be aware of what is being said but also of how it is being said. Is this a huge predatory bird that we are afraid of? Is this a hopeful sign that we must follow? In order to move forward in the scene, we have to accept the other actor’s idea, interpret it

and go with the flow (Harding, 2004). It is important to note that an offer can be “be verbal, physical, conceptual, or emotional” (Koppett, 2001, p. 37). In dialogue, we also need to listen and read the other person to be able to respond authentically to him/her. As Buber stated, we must be “attentive, for no more than that is needed for the reading of the signs given to you” (1947, p.19). Scharmer advocated that in order to generatively dialogue, one must be fully conscious and aware past the superficial and current circumstances (2004). Generative dialogue occurs when the “circle of attention widens and a new reality enters the horizon and comes into being (Scharmer & Kauefer, 2013, p.20). Scharmer and Kauefer describe this presence as an embodied experience where one is in a heightened state of awareness where time seems to slow down and space seems to open up. This resembles my own embodied experience in comic improvisation performance. As I embrace the moment of the holy insecurity and open myself up to be responsive, it feels as if time has slowed down. Scharmer and Kauefer compare this embodied experience to being “*in the zone* when a jazz ensemble finds its groove” (2013, p. 20). I think my comparison to comic improvisation is similar.

2.5.5. Moving into the Holy Insecurity

The holy insecurity, as described by Buber, is a risky place to be; it is being completely present in a moment of total uncertainty and trusting it will take you on to the next moment. This is, as Bakhtin said, living in the “open ended possibilities” (as cited in Romney, 2005, p. 4). As the actor steps into the creative space to improvise, she/he is also living in that moment of open ended possibilities. This is facing the void where there is risk and vulnerability. There is no plan or script and the actor “need[s] to allow action without knowing where it will lead” (Kanter, 2002, p. 79). In comic improvisation,

as in dialogue, you must go forward into “the unforeseeable, ever changing and ever new situations” (Scott, 2011, p. 201). Comic improvisation has the “condition of being alive and present” (Engelberts, 2004, p. 163). Comic improvisation is spontaneously responding to the offers of the other actors and your own ideas while not knowing what will happen in the next moment. Spolin (1999) described playing a game in improvisation as setting out to solve a problem with no preconception as how it will be done (p.361). In both comic improvisation and dialogue one is in the moment with no plan of what will happen next.

In both generative dialogue and comic improvisation, the participants meet in the “unforeseeable, ever changing and ever new situations” (Buber, 1948, p. 24). Being in this heightened awareness and turning to another in a truly responsive manner is an embodied experience (Sinha, 2010, p.464). The holy insecurity is that moment when you have let go of your previous understandings but have not yet formed new ones. It is that moment when you are “leaning into your emerging future” (Scharmer & Kauefer, 2013). The ability as well as the embodied experience of being responsive in the holy insecurity is a competency that I hope will cross from comic improvisation into generative dialogue.

2.5.6. Creation Out of the Blue

Another common trait of comic improvisation and generative dialogue is the quality of truly being in the moment and creating something new for the first time. When doing improvisation, a creation of something original and new that will never be again occurs. The actors do not know what will happen from moment to moment; it is being

created then and there (Engelberts, 2004). This is part of the magical quality of the work that engages the audience. “Through active listening and reading the cues from the other party both actors [are] able to explore ideas that they did not have when they stepped out onto the stage” (Harding, 2004, p. 210).

Dialogue has the same quality. Dialogue has been described by McNamee and Shotter (2004) as “spontaneously responding to the events occurring around us in uniquely new first time ways” (p. 99). Each dialogue must be approached as a new creation even when one has engaged with the topic and/or the person before (p. 92). The dialogue must have “a special kind of first time creativity ... the creation out of the blue” (p. 94). Dialogue has neither “a predetermined direction nor a specific anticipated outcome” (Shields & Edwards, 2005, p. 142). Isaacs (1999) described dialogue as taking energy and channeling it “toward something that has never been created before” (as cited in Jones, 2007, p.1). Bahktin (1984) actually referred to this as “giving birth to a new truth” (p. 123).

As previously discussed, Scharmer identified the quality of *presencing* as necessary for generative dialogue. “Presencing, represents a state of the social field in which the circle of attention widens and a new reality enters the horizon and comes into being” (Scharmer & Kauefer, 2013, p. 20). He contrasts this with *abscencing*. While presencing leans into the future, “abscencing holds tight to the past way of thinking and operating. Absencing holds on to the known and the planned” (Scharmer & Kauefer, 2013, p. 20). This can be compared to the difference between scripted and rehearsed theatre, which is known and planned, to improvisation, which is unknown and spontaneous. In dialogue, like comic improvisation, what is created is new and emerging for the first time.

2.6. Comparing Comic Improvisation and Dialogue

In an effort to be transparent, I must reveal that there are some subtle differences when applying the competencies inherent in comic improvisation to those in generative dialogue. Participants are not simply replicating the use of these competencies but are applying them to a different construct and context. Comic improvisation occurs in a fictitious context where the situations and characters are imaginary. In contrast, dialogue typically takes place with people discussing real world problems. This study explored the potential application of comic improvisation as a framework for developing competencies in generative dialogue. The framework of comic improvisation differs from that of generative dialogue so the application and context of the competencies being explored differs as well. The competencies may be the same but their application differs because the contexts are different.

The similarity that initially drew me to this research was the connection I saw between being in the holy insecurity in comic improvisation and the processes of generative dialogue. I still see this competency as being very evident in both generative dialogue and comic improvisation. “The biggest difference between the scripted model and the improvisational model is the need to allow action without knowing where it will lead” (Kanter, 2002, p. 79). I have been using the term holy insecurity to describe this lack of knowing and letting go of control in order to enter the moment with uncertainty in both comic improvisation and dialogue. There is, however, a purpose for being in the holy insecurity in dialogue that is different from that of comic improvisation. In dialogue, Buber (1948) believed that we are delving into that moment for true understanding, and by doing this, we are creating a moment with God. He described that “in such a way, out

of the givers of the signs, the speakers of the words is real life out of the moment Gods where there arise for us a single identity the Lord of the voice, the One” (Buber, 1947/2002, p. 18). Scharmer explained that leaning into our unknown emerging future allows us to care for “the well-being of our global communities and planetary ecosystem” (Scharmer & Kauefer, 2013, p. 1). I do not see the goal nor potential results of comic improvisation as being this profound.

The competencies of being responsive and in relationship in comic improvisation when compared to dialogue have a similar discrepancy. Comic improvisation can provide a medium to build competencies towards developing true relational responsibility but not the capacity to completely achieve it. Similar to the way Baxter described dialogue, comic improvisation necessitates that players “engage with but not define the other else they become two dimensional and static” (2004, p. 111). I see comic improvisation as building competencies for true relational responsibility, but it does not have the context to actually achieve it. In analyzing Bahktin’s concept of relational dialectics, Baxter (2004) suggested that increasing self-disclosure creates relational intimacy and allows us to define our understanding of self. As participants move through and contribute to a dialogue, they are discovering or building a new awareness of themselves in relation to the ideas being shared and cogenerated in the dialogue. This process is not a part of comic improvisation as true disclosure does not occur.

Buber saw dialogue as being able to provide a medium for discovering “the mutual and holistic existence of two entities” (as cited in Guilherme & Morgan, 2011, p. 110). Generative dialogue, unlike comic improvisation, allows for the emerging of the whole person, and in the “multiplicity of their humanism see our connection to that” (Shields & Edwards, 2005, p. 52). Comic improvisation begins to build the competency

of relational responsibility, but because players are confined to a created make-believe fiction, they are not revealing their own thoughts and feelings to each other.

Similar to being responsive, practicing suspension is also a dialogue competency that comic improvisation has the potential to begin to build. Suspension is the meta-cognitive ability to be aware of your own preconceptions and judgements and hold them separate in order to focus on what is emerging. In comic improvisation, players must constantly be aware of a scene developing in their head and move out of it and back into the reality being created by the other players (Leep, 2004). McNamee and Shotter (2004) described suspension in the context of dialogue as being “aware of your ‘plan,’ position, history, power, prejudice and role and recognize this colours your perspective” (p. 92). I do not think that the suspension in comic improvisation requires this depth of recognition. For the most part, players are simply becoming aware of their ideas and plans for the scene. The depth of insight to recognize one’s own background and prejudice is not generally required in comic improvisation. Comic improvisation allows players to begin to experience some of the qualities necessary for building the competency of suspension, but comic improvisation does not take this competency to the same depth that dialogue does.

The final dialogue competency I will discuss here is that of creating something new or the creation of new ideas and understanding. The spontaneous nature of comic improvisation requires a new creation. A comic improvisation performance is “a series of (fictional) events (a ‘story’) that is not known before the actual performance is enacted by actors in front of an audience” (Engelberts, 2004, p. 158). These fictional events are spontaneously created by the players right before the eyes of the audience in every performance. This has a similarity to dialogue, as dialogue is a way of taking the energy

of our differences and channelling it toward something that has never been created before (Isaac, 2009). Generative dialogue is a co-creation of new ideas and understandings. Comic improvisation also “works on collective knowledge” (Kanter, 2002, p. 78), though dialogue is grounded in reality. “It is talk that carries us to new places, talk that constitutes change, and talk that creates and transforms realities” (Poulos, p. 2008, p. 118). Comic improvisation’s creation of fictional events does not share this ability; it does not transform reality but rather creates a make-believe reality for entertainment.

Comic improvisation may provide a framework for exploring and understanding the competencies used in generative dialogue, but there are some differences between the context of dialogue and comic improvisation. In a report on *Education for Life and Work: Developing Transferable Knowledge and Skills in the 21st Century* written by the American National Research Council, deep learning is defined as “the process through which an individual becomes capable of taking what was learned in one situation and applying it to new situations” (2012, p. 3). In using comic improvisation as a context to explore dialogical competencies, I am pushing the participants towards deep learning. The extensive *Education for Life and Work* report suggests that this is a difficult and complex task. The differences between comic improvisation and generative dialogue are not problematic but are simply inherent when competencies are transferred from one context to another. My purpose here was to articulate these differences.

2.7. Current State of the Literature

In my search for examples of using comic improvisation to promote competency building toward dialogue, I found nothing that directly relates to this model. In fact, research seems to indicate that comic improvisation has not been examined a great deal as a method of developing these transferable competencies, or explored by academics generally. Engelberts (2004) stated that there is a “dearth of research on Theatresports ... [and that] despite their popularity, Theatresports have not attracted any serious attention by researchers” (pp. 155 - 156). Dessel, Rogge and Garlinton (2006) supported that “research on [comic improvisation as an] intervention in community settings is in an early stage, and the methodological rigor used to assess outcomes, particularly outside settings, has been relatively low ... [and] much work needs to be done” (p. 132). Although not a specific form of comic improvisation, there has been some work in the field of education and social justice on improvisation. Improvisation and role playing is currently seen as a device for metaphor and a tool for teaching (Sawyer, 2004).

There has been some amazing work done, for example, by Augusto Boal, using Theatre of the Oppressed in areas of social justice (Syneder-Young, 2011). This use of applying theatre to areas of social justice uses improvisation as a medium for dialogue on the issues being explored rather than as a device for training skills towards exploring the issues through dialogue (Diamond, 2004). This is very valuable work but is beyond the scope of this dissertation. I am also specifically choosing not including improvisation that is used in role plays and simulations such as medical students' role playing the doctor and patient or social studies students simulating an assembly line. Both are

effective teaching/training tools but differ from the use of comic improvisation in this study. Firstly, it is not taught separately to develop transferable competencies but taught inclusively in the context that these competencies will be used. Secondly, comic improvisation, as defined previously in this chapter, is a particular form of improvisation with specific internal and external guidelines. Thirdly, comic improvisation is comical with the intention of entertaining the audience.

2.7.1. Comic Improvisation in Business and Organizational Leadership

There has been a growing body of research done in the world of business on using comic improvisation as a competency building tool. Dan Moshavi (2001) at the Business School at Montana State University saw comic improvisation as an excellent technique for teaching management techniques and outlined specific exercises to be used toward this end. Mary Crossan is an associate professor of business policy at the Richard Ivey School of Business at the University of Western Ontario who believed that comic improvisational theatre was not only a “metaphor but also a technique that enables firms to manage in these more turbulent times” (Vera & Crossan, 2004, p. 745). Comic improvisation is gaining legitimacy as an element of curriculum in business management training.

Mirvas (1998) urged organizational scientists to study improvisation in the arts as strategies for application to business settings. Comic improvisational theatre was deconstructed by Harding (2004) to provide skills and timing for successful negotiation. Gagnon, Vough and Nickerson (2012) developed “a conceptual model of how the skills

that can be gained through improvisational theatre help to address the gap in approaches for developing ... *affiliative leadership*" (p. 304). Balachandra et al. promoted that "incorporating improvisational comedy techniques into the negotiation skills repertoire holds great promise for practicing negotiators and is a worthy topic of future negotiation research and teaching" (2005, p. 416).

In addition to providing useful curriculum for the classroom, there are "training interventions that have been designed for business organizations based on exercises used by actors in the world of [comic] improvisational theater" (Vera & Crossan, 2005, p. 203). This has created work for a growing number of consultants that provide comic improvisation training for businesses and organizations. For example, in developing my literature review, I came across the work of Karen Hough. Hough is the Founder and CEO of ImprovEdge, and has been using improvisation as a training tool for over 12 years. She offers a variety of workshops and targets clients from small agencies to large corporations. As well as being recognized in a number of capacities, her company ImprovEdge received the silver Stevie International Award for Most Innovative Company of the Year 2012 for Women in Business in the U.S.A. Hough's has an interesting dual career. She graduated from Yale and worked as a senior sales executive and manager in New York and Chicago. In addition, she trained with Chicago's legendary Second City (co-founded by Paul Sills and David Sheppard previously mentioned in this literature review) and had a successful career in stage, film and TV. She also wrote a book entitled *The Improvisation Edge: Secrets to Building Trust and Radical Collaboration at Work* in 2011. Her book describes four principles that will help leaders, managers, trainers and front-line employees adopt the improviser's mindset by using improvisational game playing as an experiential way to build organizational trust and

collaboration. She describes comic improvisation as a technique to develop a positive work environment with increased participation, selfless collaboration and increased adaptability and innovation (2011).

Another example that describes this growing phenomenon, is the work of Kat Koppett. Koppett has a diverse professional life. She runs a leadership training and consulting company, Koppett & Company, and also co-directs the Mop & Bucket Improvisation Theatre Company, which she runs out of Schenectady, New York. Koppett (2001) wrote a handbook titled *Training to Imagine: Practical Improvisational Theatre Techniques for Trainers and Managers to Enhance Teamwork, Creativity, Leadership and Learning*. The book is designed for “trainers and managers who have become aware that the complex chaos in today’s work-place requires something different from the standard, systematic, rational approach” (Koppett, 2001, p. xi). Her handbook is divided into two sections. The first section describes and qualifies the use of comic improvisation as a training tool for management and leadership in the corporate world. The second section of her handbook pragmatically outlines specific comic improvisational exercises to develop these competency competencies. Koppett’s approach to using comic improvisation to develop competencies for management and leadership is very similar to the framework of this study in using comic improvisation to develop transferable competencies. She leads the participants through comic improvisational exercises and then draws parallels to the business world. This is similar to my approach in which comic improvisation is used towards building competencies for generative dialogue.

Koppett’s research uses comic improvisation as I have defined it. I am not suggesting, however, that this research and practice is using comic improvisation as a

technique for building competencies and an increased awareness to support generative dialogue. I find it interesting, however, that Business Management and Organizational Studies seems to be the academic areas where the potential of comic improvisation as a transferable skill building technique and teaching tool is recognized. As Koppett stated: “improvisation is an increasingly valued platform for workplace development and training. After all, what improvisers do – work collaboratively, flexibly, under extreme pressure, and without knowing what will happen next – is what business professionals do every day as well” (2013, Improvisation and Business section, para 2). I see that using generative dialogue for problem solving and generating solutions also requires this collaboration and flexibility under pressure without knowing what will happen next.

Another interesting phenomenon that emerged from my study of the literature is that generative dialogue, like comic improvisation, is also being researched and applied to the world of business. Scharmer and Isaac and Gunnlaugson have taken the theories, methods and skills of dialogue and are currently working as contractors to apply them in organizations. They are utilizing generative communication to create an atmosphere for building relationships with trust. This atmosphere helps to navigate the emerging realities when adapting to a competitive ever shifting complex global market (Gunnlaugson, 2011; Isaacs, 1996; Scharmer, 2007). I see comic improvisation currently being applied to build competencies for negotiation and leadership in business. Generative dialogue is also being used for organizational problem solving. However, according to my research, the link of using comic improvisation for the competency building required for generational dialogue is not presently occurring.

2.7.2. Comic Improvisation in Psychotherapy

While completing the revision for my dissertation, I also came upon the use of comic improvisation in the area of psychotherapy. Although when designing my study I was aware of drama therapy and the use of role playing and re-enactments in a therapeutic context, I was not aware of the specific use of comic improvisation in therapy. According to the North American Drama Therapist Association, drama therapy is an active experiential process and “is a creative arts therapy method that integrates role play, stories, improvisation, and other techniques taken from the theater with the theories and methods of therapy” and has been accepted in common use since the late 1970’s (Beauregard, M.; Haen, C.; Long, K.; Zaiser, J.; (n.d.) *the Fact Sheet*. The processes and techniques used in drama therapy “may include improvisation, theater games, storytelling, and enactment. The theoretical foundation of drama therapy lies in drama, theater, psychology, psychotherapy, anthropology, play, and interactive and creative processes” (Beauregard, M. et al. (n.d.).

The use of comic improvisation in psychotherapy has been described as different from traditional drama therapy because rather than focusing on facilitating change in individuals, the use of comic improvisation techniques “focuses on the shaping the context and functioning of relationships” (Wiener, 1997, p. 309). Exploring and describing the nature of drama therapy is beyond the scope of this study, but the specific use of comic improvisation is, however, important to note. In this context, comic improvisation is “used as an intervention to teach interpersonal skills” (Wiener, 1997, p. 309). As I am exploring the use of comic improvisation to develop skills or competencies in generative dialogue, I found this body of work very relevant to my study. There are numerous articles, books and conferences that engage with this emerging phenomenon.

I am going to highlight the two contributors that, according to my research, are central to the use of comic improvisation in psychotherapy. They also have two different approaches to using comic improvisation to inform their practice.

The most pertinent use of comic improvisation in psychotherapy that I found was that of Dr. Daniel Wiener. Wiener is a Professor at Central Connecticut State University in the Graduate Marriage and Family Therapy Program. Wiener has over 40 years of experience in academic teaching, psychotherapy practice, postgraduate clinical training, and organizational consulting and has written numerous books and training manuals. Through his wife, an acting teacher, he became involved in comic improvisation. His wife, Gloria, Maddox, studied under Keith Johnstone, who I have previously noted as the founder of Theatresports. Wiener “became part of a performing improvisational team for six years and recognized that the principles of good improvising and good relationship functioning overlap considerably” (Reiter, S. 1997, p.303). He began to utilize some of the improvisation exercises and games in his clinical practice with individuals, couples and families.

In 1985, he founded an approach to psychotherapy called Rehearsals for Growth or RfG. Wiener also began offering training to clinicians in his method. Wiener continued developing his skills in comic improvisation and even trained with the famous Loose Moose Theatre in Calgary with Keith Johnstone in 1993 (Wiener, 1994). He eventually published *Rehearsals for Growth: Theater Improvisation for Psychotherapists* (Norton, 1994). Wiener adapted over 200 comic improvisation games for RfG but has more recently narrowed this down. Currently, for example, he commonly uses eight comic improvisation exercises in couples and family therapy (Wiener, n/d). These are generally introductory games or warm up exercises that do not require a great deal of

skill at improvisation. One game that he uses, for example is *One Word Story*. This is the same game I used for the first comic improvisation training session in this study. I chose this game as even beginners are able to execute it fairly quickly. Wiener believes that comic improvisation shares a number of characteristics with good interpersonal relationship functioning (2000). He explicitly states these characteristics are:

attentiveness to others' words and actions; **flexibility** in both initiating and accepting others' directions and suggestions (giving up over-control); and making others right (**validation** of their reality, thereby supporting them to look good)" (Wiener, 2000, p. 11).

The attentiveness and acceptance that Wiener refers to is similar to the competency of responsiveness that I am exploring. I would also suggest that having flexibility and giving up of control to validate another's reality has elements of suspension because this requires the ability to recognize and separate from one's perceptions and allow the other to be right.

Relevant to this study is Wiener's use of comic improvisation as a training tool for training therapists as well as exercises for his clients in therapy. RfG's primary focus is "developing skills that promote good relationship functioning" (Wiener, 1997, p. 209). In this study, I am also concerned with skill building using the experience of comic improvisation. Although Wiener does not use the term competency, I have previously defined competencies as skills that are deeply learned to transfer from one area to another area. As Wiener is using skills learned in comic improvisation to be used in family relationships and social interaction, I would suggest that he too is looking at building competencies. I will further describe Wiener's therapeutic use of comic improvisation in my final chapter.

Another therapist who uses comic improvisation to inform his psychotherapy practice is Dr. Phil Ringstrom. Ringstrom is a Senior Training and Supervising Analyst and Faculty Member at the Institute of Contemporary Psychoanalysis in Los Angeles, California. He does not, like Wiener, advocate for actually using comic improvisation exercises to train therapists or for use in sessions with clients. Ringstrom believes that “improvisational theater can be a useful metaphor for grasping key elements in the moment-to-moment unfolding of any analytic process” (Ringstrom, 2001, p. 731). Knoblauch (2001) described Ringstrom as “using the concepts of improvisational theater to think about the analyst’s participation. Ringstrom addressed “the conflict for the analyst between ritual and spontaneity” (p. 786). Ringstrom has described some guidelines for therapist when using the principles for comic improvisation in therapy.

Rules for using Improvisation

1. Listen intently, not only for content but for what spontaneously emerges in you.
2. Don’t be afraid to introduce that emergence.
3. Especially if you are also following the next cardinal rule which is try not to negate the other’s version of reality.
4. Instead, play off of it and with it. (Ringstrom & Psy, 2007, p.111)

Ringstrom also strongly connected the idea of comic improvisation to relationship. He saw improvisation as having the power of moving people “from *subject-to-object* relating to *subject-to-subject* relating or from Buber’s “I-it” relating to “I-thou” relating (Ringstrom, 2011, p. 444). Although I came across the work of Ringstrom in the

later stages of this study, his use of Buber's theory of the I-thou relationship is directly connected to the idea of responsiveness articulated previously in this study. Similarly Ringstorm is also making a similar connection from Buber's relational dialogue to comic improvisation.

Ringstorm also suggested that therapists can use the competency of yes...and (or the idea always of accepting an idea and then building on it) as a useful tool for therapists (Ringstorm, 2007). This technique creates a spontaneous session that allows for equality between patient and therapist. Comic improvisation "begins from the unknown, draws from the unknown, and thereafter unfolds from some unknown into a co-created setting and relationship that eventually lead to a plausible end—an end that, like psychoanalysis, is quite understandable in retrospect though impossible to have divined in advance" (Ringstorm, 2001, p. 733). Although I am exploring the use comic improvisation related to generative dialogue rather than therapy, there are some striking similarities here. I too have suggested that comic improvisation begins from the unknown of the holy insecurity and moves to generate a co-created new idea or understanding. Ringstorm recently published *A Relational Psychoanalytic Approach to Couples Psychotherapy* (2014) and is a frequent presenter at conferences particularly looking at using improvisation as a model of engagement for couple's therapy.

I find the connection from comic improvisation to psychotherapy a very interesting one. Although being in a therapeutic session is not necessarily being in generative dialogue as defined by this study, there are a number of similarities. Psychotherapy, like comic improvisation, is done in relationship and seeking to find new understandings or "improvised moments of co-creativity" (Ringstorm & Psy, 2007,

p.110). I will be further exploring this use of comic improvisation further in my final chapter.

2.8. Necessity of the Research

Using comic improvisation as a competency building tool to assist business and organization in their ability to generatively dialogue is worthwhile and, in my opinion practical. Developing competencies toward dialogue has never been more critical. We live in an age of increasing globalization but often in increasing fragmentation (Baxter, 2004; McNamee & Shotter, 2004; Romney, 2005; Sinha, 2010). Romney declared that dialogue is essential as “an increasingly diverse and conflicted world calls us to collaborate with one another to survive and share the planet ... all kinds of individuals and groups need to come together and talk about the controversial matters that affect our survival and progress” (2005, p.1). Dialogue allows us to build relationships and understanding as well as co-create new knowledge. It is a respectful way to explore our differences and have difficult conversations, but true relational or generative dialogue requires a difficult competencies to be developed. Scholars have theorized that developing an ability to improvise may be effective for enacting a range of tasks: for example, interpreting the environment, creating emergent strategies, fostering teamwork, undertaking psychological risk, listening and communicating (Crossan, 1998). Comic improvisation was created for its mass appeal and accessibility. Participating in improvisation provides a cognitive, affective and embodied experience (Lockford & Pelias, 2004, p. 439) that is remembered and recognizable. The business world has been using comic Improvisation as a transferable skill building tool for negotiation,

leadership and management training (Balachandra et al., 2005; Demsond & Jowitt, 2012; Diamond & Lefkoff, 1992; Gagnon, Vough & Nickerson, 2012; Harding, 2004; Hough, 2011; Moshavi, 2001; Koppett, 2001; Vera & Crossan, 2004). In 2002, the Applied Improvisation Network was formed to provide a forum for practitioners to come together and share practice and research in the field. This network now includes thousands of members and has spread throughout Europe and Asia. This website claimed that comic improvisation “is being used in more than half the top business schools around the world” (Applied Improvisation Network, May, 2014. Retrieved: <http://www.appliedimprov.com>). This is a currently emerging field. At the same, time leaders and trainers in the field of dialogue have been using forms of generative dialogue to increase understandings and problem solve in the areas such as social justice, business and organizations and in political arenas (Dessel, Rogge & Garlington, 2006; Rozas, 2004; Wayne, 2008). I see using comic improvisation to build competencies for generative dialogue as a natural next step.

Comic improvisation creates a special space, and necessitates letting go of preconceptions in order to be truly responsive to others, creating new meanings for the first time in a state of heightened awareness. As these are some of the critical elements necessary for dialogue, comic improvisation could be a wonderful engaging training ground to develop these competencies. Engelberts believed that comic improvisation can potentially be used as “a formative instrument in communication and social relations” (2004, p. 167). I agree and believe that now is an important time to unleash this potential. Koppett, described comic improvisation as “ a well-developed discipline designed to support innovation, achieve goals in the face of unexpected and ever-changing obstacles, build trust, and enhance presence” (2013, January, “Improvisation-

Based Organizational Development.” para. 2). If educators and citizens use the wide appeal of comic improvisation, it might be a way to move closer to allowing the collaborative voice of dialogue to emerge.

Chapter 3. Research Methodology

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will provide a description of the study's research methods and a justification for the methods chosen. I begin with my choice of research tradition, which relates to the purpose of my study and myself as researcher. I then provide an explanation of the methods used throughout the study, including ethical approval, the recruitment of study participants, research instruments and procedures, the processes for data analysis, as well as the steps taken to ensure the reliability and validity of the data. A final discussion is included to provide information on the processes used to overcome obstacles to the research study.

3.2. Choosing a Tradition

The purpose of my research was to explore how the experience of being actively involved in five comic improvisation training workshops informed the participants. Do participants see connections between the competencies used in comic improvisation and dialogue and are these connections perceived by the participants as improving their understanding? The potential connection between comic improvisation and generative dialogue is a new concept; teasing out the specific common competencies moves into previously uncharted territories. My intention is to explore rather than measure. This study lends itself to the qualitative tradition that allows me to “build a rich description of a complex holistic picture, analyse words, and explore meaning making” (Creswell, 1998,

p. 15). This rich description is built from the perceptions of the participants and my observations and interpretations rather than a comparison against a theoretical standard. In qualitative research, it is important that accounts include enough contextual detail and sufficient representation of the participants' voices so that readers can place themselves in the shoes of the participants at some level and judge the quality of the findings based on criteria other than those used in positivist and post-positivist paradigms. The goal of qualitative data analysis applied to the perceptions of participants is to uncover emerging themes, patterns, concepts, insights and understandings (Patton, 2002). I am trying to discover the meanings and interpretations developed by the individuals who experienced the intervention of comic improvisational training on generative dialogue.

I wanted to focus on a specific experience and to gain insights from a full documentation of the experience; thus, I have chosen to do a qualitative case study. This is also an instrumental case study as I am hoping to generate academic and practitioner interest in pursuing research on the use of comic improvisation as a tool for increasing generative dialogue competencies (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). The case study was bounded (Creswell, 1998) and limited to the 10 participants of dialogue and comic improvisation training during the identified time period of the initial dialogue and interview, the comic improvisation workshops, and the final dialogue and interview. A constructivist epistemology also helped determine my selection of a qualitative case study as knowledge produced within the constructivist paradigm is often presented in the form of case studies. Constructivism is the belief that knowledge is actively constructed by individuals as they interact and collaborate in the world (Sjøberg, 2007). Using a social constructivist epistemology shapes the idea of multiple realities constructed

socially through interactions (Kim, 2001). Because this study concerns generative dialogue, where dialogue creates new understandings and ideas, this idea of a socially constructed, collaboratively created reality is reflected in the study itself. It also allows the researcher participant to be part of this active construction.

My vision for this study has always been to have participants engage in classes of comic improvisation and investigate whether this transfers to their understanding of dialogue. I chose to be quite close to the research as I directed the comic improvisation classes. This put me in the role of participant observer and also determined my choice of a qualitative approach. As a facilitator, I gave participants a set of activities to participate in, directions and feedback. I tried to limit participants' reactions as little as possible in order to be consistent with a naturalistic setting for qualitative research (Chesebro & Borisoff, 2007, p. 6).

Another characteristic of qualitative research is that the researcher is immersed and engaged in the study. This allows researchers to build relationships and trust with participants. It also allows them to check out hunches and give feedback to participants (Creswell & Miller, 2000). During the comic improvisation workshops, I was simultaneously acting as researcher and facilitator/director. The "central skills in improvisational theatre include maintaining an external focus, openness, listening and responsiveness, and an ability to create trust and 'action space' for collective development of new ideas, approaches, methods and outcomes" (Gagnon, Vough & Nickerson, 2012, p. 300). It was necessary for me as facilitator/director to be proactive in creating this action space of openness and trust for comic improvisation to occur. I consciously constructed and developed this and in doing so also provided an opportunity to develop relationships with my participants.

During the first session of my study, I provided an orientation that included an overview of the study as well as a description of the competencies for comic improvisation and generative dialogue. My intention was to provide transparency and to also create a common language and understandings for our work together. Johnson and Christensen (2014) defined interpretative validity as the ability to understand the researcher participant and his/her interpretations of meaning attached to the study. I believe that my orientation session provided a beginning for interpretive validity. The session took thirty minutes more than I had originally planned as participants drew me into a discussion on what I meant by generative dialogue and what I was truly trying to explore in the study. I believe, looking back, this allowed us to further build or co-construct some common understandings as we entered the study.

As Hatch (2002) advocated, the qualitative researcher should engage and experience the setting, interacting with those being studied so as to get a better sense of the experience and perceptions of the participants. Because the workshops were progressive in nature, as further detailed in Chapter 4, acting as a facilitator/director I was also able to reflect with participants as well as revisit concepts and observations experienced through the comic improvisation workshops. My role also provided an opportunity to develop a relationship with the participants that the role of an observer would not have. The role of facilitator/director also provides a natural separation from the group while interacting with the group. Although, as facilitator /director, I was present and interacting with the group, I was not one of the players. It also afforded me the ability to naturally guide and question to better inform my understanding of the experience.

3.3. Ethic Approval

I began the process of Ethics Approval in the spring of 2013. As a student of Simon Fraser University (SFU) I needed the institution's approval, and as I chose to do the research at Vancouver Island University (VIU), I also needed ethical approval from that institution. I successfully completed my Orientation for Research Ethics (ORE) from SFU on March 15, 2013. In order to conduct my research, I needed some very practical resources. I needed iPods with an audio function to record the dialogues, a data projector and laptop computer for my PowerPoint presentations and a space large enough to conduct my comic improvisation workshops. I began connecting with the Research and Scholarly Activity Office at Vancouver Island University to gain support for free space to conduct my sessions. I received a wonderful room, loan of some of the equipment and a space for the comic improvisation. The Faculty of Education gave me use of the iPods. I then moved toward my Ethics Approval. The next step entailed completing my Study Details. I included copies of posters and emails to be used for recruiting, the pre and post surveys, pre and post interview questions, the focus group topics as well as the consent forms for participants. After several revisions, I received Ethics Approval April 19, 2013 from Simon Fraser University contingent upon my approval at Vancouver Island. I received my approval from Vancouver Island University on April 23, 2013, which I then sent to Simon Fraser University.

I found this process to be very informative. Designing the recruitment process and setting, the surveys, interviews and focus group questions gave real structure to my study. I had my research tools ready and space booked the following fall. I included the timeline that came from my Research Proposal in my ethics package and this served as

a guiding sign post as I moved through recruitment and data generation work with the participants.

3.4. Recruitment of Participants

For the purpose of this study, my participants were recruited primarily from the Nanaimo campus of Vancouver Island University as it is recognizable to the community and has an infrastructure to support research and scholarly activity. I was also working at VIU and had numerous connections. I felt that recruits would also feel reassured, as I was a faculty member at this institution. I was open to including students, staff, faculty or general members of the public. I wanted 12 dedicated people who were over 18 years of age and committed to completing the workshop series and research participation. For the purpose of this study, I also needed participants to be proficient in English. I wanted to have participants with little or experience in comic improvisation so that the competency building experience would be similar for all. I expected recruits to be interested in participating because they would like to try comic improvisation.

For the recruitment process, I put up numerous posters throughout the VIU Nanaimo Campus as well as two city recreation centres in Nanaimo. Four participants responded to the VIU posters and one to the city recreation posters. I posted an advertisement in VIU's Nautical, the campus newspaper, but none of the participants indicated that this method recruited them. I also set up an advertisement in the INVIU website, but none of the participants indicated this method was where they heard about the study. I sent an email out through VIU and five participants responded. I had a fair amount of interest but many of the prospective participants who contacted me were not

available for the entire study. Although I had hoped to begin with 12 participants in case of attrition, I started with 10.

3.5. Participants

In my introduction, I have described the participants themselves. I want to identify some of the basic characteristics of the participants as a group. My participants were recruited from the community as well as from Vancouver Island University. They were staff, faculty, students, and involved community members. Appendix C includes a chart that compiles the background information gathered from participants. Appendix C also includes the background information for all participants who initially began the study. I have included in this chapter only highlights based on participants that completed the study.

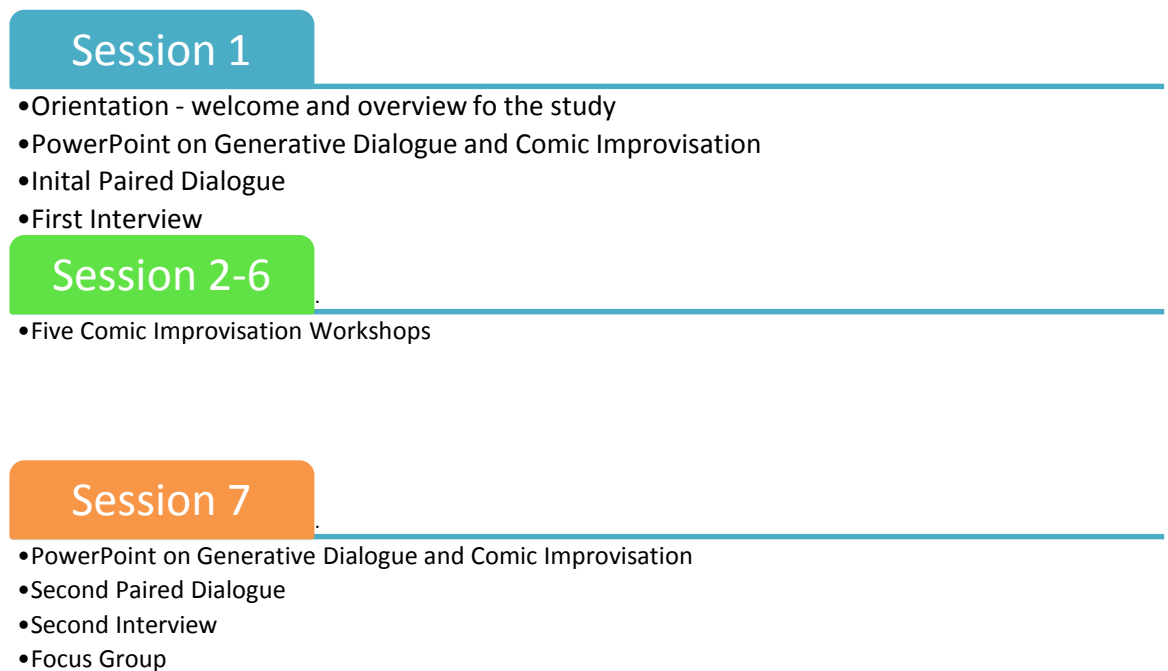
All the participants who completed the study, and all but one of the original recruits, had some post-secondary education. Participants ranged in age from 20 to 65 years of age, with one participant under 25, two participants between 25 and 45, three participants between 46 and 65 and one participant over 65. All the participants who completed the study were male. None of the participants had experience in comic improvisation and only two participants had any experience in theatre. There were two retired participants. One of these participants had been an English as a second language (ESL) teacher in Asia and the other was a mental health worker. The remainder of the participants' occupations were literacy coordinator, Information technology (IT) worker, ESL teacher, education student and farmer, and business student. When asked why they had decided to participate in the study, five of the seven

responses indicated interest, fun and amusement. Three responses indicated skill development and one responded specifically to learn a new skill for application in his teaching.

3.6. Study Process

The study itself had three phases: orientation with the initial dialogue and interviews, the five comic improvisation workshops, followed by the final dialogue, interviews and focus group. I have included below a figure indicating the sessions and the activities that occurred in the sessions. The details of each are described in further detail below in my Research Instruments and Procedures section. The description that follows is intended to provide an overview of the study's flow and process.

Figure 3-1: The Process



The study began with an orientation dialogue session. During this session, I welcomed participants, explained the purposes and structure of the study and had them sign Consent Forms and provide some brief background information (included in Appendix C: Background Sheet) and contact information. I then gave a PowerPoint presentation on comic improvisation and generative dialogue and answered any questions. The purpose of the presentation was to give participants a working knowledge of the terms and concepts that we would be using and exploring during the study. Because we were going to explore ways of thinking about and understanding dialogue through comic improvisation, I felt that we needed to have common context and vocabulary. I was also able to informally check for understanding among the participants as recommended by Creswell (2000) in an article titled, "Getting Good Qualitative Data." The orientation was also intended to ensure that the participant interviews were in language that was commonly understood (Hatch, 2002). I also wanted to provide a transparent process so that I could establish a trust relationship with my participants and develop a climate of trust and openness among the participants as well. My intent was to establish a tone in which we were entering this experience together to explore comic improvisation and its possible connections to competency building for generative dialogue.

Participants were then paired and given a different dialogue topic. I chose to use controversial topics for two reasons. First, dialogue is often connected with social justice issues as a critical skill in dealing with these issues. Second, I wanted the topics to expose some background opinions and judgements of participants so that the competencies of suspension and responsiveness could be experienced. If participants had no connections to the topics, then suspending their opinions would be a moot point.

As Greg stated in the focus group, “we have a lot of opinions about reality, which are immediately jogged by the question”.

Although the main purpose of my research design was to have participants experience comic improvisation in order to think about and explore competencies that might have the potential to improve their ability to engage in generative dialogue, it was necessary to have them also experience dialogue in order to frame their understanding. I did not expect the participants to have the ability to generatively dialogue at this point. This is why I am simply using the term dialogue to refer to this activity as opposed to generative dialogue. I limited the opening dialogue sessions to five minutes. My rationale in this timing was to ensure that participants were reasonably comfortable in their attempts to dialogue as they entered the study. I also chose five minutes as a time limit to mimic the experience of the average length of comic improvisation scenes. Based on my previous experience teaching comic improvisation, five minutes is the average length for a scene. I wanted the dialogue experiences to resemble their comic improvisation experiences. My goal was to have participants attempt to apply the competencies of being in the holy insecurity while practicing suspension and being responsive in a dialogue similar to their experience of applying these competencies in comic improvisation. These are difficult competencies to sustain, so I did not want the length of time to vary between the comic improvisation and the dialogues. As will be discussed further, this time limit may not have been the best choice for participants.

Participants were randomly paired up and assigned a dialogue topic. The possible topics were: Prison terms should focus on providing an opportunity for criminals to revision themselves and receive rehabilitation such as drug treatment, education, life skills and training rather than punishment; it is morally acceptable to do

medical experiments on animals that could save human lives; school classes should be segregated by ability to ensure appropriate resources and teaching for each student; affirmative action is necessary to allow marginalized people an opportunity; and when allocating resources in our school system (such as teacher time and materials), equality is not equitable: some students need more resources. Each pair of participants was given an iPod to record their dialogues and a brief demonstration on how to do this recording. Participants then did a sample recording while I circulated with the technician to ensure they were comfortable recording themselves. Participants were then given five minutes to dialogue. I transcribed these dialogues at a later date. Immediately after the dialogues, participants signed up for a time for an interview. I then interviewed all participants one on one.

For the next five Saturdays, the group engaged in two hour comic improvisation workshops. Further discussion on the nature of these activities is located in Chapter Four and a detailed list of activities in Appendix F. Each session began with an introduction from me. This generally gave a focus to the session. For example: "Today we are looking at suspension; this is where we are aware we have ideas in our head, but we hold them separately in order to be responsive and aware of what is going on in the scene. In comic improvisation terms, this is going with the flow." I then led the class through a warm up exercise and game. We then played a series of comic improvisational games. I gave instructions for each game and then asked for volunteers. All participants partook in every game, so each game was played several times. I also acted a host and got suggestions from the audience, who in this case were the players. During the games I coached from the side saying things like: "no- take the offer... accept" or "take your time... show where you are." These sessions were videotaped

using my iPad. I also made field notes after each session. I sent the agenda of the session by email to participants after each session. The participants requested this so that they could remember the games and their structure.

After the five comic improvisation workshops, we had our final or seventh session of the study. We began by reviewing the initial PowerPoint presentation, as used in the Orientation. This was not followed by the same lengthy discussion that had occurred in the first presentation. I then had participants dialogue in assigned pairs and each pair was given a dialogue topic. These topics were the same as the original topics, but I ensured each participant had a different topic. I had originally anticipated having the same pairs as I had constructed for their initial dialogues, but as three participants had dropped out of the study, this was impossible. Because there were now seven participants rather than 10, I had an odd number. As previously noted, one participant had been unable to attend the final session due to illness. I did not want any of the participants to participate in two final dialogues as that would give one participant a different experience than the others. I chose to pair Sam with the technician who had been with us for the first session as well as this final session. The technician had been present for the initial and final PowerPoint presentations, so he was familiar with the study. He had also built a relationship with the participants. I determined that this was the best course of action available given the circumstances. As my goal for the dialogues was simply to better frame participants' understandings rather than actually have a quantitative comparison with the first dialogue, this construct allowed Sam to have a dialogue experience to reflect on following the comic improvisation workshops. The dialogues were once again five minutes long and were audio recorded. Following

the dialogues, I interviewed each participant individually. We then all reconvened for the focus group. The focus group was audio recorded.

3.7. Research Instruments and Procedures

3.7.1. Interviews

A one on one interview was conducted with each of the participants following their initial dialogue before the sequence of comic improvisation workshop sessions began. This was done in the first session of the study. The participants then had five comic improvisation workshops (sessions two to six). On the last and final session (session seven), participants participated in the PowerPoint and a paired dialogue as previously discussed. After the final dialogue activity, another interview was conducted. The pre comic improvisation interviews in the first session had three open-ended questions and the post comic improvisation interviews had the same three questions with two more questions added. All the interview questions were semi-structured, open-ended questions. I designed questions for clarity, understandability and neutrality (Hatch, 2002, p. 102). I worded the questions in simple understandable language. I use concepts that had been previously explained in the presentation and I checked for understanding of these concepts. I also worded questions in a manner that was neutral and tried not to lead participants to particular conclusions. The first question was intentionally built to point participants towards reflections on their ability to be responsive and to practice suspension. The questions were as follows;

1. Describe the experience of trying to listen and be responsive to your partner without preconceptions and opinions interfering.
2. Can you comment on whether there were new ideas and understandings that you gained from this dialogue? Why was this?
3. What was the most challenging part of trying to dialogue with your partner?

Included in the post intervention interview

4. Were there similarities that you experienced in participating in comic improvisation and dialogue?
5. Did the training in comic improvisation assist you in being able to dialogue? If yes, how? If no, why not?

During the individual interviews, I give prompts, asked for additional information and clarification such as “can you tell me more about that?” or “can you explain that again for me.” The interviews were informal, open-ended and were carried out in a conversational style. Due to time constraints, I provided the option of telephone interviews. I indicated on my Consent Forms that, due to the nature of telephones, I could not guarantee confidentiality if this method was chosen. One participant chose this method and was interviewed by phone two days after the initial dialogue. The other nine participants were interviewed in person on the same day as the dialog exercise. All participants were also interviewed individually on the final day of the study after the second dialogue exercise. All participants were provided with a printout of the questions during their interview. I transcribed the responses during the interviews. After completing the interview, I read back the transcript and invited participants to make any

corrections, changes or additions that they felt might better describe their experience and ideas. After including any additions or changes, I read back the interview in its entirety for respondent verification. The interviews generally took 20 to 30 minutes.

3.7.2. Field Notes

As an active participant observer I also observed the participants during the comic improvisation workshops. My role was as both a researcher and teacher/coach of the comic improvisation sessions. Although actively engaged in the process of instruction, I was still observing (Mills, 2011, p. 75). I also found myself doing informal ethnographic interview questions that naturally emerged from the work (Mills, 2011, p. 79). These were questions that came forward during the natural process of reflection that I do as a teacher. For example, “is it getting easier to accept your partner’s offers during a scene?” After each session, I reflected and took field notes. I included my impressions from the ethnographic interview questions in these notes. Each session was also videotaped and was reviewed for the purpose of informing my reflections. I primarily looked for evidence of moving into the holy insecurity, turning to the other and being responsive, practicing suspension and letting go of a plan and creating something new for the first time.

3.7.3. Focus Group

Seven participants were involved in the final focus group. I had the participants join this focus group after their dialogue sessions, surveys and interviews on the final and seventh session. I specifically placed the focus group after the interviews so that

participants could reflect and respond prior to hearing each other's thoughts. I conducted the focus group to collect a shared understanding of the questions and experience (Mills, 2011, p. 83), and I also wanted to lend rigor to the other types of data through triangulation. I also believed that individuals could go deeper into their experiences through listening to each other's thoughts and insights and that the group interaction would provide rich data (Delamont, 2012, p. 406).

Initially, I attempted to allow each participant to have a moment to speak to each question and then after a round was done, had participants respond to each other. I also asked for additional comments before moving on to the next question. I allowed participants to refrain from commenting and many took this option. Every participant chose to verbally engage, but as is frequent in focus groups, some voices were heard more often than others. Although I asked follow up questions for clarification or for more details on the question, I did not attempt to redirect the group when I perceived they were off topic, in order to allow for what might naturally emerge. All participants were provided with a list of the questions immediately before the focus group began. I audio recorded the session and transcribed it. This allowed me to become immersed in the data and to be aware of the nuanced communication of laughter, pauses and tone captured in the audio recording. The focus group questions were as follows:

- 1 Was the idea of moving into the holy insecurity or the unknown in between place evident in your work in comic improvisation? Can you comment on this?
- 2 Were you able to connect your work in comic improvisation to your dialogue in so far as being in the holy insecurity or the unknown in between place? Can you comment on this?

- 3 Was the idea of being responsive, aware and accepting of other people's offers evident in your work in comic improvisation? Can you comment on this?
- 4 Was the idea of being responsive, aware and accepting of other people's offers evident in your work in dialogue? Can you comment on this?
- 5 Were you able to connect your work in comic improvisation into your dialogue in so far as being responsive, aware and accepting of other people's offers'? Do you see that connection in dialogue and Comic Improv?
- 6 Was the idea of co-generating a new creation evident in your work in comic improvisation?
- 7 Was the idea of co-generating a new creation evident in your work in dialogue?

I did not limit myself to the prescribed questions. I also asked questions for clarification as well as probing questions to get a sense of whether a participant had more to share. There were also times where participants asked me for clarification, which I provided. I have examples from the focus group transcript below. I attempted not to influence participants' understandings but to illuminate them. I sometimes probed for clarification with questions such as "so, in the improvisation, did you feel you were in the holy insecurity ... in that place?" or "was there an awareness but not necessarily an application?" I also checked for more thoughts or ideas on a question by prompting with questions such as "so, anything more about being responsive and accepting in comic

improv?” I also sometimes answered participants’ questions by giving information and clarification such as “the idea of being responsive, aware and accepting of other people’s offers is what we are exploring.”

3.7.4. Dialogue

All the dialogue sessions were audio recorded by the participants as previously noted. I later transcribed these audio recorded pre and post dialogues to generate data. I then coded these, looking for competencies associated with the study: moving into the holy insecurity, turning to the other and being responsive, practicing suspension and letting go of a plan and creating something new. The categories I used were: agreement, ideas brought forward, seeking clarification and new ideas that were co-generated. In coding for agreement, I included “yeah,” “uh huh” as well as “that’s a good point” or “I see where you are going with that.” In defining seeking clarification, McNamee and Shotter (2004) described this as “not only paraphrasing but also questioning and clarifying our understanding by contextualizing our own experiences” (p. 93). Instances that were identified as seeking clarity generally included questions on previous ideas brought forward such as “and if the problem is lack of resources, segregation could be one solution?” or “so segregation itself has to be supported by good measurement?” I also included contextualizing comments or questions such as “and so you deal with First Nation’s Aboriginal studies right?” I identified an idea as a co-generated idea when it was built on previous ideas, was surrounded by struggles and pauses and appeared to be new to both participants. I also noted other qualities such as disagreement or cutting off the speaker. In designing the dialogue topics, I constructed what I felt were complex topics that would inspire dialogue. The dialogue pairs were given different topics for the

pre and post dialogues. Initially, I tried to have the pairs remain the same for the pre and post dialogues, but this only ended up being possible for one pair due to attrition of participants in the study. All dialogues were five minutes in duration and were recorded on iPods by the participants. I did not video the focus group as I believed that participants may have been made self-conscious, which would have interrupted the flow. I also believed that the audio was the priority data being generated.

3.8. Process for Data Analysis

Data analysis is a systematic search for meaning. The qualitative researcher is not testing a predetermined hypothesis, as in quantitative research, but is working with the data to allow the connections and meanings to come forward or emerge during the data collection and analysis. I started out with a purpose and some guiding questions, but the specific conceptual categories that built towards themes emerged by working with the data. I also recognize that I moved into this study believing that there were specific connections between comic improvisation and generative dialogue and these were reflected in my research questions. During the data analysis, I made a conscious effort to look for instances where participants did not find these connections or found differences between comic improvisation and dialogue. I also allowed categories to emerge that were unexpected and were generated by the participants. In qualitative research, “analysis means organizing and interrogating data in ways that allows researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques, or generate theories” (Hatch, 2002, p. 148).

I used an inductive data analysis in which I collected as many detailed specifics from the research setting as possible and then began looking for patterns of relationship among the specifics. I moved from the specifics of the data to analytic generalizations. I also used, to a lesser degree, an element of deductive analysis. As patterns or relationships were discovered in the data and hypothetical categories were formed and coded, I then read data deductively to determine whether these categories were supported by the overall data (Hatch, 2002). Still, the overall pattern of data analysis was decidedly inductive.

The interviews and focus group generated data that was coded and examined for common themes that arose. Although I initially considered the use of software for voice recognition, I chose to transcribe the data myself. This allowed me a level of intimacy with the data that became helpful during the coding. I used a data analysis spiral for analysis. This is a reflexive process in which a process of moving in analytical circles is used rather than a fixed linear approach. Themes and sub themes apparent in the data were identified and the data coded. As more data were coded more themes were generated, I went back through the data again. “The analytic challenge for the qualitative researcher is to reduce data, identify categories and connections, develop themes, and offer well-reasoned, reflective conclusions” (Merriam, 2012, p. 353). This is a process of tearing apart and rebuilding abstract conceptual linkages, and it requires synthesis, creative insight, changing one’s lens to reconstruct an interpretation and carefully documenting the process to enhance the credibility of findings (Merriam, 2012). When answering questions in the interviews, participants used different expressions to convey their meanings. The words and phrases I used as coding did not always exactly match

the words used by the participants. As a researcher, I used discretion and intuition to group these into categories.

I used direct interpretation to draw meaning from specific instances. For example, in the focus group Hank asked if method acting is the same as being in the holy insecurity. As Hank is not only asking about the holy insecurity but is also making an incorrect comparison, I interpreted this to mean that he was still unclear about what the holy insecurity was. I also used categorical aggregation or collecting of multiple instances. For example, in the focus group, participants believed that there were instances where they were responsive to the other players in comic improvisation when they were asked if there was evidence of being responsive, aware and accepting of other people's offers in your work in comic improvisation. I then looked through the data generated from the interview questions to see if there were similar answers where participants believed they were able to be responsive in their comic improvisation work. I viewed the video of comic improvisation workshops specifically looking for instances of participants being responsive to each other. I then viewed my field notes for impressions and comments of being responsive during the comic improvisation sessions.

The audio recorded and transcribed dialogues were also analysed to find instances that supported and illustrated the analysis for triangulation of the findings. For example, if a participant indicated that they self-assessed instances of being responsive in their dialogue experience, I was able to reference the recording and transcription of that dialogue. When coding the data, I was informed by the particular characteristics central to my research question. I did, however, allow other themes to emerge and used axial coding to note these. For example, some of the participants articulated a need for

conflict as necessary for generating dialogue and this became a category that I investigated. I continued to comb through the data searching for instances that created new categories until there were no more that emerged. From this analysis, I developed natural generalizations that were applied to answering my research question: whether or not comic improvisation shows potential, as seen by the participants, as a method for gaining competencies and embodied experience and awareness transferable to generative dialogue.

I tried to find methodological triangulation, which is why I used interviews, observations and recordings to validate my findings. For example, after coding my interviews, I would find an emerging theme such as “an increased ability to be responsive.” I examined the focus group transcript to pull out similar themes. I checked my analysis of the actual transcripts to detect whether this was exhibited in the dialogues themselves. I watched the video transcripts and also read my anecdotal notes to see whether an ability brought forward was evident in the progression during the comic improvisation workshops.

3.9. Testing for Reliability, Validity and Trustworthiness

As Denzin and Lincoln (1994) explained, in qualitative research, “terms such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability replace the usual positivist criteria of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity” (p. 14). These are commonly asserted as the criteria for reliability, validity and trustworthiness in qualitative research (Merriam, 2012). Credibility, in short, is the believability of the findings. The credibility is enhanced by triangulation, that is, when conclusions are supported by

multiple sources of data. I designed my study to address the core research questions based on my guiding research questions from a number of sources. I designed my study not to support conclusions, which might lead to a selection bias in my data analysis and interpretation. I was able to draw on six data sources to explore the extent of increased awareness and development of the competencies of being in the holy insecurity, being responsive, practicing suspension and creating something new. The data sources were the dialogue transcriptions, pre and post interviews, the focus group record, as well as the field notes and video records of the comic improvisation workshops. Although all these data sources were relevant to my research question, the comic improvisation video tapes as well as the field notes were only relevant to the comic improvisation workshops and the dialogue transcripts were only relevant to the dialogues. This still gave sufficient sources for interpretation of the findings, to provide triangulation and to describe and contextualize the participants' experiences.

Transferability refers to the generalization of conclusions to other contexts. In that the research entailed a small sample of participants in a qualitative case study context, broad generalizations are not valid. I have, however, provided rich descriptions to contextualize my study. This may enable a reader to judge how relevant the findings are to other instances. I have a clear audit trail and have tried for rich documentation and triangulation as recommended in Merriam (2012), to increase the dependability of my findings. Conformability is not the attempt to be objective, as qualitative research assumes bias, but is an attempt to identify the researcher's biases. I have included a declaration of my perspective and relationship to the research in my documentation and to explained this to my participants as well.

I am using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) definitions of credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability for qualitative research. Credibility entails taking into account the complexities that present themselves in the data. The strategies I used were the collection of raw data such as video of the comic improvisation workshops and the audio recordings and transcriptions of the dialogues. I also checked for understanding with my participants and included these responses in my anecdotal notes. Transferability is the belief that everything is context bound. To reflect the context, in Chapter Four, I include background information about my venue and participants, the topics for the dialogues and detailed descriptions of the comic improvisation workshops. Dependability refers to the stability of the data. I have established a clear trail of documentation such as audio recordings, transcripts, videos, field notes as well as the interviews, and focus group for this study. Confirmability refers to the neutrality of the data collected. As mentioned previously, I provided triangulation of the data as represented. I practiced reflexivity by revisiting the original videos of the comic improvisation and reflecting on my field notes as well as revisiting the dialogue transcripts and audio recordings. I have also overtly identified my biases in Chapter One. This process is based on Guba's criteria as reflected in Mills (2011).

Johnson and Christensen (2014) suggested that for external validity qualitative researchers "should provide information on the number and kinds of people in the study, contextual information, the nature of the researcher's relationship with the participants, the methods of data collection and techniques for data analysis" (p. 306). The reason for this is to provide a process for natural generalization. This allows further researchers to make informed decisions about how and when the results may be generalized. It also allows for replication logic. That is to say, by providing an understanding of the

participants and the context of this study, the findings have an increased generalization if further researchers repeat the study with different sets of people in a different context with similar results. I believe that I have included the information in this study to provide external validity.

3.10. Computer Programs

To record the dialogues and focus group, I used iPods and a simple audio recording program. To video the comic improvisation workshops I used the Movie application installed on my iPad. I used Microsoft Word and Excel to analyze my data according to processes developed by Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003).

3.11. Challenges in the Research Process

The major obstacles that I encountered in the research process dealt with the recruiting and retaining of participants. As I began to recruit, I had difficulty finding participants who were able to commit to my timeline. I had numerous expressions of interest from people who were not able to attend all of the comic improvisation sessions. I chose to reject these participants because missing some of the comic improvisation sessions would limit their experience and understanding. This would then limit their ability to consider the connections between comic improvisation and dialogue. By requiring all participants to attend all seven sessions, I began the study with ten participants instead of the twelve I had hoped for.

I delayed the start date one week, but this did not resolve the situation. During my study, a flu virus broke out in Nanaimo. I had two participants who withdrew from the study due to illness after attending the initial orientation and dialogue session and two comic improvisations sessions. One participant was able to attend all but the final dialogue session. After careful consideration, I chose to withdraw him from the study as well.

My study was not funded and I was working full time for the duration of my research. Limited resources are typical in research (Hatch, 2002). I did not have another researcher to code my findings or verify my observations to increase dependability (Merriam, 2012). I was able to apply axial coding to my data and then step away for weeks and redo the coding to provide a fresh perspective. I also reviewed the video tapes and audio recordings months after the event to reconnect with the originally captured experience.

Chapter 4. The Sessions

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will further describe and discuss what occurred in the seven sessions I had with the participants. My intention here is not to deeply explore the strategies used in these sessions but to explicitly describe what occurred to provide context for the study. As previously stated in Chapter Three, I had two sessions, one at the beginning and one at the end of the study in which I gave a PowerPoint presentation. I also had the participants complete dialogues and interviews in sessions 1 and 7 and, in the last session, I also included a focus group. In this chapter, I give a more detailed account of those sessions. I have also included a description of how I developed the comic improvisation workshops.

4.2. The First Session

The first session was held on October 12, 2013. It was comprised of a welcome, an overview of the study, the initial paired dialogues, and interviews. The first session was the first time the study participants had been together as a whole group. There were, at this point, 10 participants. I had been in email contact with all of them prior to the opening session. I had previously met eight of the participants in two recruitment sessions.

4.2.1. The Beginning

The first and last sessions of my study took place in the research area conference room. This was a large room with wheeled tables that I had formed in a big rectangle. The room had a data projector at the front and a whiteboard. It was an aesthetically pleasing, although fairly formal setting. I introduced myself and also introduced the technician who would be assisting us in the first and last session. I welcomed the participants and asked them to complete a brief background sheet (see Appendix C). As this was the first meeting, initially people were quiet and a little ill at ease.

Once all the participants had arrived, I gave an overview of our planned process. I described the activities we would be doing on this day and also provided an outline of the Saturday sessions. I also told the group that we could have a performance after our seventh session and that this was voluntary and not part of the study. There was some excitement at this announcement. After the initial outline of the opening day, I had participants complete their Consent Forms (see Appendix B) and answered any questions they might have. Once all the Consent Forms were completed, I then had participants introduce themselves. I asked them to say a little something about themselves and also share what brought them to this study.

I then gave a presentation using PowerPoint (see Appendix E) to provide an explanation of the concepts and terms being used in the study such as generative dialogue, the holy insecurity, being responsive and practicing suspension. I also explained the purpose of my study: to explore whether participants perceived an improved ability to engage in dialogue after being actively involved in 5 two hour comic

improvisation training workshops. I wanted to give participants the necessary background and also be transparent in my purpose and process. I invited questions and comments. I was pleasantly surprised at the depth of discussion that arose. Participants were very interested in really understanding the research and the underlying concepts associated with generative dialogue. Every one of them asked questions. Hank wanted to know if his discussion at a recent event on global warming was talking tough or generative dialogue. Bob wanted to understand the nature of the holy insecurity and Greg wanted clarification on the method of inquiry. There was an atmosphere of excitement and enthusiasm. The formerly quiet group was now chatty.

4.2.2. The First Dialogues

After completing the PowerPoint presentation, participants were paired up and each pair was given an iPod. The technician and I ensured that all the participants were instructed and comfortable in using the audio recording application installed on the iPods. Each pair was given a topic for their dialogue and the pairs distributed themselves throughout the conference room and larger common area. I instructed them when to begin and circulated during the dialogues to ensure there were no technical issues. After five minutes, I announced their time was done.

The topics for the dialogues are below.

- 1 Prison terms should focus on providing an opportunity for criminals to revision themselves and receive rehabilitation such as drug treatment, education, life skills and training rather than punishment.

- 2 It is morally acceptable to do medical experiments on animals that could save human lives.
- 3 School classes should be segregated by ability to ensure appropriate resources and teaching for each student.
- 4 Affirmative action is necessary to allow marginalized people an opportunity.
- 5 When allocating resources in our school system (such as teacher time and materials) equality is not equitable: some students need more.

I chose these subjects to provide a topic that would stimulate discussion and bring forward various understandings and points of view. The topics were randomly assigned as were the dialogue partners.

4.2.3. The Interviews

After completing the dialogues, participants reconvened in the conference room. Each participant then signed up for a time for a one on one interview. I individually interviewed all but one of the participants on the same day as the orientation session. The interviews were held in the common area. Each participant was given a copy of the interview questions during the interview. Bob had to leave, so I interviewed him by phone two days later. I have included the interview questions in Appendix E. The interviews were generally fifteen to twenty minutes in length. After the interviews, participants were free to leave.

Following the Introductory Session, the core of the project entailed five workshops in comic improvisation. The workshops were all scheduled across a five week period following the Opening Orientation session. The Workshops were all held on Saturdays, at Vancouver Island University campus and were scheduled for a duration of approximately two hours.

4.3. Teaching Comic Improvisation

The comic improvisation workshops took place over five Saturdays: October 19, to /November 16, 2013. Each of the five comic improvisation workshops had unique elements but also had common features. They always began with a warm up, a series of games and then ended with a brief reflection. Each session had a different focus and the warm ups and games were different. The final session, however, featured games that had been previously played. The games were specifically selected to be progressive for building competencies in comic improvisation. They also reinforced competencies from the previous week. Although selected specifically for a focus, such as being responsive, the games included more than one competency but may have required different levels of skill in those competencies. A detailed description of each workshop is included in in Appendix G. Although these sessions specifically note dialogue competencies, I did not refer to these during the comic improvisation workshops and intentionally used comic improvisation terminology. All the comic improvisation session took place in a large common area. It was well lit with a lot of natural light and had carpet. The Warm Ups

All the comic improvisation sessions took place in a large common area located on Vancouver Island University campus as described above. For each session, we needed to move the couches and seats to provide an open space. This activity almost had the quality of an unofficial warm up for the session. It is standard to include warm ups when working in drama and theatre. These introductory exercises physically warm up the muscles and body. Benedetti (1976) compared an actor's body to an instrument. When a musical group rehearses, they begin with simple exercises and scales to warm up. This concept applies also to actors. Another function of a warm up is to shift participants out of their heads and into action. Warm ups should connect mind and body and bring people out of their heads and back into connection with our bodies or physical self (Benedetti, 1976). Specific warm up activities are also generally chosen to ready the participants for what is to come. "Warm ups are essential to activating the creative problem solving process and giving focus" (Cornett & Smitherim, 2001, p. 45). They also set a fun, interactive collaborative tone for the work.

I always started each session with several warm up exercises. As is standard, I began in a circle. This provides a space where participants can view each other. Although I led the activities, I always also joined in and participated. As mentioned by Cornett and Smitherim (2001), warm ups also introduce the focus for the work that follows. I generally began with some simple stretches and movements. I then introduced a game that would support the comic improvisational principles we would be exploring in the session. For example, in workshop three, I wanted participants to accept other player's offers. Therefore, in the warm up, we played *Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves*. In this game, the group keeps repeating "Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves" and then player one starts making a gesture to this rhythm, say, tapping his/her head with

his/her left hand. When the sentence is repeated, player two takes over this gesture, while the player one starts a completely different gesture. The third time the sentence is done, player three does the first gesture, player two does the second gesture and player one invents a new one again: and so on. This required participants to be aware of the proceeding person's actions as well as a level of focus and concentration. This game also has a physical aspect as well as a vocal one.

4.3.1 Structure of the Workshops

In constructing the individual workshops as well as the series, I made my intentions transparent and overt to the participants (Hattie, 2012). Additionally, I attempted to build and then scaffold skills onto previous knowledge from one activity to another in each workshop as well as from one workshop to the next. For example, in our first workshop, I did a *One Word Circle Story* as part of the warm up. In this warm up, each person added one word as we went around the circle, and in this way we told a story. I then had participants find a partner and build One Word Stories in pairs. I then had them build One Word Stories in pairs with actions. I then moved to the game *Fatal Story* that was done in groups of five. In this game, suggestions from the audience made up a story title. In our workshop, the audience was made up of the group members who were not playing the game. As the host, I pointed at a person who began to make up the suggested story. I then chose a new person who had to continue the story. If anyone paused, was slow to get started, repeated words or did not make sense, they were 'killed.' In a performance this would be done by the host or audience yelling "die!" When 'killed,' the selected person then got to quickly enact his death. The remaining group members continued on to a new story and the game continued until there was a winner. As is evident, the skills were built

on and increased in difficulty. Participants moved from simply stating a word to creating a story. The necessity of being responsive was inherent in all exercises. The first workshop also moved from a relatively safe activity (standing in a circle saying one word) to a more difficult activity that had a higher risk (contributing to a continuing a story).

In comic improvisation workshops, there are always two foci. One focus is the external component, or rules of the game, and the other is the internal component, or competencies for the improvisation (Moshavi, 2001). Both components are necessary for participants to be successful in comic improvisation. In choosing the comic improvisation exercises and games for each workshop, I had a central skill on which I focused (Hattie, 2012). The internal components for development that I chose paralleled the guiding principles of comic improvisation discussed in Chapter Two in my literature review. These comprised of go big or go home (exaggeration), digging deep (facing and staying in the unknown), going with the flow (being aware, accepting and responsive to others' offers), yes and.... (accepting and then adding to offers). In dialogue terminology, I was focusing on being in the holy insecurity, being responsive, practicing suspension and creating something new. I had a specific focus for each workshop with exercises and games that emphasized and reinforced these concepts. By doing this, I was aligning the internal focus with the external structures. Each workshop, however, did not have a discrete internal focus. The very nature of comic improvisation requires attention and ability in all these areas simultaneously. Going with the flow or being responsive, for example, necessitates digging deep and staying in the unknown.

The first comic improvisation workshop, which was the second session of the study, focused on introducing participants to comic improvisation and the concept of digging deep or moving into the holy insecurity. This is an underlying principle that was

continued throughout the workshops. My second comic improvisation workshop, which was the third session of the study, dealt with the theatrical elements of mime and exaggeration. This moved participants into the physical nature of the comic improvisation work. I also included the aspects of scene building: characters, setting and problem solving as a plot construct. Although I focused on the more theatrical elements, the very nature of the work also included common elements of dialogue. For example, in the mime a gibberish game (*In a, with a, what*) participants had to be responsive and accept and build on offers. In the game *Emotional Switch*, in which elements of a scene were experienced, it was also necessary to be responsive and accept offers as well as practice suspension to allow the scene to develop (Balachandra et al, 2005). The third comic improvisation workshop, which was the fourth session in the study, focused on being responsive and applying attention to the offers being made (Harding, 2004). The fourth comic improvisation workshop, which was the fifth session of the study, focused on suspension or letting go of a plan to truly move into the yes... and of comic improvisation. In order to successfully achieve this, however, participants needed to be responsive and present in the moment (Gagnon et al., 2012; Moshavi, 2001). The final workshop, which was the sixth session of the study, was a culminating review of all the previous work. This was an opportunity for participants to actively engage in all the explicit (rules of games) and implicit (principles and guidelines) previously explored. Although I had a specific focus for each workshop, the nature of comic improvisation demanded that these elements or characteristics could not be entirely separated and individually explored. The curriculum was not discrete sequential competencies moved through in a linear fashion, but rather it more closely resembled a spiral where we circled comic improvisation from a slightly different focus inclusive of our previous understandings.

4.3.2 Reflections and checking in

In tying the work to dialogue, I did not consciously draw participants' awareness of the dialogical principles we were reinforcing. I made this choice because it would be confusing for participants to try to gain an understanding of the principles of comic improvisation while at the same time consciously trying to gain an understanding of the principles of dialogue. I intentionally used comic improvisation terminology when commenting on the participants' work during the comic improvisation workshops. I directed using comic improvisation terminology like "go with the flow" or "accept the offer" and did not use dialogue terminology like "be responsive" or "suspend your thoughts."

Another reason that I did not use dialogue terms during the comic improvisation sessions is that one principle of comic improvisation does not necessarily directly translate to one principle of dialogue although there are some that are closely related. For example, digging deep and being in the unknown in comic improvisation closely resembles the holy insecurity of dialogue. In my opinion, these two terms can almost be interchangeable. Going with the flow and accepting the offers of others are closely tied to being responsive, but they also necessitate being aware of your own image of the scene and holding that back. This holding back is very similar to suspending your own perceptions and opinions to truly hear the other speaker in dialogue. The yes and... principle of comic improvisation is similar to two principles in dialogue. In dialogue terms, the yes is being responsive as well as practicing suspension. As illustrated here, although possible, using both terminologies would be very confusing and dialogue terms are not specifically created for use in comic improvisation. I also did not want to

influence participants in making connections from the comic improvisation to the generative dialogue by specifically using dialogical terms. I wanted to later explore if they made connections informed by their work in comic improvisation rather than making connections by my use of generative dialogue terms during their work in comic improvisation.

The curriculum I used was based on previous comic improvisation courses that I taught at Vancouver Island University (2003, 2004). The VIU course entailed seven sessions and was designed for novice participants. This course was built based on my previous work in Victoria, BC (1994-1997) as a director and troupe member of the *Impromaniacs*. I did not do any significant adjustments to the curriculum for this study. I was, however, aware of the overlapping focus of generative dialogue. During the delivery of the five session of the comic improvisation course, comparisons did come up in our reflections but not significantly or frequently. Although participants had been introduced to generative dialogue, they were naturally focused on the comic improvisation.

I checked for understanding of comic improvisation structures and competencies throughout the workshops. This was partially an element of instructional strategy to check for understanding. I was also assessing whether participants were able to understand what we were trying to achieve or focus on. I asked questions like: “does that make sense?” or “what was being offered there?” I also checked for understanding on a more conceptual level. I believe I was more aware of the underlying competencies being explored due to my research than when I have previously instructed comic improvisation. Although I did not use the terms, I felt I was drawing participant’s awareness of being responsive or being in the holy insecurity more than I normally might

have. I also allowed for deeper reflection than I might normally have during a series of comic improvisation workshops. This allowed me to better understand the participants' perception of the experience. I asked questions like "how did it feel today when" I also found myself clarifying my observations as researcher. For example, "it looked like people are still having difficulty letting go of their own ideas and accepting and developing the offers that are coming forward. What do you guys think?" Or "it looks like it is getting easier to stay present in the moment and trust something will come. Is it?" I was aware that I was acting as researcher at these moments more than director or facilitator. I do believe, however, that it also enriched the work for the participants.

The group eagerly participated in reflecting on their work. During the first session, for example, we played *Whole Group One Word Story*. After the game some interesting observations came forward. Jess suggested that it was like a tennis game where you had to run and hit the ball wherever it was coming from. Murray, who teaches English as a second language, was extremely aware of the types of words that were being used (adjectives, propositions, verbs) and the results of placement and usage. Greg even asked: if your word was an article or preposition, could you add another word? I agreed and we tried the game again. When we played *One Word Story* in pairs with actions, Bob found the actions helped forward the story while Hank found the actions to be distracting. This is typical of the active engagement the participants displayed throughout the study (see Appendix F: Anecdotal notes).

4.4. The Final Session

The final or seventh session of the study took place on November 23, 2013. Similar to the previous sessions, we began at ten o'clock. The session was held in the conference room that we had been in during the first session, as opposed to the open area used for the comic improvisation workshops. The process for the day was written on a whiteboard and I explained the plan for the session. I began with the PowerPoint presentation. There were very few questions or comments and this went quickly. The lively discussion that occurred during the first session did not happen this time. After the PowerPoint presentation, participants were paired for the dialogues, then given iPods and topics. Other than reviewing the iPod instructions and the time limit, I did not give any other instructions. As the structure for the dialogues was the same as in the first session, participants did not ask any further instructions. There were only two pairs that had the same partners as the first session because three participants had left the study. I assigned all participants a topic different from that which they received in the opening session. This was exactly the same process as their initial dialogues, with the dialogues being conducted in a five minute time period. Things went smoothly and quickly. After their dialogues, participants signed up for their individual interview times and were interviewed by me. Food, water and coffee were provided in the conference room while I conducted the interviews in the common room. The technician remained in the conference room as he would be needed for taping the focus group. Participants were instructed not to talk about the dialogues or their interviews. Participants did not congregate in the conference room and most left before and after their interviews. As in the first interviews, each participant was given a copy of the questions. I transcribed

while I interviewed. After each interview I read back the questions and answers to seek agreement and made any additions or changes participants suggested.

After the last interview, I gathered the participants for the focus group. As we gathered, we had to wait 15 minutes. At this point participants were becoming more interested in talking about the dialogues and the study but I reminded them to “wait for it.” The technician attended both the focus group and the dialogue sessions. The focus group was audio taped from two sources. Because I felt a video camera might be distracting, only audio was recorded. The focus group seemed to be an enjoyable experience with lively discussion and a lot of laughter. It felt like a culminating experience where participants were eager to share their thoughts. The relationship that had been built during the sessions was evident. The group enjoyed being together. After the focus group, participants were thanked for their time and dispersed.

4.5. No Show

There was initial interest in having an opportunity to perform comic improvisation. This was never meant to be part of my study, but I wanted to give participants an opportunity to invite friends and family to showcase their new skills. Unfortunately, this did not occur. The five comic improvisation sessions had provided participants with enough competency to give a short demonstration, and I felt confident in volunteering this opportunity. However, because the sessions ended in December, which is a busy month for many people, the participants had obligations that minimized availability. We spent time and trying to schedule a time that worked. The suggestion was also made that we could also try to find time in January, but I insisted that if this was done, we

would need to have a rehearsal to refresh our skills. In the end, two of the participants were not available in January. It was disappointing for some of the participants that this performance did not happen. The willingness to perform showed the enthusiasm that this group brought to our work.

Chapter 5. Data Analysis

5.1. Introduction

Some qualitative researchers prefer to describe their process as understanding of data instead of an analysis of the data (Merriam, 2012). I find myself oriented towards seeking to understand the data in my analysis. What drew me initially to this study was the desire to explore the connections I was making from comic improvisation to dialogue. My experience with comic improvisation informed my understanding of dialogue. My analysis will provide an examination of the participants' experiences of participating in comic improvisation training and then their assessment of if and how this connected to generative dialogue. I also wanted to explore whether the comic improvisation training affected their understanding of dialogue.

I hope my analysis will generate new perspectives and understandings, reveal possible interconnecting themes and provide useful insights. The data analyzed included the pre and post interviews and the focus group. I further informed my findings with my observation notes, videotaped comic improvisation sessions and the paired dialogue transcripts. The task of reviewing such a complex dataset was daunting. I cannot completely describe all that occurred, but by providing explicit lenses to examine the data, I hoped to identify some emerging themes that came forward for the seven participants in this study. As Merriam (2012) described "the depth afforded by qualitative analysis is believed by many to be the best method for understanding the complexity of educational practice" (p.352). In analyzing my data, I first wanted to verify that the

participants experienced the competencies that I have identified as common in both generative dialogue and in comic improvisation during their experience of comic improvisation. These competencies are reflected directly in my research sub questions in Chapter One. I identified the purpose of my research as exploring the potential of comic improvisation training workshops as a means to develop enhanced understanding of dialogue and new approaches to develop competencies to engage in dialogue.

The dialogue competencies explored were specifically:

- Moving into the holy insecurity – the unknown in between place
- Turning to the other and being responsive and seeing the other person as emerging and whole.
- Heightened meta awareness with suspension: being aware of your preconceptions and judgments without allowing them to block new understandings.
- Letting go of a plan and creating something new for the first time.

The first task I chose to do in my analysis was to verify that participants experienced these dialogue competencies in the comic improvisation workshops. I returned to the previously identified competencies to use as a lens to view the data through. This is an important practice for a case study as it “leads to a focused analysis that is [defined within] the scope of the research question” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 155). For this analysis, I used the Second Interviews and focus group transcripts because I explicitly questioned participants on their experience in comic improvisation in regards to the dialogue competencies. In the focus group, I asked participants if each of the

competencies were evident in their work in comic improvisation. For example, I asked “was the idea of being in the holy insecurity, that unknown place, evident in your work in comic improvisation?” I then asked them to comment on this. A similar question was asked for the other competencies. In the Second Interviews, I asked participants if there were similarities they experienced in comic improvisation and dialogue and also asked if and how the comic improvisation assisted them in dialoguing. I also triangulated my findings with my observation notes as well as the videotapes of the comic improvisation workshops. I then examined whether these dialogue competencies were experienced by the participants in their dialogues. For this piece of my analysis, I used the pre and post interviews, the focus group and the dialogue transcriptions. I specifically looked at data generated from questions that referenced the dialogues. For instance, in the interviews, I asked: “What was the most challenging part of trying to dialogue with your partner?” In the focus group, I asked: “Was the idea of being responsive evident in your work in dialogue?” There are numerous prompts I used to generate data on the participants’ experience and understanding of dialogue. I will identify these as I move forward analyzing the data.

The pre and post interviews and the focus group were then coded using a data analysis spiral approach (Cresswell, 1998). From this coding, common themes emerged, I then examined the data to find multiple occurrences of these instances and triangulate these themes. I ended my analysis in examining the interviews and focus group transcript to specifically investigate what participants perceived in regards to dialogue after being actively involved in five two hour comic improvisation training workshops.

5.2. Comic Improvisation Workshops

5.2.1. Being in the Holy Insecurity

First, I examined my data to discover whether participants perceived an awareness of experiencing these competencies in the comic improvisation workshops. All of these competencies were introduced in the initial dialogue session in my PowerPoint presentation, and this presentation was also repeated at the final dialogue session.

Being in the holy insecurity is being present in a moment where the next moment is “the unforeseeable, every changing and [with] ever new situations” (Buber, 1948, p. 24). During the focus group, I asked participants if they believed the idea of being in the holy insecurity was evident in their work in comic improvisation. I also asked them to comment on this. Six of the seven participants explicitly gave statements in which they indicated that during comic improvisation, they believed they experienced being in the holy insecurity at times although one participant, Hank, was a little uncertain. Hank mentioned that not knowing his character was a place of insecurity. Based on my own experience in comic improvisation, I believe this indicates an example of being in the holy insecurity. Walking onto the stage and not knowing who you are playing is definitely a moment of walking into the holy insecurity. He also went on to add that he was “still not really sure about this holy insecurity.” Later, in the focus group, Hank further explained that he was not sure whether he achieved being in the holy insecurity. Bob, when answering the focus group question on experiencing the holy insecurity during the comic improvisation, stated that “I was sometimes able to do it [be in the holy

insecurity] depending on the game.” Bob later described comic improvisation as “absolutely not knowing what was going on and what would happen next.” He also commented on how in “acting you have a role and script. You have something to guide you but with this [comic improvisation] you are winging it.” Jess had a deeper understanding of the holy insecurity; he said that “there were moments that I achieved that but it was difficult. It is not a very easy thing to get into.” Murray agreed that it was experienced some of time; he commented: “It was very difficult to get into – obviously we were there at times.” Mark commented on developing the competency during the comic improvisation sessions; he described how “it became easier to sit there in that place of unknowing.” Greg had a similar experience when he stated that “the more familiar you are with the process, the more you are able to suspend your anxiety and go into that moment.” Sam described being in the holy insecurity in comic improvisation as “it is like suddenly jumping into it.”

In exploring the perceptions of the participants in regards to the holy insecurity, I went back to the video tapes of the comic improvisation workshops and my notes. In the second comic improvisation workshop or third session of the study, my notes on the post discussion indicated that “there was agreement from participants that the talking over was nervous energy and a resistance to sitting in the holy insecurity.” This came from a brief reflection at the end of the workshop where I simply asked participants to share how the workshop went for them. The term holy insecurity had not been referenced by me in this discussion but by one of the participants. Participants also stated that they were “uncomfortable with silence.” This discomfort with any silence or pause was also very evident when viewing the video tape of this session. Participants were constantly

talking over and interrupting each other. This silence is the moment of 'what next?' It was the beginning of an awareness of the holy insecurity.

As this was only the second session, it was not surprising that this silence, which seems to go on endlessly when performing, was uncomfortable for participants. People naturally want to know what they are supposed to do or say and what is about to happen.

In my notes on the fifth and final comic improvisation workshop, I noted that "the digging deep into the holy insecurity is still difficult for participants." This was further evident when I viewed the video tapes. A specific example occurred during this final comic improvisation workshop in the game *First Line; Last Line*. In this game, participants were given a scripted first line and a scripted last line. They then were asked to build a scene based on suggestions from non-playing participants that included these two lines. When playing this game, participants sometimes simply found a way to insert the last line into the scene in order to end the scene rather than staying in the uncomfortable place of the holy insecurity until something developed. Based on my experience in comic improvisation, this would suggest that even in the fifth comic improvisation workshop, participants are still struggling to stay in that uncertain feeling and dig deep to let something emerge naturally. This was not to say, however, that participants were not experiencing the holy insecurity. Even in session two, participants spoke of an awareness of being in the unknowing place during our debrief discussion. From this, I concluded that participants experienced the holy insecurity but were not always able to develop the scene past it. This pointed to a lack of skill in improvisation as opposed to a lack of awareness of being in the holy insecurity.

5.2.2. **Listening and Being Responsive, Aware and Accepting other People's Offers**

Being responsive is to be accurately aware of others and to see them as emerging as opposed to static. In the focus group, I asked if participants saw evidence of being responsive, aware and accepting of other people's offers in their work in comic improvisation. All participants agreed that being responsive was evident in their work in comic improvisation. Jess stated that "yes [I] was able to be responsive for the most part." Greg acknowledges that "yes [responsiveness] was there." Most participants went further and stated how they were aware of what necessitated being responsive and assessed their ability to do it. Bob commented: "in the last comic improvisation workshop everything was accepted, everything was responsive." This suggested a sense, on Bob's part, of a progressive improvement by the group on their ability to be responsive in the sessions. Murray described the process as follows: "I found there was really a need to listen and work with the other person. Like when you are talking about the I-It and I-Thou and making that transition so that's been a huge learning process for me." Here, he was referencing the Buber quotes that I had included in the PowerPoint shown in the first and final sessions of the study. He also connected this with his work in comic improvisation in regards to being responsive. This was particularly noteworthy, because I never referenced this concept outside the PowerPoint presentations. I did not use the term during the comic improvisation sessions or in the focus group questions. Murray was connecting the competencies for dialogue described in the PowerPoint to his work in comic improvisation. Murray also noted: "the idea of accepting what the other person says ...it puts you in the place of where can we go from here." This idea connected to the concept that being responsive is necessary for new ideas to emerge

and be generated. Sam commented that it was pleasant to have someone else be responsive to you when he stated: “going with the flow and having a reaction that is positive.”

In my notes on the second comic improvisation workshop, I observed participants talking over each other or talking at the same time. These interactions are a clear indication of not being responsive because talking over another player means that the player is not fully aware of what the other player is doing or offering. I previously described in Chapter 2 that an offer in comic improvisation is an idea brought forward by a player. In viewing the videotapes of the second comic improvisation workshop, I saw that my notes were correct and that participants were indeed talking over each other and not listening to or developing each other’s offers. For example, Bob and Jess were playing *Emotional Switch*. This game requires the audience to provide suggestions for two emotions and a setting. Each player is assigned an emotion and as they move through the scene, they have to find motivation to switch to the other players’ emotion. The scene was played in a bakery with Bob’s emotion being thrilled and Jess’s emotion being jealous. Bob began the scene by excitedly racing around eating cakes and doughnuts. Jess entered the scene and Bob asked him if he liked doughnuts. Jess stated that he could not eat doughnuts. At this point, Bob talked over Jess and he continued to excitedly describe all the baked goods. In this example, Bob was so busy establishing that his character was excited to be in a bakery that he did not suspend in order to listen and respond to Jess’s offer. At the end of the same scene, Bob said that he wished he could have Jess’s stun gun. Jess ignored this request and continued the scene without giving Bob his stun gun or even addressing Bob’s request for it. At this stage, participants were not even listening to each other.

Later on in the same session, Mark and Murray were also playing *Emotional Switch*. The audience suggested a paint store as a setting. Mark played an old man who was depressed. Murray entered the scene playing a customer who was happy. He began demonstrating his happiness by describing all the wonderful colours he saw in the store. Mark approached him and quietly asked for help choosing a colour. Murray ignored him and continued to describe the colours that he saw. He was not being responsive to Mark. Later on in the scene, Mark asked Murray to help him as he was old and had had an accident. Murray said that he would help him but did not and continued the scene by talking about getting old. He did not reject Mark's offer, but he was not being responsive by truly acknowledging and helping Mark.

In a post discussion during the second comic improvisation workshop I documented that "everyone agreed that saying yes was a huge shift in their thinking." In the third comic improvisation workshop, we played the game *Experts*. This game requires two players to speak as one person who is an expert in a field. The field is supplied by an audience suggestion. The audience (in this case the other participants) then ask questions to the expert. This game was played several times and progressed quite smoothly. In my notes, I documented that in the post discussion of this session, I asked why participants thought this game worked so well. In response, participants said that it worked because they built on the previous words and that all answers were accepted. This is a clear example of being responsive to each other. They heard each other and felt heard themselves. In the fourth comic improvisation workshop, I documented that "offers are made and acknowledged now but skipped over rather than dug into." What I meant by *skipping over* an offer was that the offer may have been heard but received no response. For instance, in my previous example, Mark asked

Murray for help and Murray said yes but did not actually help him. Murray skipped over that offer which would have developed the scene. Participants were at the beginning stages of responsiveness with this acknowledgement. They hear an offer but did not necessarily develop it.

This was particularly evident in the game *In a, With a, What* that was played in the second comic improvisation workshop. The structure of this game requires less responsiveness from the players and may have been more appropriate for this stage of development compared to the other games such as *Emotional Switch*, which was also played in the second workshop. *In a, With a, What* requires each player to transmit the audience suggestions to the next player. One player focuses on transmitting the information while the other player focuses on receiving it. The videotape of this session showed that players entered the scene and focused on and often mimicked the first player. In the structure of this particular game, participants do not need to jointly develop the scene. Given the structure of the game, it is easier to achieve responsiveness. As previously discussed in the more complicated game of *Emotional Switch*, participants needed to respond to each other; therefore, they found it more challenging.

In the fifth and final comic improvisation workshop, I noted an increase in the ability to be responsive and accept and develop offers. This clearly indicated a progression in the competency of being responsive from the second comic improvisation workshop to the fifth comic improvisation workshop. However, when viewing the videotapes, my assessment was a little less positive. Many offers were still being acknowledged but not developed or missed altogether. As director, I was still cueing the participants at times. Nonetheless, in fifth comic improvisation workshop participants

were much better at being responsive than they were in the second workshop. In workshop five, when the scenes worked (and there were always moments when they did), the offers were heard, accepted and developed. An example of this can be seen in a scene in workshop five during the game *First Line Last Line*. In this particular scene, two participants were in an aerobics studio and one participant made the offer of a jack hammer. This jack hammer was used to shift the aerobic exercise and eventually to redesign the studio. This offer was fully developed and provided a vehicle for the participants to eventually find an ending with their last line. There were no scenes in workshop two where an offer was developed to this depth. The videotapes also showed an increase in this competency, indicating an increase in responsiveness in comic improvisation, and it supports the participants' descriptions of their experiences as stated in the focus group.

5.2.3. Suspension in Comic Improvisation

“Suspension requires us to become aware of our own thoughts, judgments and opinions and then slightly separate from them and hold them up for others to examine” (Jones, 2007, p.4). In comic improvisation, it is necessary, if not vital, to suspend one's own ideas. When a player receives suggestions for a scene, often a vision for the whole scene pops in the player's head. The other players in the scene obviously do not share this vision. If the player continues with his/her own idea, the ideas of the other players are over ridden and offers from other participants are not responded to. If players are aware of their own ideas but are able to separate from them and still be responsive to the other players, they are practicing suspension.

There was evidence of a lack of suspension in the video and my notes in session two when participants talked over each other. They already had an idea for the scene and were struggling to suspend it. In the previously mentioned scene of *Emotional Switch* with Murray and Mark, Murray knew he had to find a motivation to switch from being happy to being depressed. When Mark entered the scene as an old man, Murray decided he would use aging as a reason to become depressed. He commented on how hard it must be to get old. He actually began a monologue on his feelings about aging. He was unable to separate from this idea and be present in the scene, so the action stopped. I cued Murray to take the offer and help. In viewing the video of this session, Murray could actually be overheard saying that he “can’t turn off the monologue in his head” as he sat down after the scene. Murray was not able to practice suspension, but he was becoming acutely aware of it.

In the focus group, Bob described a similar awareness that did not move into his practice when he said: “I was not responding properly or maybe thinking I was directing.” This was a wonderful example of when the inability to suspend one’s own thoughts interferes with the ability to respond. This was an example of the meta-cognitive awareness of not being able to hold back his ideas; thus, he referred himself as the director. Although Bob spoke of his inability, it indicated he was aware of when he was suspending and when he was not. Murray spoke of finding it difficult to suspend his own agenda: “we had to wrap it up ... and I found myself trying to manipulate the dialogue so we could get to that end without making it seem like I was.” The very fact that Murray was aware of pushing his own agenda towards an end revealed awareness and sometimes an ability to suspend. In response to Bob’s comment, Jess spoke of being aware and “sometimes wondering how I am going to push this in that direction.” This

was another example of a meta-cognitive awareness. In this instance, the participant was aware that he was not suspending as he was inserting, or trying to insert, his own agenda into the game. In my notes on session five, I stated that overall “suspension seems to be improving.” This was also evident by a decrease in participants’ talking over each other during scenes. In the early sessions, when I view the videotapes of two person scenes, participants talk at the same time and did not make eye contact with each other. In the later sessions, participants were speaking one at a time and were making frequent eye contact with each other. Participants were becoming more aware of each other’s offers and listening rather than simply moving forward with their own ideas. This was not evident, however, in four person scenes. For example, in session four, Bob, Jess, Mike and Hank were in a scene together. At one point three of them were talking at the same time. Jess asked for help finding his stethoscope while Mike was talking over him describing the drinks on his tray while Bob was dancing and describing his moves. All of them were clearly trying to develop their own idea for the scene. Four person scenes are more difficult and require additional focus. Participants appeared to struggle and resumed their inability to suspend their ideas and be responsive to each other to allow new offers to be heard and developed.

5.2.4. Creation out of the Blue

In defining creation out of the blue in regards to dialogue, Shields and Edwards (2005) mentioned the qualities of no “predetermined direction nor a specific anticipated outcome” (p. 142). McNamee and Shotter (2004) wrote of “a special kind of first time creativity ... the creation out of the blue” (p. 94). The concept of creation out of the blue is a quality inherent in comic improvisation. There was not a term or guideline that was

referenced during the comic improvisations to describe this. To complete a game you must, by necessity, create something new. I am not, however, analyzing the nature of comic improvisation but my participants' experience with it. Did they experience creating something new in comic improvisations?

In the focus group, I asked whether there was evidence of co-generating a new creation in their work in comic improvisation. All participants verbally agreed that something new was co-created in their comic improvisation work. I feel confident stating there was consensus on this. Sam noted that "something was expected to come out of it and then something else came out of it." Mike also spoke of this surprising element when he stated that "before you know it, you have just bought something and you have no idea what it is." Jess made a comment that generated nonverbal agreement from the rest of the participants when he answered my question on whether the co-generation of a new creation was evident in the work in comic improvisation, he answered: "Yes, you can't do the whole Comic Improv thing without something else starting or adding." This creation was evident in every session on the videotape as developing scenes based on audience suggestions always required a new creation.

This creation initially began the scene, but other new ideas were needed to co-develop and continue the scene. In my notes, I commented in the first comic improvisation session: "often times, people were stuck in the 'what next' place after the initial activity was done, but sometimes they broke through and began to create something new." An example of this creativity was seen in the third comic improvisation session. Greg, Mark and Sam were playing *Stand, Sit and Lie Down*. In this game, there must always be one person standing, one person sitting and one person lying down. If one person moves from sitting to standing, for example, then the previously

standing person must sit down. The setting of the scene is a cell phone company. As the scene opened Mark said: “Oh I am so tired I am going to take a nap.” After some silence, Sam said: “Yeah a nap sounds good” and laid down. Mark then stood and said: “I think I will stretch.” This shifting of who was taking the nap continued. The scene was going nowhere. Finally, Greg asked: “How can we drum up some business?” From this offer, a new idea was created and all three players began drumming and singing to attract business.

Jess stated later in the focus group that “the biggest co-generation was the one word story.” He was referencing an exercise that we did during the first comic improvisation workshop. This is a fairly low skill game. Participants tell a story by each saying one word while standing in a circle. This is a common warm up game as it requires each player to hear the previous person’s word and respond appropriately so that the story flows and makes sense. He saw this as an excellent example of co-generation as “you are all creating this big thing that without the other people doesn’t work.” Although this game does not require much ability to be responsive, as each player is only required to respond to and add one word, it was one of the only times that all participants contributed to creating one thing together as a group.

5.3. The Dialogues

When analyzing the participants’ experience of dialoguing, the first thing I wanted to examine was an awareness of being in the holy insecurity, listening and being responsive, practicing suspension and creating or generating new ideas or understandings. I then analyzed the data to see whether there was a perceived increase in these competencies for the participants. The increased awareness of the

competencies being explored and the ability to apply these competencies are linked but have differences worth teasing out. For example, participants may not have been able to suspend their thoughts and preconceptions in dialogue, but there may have been an increased awareness of the process of suspension from the comic improvisation experience. If evident, this increased awareness, or recognition, is significant as this could be considered a prerequisite to application. It is plausible that this competency would become more pronounced with more practice or in a longer dialogue if the participants had gained some understanding and increased awareness of this competency. I analyzed the participant interviews and the focus group discussion in light of these considerations and also referenced the dialogue transcripts and audio recordings.

5.3.1. Being in the Holy Insecurity

When examining participants' responses to being in the holy insecurity, I must acknowledge that this was a new term and a new concept for them. Unlike being responsive or creating a new understandings or idea, participants were generally not previously aware of this competency and I believed that they would not have a clear understanding of it until after they had experienced the comic improvisation. I specifically questioned participants about their ability to be in the holy insecurity in the second dialogue during the focus group.

During the focus group, Mark described "dwelling in the holy insecurity to create space for building understandings." He was aware of being in the holy insecurity. Bob said: "I kept in mind the holy insecurity as something I was trying to find, but I didn't find

it.” He had an awareness of what being in the holy insecurity was and assessed his inability to achieve it in the second dialogue. Greg said: “you have to un-package [your understandings of the topic] first before you even get to the point where you can be holy insecure.” This illustrated a confident understanding of what the holy insecurity was and an acknowledgement that he was not able to achieve it in the time provided. Jess described: “the insecurity in the dialogue portion is a more subtle restrained insecurity.” His ability to compare being in the holy insecurity in dialogue to comic improvisation also demonstrated that he had an understanding of what it was. Bob explained: “I remember sort of experiences [in comic improvisation] of being totally and absolutely not know what is going to happen next and liking it and wanting that for the dialogue.” Using his experience in comic improvisation, he was aware of what being in the holy insecurity and was therefore more aware of trying to find that experience in the dialogue. He went on to say: “I don’t think I got there but I think I was aware of it.” In the Second Interview, I asked if there were similarities experienced when participating in comic improvisation and dialogue. Bob felt that there was a similarity, which was the ability “to be comfortable in that uncertainty and know something good will come and trust it will be positive and new”. I believe that Bob had an awareness of being in the holy insecurity that was informed by the comic improvisation and that he could apply this understanding to dialogue although not necessarily achieve the competency.

During the focus group, I explicitly asked for clarification of whether “there was an awareness but not necessarily an application of being in the holy insecurity.” Two participants verbally agreed, and there were a number of nods and nonverbal affirmations. There was also a general agreement that it was much easier to be in the holy insecurity during comic improvisation. In the focus group, there were nine

comments that declared how difficult it was to be in the holy insecurity during comic improvisation. Because participants acknowledged that it was even more difficult in dialogue, this indicated it was perceived as very challenging. Jess spoke of the difficulty of going to the holy insecurity in dialogue when he described: “being able to step into the insecure where you both ... let’s take that instance where both sides are so firmly entrenched that there is no unknown. Both sides are totally correct.”

By these comments, I can conclude that participants had an awareness of what being in the holy insecurity was during the experience of the comic improvisation training. In the f focus group, Greg stated: “I walk away feeling more comfortable with the holy insecurity.” This inferred an ability to be in the holy insecurity. The data is a little conflicting because participants referenced being in the holy insecurity and then struggling to get there. In the focus group, five participants referenced being in the holy insecurity. For example Murray described: “you both have your own view point and then trying to establishing what the view point is and going from there into the holy insecurity.” I conclude that there were moments when participants felt they were edging into the holy insecurity in their dialogue but perceived it as fleeting and difficult.

5.3.2. Listening and Being Responsive

McNamee and Shotter (2004) describe being responsive to the other as “being aware of what is actually being said and happening by moving into the present and being attentive” (p. 94). In examining the competency of being responsive and listening, I must assume that participants have practiced this competency previously. They were walking in with some experience. As one participant was actually a counsellor, to

presume he had never deeply listened and been responsive would be impossible. In fact, in our initial interview this participant stated: "I can't say that I am a naive subject matter as I have been a counsellor." All participants claimed to have had some understanding and practice in this ability. My study was to examine whether or not there was an increased awareness of this competency.

Because this was a competency more familiar to participants, I specifically asked in all the interviews "to describe the experience of trying to listen and be responsive." In the first interview, participants were able to discuss this competency. There were, however, some misconceptions. Bob stated: "We were always waiting to see who would speak. Normally, I would let that silence go, but here I was aware that it was dialogue so I spoke. I was able to do this - be responsive." However, filling the silence with a response is not actually being responsive. If you are involved in the act of deeply listening, you need to take some time to process and consider what has been said. I consider that minimizing silences and pauses would more accurately be described as having a ready response; thus, you are not being responsive. A quick response may be more accurately described as listening to reload, which is explicitly noted as uncharacteristic of generative dialogue (Gunnlaugson, 2007, p.46). Bob had quite a different answer to the same question in the Second Interview when he described being "aware on a metacognitive level where I tried to [be responsive] than when I tried to in the first dialogue. This time I was aware in my body." He further connected this directly to the comic improvisation workshops when he reasoned: "I think it has a lot to do with this five week embodied experience of the workshops." This certainly spoke to an increase in a perceived awareness of being more responsive in the second dialogue compared to the first. The second dialogue audiotapes contained segments where Bob

and his partner had two extended pauses or moments of silence. This was less evident in the first dialogue.

During the Second Interview, when asked about the experience of being responsive in the second dialogue, Hank reflected: “I think we interacted more than last time, more probing.” As previously discussed in Chapter Two, being responsive is about being attentive and being relational. When Hank spoke of being interactive and probing, this can be interpreted as describing the process of seeking to understand, which is necessary to be responsive. In dialogue, thoughts and meanings are not assumed but are explored (Baxter, 2004). Hank’s probing and interacting in his second dialogue referenced this quality of exploration.

In both interviews I asked participants to describe the experience of trying to listen and be responsive to their partners without preconceptions and opinions interfering. There is a depth of answers in the Second Interviews that did not appear in the first. For example, Jess stated in his Second Interview that listening and being responsive, although he was able to do this, was “definitely not natural ... not what we are trained to do.” What made this even more interesting was that Jess felt it was “not terribly difficult” to listen and be responsive when answering the same question in the first interview. His ability to understand how difficult being truly responsive was spoke to a heightened awareness of what constituted being responsive after completing the comic improvisation workshops. When Bob, in the Second Interview, talked about “an increased meta-cognitive awareness coming from the recognition of the embodied experience” of the comic improvisation. This is a very complex answer that demonstrates a deep understanding of being responsive. I never referenced an embodied experience in my PowerPoint or my comments. There was one slide that had

the term metacognitive, but it was not specifically in reference to being responsive and was only used once and not referred to again. In the Second Interview when asked whether there were similarities in participating in comic improvisation and dialogue, Bob answered that there was “the ability to be open, responsive, to suspend”. In the focus group, when asked about the ability to be responsive in dialogue, Bob stated: “I was just aware that this is what we wanted to do. I was aware even more so than the first dialogue that of trying to be responsive and willing to just go for it wherever he was.” In putting together Bob’s comments, he was consistently demonstrating an understanding of the components necessary for being responsive. In general, based on the responses in the interviews and focus group, I feel confident in stating that participants’ perceived their awareness of the process of being responsive as having increased.

When reviewing the audio taped dialogues, the first dialogues were quicker in response times. Participants responded to each other with fewer and shorter gaps between speaking. There were times when participants were talking over and interrupting each other. This, of course, was not responsiveness but could possibly be misconstrued as such by participants in their first dialogues. Having few gaps and pauses also feels like a more natural flow. As discussed earlier in this section, a slowing down of response time might be seen as a positive indicator of responsiveness but may not have been perceived this way by participants. Pauses and silences feel awkward. The very fact that participants had a better understanding of what constitutes a generative dialogue may have also created a heightened awareness of trying to implement these elements. Taking time to consider the ideas of a dialogue partner would slow down the process. I did not specifically question participants on response times. Two participants did reference this, however, in the Second Interviews. In

answering the question whether there were any similarities between participating in comic improvisation and dialogue, Sam replied: “it is very similar. There is a normal slow flow of things so there is a response time.” When asked in the Second Interview what the biggest challenge in dialogue was, Bob replied: “trying to slow down.” This comment is particularly noteworthy when compared to Bob’s initial response in the first interview, referenced earlier, where he refers to minimizing silence time as being responsive. Based on the comments of these two participants, there seemed to be an awareness of the importance of slowing down to process when dialoguing.

In the both of the interviews following the dialogues, participants were asked to describe the experience of trying to listen and be responsive to their partner without preconceptions and opinions interfering. Six participants felt they were able to listen to their partners during the dialogue in both interviews. In the first interview, four participants felt they were able to be responsive and in the Second Interview six did. Five participants specifically mentioned they felt they had improved in their ability to be responsive and listen compared to the first dialogue, and five mentioned an increased awareness of trying to listen and be responsive.

I went through the transcripts of the actual dialogues and analyzed them. I looked for instances of disagreement, interruptions, seeking clarifications, agreement, and offering ideas. I also checked the audio recordings in order to confirm the interruptions because they were more obvious in real time. When analyzing the dialogues themselves, an increased frequency of being responsive was evident. In the first dialogue sessions, all but one pair of the five pairs had a disagreement over an aspect of their assigned topic. In the second dialogue session, there was only one such instance in all four dialogues. For example, Greg and Bob were paired for the first

dialogue and were discussing whether affirmative action is necessary to allow marginalized people an opportunity. Greg stated: “women have been marginalized since the history of employment and opportunities in our world.” Bob disagreed and said “not according to Statistics Canada”. He was not being responsive as he was not accepting but refuting his partner’s statement. Part of being responsive is not simply hearing the other person but also allowing thoughts and meanings to be explored rather than assumed (Baxter, 2004). Had Bob been responsive to Greg, he would have explored what he meant by “women being marginalized from opportunities in the world” rather than assuming this directly connected to some recent Canadian statistics around employment.

In the first dialogue, the transcripts and audio recordings showed numerous instances of cutting the other speaker off or interrupting. The record for Jess and Hank’s initial dialogue revealed 14 instances of this and in the second dialogue only two instances were found. This may have pointed to a lack of ability to listen in the first dialogue, which is a critical piece of being responsive. All of the second dialogues showed an increase in the amount of agreement and all the dialogues had an increase in the number of times clarification was sought. I coded agreement when participants said, “yes, good point” and “I get that.” I coded for clarification when participants were asking for or further explaining a point. For example, in the second dialogue, Mark asked Murray: “I wonder if you experience that in your work place?” At this point, he was trying to understand Murray’s previous point on accessibility. Another example I coded as clarification was found when Greg asked Bob: “Does that mean simply segregating people will guarantee resources?” At this point, Greg was trying to dig deeper into the allocation of resources statement that had previously been made. As

noted above, being attentive is also vital for being responsive. Agreeing and seeking clarification are signs of being attentive and seeking to understand. McNamee and Shotter (2004) described the process of creating meaning as beginning with seeking understanding, which includes “not only paraphrasing but also questioning and clarifying our understanding by contextualizing our own experiences” (p. 93). The increase in the number of times that participants were seeking clarification in the second dialogues appears to indicate an increased frequency of being responsive.

It should be noted that I am not inferring a direct causal relationship between the Comic Improv workshops and the changes in factors such as attention and responsiveness seen between the first and second dialog sessions. I am reporting the changes that are evident from an analysis of the recordings, but the causes for these changes may be complex and various. For example, the participants knew each other much better in the second dialog session than in the first, where they had just met.

In the focus group, participants were asked whether the idea of being responsive, aware and accepting of other people’s offers was evident in their work in dialogue and to comment on this. Bob answered: “for me I think so yes and having that experience of the comedy exercises and everything I get a little more comfortable with that and a little more exposure to doing it.” Greg said that he was able to be responsive in the second dialogue more than in the first: “yes I felt it was there to some extent I was more trying to understand what Bob’s ideas were.” Murray did not know whether he was more responsive in the second dialogue than the first, but because of the comic improvisation training, he was more conscious of trying to be responsive and was “trying to get the gist of what he was saying”. As Bakhtin indicated, “understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually conditional on each other” (as cited in Rozas, 2004, p.

233). These instances of participants seeking to understand each other can be seen as indicating an attempt to practice responsive dialogue.

5.3.3. **Suspending Ideas and Preconceptions**

“Suspension requires us to become aware of our own thoughts, judgments and opinions and then slightly separate from them and hold them up for others to examine” (Jones, 2007, p.4). The ability to suspend requires awareness of your own thoughts and preconceptions. The competency of suspension naturally necessitates awareness. This was also a competency that participants had some understanding of initially. I believe one cannot be open-minded without practicing suspension as it is necessary to be aware of one’s preconceptions in order to create space to be open. This initial understanding was demonstrated even in the first interview when Hank stated: “I don’t think [conflict] clouded my ability to listen.” He was apparently aware of his conflict and that it may have affected his ability to listen. This can be seen as an element of suspension. Also, in the initial interview, Mark stated: “I have practiced these competencies before so I allow people to continue on and don’t hijack their train of thought. I practice suspension.” This indicated an initial understanding, prior knowledge and experience of suspension as he used the term correctly. I included the idea of suspension in my first interview question and coupled it with being responsive when I asked participants to “describe the experience of trying to listen and be responsive to your partner without preconceptions and opinions interfering.” I did not actually use the term suspension in this question but described it. Participants chose to use the term based on the PowerPoint presentation. This open-ended question allowed participants to focus on

these two related competencies without necessitating an understanding or recognition of the vocabulary introduced in the PowerPoint.

In his first interview during the initial session of the study, Murray felt that simply trying to generatively dialogue after the PowerPoint presentation was a challenge. In the Second Interview, Murray stated that not being judgemental was the most challenging aspect of Dialogue Two. Murray now had a better understanding of how suspension was important when trying to generatively dialogue and was aware of the struggle to suspend and be non-judgemental. In the focus group, Bob stated: “I have history of my own experiences and a history of what has happened in the world so words like segregation automatically I got to sit there and in my mind and all this stuff is coming up.” This awareness of his “stuff coming up” was the awareness that is necessary for practicing suspension. He was aware of his preconceptions regarding segregation. The very fact he was aware of this speaks to an increased awareness of suspension although not necessarily an ability to suspend. Mark, in the focus group, said: “I had some things I could have said that would have stirred the pot a little bit more, but I wanted to come across as very open and very understanding, so I didn’t want to like put out what my judgements were.” This showed both an awareness of and an ability to suspend judgement. Bob spoke of trying “not to keep talking about all these emotional charged concepts that I could bring into the conversation.” Here, he was accurately describing an awareness of trying to suspend. A similar awareness came for Murray in the Second Interview when he was asked to describe the experience of trying to listen and be responsive to his partner without preconceptions and opinions interfering. Murray noticed that because of his experience in comic improvisation, that in dialogue “I practice a monologue in my head but the reply is what you build on. It gives you context

and direction.” His ability to recognize the monologue in his head was a step toward suspension.

I must identify that agreement in dialogue does not necessarily indicate an ability to practice suspension. A critical part of generative dialogue is exploring and illuminating differences or “going to the disturbance” (McNamee & Shotter, 2004, p. 94). Simply avoiding differences is not practicing suspension. Scharmer described the first level of dialogue, talking nice, as “holding back thinking and feeling” (as cited in Gunnlaugson, 2003, p. 46). In the examples chosen in the previous paragraph, I am interpreting the participants’ ability to recognise their judgements and preconceptions and separate from them as suspending them. I believe, based on the comments above, they were not simply avoiding debate. In debate, one identifies with one’s point of view and then listens while loading to defend a point of view (Gunnlaugson, 2003). Sometimes, there is a subtle difference when identifying a point of view (necessary for suspension) and identifying with a point of view (a characteristic of debate). If someone is continually bringing forward his/her point of view to counter or redirect a conversation, they are debating or talking tough according to Scharmer’s levels of conversation. Participants were trying to practice suspension as they were identifying what their point of view was but struggled to separate from it. Participants were also struggling with the ability to suspend from their preconceptions and still to bring forward differences to explore responsively.

Participants also had a general agreement in the focus group that it is easier to suspend your preconceptions doing comic improvisation as opposed to dialogue. For example, Greg stated:

For me the dialogue was very different from Improv because the dialogue was embedded in reality and there were real issues and most of us around the table have spent our lives collecting information and observing society; so we have a lot of opinions about reality, which are immediately jogged by the question right.

The ability to recognize the opinions and background information that came up spoke to an increased awareness. It seems that participants really struggled with the competency of suspension in the second dialogue. They were, however, able to describe this struggle. Based on this evidence, there was an awareness of what it is to suspend, but during the dialogue, they found it sometimes difficult to apply this competency.

5.3.4. Creating Something New

Because creating something new or generating new ideas and understanding is commonly understood, it is difficult to assess whether an increase in awareness was brought about in the study. In the Second Interview, Bob mentioned: “a new embodied wanting to have that feeling.” This statement appears to indicate that the comic improvisation workshops had given Bob the feeling of generating something new and that he was aware of wanting to recreate that in the dialogue session. When asked in the Second Interviews whether new ideas of understanding were generated in the Second Dialogue, Greg indicated that he did not think a sense of creating something new was achieved due to time constraints but that “all the elements were there.” Greg’s comment seems to indicate an understanding and awareness of some of the conditions for generating new ideas and understanding in a dialogic process. In the focus group, when I asked whether “co-generating a new creation was evident in your work in dialogue,” Greg stated: “I didn’t think it was [evident] so much because of the time constraints. The dialogue was too short to get to its natural evolution.” If you are able to

know something is not there; you must first be aware of what it is. As Greg was able to assess the quality or phenomena of generating new ideas and understandings were not evident, he was indicating an understanding of it. Bob had a similar response when he stated: "I would say that the hope and what I was trying to do was there. I don't know if we got there because we didn't have enough time but I wanted that." Again Bob's comments suggested his ability to assess the requirements for the generation of new ideas and understandings. Mark also spoke to the time constraint being problematic when he explained: "like before something new you had to know what the old is right? That is your background information. It takes time to develop." At this point he was analyzing what was necessary, or what he believed was necessary, for new understandings and ideas to develop. His comment once again suggested his awareness of the process for co-generation of new ideas and understanding to occur.

In the focus group, I asked whether participants could "connect [their] work in comic improvisation to [their] work in dialogue concerning being in the holy insecurity." Murray shared that once you have accepted someone else's idea you are in the uncertainty of "where can we go from here...how can I build on this?" He then stated "you have to build on what is said before." Although not being asked about generating new ideas, this comment reflected his awareness of how to build new ideas and understandings. Later, in the focus group when asked if there was something new created in the Second Dialogue, Murray agreed with Jess that there was potential that was not achieved. He stated that "comic improv taught us skills like acceptance." I wanted to "build on that [in the dialogue]. Comic improv was very important in building that [skill]." Murray had gained and articulated an understanding of the competencies necessary for generative dialogue and he was saying that comic improvisation assisted

him with this. He was also saying that he was not able to apply these competencies to generate new ideas during his Second Dialogue. Sam, when discussing the ability to generate new ideas, stated: “people were falling short in the dialogue. The dialogue was five minutes and it was a great conversation but, unlike comic improv, I didn’t know how to how to push it.” He also suggested that we needed more practice with dialogue. He seemed to understand what was desired to create something new but was struggling with transferring this competency from comic improvisation to dialogue. Murray described the process of creating new understandings and ideas as follows.

You want to keep building and that is the nature of generative dialogue. You are trying to generate new ideas but by the same token though, how do you move forward? You have to build on what is said before. You have to accept what the other person says.

It was evident that participants were keenly aware of a desire to build and create new ideas and understandings through dialogue. However, they seemed to, , struggle to recreate or apply the experience from the comic improvisation to the dialogue.

Question Two of the pre and post-dialogue interviews asked participants “to comment on whether there were new ideas or understandings gained from this dialogue.” After the initial dialogue exercise in the opening session, only one of the participants felt that a new idea was generated. During the Second Interviews, three of the seven participants felt there were new ideas or understandings generated. For example, Sam in his second interview, stated: “Yes there were new ideas.” Later, in the focus group, Sam described the process of the second dialogue: “It was like there were elevations or something” in the ideas. During the Second Dialogue, Mark and his

partner Murray discussed whether affirmative action was necessary to allow marginalized people an opportunity. During this dialogue, he and his partner developed a graphic organizer when Mark said: "I look at a big circle and I see an inner core society and then on the outside of the circle are the marginalized people." In his interview, Mark agreed that "yes [there were new ideas generated in the dialogue]. It was a new metaphor that articulated the concept. He used a metaphor of marginalized people - from there it was easy." His partner Murray, on the other hand, indicated in the Second Interview when asked if there were new ideas and understanding generated in the dialogue, said that there were not, but there was a good reflection. He stated that "learning like this was quite good" but did not qualify this as a new idea. I believe this was a new understanding and my question was whether "there were new ideas or understanding generated in the dialogue." This, however, was not the perception that Murray had. He assessed, unlike his partner, that this was simply a good way to express something that was already understood.

The other four participants felt that they were getting close to generating new ideas, but even so, two of the four felt that there was not enough time, and two other participants felt that their ideas were too similar to their partners' for new ideas to be generated. As previously discussed, participants found they were struggling towards generating new ideas and understanding in the second dialogue. The co-generation of new ideas and understandings is very difficult; therefore, these results are not surprising. I also think that the five minute time limit that I constructed restricted the possibility of new ideas being developed by these participants. They did not have the time to share what they already knew and to build towards new ideas.

5.4. Connections between the Competencies of Comic Improvisation and Dialogue

In this study, I set out to explore whether comic improvisation can be used as an experience that informs and creates awareness of competencies for generative dialogue. In the focus group, we discussed whether responsiveness and the ability to say yes were evident in the Second Dialogues. From that question, participants began to discuss evidence of this generally rather than specifically in the five minute dialogues. This prompted me to ask: “are you alluding to taking this past the five minute dialogues out into the world?” Jess said: “yeah I think so.” He went on to add that “when you learn how to do something it is part of you from that point forward.” Murray added that “you like to think you can but ... what if the other person isn’t [being responsive].” Jess agreed and stated that “it is situational stuff. It depends on whether the other person is an adversary then your immediate reaction is: Ok fine we will fight.” He went on to suggest that it might be possible to transfer the competency of being responsive as he said: “whether or not you can get past that is , yeah, that is a whole other problem.” Mark was more optimistic. He shared that he “want[ed] to have a new way of relating with people you know with reflective listening.” He believed that by “engaging them in a in a process that they may not be familiar with and you are kind of sharing that culture” and that by doing this, one could bring someone else into relational dialogue. Greg stated that “I think there is an awareness that will carry over but I don’t think the behaviour will carry over because there is no consensual agreement on the rules,” but he was less sure that the behaviour could be applied if there was no mutual consent by those participating in the dialogue.

In the Second Interviews, participants were asked whether comic improvisation assisted them in the ability to dialogue. They were also asked: “if it had, how” and “if not, why not?” All seven participants self-assessed that comic improvisational training assisted their ability to dialogue. Bob and Jess felt the experience validated and drew attention to skills that they already had, namely paying attention. Jess said comic improvisation had improved his ability to dialogue “due to the reinforcement of paying attention - being aware of what was going on and being said to then respond to it.” Murray had a similar answer. He believed comic improvisation had definitely assisted his ability to dialogue because “it did bring about social skills of listening more and accepting more.” Hank said: “I think it improved my ability to probe a bit and to listen a bit,” and Sam professed that it definitely had and described how “comic improv opens up new ways- shakes up ways of thinking.” Greg was less sure and said: “I think it would have if the process had more time to unfold.” Greg, however, believed that it was the relationship created in the comic improvisation that best assisted his ability to dialogue. Here, he was not referencing an increased awareness of or abilities in the competencies I was exploring in the study.

5.5. Themes

Initially, I examined data in light of my research question, which was to explore whether comic improvisation could be used as an embodied experience that informs and creates awareness of competencies for generative dialogue. I then moved more specifically to analyze participants’ experiences with the holy insecurity of listening and being responsive, suspending their own ideas and preconceptions, and co-generating

new ideas or understandings in both comic improvisation and dialogue. According to Merriam (2012), “the analytic challenge for the qualitative researcher is to reduce data, identify categories and connections, develop themes, and offer well-reasoned reflective conclusions” (p. 353). As qualitative research allows for emerging connections and themes to be identified, I have gone through my coding to identify themes that came forward outside of the initially identified dialogue competencies previously mentioned. Were there unforeseen themes that emerged from the participants’ experience? In fact, there were. I have identified common themes that were echoed by several participants and were evident in more than one data source.

5.5.1. Theme 1: The Necessity of Conflict for Generative Dialogue.

In examining the data, a theme that emerged for two of the participants was that establishing a conflict or searching for disagreement was necessary for generative dialogue. There were seven instances that referred the need for conflict or disagreeing points of view in generative dialogue. Six of these comments came from the same two participants, Hank and Jess, who were paired together for both dialogues. Four of these comments were made in the focus group, and three were made in the interviews. Hank, for example, in his second interview stated: “in dialogue I was trying to listen but not agree.” He went on to explain: “the problem was I was trying to find points where we disagree. It wasn’t available so more or less we had the same view point.” This idea of needing conflict and disagreement to dialogue is in contradiction to generative dialogue. This is not to say that having different viewpoints and understandings is not acceptable or may even be important for generative dialogue, but these are to be explored for understanding not contradicted or argued. As Shields and Edwards (2005) articulated,

dialogue necessities a “desire to understand the other and to believe you have something to learn from them” (, p. 109). I am not suggesting that debate can never lead to generating new understandings; in fact, it sometimes may. I am reaffirming that my purpose here was to explore competencies for generative dialogue as defined by Scharmer. This requires an open heart and open mind where new ideas and differences are welcomed and explored (Scharmer & Kauefer, 2013).

A desperate searching for disagreement is not necessary for dialogue and may actually interfere with it as the initial idea is not explored but assumed. Acceptance is an important part of dialogue and participants should be “seeking to understand rather than seeking to be right” (Shields & Edwards, 2005, p. 57). In dialogue, it is not necessary to agree but to accept the other view points and ideas and then seek to understand them. When answering the question concerning why new ideas and understandings were not generated in the second interview, Sam stated that there was no “criticizing system” and that the “conversation was neutral.” In generative dialogue, ideas are accepted and explored although not necessarily agreed with. Sam’s preconception of the necessity of a criticizing system is more reflective of a Socratic Method of dialogue rather than a generative one. Generative dialogue requires deep listening and a willingness to change your point of view rather than prove it (Gunnlaugson, 2007).

Hank and Jess were sometimes trying to locate obvious differences of opinions so they could move into debate. This was in direct contradiction to my PowerPoint presentation on generative dialogue that preceded both dialogues. I clearly stated that toughing tough, debating, or listening and reloading were not characteristics of generative dialogue. Searching for disagreement could be described as searching for a counterpoint in a discussion and then bringing forward formerly thought out arguments

that fall into familiar patterns (McNamee & Shotter, 2004). In being responsive, it is necessary to be attentive to what is actually being said rather than what is expected to be said. It is not identifying and locating someone in a point of view and thereby reducing them to a static counter point. Rather, this is the listen and reload quality that Scharmer identified in talking tough or debate form of dialogue rather than generative dialogue (Gunnlaugson, 2007).

I did, however, chose controversial topics that I hoped would bring forward differing opinions. It might have appeared that I had cross-purposes. My intention was to provide a platform that allowed for different ideas and understandings to necessitate the quality of suspension, as participants would have some preconceived ideas on the topics. Occasionally, there is a faint difference between identifying with “your own point of view and the seeing the other as target” (Gunnlaugson, 2007, p. 45) and noticing a difference so it can openly be explored. As McNamee and Shotter eloquently pointed out, “it is our difference that makes the difference [and] the merging of our knowledge and outlooks with that of the other to bring us to a new understanding” (2004, p, 94). Bohm also supported this belief and actively encouraged exploring differences. He believed that dialogue is a way of “taking the energy of our differences and channelling it toward something that has never been created before. It lifts us out of polarization and into a greater common sense” (as cited in Romney, 2005, p. 9). Identifying differences to explore and understand them is a different process than finding counter points to debate.

At least two of the participants, Hank and Jess, may not have necessarily understood that deeply exploring a subject to find varying points of view is not the same as simply providing counter viewpoints. In the focus group, both Hank and Jess identified

disagreement as necessary to delve into the holy insecurity during a dialogue. As the holy insecurity is simply letting go of planned communication and being open to the new and unexpected, disagreement is not necessary. This could also reveal a lack of understanding of the concept of the holy insecurity. In the Second Interview, these participants mentioned that the similar viewpoints shared with and their partners interfered with the generation of new understandings and ideas. Jess stated that “if two people don't disagree we can't move on. We need to have different opinions.” In the same interview Hank stated that, in the dialogue, “there wasn't much challenge because the viewpoints were similar.” Although on first encounter viewpoints may have been similar but if explored in depth, there might have been some differences revealed. I think that these participants made very quick assumptions on each other's viewpoints. Shields and Edwards described the challenge in dialogue as the ability “to live in openness to difference, encounter difference and listening to a multitude of voices” (2005, p. 129).

The use of the word conflict in the responses that were coded, however, do not necessarily preclude striving for a deeper understanding and openness to multiple perspectives. In the focus group, Jess explained his view that he and his partner were not able to generate new ideas.

I think in our dialogue there was potential, there were a few points in the short time to identify as, if you will, potential areas of conflict where growth can occur but given the time constraint there just wasn't enough time to probe deeply into those areas.

Perhaps, this deep probing refers to the exploration I referred to earlier. I must comment on the fact that much of the conversation surrounding differences of opinions and

preconceived judgements was located under the topic of suspension previously discussed, and in this context, it was correctly seen as a challenge to practicing suspension and generative dialogue as opposed to a necessity for generative dialogue. In summary, I think there was a lack of understanding regarding conflict and generative dialogue, particularly from these two participants, or it might also have been that they simply disagree with Scharmer's view of generative dialogue.

5.5.2. Theme 2: Relationship

In the First Interview, I asked: "what was the most challenging part of the dialogue with your partner?" Three of the answers referenced relationship. Sam felt insulted by his partner and described how his partner had said: "your ideas are conflicting with yourself" and this distracted him during the dialogue. Murray mentioned "it was the first time we had met. I began to feel comfortable." Greg said he was a little tentative because of the newness of the relationship." It follows then that this was probably true for all of the participants as this was the first time they had met each other. Interestingly, Murray felt that even in the short dialogue, he began to feel more comfortable with his partner as they began to build a relationship. He also brought up another good point, which was that the particular partner also had an effect on the dialogue experience. In the focus group in the closing session, Jess said he was more comfortable and less insecure in the second dialogue because he was more comfortable with his dialogue partner. Murray agreed that he found this to be true as well.

Relationship and trust are important for dialogue. Shields and Edwards (2005) stated that dialogue is "action grounded in trust and absolute regard for the other" (p.

57). In the Second Interview, Greg shared that he trusted his partner and that this enhanced his ability to be responsive. He also stated that trust had been built through the experience of the comic improvisation and this shifted the relationship. In the focus group, there were four comments on the building of relationship positively affecting the dialogue. Jess said that he felt “more secure “because I felt really comfortable with Hank [his partner for the dialogue]”. He later added that he felt more secure” as there was more trust. Bob replied: “I agree with that.” Greg also agreed and said that “this is exactly what I said before.” What he was referring to was that earlier in the focus group he described improving his ability for the dialogue through the comic improvisation training. He said: “to me it is about trust and at the beginning it is hard to trust people you don’t know and so you trust yourself and this is where you get locked into your own agenda.” He is making an interesting link that directly equates relationship with building competencies in comic improvisation. He then went on to explain how “the more familiar you are with each other and with the process the more you can suspend your own anxiety and then go into that moment; that’s my feeling.” I think Greg was making a good point here. Comic improvisation is intended to assist in forming relationships. Each scene or game is essentially a cycle of taking a risk and being accepted with each accepted offer. Nicholson stated that in the performing arts, it is necessary for “people feel [to] safe enough to take risks and to allow themselves and others to experience vulnerability” (, 2010, p. 251). Participating in comic improvisation is a relationship builder as it necessitates responding to each other. Participating in comic improvisation is also a risk taking activity where time and time again your risks are accepted. It is not surprising that relationships and trust were built. Thus, participants were having their second dialogue experiences with someone they had built relationship with and with

whom they were familiar. This may well have had an impact that is not mitigated for in the research.

5.5.3. Theme 3: Time constraints for second dialogue

In the second Interviews, three participants said that there was not enough time to generate new ideas in the final dialogues. Greg, when asked to identify a challenge in the second interview, identified that “the time element; we were just starting to get warmed up.” Bob commented: “I could have done five minutes by myself.” The issue of time constraints for the dialogue also surfaced in the focus group discussion. During the focus group, there were three comments regarding the shortage of time impeding the ability to generate new ideas. These were peppered through other discussions. The participants did not really discuss the issue of time as a group. There were, however, some commonalities to these discrete comments. Participants felt that they first had to define and explore a dialogue topic before they could move into a deeper level of discussion. In the focus group, Jess wondered whether the dialogue “might have changed if it had gone longer than the five minutes. Because we would have gotten through that initial stage and there would have been more room for the unknown.” Greg stated that “the dialogue was too short to get to its natural evolution ... we were still un-packaging the ideas which were quite significant and so five minutes didn’t give us enough time to un-package and then go and say now what.” When Murray was explaining how one first needed to establish one’s view point before going into the holy insecurity, he said: “You both have your own view point and then trying to establish what the view point is and going from there into the holy insecurity.”

Based on the data from the Interviews and the focus group, I can assume that, unlike comic improvisation, the participants in this study perceived it as necessary to have more time allowed to move into generative dialogue. This idea is also supported in the literature. McNamee and Shotter (2004) advocated for the necessity of contextualizing your point of view to give meaning and develop the understanding necessarily for dialogue. Maracle (2007) also described an initial spiral of dialogue where there is space to identify beliefs, biases and agendas before moving deeper into the subject being explored. This can be found in Greg's comments about how he and his partner needed to finish unpacking their ideas. Upon reflection, I concur that I should have assigned more time for the dialogues. I will discuss this further in my conclusion in Chapter 6.

5.5.4. Theme 4: The playful nature of comic improvisation

Another theme that emerged in the focus group data was how much fun the participants had doing the comic improvisation workshops. During the focus group, some stated that doing five workshops on generative dialogue would assist the study model, but there was general laughter and agreement among participants that they would not have signed up for it. I feel that this is significant. Although I advertised that this was an opportunity to participate in a research project examining the use of comic improvisation to build skills for dialogue, the appeal of comic improvisation was what brought these particular participants out to learn the competencies for dialogue. This is further evidenced in their recruitment background statements. The complete information from these can be found in Appendix C. I would simply like to provide an overview here. Participants wrote on their background information sheets that they wanted fun and

amusement or to learn about comedy. They also cited that they wanted to build skills, but the skills were in acting, comedy and voice. Murray wrote that he wanted skills that he could apply to his ESL teaching. When reading his background sheet, I assumed he meant the dialogue competencies, but during the comic improvisation training, he wanted specifics for using the games in his classes. I would say that the participants appreciated the possible application of the dialogue competencies but preferred engaging in the activity of comic improvisation. One of the reasons that I considered exploring the use of comic improvisation as for a competency building tool was its wide appeal and popularity (Engelberts, 2004, p. 155). Diamond and Lefkoff (1992) were essentially correct when they described comic improvisation as playing games.

In the focus group, Jess stated (somewhat tongue in cheek): “comic improvisation fun and exciting: dialogue boring” and the group laughed. This is particularly noteworthy as participants had ten hours of comic improvisation and only ten minutes of dialogue. Jess described dialogue as being a “slow slog,” and Bob declared that “in the improv something wonderful was happening.” Bob later described that after the last comic improvisation session, “I walked away from last Saturday feeling, I was exhausted by 11:00AM, but had this incredible high realising you got to stop saying hi to people that don’t know you because you just want to keep having this energy and let’s just keep going.”

There seemed to be agreement that comic improvisation was fun. Participants also described the comic improvisation sessions as play. As Mark stated: “I’m just noticing that when things clicked there was a whole bunch of pleasurable feelings. I was so impressed that the absurdity of it was agreed upon and was a consensual part. Yeah we could play.” This idea of play and fun connected with comic improvisation came up

numerous times during the focus group discussion. This is significant because none of the questions related to this phenomenon were asked; these comments naturally emerged. During the focus group, I asked participants how evident being responsive was in their second dialogues. From that question came five comments concerning how comic improvisation was playful or fun. Bob said there is a “playfulness in Improv. There is a sense of spontaneity and freedom.” He did not find this in dialogue and he wondered “how can you be playful when you are talking about these things like segregation and allocating resources and testing?” Mark replied that comic improvisation “has an energy that bubbles across.” Greg commented that the beauty of comic improvisation was “you put things together that you would never ever occur together in reality and so you have this conjured reality you have to affect and interact with.” There were an additional three comments on how being responsive in comic improvisation was fun, but it made dialogue boring. In the focus group, my first question asked whether the idea of moving into the holy insecurity or that unknown in between place evident in your work in comic improvisation? Can you comment on this?” There were four comments from three participants indicating that being in the holy insecurity in comic improvisation became anticipated and playful. Mark said that when participating in comic improvisation, “you are in a more playful state.” Bob agreed and said that in comic improvisation, “it is a lovely thing to not know and not have to figure something out and just go with what comes up.” There were also two comments in the focus group that the co-generation of ideas was easier in comic improvisation because it was play.

A wonderful example of the anticipation and playful nature that the participants experienced in comic improvisation came from Bob in the focus group when he referenced being in the holy insecurity in comic improvisation. He was replying to Mark’s

earlier comment of the anticipation and moving “to wanting to contribute instead of oh my God I have to contribute now.” Bob described this anticipation as follows.

A lovely thing to not know and not have to figure something out and just go with what comes up. I didn’t think of it till you said that closer along kind of that, to use an analogy, that little kid looking forward to Christmas excitement ... kind of an excitement about that. I found that I don’t know what is going on.

On viewing the videotapes of the sessions, there was definitely a lot of laughter and fun evident in the comic improvisation sessions.

The other aspect of using comic improvisation as a training tool for dialogue competencies is the very fact it involves pretending. As Jess articulated in the focus group, comic improvisation allows you to “put things together that you would never ever occur together in reality.” Although, in dialogue, you are also striving to create something new, there is less freedom because you are not dealing with an imaginary world where everything is possible. Mark spoke of how comic improvisation “takes the pressure off of having to be so serious because we are able to laugh about it and see the absurdity of just the absolute craziness of these things.” He went on further to describe why he believed that comic improvisation was useful as a training strategy. He said: “So that is where I think that this play or this improvisational comedy helps -- like applied to looking at harder, tighter situations in life you know.” This is a wonderful statement on exactly how comic improvisation can provide a lighter context for the practice of dialogue competencies. Jess stated that comic improvisation “is meaningless so the moment is everything.” Mark talked about how comic improvisation “has no

repercussions.” I infer from this that comic improvisation is a safe place to learn the competencies. As Jess articulated in the focus group, “for me, the dialogue was very different from improv because the dialogue was embedded in reality and there were real issues.” As Greg commented: “improv is safe.” Without any prompting, participants naturally commented on how the playful nature of comic improvisation games, unbound by the restrictions of reality, made a safe place for them to develop dialogue competencies. I will explore this idea further in Chapter 6.

5.5.5. Theme 5: The Structures for the Comic Improvisation and the Dialogues

One of the themes that emerged in the focus group was the difference in the structure of comic improvisation and the dialogues as experienced by participants in this study. The comic improvisation workshops were comprised of exercises and games that had specific external structures or rules as well as internal guidelines or principles (Moshavi, 2001). As a facilitator, I also made these very clear to the participants and coached them on the guidelines throughout the workshops. For example, I would coach from the side lines: “Accept the offer – say yes.” As I outline in Chapter Two, generative dialogue also has internal guidelines, such as being responsive, which are also guiding principles. I did not coach these guiding principles during the dialogues in this study.

Participants knew they were coming into for a final dialogue session. As previously described in Chapter 4, they were informed of the structure that the day would take upon arrival. It was explicitly shared through the PowerPoint presentation (see Appendix D). Participants were fully informed at the first and then again at the final

session that my research study was to explore the connections between comic improvisation and generative dialogue. Through the PowerPoint they were also reintroduced to the terminology and competencies we were exploring in dialogue as well as the nature of generative dialogue.

Participants dialogued in pairs in isolation where they could not hear each other. This set up is not necessarily always the case with dialogue. In intergroup dialogues, for example, there is a facilitator and sometimes there is even a specific external structure imposed onto the dialogue (Rozas, 2004).

Two of the participants commented on how the lack of audience in the dialogues made a difference. When comparing comic improvisation to the dialogues, Mark stated: "I would say that it is a very different structure. There is just like one-on-one interaction without seven other people watching me, so there is a different kind of pressure there or absence of pressure to perform." Sam also commented, when discussing about being responsive, "there is an audience watching so you can't say no."

There were deeper differences noted by participants than simply the lack of an audience. During the focus group, I asked participants "was the idea of being responsive, aware and accepting, of other people's offers evident in your work in comic improvisation?" There were a number of comments that dealt with the structure of comic improvisation. Bob explicitly recognized: "When you are doing one of those games you have an organizing structure." This statement was agreed upon by the other participants. Greg spoke of how necessary responsiveness was to comic improvisation when he commented, "you had to do it to make it work and you as the moderator were policing that if you will. Where as in the ... well ah, so if it is not there the comic improv

won't work." He was not only referencing my role as coach here, but also how, in comic improvisation, if you were not responsive, then the scene literally could not continue. It simply cannot progress. As Harding (2004) stated, in comic improvisation, "not listening to each other, ignoring nonverbal cues, and pushing individual agendas results in the scene never progressing" (p. 211). A generative dialogue will also not progress without participants being responsive but the conversation will. A conversation, however, does not have the qualities of a generative dialogue. This continuing of the conversation makes it less apparent that there has been a breakdown in being responsive. In comic improvisation, it is very apparent when this has occurred as the scene falls apart and does not progress. This is significant as it demonstrates how useful a training tool comic improvisation can be to build these dialogue competencies.

Another interesting theme that emerged from the data was the participants' discussion about the application of learned dialogue competencies in everyday life. This evolved through conversation in the focus group when I asked "were you able to connect your work in comic improvisation to your dialogue in so far as being in the holy insecurity or the unknown in between place?" Jess compared comic improvisation with real life when he stated:

...rules of society and how you are supposed to think and talk and respond, but we've adopted this other set of rules that says you have to accept what that person just said which is, in of itself, a very strict rule, so you have traded one set of straight [strict] rules for another.

Further, in the same conversation when discussing applying the dialogue competencies learned in comic improvisation to real life, Greg suggested:

Nobody else has agreed to this new set of rules right? So the question is:
are there contexts in my life where it is ok for me to be improvisational
and go into the holy insecurity and not be carted off to the looney bin?

When discussing group dialogues in real world contexts, Bob suggested that sometimes there is a set of rules because “sometimes it is a written norm, and sometimes it is not an explicit norm, but we are going to accept everybody’s contribution here.” He was referring to a town meeting or school classes where there is an understood set of guidelines.

Another interesting topic that arose solely in the focus group was the question whether or not a person who was trying to engage in a generative dialogue could take these dialogue competencies and apply them with someone who did not share similar understandings or training. This came forward when I asked: “Were you able to connect your work in comic improvisation to your dialogue in so far as being responsive to the other?” All the participants actively engaged in the focus group discussion of this topic. Jess stated: “It depends on whether the other person is an adversary then your immediate reaction is: ok fine we will fight. Now whether or not you can get past that is, yeah, that is a whole other problem.” Mark went further and even had an idea of how to implement the process. He said:

I want to have a new way of relating with the person, you know, with reflective listening. ‘Would you be willing to paraphrase what I just asked-- what I just said’ You know? It is like engaging them in a in a process that they may not be familiar with and you are kind of sharing that culture.

Jess hypothesized that this could be a way to “Invite them in without giving them a whole lecture on this is what we are doing and how we are going to do it.” Greg was not sure that this would actually work and he countered: “I think there is an awareness that will carry over but I don’t think the behaviour will carry over because there is no consensual agreement on the rules.”

Bob felt the experience of the comic improvisation had impacted how he could respond. He suggested:

So the holy insecurity, the yes and ..., I might not be able to engage actively with people because they don’t know that rule, but for me, it just reminds me of staying open to possibilities: to be flexible, to be responsive, to be respectful, and look for opportunities to enact that in my daily life.

Jess agreed when he stated: “You can bring that tool kit, if you will, to the discussion and start to use it and then maybe the other participants kind of catch on either consciously or subconsciously.” He then later elaborated: “You don’t necessarily need the other person to be aware of that.” I cannot, in the scope of this study, provide a definitive answer to the question of whether a person with these increased dialogue competencies and understandings can or should implement them in discussions generally. What is significant for this study is that this concept was seriously discussed in the closing, summary Focus group. The participants were actively engaged in intelligently considering relevant issues in the application of dialogue competencies. It also inferred an understanding of these competencies and how they might play out in the world.

5.5.6. Theme 6: Embodied Experience

Although not a major theme, a comment made by Bob in the Second Interview was further supported by three other references in the Focus group. The comment concerned the physical or embodied energy that came from the comic improvisation. In his Second Interview, Bob talked about an

increased meta-cognitive awareness coming from the recognition of the embodied experience of the comic improvisation. This time I was aware in my body. I think it has a lot to do with this five week embodied experience of the workshops—getting comfortable with these skills.

When describing being responsive in comic improvisation during the focus group, Bob said: “I had embodied it.” Jess agreed and stated: “It felt like instead staying here in the mind; it was actually going all the way through my body. So there is a body awareness.” Later on in the focus group, when discussing whether co-generating a new creation was evident in the work in comic improvisation, Mark mentioned: “I was noticing the physical response to that was a gratified feeling when something was able to be translated and understood and moved with Yes.” Bob went on to respond that, in the comic improvisation, “the energy itself was kind of a generating force.” I believe this energy was also related to the feeling of play that participants described as well as the active nature of comic improvisation. While not a main theme, in Chapter One, I queried whether comic improvisation could provide an embodied knowing of dialogue competencies. Talking and acting are actions; they are embodied rather than purely cognitive ways of understanding (Cunliffe, 2002). The fact that comic improvisation is a

more embodied and active experience in which dialogue competencies can be experienced is significant and may be worth further exploration.

5.6. Limitations of the Study

5.6.1. Lack of Collaborators

Because of the tight constraints of being a working researcher and the fact there was no funding for my study, I did this study alone. I did not have multiple investigators to increase my descriptive validity as is suggested by Johnson and Christensen (2014). However, I tried to mitigate this by videotaping the comic improvisation classes and audio taping the focus group and dialogues, so I could go back and re-evaluate them with fresh eyes and ears. I also coded my data and then left it alone for weeks and then recoded it. However, I did not have another person to cross-reference these codes.

5.6.2. Participants

I recruited mostly through Vancouver Island University and all seven of my final group participants had some post-secondary education. This may have increased their ability to readily understand the dialogue concepts being explored. I began the study with 12 participants but five participants left the study. This brought my final numbers down to seven, which is a very small sample. In the recruitment process, only one female was able to commit, and she left the study as she became ill part way through. This meant all my participants were male. I have endeavoured to provide rich

descriptions to contextualize my study as the participants may not provide a representative sample of a larger population.

5.6.3. **Structure**

There are some limitations inherent in the structure I chose for my study. The most apparent of these has been discussed: the time constraints of the second dialogue. (The first dialogue was also very time constrained.) As already noted, the participants found the time limit for the second dialogue to be problematic in applying the dialogue competencies effectively. As previously noted in Chapter Three (3.6 Study Process), I chose a five-minute time limit because I wanted to ensure that the participants felt relatively comfortable in their first dialogue attempt. I also wanted to provide a similar dialogue experience for both the first and final dialogues, so I assigned the same time limit for the final dialogues. In addition, I selected a time limit that would mirror the time of an average scene performed in the comic improvisation workshops. Upon reflection, it would have been better to consider a time limit that would best suit the final dialogues to allow participants adequate time to apply the competencies I was exploring. A ten- or fifteen minute time limit for the dialogues would likely have been more appropriate.

For the second dialogue, participants were conversing with people with whom they had built relationships. This meant that, in contrast to the first dialogue where they were paired with a virtual stranger, they were now engaged with someone with whom they had a relationship. Johnson and Christensen (2014) described theoretical validity as using different theories to explain the behaviour. The increased ability to engage in dialogue might indicate an enhanced development of relationship rather than a direct

influence from the experiences with comic improvisation. This is noted in the analysis of data as previously discussed. The relationships that were built may have influenced the experience of the Second Dialogues for the participants and this is acknowledged as a limitation in my study.

5.6.4. Conclusion

According to my data, the competencies of being in the holy insecurity, being responsive, practicing suspension and creating something new were evident in comic improvisation for the participants and they expressed this belief as part of their experience. The Second Interview and focus group transcripts indicate that the participants also believed that they had an increased awareness of these competencies in dialogue and were moving towards the application of them. A number of themes emerged in the data. Some participants believed that conflict was necessary for generative dialogue and may still have some confusion between dialogue for debate and generative dialogue. The building of relationships likely influenced their perceptions of their abilities to dialogue. The time constraint of five minutes in the second dialogue likely limited participants' ability to apply the dialogue competencies. Participants noted the difference between the structure of the series of workshops with coaching in front of an audience for comic improvisation and the isolated, private paired dialogues. They noted that this influenced their experience. Participants noted that there was an element of play and pretend that enhanced the experience of performing comic improvisation and that this element was not present for the dialogues.

In general, there was a perceived increase in the ability to dialogue that was attributed to the comic improvisation workshops as well as an increased awareness of the particular competencies, an awareness supported by the participants use of language and terminology to describe their process. As noted in my previous section, I faced a number of challenges in the conduct of this research, in particular with the recruitment, retention and composition of participants for this study. Upon reflection, I should have extended the length of time for the second dialogues. The second dialogue did, however, allow participants to experience attempting to apply the competencies being explored in a dialogue and provided a context to inform their reflections in the interviews and focus group. This study has provided insight into the connections between comic improvisation and dialogue specifically in the competencies of being responsive, moving into the holy insecurity, practicing suspension and creating something out of the blue.

This study was exploratory in nature. It was intended to follow up on a personal belief that there could be a positive relationship between the skills and attributes developed through experiences in comic improvisation and the skills and attributes described as being important to generative dialog. The comments provided by the participants indicate that they saw their experiences in comic improvisation as having the power to affect how they approached dialogue although they also noted significant differences in the nature and process of comic improvisation and the tone and process normally associated with dialogue.

Chapter 6. Conclusions

6.1. Introduction

I began this dissertation to explore the possible connections between comic improvisation and dialogue. I designed the research to examine the potential of comic improvisation training workshops as a means to develop enhanced understandings about generative dialogue and to discover possible new approaches to the development of the competencies needed to engage effectively in generative dialogue. Comic improvisation was used as a learning experience to provide a framework for participants to explore and possibly enhance their understandings of generative dialogue. The specific dialogue competencies being examined were: being in the holy insecurity, listening and being responsive, suspension of ideas and preconceptions, and creating something new. I identified these as central competencies based on my own experience in comic improvisation and my understandings from graduate course work in dialogue. In Chapter 5, I discussed that an increased awareness for each of the dialogue competencies was revealed. In this chapter, I will also further explore the indications of this increased awareness and understanding.

In designing this study, I attempted to keep the experience of using these competencies fairly discrete between the comic improvisation sessions and the paired dialogue exercises. The structure of the study was not found to be ideal for transferring competency development from comic improvisation to dialogue; however, I was not building a curriculum to specifically transfer competencies from comic improvisation to

generative dialogue. The problem I identified for my study was to explore whether comic improvisation could be used as an embodied experience that would inform and create awareness on the part of the participants of some of the competencies for generative dialogue. I was providing a structure in which parallel features of comic improvisation and dialogue might be illuminated. Nevertheless, some themes arising from the data suggest possible considerations for curriculum design. In this concluding chapter, I further explore these parallel features and consider them in light of current educational research.

Because the theme of comic improvisation as appealing and energized play appeared significantly in my data, it is worth further discussion as well. I also want to revisit some of these themes from the research reviewed in my literature review, specifically in terms of the work of Bakhtin and Scharmer. In addition, I will revisit current research previously noted in Chapter 2 and consider the implications for further research and application of ideas emerging from this study.

6.2. Developing an Increased Awareness of Dialogue Competencies

My research question was: can comic improvisation be used as an embodied experience that informs and creates awareness of the competencies for generative dialogue? Thus, I was not expecting participants to be able to demonstrate a complete understanding and application of the dialogue competencies. My research focused on whether participants had an increased awareness and understanding of the competencies, including being in the holy insecurity, listening and being responsive, suspending their own ideas and preconceptions and creating something new through the

experience of the comic improvisation. I further questioned whether they could connect these new understandings to generative dialogue.

This study explores participants' understandings of being the holy insecurity, begin responsive, and practicing suspension. In Chapter 5, I examined these understandings and it became apparent that the participants had begun to move from the use of terms specifically referencing their comic improvisation experience and were beginning to connect those experiences to generative dialogue. In the focus group, Mark described "dwelling in the holy insecurity to create space for building understandings." Bob commented, in his Second Interview that, when he tried to be responsive in the Second Dialogue, he was "aware on a metacognitive level" of his behaviour. In his Second Interview, Jess described how he became aware during the course of the study that he had to relearn communication patterns because being responsive was "definitely not natural ... not what we are trained to do." In the focus group, participants discussed how in our culture we are rewarded for being in control and winning an argument. Greg remarked that we have "spent our time developing ourselves so we can be in control or so that life is predictable so we can be in charge of what we need to be in charge of and generative dialogue is the opposite."

As evidenced in the above comments, the participants were able to articulate a reasonably deep comprehension of being responsive and were actively beginning to recognize the difference between tough talk or debate and generative dialogue, according to Scharmer's categories of types of dialogue (Gunnlaugson, 2007). These categories were briefly referenced in my PowerPoint pre-dialogue presentations on the first and final sessions – see Appendix D. This provided a basic understanding and framework for our exploration of dialogue. The descriptions referenced above emerged

spontaneously, however, out of a conversation about being responsive. The use of these terms by the participants would seem to reflect the development of a deeper understanding of dialogue and participants were actively attaching their experience to the framework provided. I did not prompt these connections in my questions during the focus group.

The depth of understanding and ability to articulate this understanding of the dialogue competencies being explored in this study was very evident in the focus group discussion. I will only highlight a few examples here. When looking at the ability of suspension in the focus group, Murray stated: "I practice a monologue in my head but the reply is what you build on. It gives you context and direction." Greg found there was a difference between comic improvisation and reality when he described how

... the dialogue was embedded in reality and there were real issues and most of us around the table have spent our lives collecting information and observing society; so we have a lot of opinions about reality which are immediately jogged by the question.

He was clearly aware of the preconceptions and judgements that rose up for him in the second dialogue. Greg was describing a difficulty to suspend in regards to co-generating new ideas in the dialogue. The idea of building new ideas and understanding or creating something new was one of the more difficult competencies to apply in the dialogue. It can be seen as a summative competency, which requires being in the holy insecurity, being responsive and practicing suspension. In his second dialogue, Sam stated that "there were new ideas ... it was like there were elevations or something." Many participants described a process in dialogue of identifying current understandings

as necessary to build toward new ones. This demonstrated an ability to reflect on the process in a very meaningful way. It also suggested, however, the necessity of allowing time for a more in-depth exploration of the ideas than was provided in the five-minute dialogues.

As discussed in Chapter Five, Section 5.4, during the Second Interviews and the Focus Group, participants were able to reflect on the competencies for dialogue and their reflections were informed by their experiences of comic improvisation. This ability to transfer learning is particularly striking as participants primarily experienced the dialogue competencies in the context of comic improvisation and only had a five minute opportunity to apply them to the dialogue exercise. This is also noteworthy because, in the design of this study, they received little knowledge or cues that could truly help them to bridge into the application of these competencies to generative dialogue. I intentionally did not use dialogical competencies terms during the comic improvisation training. Connections expressed by the participants were based on their experience and understanding, not my explanations.

In designing this study I did not modify the method and design I have previously used in facilitating comic improvisation workshops in the past. As previously mentioned in Chapter 1, I made the connections between dialogue and comic improvisation based on my previous experience participating in comic improvisation. In this study, I wanted to explore whether the participants also made connections based on their experience of participating in comic improvisation and, if so, what those might be. I wanted to see if the experience of comic improvisation itself would inform their understanding of dialogue.

6.3. Comic Improvisation as Energetic Play

In contrast to comic improvisation, the participants in this study did not describe their experience with dialogue as energizing or playful. This, however, should not be generalized to all dialogue. Dialogue can provide an energized pleasurable space of discovery and freedom (Bakhtin, 1983). Having serious dialogues punctuated by moments of hilarity is also a common experience. Comic improvisation, however, goes a step further and ensures a distinct atmosphere of playful fun and is designed for entertainment. One could say that dialogue can be fun but by its very form and intention comic improvisation is fun. In considering comic improvisation as a strategy for training, this is an important characteristic to identify.

Having been present for the comic improvisation sessions and reviewing the video tapes, there is no doubt that the participants enjoyed themselves. The sessions are filled with laughter, cheering and applause. Semtov (2011) describes comic improvisation as “a joyful, creative, and playful activity of discovery” (p. 103). In my rationale in Chapter One, I identified the wide appeal of comic improvisation as a reason why it is an excellent method for training. Engleberts called improvisation playful and energetic and remarked that “it is possible to call theatresports a jubilant art” (2004, p. 155). The participants of this study brought forward similar conclusions. In the focus group, when Jess compared comic improvisation to dialogue, he commented that in dialogue “the energy is not there ... it just dissipates because you have stopped having fun.” Bob described that after a comic improvisation workshop “you just want to keep having this energy and let’s just keep going.” Many of the participants commented on the playful nature of comic improvisation. This is not surprising as the form of comic

improvisation used in this study can be described as a series of “short, funny games driven by audience suggestions” (Love, 2008, p. 39).

There is significance in the fact that participants found comic improvisation to be pleasurable. In a cross-case analysis of critical media literacy and implications for transformative learning, Tisdell (2008) found that the pleasure and humor of watching television or movies has the ability to facilitate transformative learning by drawing the learner into new experiences. In the focus group, Mark declared that comic improvisation created “a whole bunch of pleasurable feelings.” By reviewing recent research on motivation and emotion in learning, Boekarets (2010) determined that “students are more motivated to engage in learning when they experience positive emotions towards learning activities” (p. 100). This would mean that, as a strategy for training, comic improvisation can be a motivator for learning these transferable dialogue competencies. As Tisdell observed in her study in *Critical Media Literacy*, when students were “given the pleasure element [students were] easy to engage” (2008, p. 155).

Another important aspect of the playful nature of comic improvisation is that it creates a safe place for participants to experiment with the difficult dialogue competencies, including being in the holy insecurity, being responsive and accepting, suspending judgement and preconception and generating something new. This is not to say that the participants were not taking risks as they performed in front of their peers, but the subject matter was fictional. As Greg described in comic improvisation “the beauty of it and the uniqueness of it was ... you put things together that would never ever occur together in reality and so you have this conjured reality.” This ‘conjured reality’ was spontaneously built on audience suggestions and by the players themselves.

The nature of comic improvisation is to suspend your disbelief and create; it is not intended to be real. It was in this realm of make-believe where players were not bound by what was reasonable that the dialogue competencies were practiced. Theatre is often used as a strategy or method to explore social justice issues in a similar manner. Butterick and Selman (2003) advocated using a fictitious context to explore serious topics to provide an element of protection for those participating. An example of this can be seen in an applied theatre project done in the K-12 school system in New Zealand, where an applied theatre project that dealt with the very sensitive issue of child abuse toured the schools. This project utilised a sophisticated in-role use of a video game about a dysfunctional family to provide the necessary distance and protection to create a safe forum for participants (O'Connor & Welsh-Morris, 2006). Bob spoke of using play to explore trauma in the focus group. He said:

Safety has to do with how much control they feel so in that case because it gives them an ability to laugh and look at it playfully. They have more control which allows them to feel that they have that ability to keep away from the stuff that could traumatize or trigger and maybe work through something in a creative way.

By having the participants in this study learn and practice the dialogue competencies in the realm of comedy, there was an element of safety. As Vera and Crossan pointed out, in comic improvisation, there is no failure; you can't get it wrong (2004).

The element of safety was described by the participants particularly when they compared using the dialogue competencies in comic improvisation to the paired dialogues. In the focus group, Jess compared comic improvisation and dialogue and remarked that in dialogue, "you can't just say oh there is an elephant" where as in comic

improvisation all things are possible”. Mark commented in the focus group that in comic improvisation, you can “just be creative and silly and just make up the most bizarre kind of things.” He later added “there are no repercussions in the future and so my mental state is very much in a different place.” Greg agreed when he said that “for me the dialogue was very different from Improv because the dialogue was embedded in reality and there were real issues.” It seems evident that the participants found it easier to put forward ideas and practice dialogue competencies in the context of comic improvisation. As Bob described, “there is a sense of spontaneity and freedom” and in the dialogues “it didn’t feel so playful.” This aspect of protection or freedom is a positive attribute that comic improvisation brings as a training strategy.

Comic improvisation is a distinct form of improvisation that has specific inherent structures that provide the element of comedy. Role playing, for example, is a form of improvisation that is housed in the context of reality; conversely, comic improvisation is housed in the context of the absurd where the unbelievable can happen. It is this element of incongruity that produces the comedy and makes it fun. When looking at the potential of comic improvisation as a means of gaining awareness and understanding of some of the competencies for generative dialogue, this appealing sense of fun was an aspect I considered. The wide appeal and attraction of comic improvisation attracts, engages and motivates. This is quite an asset for a training tool. Specifically, the previously mentioned element of protection also makes comic improvisation an excellent method for training dialogical competencies. Housed in the frame of make-believe and the ridiculous, participants can acquire serious competencies for serious dialogues.

6.4. Comic Improvisation as Carnival

Previously, in my literature review, I linked comic improvisation to Bakhtin's carnival. Bakhtin's idea of carnival is a joyful communal moment where normal hierarchies and rules are suspended. I will now go further and assert that comic improvisation performances are in carnival. Lowe, when exploring the nature of comedy, suggested that "comedy encourages a Bakhtinian view of itself as anarchic, entropic, centrifugal, and a carnivalesque inversion of everyday life (2007, p.2). In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin himself stated: "it is characteristic that the subculture of the theater has even retained something of carnivalistic license, the carnivalistic sense of the world" (1984, p. 131). Comic improvisation fits into this category as a subculture of theatre. He further described the venue of carnival: "Carnival knows neither stage nor footlights [occurring in] contact-points for heterogeneous people — streets, taverns, roads, bathhouses, decks of ships, and so on" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 128). Similarly, comic improvisation often takes place in coffee houses, nightclubs and less traditional theatre spaces. Johnston began Theatresports in wrestling arenas and his first company in Calgary performed in a cattle auction house (1999). I am reminded of my own performances in Victoria, BC that took place in the causeway of the Inner Harbour with the host calling out to the swarms of tourists "come see the show." This fits so nicely with Bakhtin's insistence that the carnival must take place in the common square because the "idea [of] carnival belongs to the whole people, it is universal, everyone must participate in its familiar contact" (1984, p. 128).

Similar to Bakhtin's idea of the polyphonic where there is a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness (Bakhtin, 1984) so is the laughter of the carnival a plurality of voices. Carnival can be described as a moment when

“normal life is suspended, including hierarchical distances between people produced by family, groups, associations, institutions, traditions, and the society” (Sullivan et al., 2009, p.329). Bakhtin describes carnival as “a pageant without footlights and without a division into performers and spectators” (1984, p. 122). A comic improvisation performance also has a tearing down of the division and roles of audience and performers. Audience members shout suggestions for the scenes and are sometimes invited on stage to join in. The host speaks directly to the audience, and by doing this, tears down the fourth wall or invisible barrier between audience and actors in traditional theatre. In standard Theatresports, “during the performance, the spectators can throw (plastic) roses to the actor or team they particularly like, and sponges at the judge(s) with whom they disagree” and are invited to vote on their favourite teams (Engelberts, 2004, p 158). The audience is invited into the performance and normal rules of behaviour do not apply. Bakhtin’s description of carnival is similar as it too is communal performance free from the normal social order where all people direct participants (1984).

Bakhtin further describes the atmosphere of carnival as a “free and familiar attitude spread[ing] over everything: over all values, thoughts, phenomena, and things. All things that were once self-enclosed, disunified, distanced from one another by a noncarnivalistic hierarchical worldview are drawn into carnivalistic contacts and combinations” (1984, p. 123). The atmosphere of carnival is an atmosphere of emancipation. “People who in life are separated by impenetrable hierarchical barriers enter into free familiar contact on the carnival square” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 123).

This removal of hegemonic structure in carnival provides “an environment where true dialogue can occur” (Sullivan et al., 2009, p. 329). Gallagher (2010) suggested that comic “improvisation validates play *and* promises a social agenda with emancipatory

ideals” (p. 45). The idea of comic improvisation having emancipatory ideals is interesting. Generally, comic improvisation is simply thought of as a form of entertainment. However, David Shepherd, the co-founder of the famous Second City Company, also associated improvisation with this idea of emancipation. Shepherd advocated for political community theatre that would fight oppression through dialogue interaction (Seham, 2001). I did not find enough evidence in my study or research to support the idea that comic improvisation is a form that leads to social emancipation. I did, however, see connections to comic improvisation creating relationships of equity within its form (Ringstorm & Psy, 2007; Wiener, 1996).

Comic improvisation is a humbling experience. It demands that players enter the stage in equality and humility as they must accept and forward the ideas of others. As Mark stated in the closing focus group, in the construct of comic improvisation “with yes *and* ... you just said something ridiculous and I have to agree with it.” Comic improvisation also invites the spectator in. Unlike traditional theatre where the actors have rehearsed and developed expertise in the script and then deliver it to the audience who is separated from them, comic improvisation is co-created with the audience in the moment. The players’ struggles are revealed and are part of the performance. Like carnival, comic improvisation is not a place of lofty status and position.

Bakhtin popularized the idea of carnival as “a signifier of joyful relativism—a temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order” (Hollis, 2001, p.227). Bakhtin saw carnival as an atmosphere that allowed true discourse as it removed the hegemonic structures. There are no experts or sacredly held truths – all is up in the air and open. In carnival we do “not laugh from a position outside, but from within the body of humanity” (Hollis, 2001, p.230). Shields and Edwards (2005)

described true dialogue as a safe place “where people can come together without the usual power structures and rules. It is not only a physical space but also an emotional, intellectual and spiritual space” (p. 76). Comic improvisation also has this quality.

Holland-Toll (2004) suggested that carnival shifts the world order and allows for truth to be spoken. This can be associated with the current popularity of the NEWS parody. Druick (2009) examined television NEWS parodies through Bakhtin’s concept of genre. She connects them to carnival as they are “offering carnivalesque inversions of the usual order, these shows use the cultural knowledge of genre to upset expectations and de-familiarize authoritative” (Druick, p. 305). NEWS parodies are a form of sketch comedy, as previously defined, related to but not defined as comic improvisation. Sketch comedy relies on improvisation for its creation but its performance is planned and partially scripted. The genre of the NEWS parody began from segments of sketch comedy TV shows where one weekly sketch would be framed as a NEWS show. These NEWS parodies became full-length shows in their own right. Shows like *The Rick Mercer Report*, *The Daily Show*, and *The Colbert Report* are all part of this new genre. Parody of the sacred and serious is an element of carnival (Bahktin, 1984). It is a moment where the comedian, or clown, can poke fun at the King or the reigning political power. In carnival, we see the de-crowning of the king (Bahktin, 1984).

Bakhtin (date) described carnival as “the place for working out a new mode of interrelationship between individuals, counter posed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of non-carnival life” (p. 122). It is in carnival that people are freed “from the authority of all hierarchical positions (social estate, rank, age, property) defining them totally in non-carnival life” (1984, p.123). This freedom allows the normally unspoken to be spoken. It is a place of shifting culture.

In reviewing my data, I see that the participants experienced this place of acceptance and freedom, in comic improvisation where things were not usual. In the focus group, Jess said that in comic improvisation, “you give up the normal, if you will, rules of society.” Comic improvisation was described as energized fun where “there is a sense of spontaneity and freedom” (Bob, focus group). I feel confident in stating that participants were in a state of carnival while they participated in comic improvisation. However, there is no evidence that this was carried over into the paired dialogues. In fact, evidence would suggest the opposite. There is a common thread in the research that links the idea of carnival to dialogue; however, these connections were not brought forward or realised by the participants. I would suggest that methods of bringing the playful carnival like energy found in the comic improvisation workshops into the dialogues would be worth exploring. As identified early in this chapter, perhaps providing a similar structure for both could assist in creating this space. The carnivalistic nature of comic improvisation is important in its own right as it provides the attractive appeal that draws people to it as well as an element of protection. It also supplies an experience of abandoning conventional rules and protocols that can inform an understanding of dialogical competencies. I believe it may be possible for comic improvisation to be used to help participants discover that joyful emancipation of Bakhtin’s carnival in dialogue. This would be valuable and is worth further exploration.

6.5. Linking to Scharmer’s Theory

In Bakhtin’s advocacy for all voices to be heard and a reversal or suspension of hierarchical structures, I find that he is making a political statement. Bakhtin (1984) suggested that “everything resulting from socio-hierarchical inequality or any other form

of inequality among people” should be suspended in dialogue (p. 122). A movement to dialogue was a movement to equality. In *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin advocates for a “plurality of consciousness-centres not reduced to a single ideological common denominator” (1984, p. 26). Bakhtin was Russian and much of his early career was under Stalin’s regime where his work was often repressed. At one point, he was even sent to prison (Sullivan et al., 2009). It is not surprising then that he supported liberation and the free exchange of thoughts and ideas through dialogue. Scharmer, who coined the term generative dialogue, also seeks emancipation through dialogue. However, he advocates generative dialogue as a method for economic inclusion.

Scharmer and Kaueferin (2013) advocated moving from an “ego-system awareness that cares about the well-being of oneself to an eco-system awareness that cares about the well-being of all, including oneself” (p.1). This idea of an ecological system, where all is connected and in relationship, is one that is echoed in Indigenous worldviews. Although Scharmer uses a U as a graphic representation of this eco-system, I am reminded of a medicine wheel where all are represented and connected.

In order to move from an ego-system to an eco-system we must have an open will, an open heart and an open mind. This requires us to listen outside the world of our preconceived notions by being in presence, or a state of *presencing*. Presencing is the act of sensing what is all around you while remaining in the present moment. Presencing shifts ones seeing from an inner place where a human system operates to a place of emerging possibilities (Scharmer, 2009). In order to be in presence, one must have the competency of suspension as previously defined. Scharmer, however, is referring to suspending on a group or organizational level rather than an individual one. “Organizational communities must divest themselves of historical ways of being and

thinking that hinder new ways of creating opportunities, products or ideas” (Scharmer & Kauefer, 2013, p. 12). “Generative dialogue opens the door to the phenomena of presencing and emergent realities” (Scharmer, 2009, p. 7), which are necessary for moving into the inclusive eco-system proposed by Scharmer and Kauefer (2013).

In the focus group session I asked, “If there was an increased awareness of saying yes and being responsive connecting from the comic improvisation to dialogue?” As the focus group participants conversed in an open-ended manner, Sam spoke of how business was in direct contradiction to being responsive. He used the example of when you are trying to buy something and how in using this “yes and ... sort of thing, there is a danger ... before you know it you have just bought something and you have no idea what it is.” Jess introduced the idea that our current mode of competitive capitalism was in direct contrast to the competencies we were exploring. “It is a very cultural and societal thing. We in North America totally shun most of that expression. We like the serious business man; a serious man making serious money.” The participants’ suggestions that generative dialogue was in contradiction to our current economic system surprised me because although Scharmer directly connects generative dialogue as a method of achieving a new eco-system of economics, my participants were unaware of this. At no point was this referenced or even inferred. This connection was being made by reflecting on their limited dialogue experience informed by their participation in comic improvisation. It is here where I need to once again suggest that these findings cannot be generalized. This was an all-male group that had post-secondary education. I do not believe that these revelations can be generalized and that this experienced when replicated would necessarily produce these results. I still believe that this connection is noteworthy as the beginning of connecting generative dialogue

competencies as a method to counter an ego-system of economics seemed to be coming forward for some of the participants.

6.6. Transferring Competencies from Comic Improvisation to Generative Dialogue: Implications for Curriculum Design

The ability to transfer knowledge and competencies from one setting to another is an important area of research in education (Bransford et al, 2004; Dumont et al, 2010, Hattie, 2012). The ability to transfer competencies from one context to another determines whether formal education is applicable to the real world. According to research, it has become apparent that this ability to transfer competencies and knowledge should not be taken for granted. “Transfer is affected by the context of original learning; people can learn in one context, yet fail to transfer to other contexts” (Bransford et al, 2004, p. 56). This study is concerned with increasing awareness and understanding through comic improvisation and then with the transfer this new awareness and understanding to a new setting: generative dialogue.

In Chapter Five, when describing the self-assessed experience of the participants, they noted sometimes struggling to apply what they had learned in comic improvisation to their closing dialogues. There may be a number of reasons for their reported struggles that emerge directly from the participants’ descriptions of their experience. These observations are also supported in current educational research. First, there was a lack of scaffolding, side coaching or formative feedback in the dialogues. The lack of time for dialogue was also brought forward by the participants. The lack of time specifically references not only the five-minute time limit for the second

dialogues, but also participants' limited experience with dialogue. Further, the nature of generative dialogue was not deeply explored or experienced during this study.

These elements were, for the most part, intentional in the design of this study. I chose not to teach specific competencies important for mastering generative dialogue because I did not want my teaching of these competencies to influence the increased understanding and ability of these competencies. I also did not provide feedback or coaching during the dialogues as it would cloud whether participants' ability to transfer their increased understanding or ability in dialogue competencies was a result of the comic improvisation or was the result of coaching and feedback. However, this research design denied participants the chance for scaffolding towards skill development and developing a deep understanding of these competencies in the context of dialogue before they attempted application. In looking at implications for future designs for curriculum towards transferring competencies from comic improvisation to dialogue, these limitations could be reconciled.

As referenced briefly in Chapter Five, Section 5.4, participants compared the different structures that were used in the comic improvisation workshops and the dialogue sessions. The comic improvisation scenes were done in front of me and the other participants while the dialogues were done in isolated pairs. The comic improvisation workshops were done in five progressive two-hour sessions while the dialogues were done in two isolated five-minute sessions six weeks apart. The structure that I chose led to a number of differences between the experience of comic improvisation and the dialogues. For example, I did not provide formative feedback during the dialogues while I did offer feedback during the comic improvisation workshops. Formative feedback is when learners are given information to decrease the

gap between where they are in skill development and where they need to be for success or mastery (Hattie, 2012). During the comic improvisation workshops, I would side coach and even sometimes pause the scene to give comments, ask questions or make suggestions. I would also comment after each scene. Greg referred to me as a moderator who was policing the guidelines during the comic improvisation scenes. Bob remarked that, in the comic improvisation workshops, “we have our Director saying, ‘No you got to do this.’” Later, he commented: “And when we make our director laugh, or we feel the yes; we realise we are getting there.” Although not intentional, my laughter was also feedback.

To further elaborate on the idea of natural reactions (laughter, smiles, etc.) as feedback Sam commented on the role of the audience as he described learning to be responsive by accepting ideas in comic improvisation: “There is an audience watching so you can’t say no.” Mark spoke of a pressure to perform due to the presence of the audience. Although the other participants were not directly side coaching or commenting, as I was, they were present watching and sometimes laughing and clapping. This can definitely be seen as feedback and I believe it was powerful. Hattie (2012) claims that “receiving feedback from peers can have a positive effect on success and reducing uncertainty” (p. 131). A positive reaction such as laughter can certainly let participants know they are achieving comedy. When viewing the videotaped comic improvisation sessions, feedback was evident as audience members commented “nice” or “well done” and clapped and laughed, which let the improvising participants know they were successful. “Feedback is one of the most powerful influences on achievement” (Hattie, 2012, p. 134).

When looking at designing curriculum where competencies in comic improvisation are intended to be transferred to dialogue, I would suggest providing participants with increased feedback. “In order for learners to gain insight into their learning and their understanding, frequent feedback is critical: students need to monitor their learning and actively evaluate their strategies and their current levels of understanding (Bransford et al, 2004, p. 78). In this study design I kept the comic improvisation workshop sessions discrete from the dialogue sessions. If a similar curriculum design model were to be used in the future then it should also include debrief sessions after each comic improvisation workshop that explicitly tie the comic improvisation work to dialogue competencies. Participants could also receive feedback on their dialogues to enhance their understanding of the competencies being explored during the dialogue portion. Another model that could be used is to intersperse the comic improvisation sessions with dialogue sessions. There could be a comic improvisation workshop followed by a debrief, and then a dialogue session followed by a debrief. This would allow the participants to apply a specific competency from comic improvisation directly to dialogue.

In report by the Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, the US National Research Council found that current research indicated “the ability to transfer skills from one context to another can be dramatically improved with prompting” (Bransford et al, 2004, p. 48). The American National Research Council report on *Education for Life and Work: Developing Transferable Knowledge and Skills in the 21st Century* also suggests that “ongoing formative assessment can provide guidance to students which supports and extends their learning, encouraging deeper learning and development of transferable competencies” (2012, p. 188). As brought forward by the

participants in this study and supported by current research, formative feedback would enhance the ability to transfer competencies developed in comic improvisation to be transferred to generative dialogue. I would highly recommend feedback for the dialogue exercises be incorporated in future curriculum designs. This could also be done by mimicking the comic improvisation workshop construct of an audience or by moving into an intergroup dialogue formation of a large group dialogue. This would allow for participants to view others dialoguing in a manner that my paired dialogues did not. It would also allow participants to see others in the act of dialoguing and give each other feedback.

Another difference noted by four participants in Chapter 5 was the lack of time provided in the five-minute dialogues as a restriction that limited the opportunity to fully apply their new competencies from comic improvisation to dialogue. I must admit that this was a flaw in my design. My reason for allocating only five minutes was to provide the same time frame for the dialogues as for a comic improvisation scene. I had a vision that participants would be starting with a statement like an offer and would move into the holy insecurity as they practiced suspension and gave a response. This did not occur. Unlike comic improvisation where each scene is entirely new, dialogue is usually built on prior knowledge of an issue or context. Participants felt they needed time to express their prior knowledge and ideas before developing new ones. My decision to have only five minutes allotted for the dialogues may have impeded the application of the very competencies I was hoping participants could apply in the second dialogue. Based on the experience and this data, I regret my decision to keep the final dialogue so short

In the focus group session, participants also noted that the competencies were learned over time in a process within the comic improvisation workshops, an opportunity

that was not given to dialogue. Greg mentioned that letting go of control in the comic improvisation classes “was a process and it changed over our time with the classes, I think.” Bob, in speaking of comic improvisation, stated: “the flow was a lot easier [and] more comfortable” in the last comic improvisation workshop. Conversely, he described the beginning comic improvisation workshops as less comfortable “just because it is new and just because there was still that sense of feeling awkward and trying to get this.” This same process of gradual development was not afforded participants as preparation for the dialogues. Sam remarked on the competency of being responsive “so it is obviously a learning process, right?” When applying being responsive to the dialogue, Bob stated, “Because we have gone through this five weeks and because I know what the connection is supposed to be and everything ... we wanted to have this connection.” It was evident that the participants understood the nature of the five sessions in comic improvisation as an extended learning process.

Deliberate practice activities with formative feedback for extended periods can optimize learning (Hattie, 2012). This deliberate focused practice occurred for the comic improvisation in the workshops but not for the paired dialogue sessions. This was intentional in the design of this study because I wanted to analyze the participants’ unprompted experience of connecting the dialogue competencies from the comic improvisation to the dialogue. Thus, the two dialogue exercises were not intended to show a progression of practice from one dialogue to another. My intention was simply to permit participants have an initial experience of dialogue to allow them to compare their experience dialoguing before and after their comic improvisation training. The lack of opportunity for practice in dialogue was noted by Sam, when he surmised that “comic improv affected us but to work in the dialogue this should be practiced a little bit. People

were falling short in the dialogue.” In the focus group, Jess stated that what was needed was five weeks of dialogue. Clearly, the participants recognized the lack of time spent dialoguing. Focused practice has been identified as a positive contributing factor to competency development (Bransford et al, 2004; Hattie, 2012); thus, a curriculum design for transferring competencies from comic improvisation to generative dialogue should include more opportunities for practice in dialoguing. Koppett (2013) theorized that when applying the competencies developed in comic improvisation to business, “individuals [need] to use these skills in the workplace to build processes of affiliative leadership; they must continue to practice using them with colleagues” (p. 3). The same is true when these competencies are being applied to dialogue and this did not happen in the scope of this study. “Practice is essential for deeper learning” (National Research Council, 2012, p. 147) and this practice time needs to be included in future models of training for dialogue to ensure development of these competencies in dialogue. As previously discussed dialogue is more than simply a set of competencies but is a shift in consciousness. To develop, call forth and become accustomed to shifting into this other way of being would also be enhanced by practice and training. Previously, I have described two possible approaches: one where comic improvisation training is discrete and precedes dialogue sessions and the other where comic improvisation workshops are interspersed with dialogue training. In both these models, I would strongly recommend that there are numerous and longer attempts at dialogue in order to provide practice and an opportunity for building the competencies in dialogue similar to that provided for comic improvisation in my study.

Another quality that increases transferability of competencies from one context to another is knowledge of the context in which the competencies are to be applied

(Schneider & Stern, 2010). A real understanding of the nature, purposes and characteristics of dialogue was also not fully explored. In the opening session, I chose to provide participants with an initial understanding of the characteristics of generative dialogue through use of a PowerPoint presentation. This gave participants a preliminary understanding of the terms and concepts we would be exploring. Research indicates that in order to encourage positive transfer of knowledge structures from one context to another, providing a deep contextual understanding of the similarities of the contexts increases the ability for application (Schneider & Stern, 2010).

Given the design of this study, this deep contextual understanding was not provided. In the focus group, Sam described how he found it difficult to apply these new competencies and understandings in the new setting or context of dialogue. “The dialogue was five minutes and it was a great conversation, but unlike comic improv, I didn’t know how to push it.” I believe that if comic improvisation is to be used to build competencies towards dialogue, providing a much more thorough exploration of generative dialogue would assist participants in transference. Often, evidence for positive transfer does not appear until people have had a chance to learn about the new domain to which transfer is expected or desired. Then, transfer occurs and is evident in the learner’s ability to grasp the new information more quickly (Bransford et al, 2004, p. 218). Although participants self-assessed some transfer of the competencies experienced in comic improvisation into the dialogue sessions, a deeper exploration of the nature of generative dialogue and the application of these competencies in generative dialogue is indicated and may have increased the transfer. I must note that the transfer of competencies is apparent only in the participants’ perceptions and descriptions of the dialogue exercise. An independent observer using a rating

instrument or observational framework could have given a better indication of the extent to which transfer actually occurred. Nevertheless, I would make a recommendation for further examination of generative dialogue with the participants to be included when developing models for further use of comic improvisation as a training strategy for generative dialogue. This would provide a better understanding of the competencies being explored and developed.

In summary, there are a number of suggestions that arise or come forward from this study for consideration in future designs for the transfer of competencies from comic improvisation to dialogue. There would need to be longer and more frequent attempts at dialogue with increased scaffolding, side coaching and formative feedback during and following the dialogue sessions. I would also recommend a further examination of the format used for the dialogues past paired dialogues. This could include large group dialogues, where an audience is included for the dialogues. This could take the form of an inner circle of dialoguing participants and an outer circle of observers. There could be more opportunities for participants to acquire a deeper understanding of the nature of generative dialogue. This could possibly be interspersed during the dialogue sessions in a manner where new knowledge from one dialogue session scaffolds into the next. There are current models that are already being pursued to transfer competencies in comic improvisation to other areas. These could also inform future designs as well as continued inclusion of strategies for learning transference in educational research.

6.6.1. **Current Comic Improvisation Competency Training Models**

Weiner and Ringstorm have been leading exploration and research for using comic improvisation to inform psychotherapy practices (Ringstorm, 2011; Weiner, 2013). Comic improvisation has been seen as a method to build a more equitable relationship between therapist and client and allows for a “flexibility in both initiating and accepting others' directions and suggestions” (Wiener, n.d., para 4). Both Ringstorm and Wiener promote the application of the accepting and building of offers that are essential in comic improvisation to the practice of psychotherapy (Ringstorm & Psy, 2007; Wiener, 2004). Ringstorm articulated that comic improvisation “begins from the unknown, draws from the unknown, and thereafter unfolds from some unknown into a co-created setting and relationship that eventually lead to a plausible end” (Ringstorm, 2001, p. 733). This is similar to the idea I offered in my earlier descriptions of a competency shared by comic improvisation and dialogue, namely: the necessity of entering into Buber’s holy insecurity to begin the generation of new ideas and understandings.

Ringstrom addresses “the conflict for the analyst between ritual and spontaneity” (Knoblauch, 2001, p. 786). He has compared traditional psychotherapy to scripted theatre as being prescriptive with set roles and scripts (Ringstorm, 2001). “In contrast the metaphor of improvisational theater refers to actions that arise on the spur of the moment, without preparation” (Ringstorm,2001, p. 727) and “can be a useful metaphor for grasping key elements in the moment-to-moment unfolding of any analytic process” (Ringstorm,2001, p. 731). Comic improvisation acts as a live metaphor “to capture how an analytic process can proceed along an amazing sequence of improvised moments of co-creativity” (Ringstorm & Psy, 2007, p.110) between therapist and client.

Ringstorm has advocated for therapists to use the metaphor of comic improvisation to “‘*break the grip*’ of repeating the familiar —that is, the patient’s age-old routine for relating and/or the analyst’s rigidified prescriptive manner of treatment” (Ringstorm, 2001, p.735). He recommended the therapist try using the comic improvisational competency of ‘yes, and...’ where the therapist accepts wherever the client is going and spontaneously adds to this (Ringstorm & Psy, 2007). He has not, however, recommend the therapist actually undertake building comic improvisational competencies or have his clients actually participate in comic improvisation but instead uses them as a lens to view psychotherapeutic techniques (Ringstorm, 2011). He then used case studies from his practice to illustrate the implementation of comic improvisational competencies in a therapeutic context (Ringstorm & Psy, 2008). This is dissimilar to my study as I am exploring the embodied experience of comic improvisation to allow competencies to be developed for use in generative dialogue.

Wiener has actually used comic improvisation in his practice to devise exercises that he intersperses with more traditional therapy and as well facilitates extensive training for therapists for using comic improvisational techniques in their practice. He has used comic improvisation exercises as an action approach and has suggested that it is more effective than talk only therapy (Wiener, n.d). Wiener’s method of RfG, (Rehearsals for Growth) in contrast to Ringstorm’s previously described approach, requires the therapist to undertake substantial experience in comic improvisation for the therapist to employ comic improvisation to psychotherapy. Wiener urges leaving the safety of simply reading research and moving into the experience of comic improvisation. “One may start in the audience at improv theaters, but one only fully appreciates and learns technique by doing—and Dr. Wiener is explicit about this”

(Reiter, 1997, p. 34). Wiener has recommended that therapists who want to use these methods in their own practice must do more than research or even watch comic improvisation but must also be trained extensively as players in the form itself. He offers “four fifteen hour courses for mental health professional” (Wiener, n.d., para # 2).

Wiener, unlike Ringstorm, is using comic improvisation as an intervention in his sessions with clients, where the clients are directed to participate in comic improvisation exercises. He has uses comic improvisation with his clients to address relationship features as role flexibility, status equality, emotional expressiveness, cooperation/competitiveness, intimacy, and capacity for play (Wiener, 1996). He uses traditional talk therapy interspersed with comic improvisation. He will begin a session with traditional talk therapy and then has the clients participate in a comic improvisation exercise like *tug of war* or *one word story*. He then moves back into talk therapy to debrief and reflect on the implications of what was experienced by the clients.

As previously noted, there has also been research on using comic improvisation in the field of business and organizational leadership. “In the past decade, improvisation has gained recognition as a strategic competence that supports 21st-century firms’ requirements for change, adaptability, responsiveness to the environment, loose boundaries, and minimal hierarchy “(Vera & Crossan, 2004, p. 727). Similar to Ringstorm’s research, some of this work has been to gain an understanding of the qualities and competencies used in comic improvisation and then to transfer these understandings to the world of business. Comic improvisation is used as a “metaphor to examine the performance implications of improvisational processes in firms” (Vera & Crossan, 2004, p. 727).

There has also been some use of participatory comic improvisation to actually train or build these competencies for business management and negotiation. For the last decade Dan Moshavi, the current Dean of Dominican University's School of Business and Leadership in California (2011), has been researching and implementing the use of comic improvisation to provide business management "instructors with improvisational tools for enhancing student understanding and application of management" (Moshavi, 2001). Moshavi, like Wiener, has been a comic improvisation performer. Similar to Wiener's use in psychotherapy, Moshavi's method also advocates specific training in comic improvisation for instructors who can then bring comic improvisation into their classrooms. His method has instructors explicitly discuss management theories, lead students through a comic improvisation game, and then debrief the students on the implications of what they have experienced in connection to the management theory. As previously noted in Chapter 2 in my literature review, comic improvisation is also being used as a teaching strategy for negotiation. "By using simple exercises from improvisational theater, negotiation teachers can demonstrate how improvisational comics develop their skills at recognizing 'offers'" (Balachandra, et al., 2005, p. 438). In this example the comic improvisation exercises develop competencies and understandings that are then discussed within the context of negotiation information and theories.

Psychotherapy, Business Management and Negotiation Training use comic improvisation activities contextualized within discussions of the context to which they are being applied to: psychotherapy and business and organizational leadership. This is different from the experience of my participants in this study. They then participated in the comic improvisation as a separate and discrete experience. They were given a brief

introduction to generative dialogue and to the competencies the study would explore. They then participated in a short, five minute paired dialogue exercise. They then participated in five weekly two hour comic improvisation workshops. This sequence was followed a week later by a review of generative dialogue and a further five minute paired dialogue session. As stated previously, my intention was not to provide a best practices model for a curriculum best suited to transfer competencies from comic improvisation to dialogue. The examples described above from a variety of fields using comic improvisation to build competencies to transfer into other arenas suggests that an interspersed use of comic improvisation within the context of the other area of practice might be better suited to facilitate the transfer process.

6.7. The Need for Further Research

As previously discussed, comic improvisation is being used for training competencies in negotiation, management and organizational leadership in business (Balachandra et al., 2005; Demsond & Jowitt, 2012; Diamond & Lefkoff, 1992; Gagnon, Vough & Nickerson, 2012; Harding, 2004; Hough, 2011; Moshavi, 2001; Koppett, 2001; Vera & Crossan, 2004). This research surrounding this training explores the theoretical connections between comic improvisation and business as well as describing the application of comic improvisation for the business management and negotiation classroom. The growing use of comic improvisation as a vehicle for training in business and organizational leadership has also resulted in a number of books to describe this process. Kat Koppet's book, for example, *Training to Imagine: Practical Improvisational Theatre Techniques for Trainers and Managers to Enhance Teamwork, Creativity, Leadership and Learning* (2001) describes methods of applying comic improvisation as a

training strategy and takes the form of a how to manual. Larger outcome based quantitative research is needed to test the validated and effects of these interventions or teaching strategies. Vera and Crossan (2004) when discussing using comic improvisation in organizational studies state that “the body of knowledge on improvisation is still fragmented, and conceptual frameworks and empirical studies are scarce (p. 728).

There are also numerous manuals for educators and directors wanting to use comic improvisation. These are generally how to books that describe methods of creating a comic improvisational troupe or ways to include comic improvisation in a classroom setting. There is a noticeable lack of academic research on the effects and outcomes of the application of comic improvisation in its own context. Leep (2004) stated that comic improvisation “remains an area of theatre that could benefit from further scholarship and critical analysis. Very few aesthetic theories on performance improvisation exist, as those who perform improvisation in the field are not scholars or theorists, but primarily performers” (p. 181). As Englebarts (2004) pointed out, “despite their popularity, theatresports have not attracted any serious attention from researchers: international databases are still silent about the phenomenon” (p. 156) in the field of theatre and education.

Why is this? Comic improvisation is outside the format of traditional theatre. Keith Johnstone devised Theatresports (a well-known and popular form of comic improvisation) as a working man’s [sic] theatre and its creation was inspired by amateur wrestling (Johnstone, 1999). Comic improvisation is intended to appeal to our baser instincts. Lowe (2007) described comic improvisation as “something appealing, something appalling ... something that’s bawdy and something for everybawdy” (p. 2).

As previously described in my literature review in Chapter 2, comic improvisation can trace its roots to commedia dell'arte which was often a street performance designed to attract a crowd of commoners coming to market (Schmitt, 2004). Commedia dell'arte was stocked with characters who were over exaggerated buffoons playing up exaggerated physical comedy for laughs (Ewald, 2005). Similar to commedia dell'arte, comic improvisation also includes easily recognizable stereotypes that don't develop any real depth in the short scenes typical to this form. Engelberts, 2004, determines that this is why comic improvisation performers are often accused of 'bad' acting by "professional critics who only occasionally indulge in watching theatresports" (p. 156).

“Comedy (particularly in contrast to rival genres) claims mass, populist appeal” (Lowe, 2007, p. 1). Comic improvisation is geared for the cheap laugh. Gallagher, a professor at the University of Toronto and Canada Research Chair in Theatre, describes encountering comic improvisation “as a competitive, male- dominated, derivative theatre form” complete with gender and racial stereotypes (2010, p. 42). Perhaps this connection to the lewd and sometimes offensive is part of comic improvisation's low status within the performing arts and academic communities. “Comedy repels as well and attracts” (Lowe, 2007, p. 1). .

Evidence of this exclusion was revealed during my recruitment phase for this study. I was sent an email from a director/professor in the Vancouver Island University's theatre department urging me to abandon any “pretense towards comic improvisation for a much more rewarding and creative form” of improvisation and further stated he would “have a hard time recommending this workshop to any of [his] students” (T. Farrell, personal communication, July 10, 2013). Engelberts described comic improvisation as having a predominantly amateur status (2004) and also commented that, “this theatrical

form transgresses the bounds of the artistic domain to which theatre is usually limited” (Engelberts, 2004, p. 156). Comic improvisation not only dismisses, it spurns the conventional rules of theatre and society itself. It “encourages a Bakhtinian view [where] anarchy is fantasized” (Lowe, 2007, p. 2). This may also be part of the reason comic improvisation is often marginalized by the academic educational and theatrical community.

6.7.1. Looking Forward

It is time for comic improvisation to be brought into the forefront of educational research. When I speak of education, I am including the K-12 system and am also including post-secondary and workplace training. Gallagher (2010) posited, “Johnstone’s influence on classroom drama is probably less considerable than it should be. His work *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre* was first published in 1979; it is hard to imagine why it has not had more impact in the field of education” (p. 43). Shaheen (2010) has contributed to a growing field of research linking the importance of creativity in education. She has described the economic necessity of an educated workforce and stated that currently “education systems are being required to undergo a major overhaul in resources, attitude and understanding so that creativity can be valued” (p. 156). She has written of a growing global movement to support educational activities to encourage creativity to promote successful learners who are confident creative thinkers who are active and informed citizens (Shaheen, 2010). Although her research is not specifically concerned with comic improvisation, it supports the idea that methods of education need to be reconceptualised. Damist specifically referenced comic improvisation as a vehicle when she stated: “if there has ever been a time when there is a need for great

spontaneous communicators who can be in the moment, embrace change, and make things happen, it's now" (2010, p.1).

As previously noted, there is work being done on comic improvisation's use in psychotherapy. Some businesses have also taken the lead by using comic improvisation as a training strategy for negotiation, management and organizational leadership (Balachandra et al., 2005; Demson & Jowitt, 2012; Diamond & Lefkoff, 1992; Gagnon, Vough & Nickerson, 2012; Harding, 2004; Hough, 2011; Moshavi, 2001; Koppett, 2001; Vera & Crossan, 2004); consequently, organizational leadership was the field in which I found the majority of the research on comic improvisation. It is important that comic improvisation has been recognized as a strategy for developing competencies applicable to other arenas. As Crossan (1998) indicated, "scholars have theorized that developing an ability to improvise may be effective for enacting a range of tasks, for example, interpreting the environment, creating emergent strategies, fostering teamwork, undertaking psychological risk, listening, and communicating" (p. 306). I found numerous examples of the emerging use of comic improvisation as a training tool for specific transferable competency development in business. Gagnon, Vough, and Nickerson (2012) described that the "central skills in improvisational theatre include maintaining an external focus, openness, listening and responsiveness, and an ability to create trust and action space for collective development of new ideas, approaches, methods and outcomes" (p. 744). They see these competencies as being applicable to a business context.

Their research, however, was primarily concerned in describing rationale and design for using comic improvisation as a training tool for businesses and organizations. "Many scholars are now offering conceptual frame-works that incorporate improvisation

into management science and instructional design” (Siviasailam, Thiagi, & Thiagarajan as cited in Koppett, 2001, p. xi). Nonetheless, there is still a lack of research that is outcome based. Although there is evidence of comic improvisation being used as a training tool in this area, I did not find any research that demonstrated the results of this training. As Crossan and Vera (2004) suggest “efforts to measure improvisation and its effects are strongly needed to sharpen current theories” (p. 744).

Weick (2001) described comic improvisation as “a just-in-time strategy and asserts that the new-found urgency in organizational studies to understand improvisation and learning is symptomatic of growing societal concerns about how to cope with discontinuity, multiple commitments, interruptions, and transient purposes that dissolve without warning” (as cited in Vera & Crossan, 2004, p. 728). I would further suggest that we take this urgency for deepening our understanding of using comic improvisation past the confines of its use in business and psychotherapy although current studies in these areas could inform the work.

I must also again assert that the research described here was in the genre of an exploratory case study that was built to explore and inform but not to prove causal relationships. This study explores a new idea for employing comic improvisation training as means of developing understanding and awareness about dialogue and fostering the competencies to engage in dialogue. Using my experience in comic improvisation to explore dialogue, I focused on four competencies. There may be other ways of viewing the competencies that are shared by both comic improvisation and dialogue. Further exploration of these and possibly other competencies in comic improvisation could also be informative.

If the use of comic improvisation to develop an increased understanding and competency for generative dialogue is to be substantiated, further research is necessary past this study. I would suggest that a deeper introspective reflective exploration of the participants' phenomenological experience that would also require prolonged engagement with and in dialogue could be done. As there is often a call for quantitative outcome based research to support qualitative studies, an experimental quantitative design could also be pursued. This study could have had two equivalent groups: one that received the comic improvisational training and a further control group that did not. These groups would need to be larger and contain a more generalized cross section of population than my seven postsecondary educated males. The element of relationship would need to be mitigated for either by building relationships or eliminating relationships among participants in both groups. Both groups should have the same orientation and dialogue sessions and, as previously noted, I strongly recommend longer dialogue sessions. The self-assessment from participants would still be useful in the form of interviews and a focus group and even possibly a survey. In addition to the self-assessment and reflection of the participants, I would recommend an objective analysis could also be developed and used to analyze the actual dialogues and provide quantitative comparative data between the two groups. An example of this sort of analysis can be seen in the work of Bob Weile. Weile, is an entrepreneur involved in knowledge management and author of the book *One Smart World* (Amazon, 2003). He has developed a "color-coded language as a process-mapping tool" called smart tracks (Weile, n.d., p.8). Using this coding would allow the dialogue contributions to be coded accordingly, so the thinking processes can emerge as "visible ... pathways to work through conflict management, planning, problem solving and decision-making tasks" (Weile, n.d., p.8). A similar system could be developed or adapted to track the actual

processes occurring in the dialogue sessions to support or verify the self-assessment of the participants. I would also recommend these dialogues be videotaped, transcribed and analyzed by a group of independent raters. This would allow for evidence to go forward for further research and could indicate a generalized application of using comic improvisation as a training tool for generative dialogue. I must caution, however, that this data would add to and not replace the introspection and reflection of the participants' phenomenological experience. What would be documented is the shift in behaviour that indicates the more profound internal shift in a way of being in the world.

My research has also indicated that there is a lack of academic research on comic improvisation in general as well as examining the effects or results of comic improvisation as a training or competency building strategy. Engelberts refers to a "dearth of research ... of this immensely popular improvisatory theatrical form" (2004, p. 155). I was unable to specifically locate any research that used comic improvisation to develop competencies for generative or relational dialogue. This case study supplies evidence that this is worth further investigation and research.

6.8. Conclusion

The purpose of my research was to explore the perceptions of participants as they engaged in dialogue after being actively involved in 5 two-hour comic improvisation-training workshops. I was looking to see if the participants were able to make connections (transfer) from comic improvisation to generative dialogue specifically in the

competencies of being in the holy insecurity, being responsive, practicing suspension and creating something new. According to the interviews and focus group data, all seven participants were able to make some connections between these two areas. As was also evident in the data, all seven participants self-assessed as having experienced some success in applying some of the competencies from comic improvisation to dialogue. However, the participants' perspectives of the experience and did not necessarily demonstrate a documented improvement in their ability to engage in dialogue. As previously described, further quantitative investigation would be necessary to give evidence for this outcome. The results do, however, suggest that participants were able to perceive and make connections from the competencies used in comic improvisation to the competencies used in dialogue. They were also able to reflect and articulate these connections.

My research question was: Can comic improvisation be used as an embodied experience that informs and creates awareness of some of the competencies for generative dialogue? The data collected appear to support this possibility and indicate that it is a connection worth pursuing. As this is a bounded case study with a small sample of participants, my purpose was to generate questions and directions for further investigation. I would suggest that this study indicates that there is reason to believe that comic improvisation can be used to gain competencies, experience and awareness applicable to generative dialogue, and that it has unique qualities that lend itself to that purpose.

Both comic improvisation and generative dialogue require the competencies of being in the holy insecurity, being in responsive relationship, practicing suspension of

judgements and preconceptions and creating something new. This description of the competencies of dialogue was supported in my review of the literature and in the perceptions of my participants. As demonstrated in the interviews and focus group results, participants in the study seemed to be able to make connections between the competencies in comic improvisation and those found in dialogue. The sessions in comic improvisation provided an experience that informed their thinking about these competencies (or aspects of these competencies) for dialogue in an active forum.

The process of comic improvisation also provides a context where the inability to practice these competencies results in a very visible halting of the scene or action. I am reminded of the scene described previously in Chapter 5 between Mark and Murray where Mark is asking for help and Murray is worried about getting old. Until they were accepting and responsive to each other the scene did not go forward. Mark and Murray were inexperienced at comic improvisation, but they knew something was wrong because the scene was not moving forward. I finally directed loudly from the side and said "Help him!" and then the scene developed. In contrast, in dialogue, an inability to use these competencies simply moves the dialogue into a conversation or, according to Scharmer (2003), another lower level of conversation. For example in their first dialogue, Jess and Hank were assigned a topic concerning allocating resources in the school system. During the dialogue, Jess suggested: "everyone should get the appropriate resources so they can achieve whatever their maximum is." Hank disagreed and replied: "I don't know about maximum." Jess replied: "You want everyone to realise their potential." Hank queried: "Who decides what potential is?" At this point Jess cut him off and said: "That is where it gets difficult." This is not a generative dialogue since both parties were inserting their preconceived ideas and were not being accepting and

responsive to each other. They were, however, able to continue having a conversation. The lack of ability to suspend and be responsive is far less obvious than in comic improvisation because the conversation continued. Because comic improvisation, unlike a conversation, cannot continue if the participants do not actively practice the competencies of delving into the holy insecurity, being responsive and practicing suspension, it is an excellent method of training for these competencies in dialogue. It has a built-in performance feedback mechanism.

As comic improvisation is now being used as a training strategy for business, organizational leadership and psychotherapy, it is worth exploring methods to support and develop the transferability of the competencies in other areas. The development and assessment of these possible methods was beyond the scope and format of this study, but there is a fair amount of educational research that looks at methods in general for increasing the ability to transfer competencies from one context to another. These findings could be considered in constructing curriculum to facilitate the transfer of competencies from comic improvisation to generative dialogue. Organizational leadership and business management instructors as well as psychotherapists have already developed models for using comic improvisation as a training tool and these models warrant further investigation to inform and refine further application.

Comic improvisation affords an imaginary place to practice dialogue competencies. As Lowe (2007) indicated, “comedy encourages a Bakhtinian view of itself as anarchic ... a carnivalesque inversion of everyday life” (p. 2). Bakhtin supports carnival as a space that allows an honest discourse free from the hegemonic structures of everyday society that promotes true dialogue (as cited in Hollis, 2001). Comic

improvisation holds the promise of assisting in the recognition and possible application of this insight.

In promoting comic improvisation as a method for increasing an understanding of competencies required for effective dialogue, I should restate why the development of these competencies is so critical. We live in an age of increasing globalization but often characterized by increasing fragmentation (Baxter, 2004; McNamee & Shotter, 2004; Romney, 2005; Sinha, 2010). Scharmer and Kauefer believe we have entered an age of disruption. This disruption is evident in “finance, food, fuel, water shortage, resource scarcity, climate chaos, mass poverty, mass migration, fundamentalism, terrorism and financial oligarchies” (2013, p. 1). They elaborated that “the possibility of profound personal, societal, and global renewal has never been more real. *Now is our time*” (2013, p. 1), and they posit that generative dialogue is the method for achieving such renewal. Romney (2005) declared that dialogue is essential as “an increasingly diverse and conflicted world calls us to collaborate with one another to survive and share the planet ... all kinds of individuals and groups need to come together and talk about the controversial matters that affect our survival and progress” (p.1). Dialogue allows us to build relationships and understanding as well as co-create new knowledge. Comic improvisers “develop a remarkable degree of empathic competence, a mutual orientation to one another’s unfolding; they continually take one another’s ideas into context as constraints and facilitators in guiding their choices” (Barrett, 1998, p. 613). True generative dialogue is a respectful way to explore our differences and have those difficult conversations, but it is a difficult and learned competency. “It requires us to *suspend* our judgments, *redirect* our attention, *let go* of the past, *lean into the future* that

wants to emerge through us, and *let it come*” (Scharmer & Kauefer, 2013, p.30). Comic improvisation may well be a way to learn how to do this.

Comic improvisation was created for its mass appeal and accessibility. Participating in improvisation provides a cognitive, affective and embodied experience that is remembered and recognizable (Lockford & Pelias, 2004). Comic improvisation is being used to augment psychotherapy and provide ways to transform relationships (Knoblauch, 2001, Ringstorm, 2011, Wiener, 2001). The business world has been using improvisation as a transferable competency building strategy for negotiation, leadership and management training (Demsond & Jowitt, 2012: Diamond & Lefkoff, Harding, 2004; Moshavi, 2001; Vera & Crossan, 2004). Comic improvisation is being used to build competencies in interpersonal communication, creative problem solving, collaboration, responsiveness, and innovation in management and organizational leadership (Moshavi, 2001; Salopek, 2004; Vera & Crossan, 2004). The president of the Applied Improvisation Network, Paul Jackson, claimed that comic improvisation “is being taught in blue chip companies and the top business schools around the world” (*Applied Improvisation Network*, 2014). Because dialogue is so critical for communication, understanding and social justice, why should the valuable training strategy of comic improvisation not also be utilized here? Improvisation creates a special space, and it necessitates letting go of preconceptions to be truly responsive to others in order to create new meanings for a first time in a state of heightened awareness. As these are some of the critical elements necessary for dialogue, would not comic improvisation be a wonderful engaging training ground to develop these competencies? Engelberts believes that comic improvisation can be potentially used as “a formative instrument in communication and social relations” (2004, p. 167). Wiener (n.d.), believes comic

improvisational exercises can be used as interventions “to enrich the behaviors of all people as a method of education and interpersonal growth”. I agree and believe that now is an important time to unleash this potential. Educators and citizens can use the wide appeal of comic improvisation to move closer to allowing the collaborative voice of dialogue to emerge. As Reiter (1997) noted when advocating Wiener’s use of comic improvisation in psychotherapy, “it’s time to take play seriously” (p. 306). It is time to create contexts in which we can “think and feel and talk together in an ongoing effort to liberate ourselves and to continue to make art that will help free us and lift us” (Romney, 2005, p.19).

I want to conclude with a quote taken from the participant focus group during a discussion on the implications of play and our modern culture. Bob remarked: “The word silly comes from a word that means blessings in Gaelic; our ancestors’ use to wish silliness. Somehow silly has become acquainted with being stupid and childish but at one point in our culture silliness was a blessing.” Maybe it is time to take the silliness of comic improvisation and carnival and remember it is a blessing; a blessing that can save us, a blessing that can help heal a divided world and help us bring dialogues that build relationships and understanding to solve our collective problems. As Scharmer and Kauefer have advocated, we may need to shift the emphasis in “our thinking from the head to the heart” (2013, p.1), and comic improvisation may help move us there.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Documentation

INVIU EMAIL

Hello

My name is Teresa Farrell. I am an instructor in the Faculty of Education here at Vancouver Island University. I am currently enrolled in doctoral studies in Education at Simon Fraser University. My area of research is to investigate whether comic improvisation can be used as a method of gaining skills towards generative dialogue. The term generative dialogue refers to being aware of your own position while being open to new ideas and generating and co-creating new meaning, knowledge and ideas. In conducting this research, I am offering 12 participants over the age of 18 an opportunity to participate in 5 comic improvisation workshops. This is open to students, faculty, and staff. Please feel free to distribute the information to anyone you believe to be suitable. You may even be interested yourself? Please find attached a recruitment poster for your information. If you have any question, please feel free to contact me.

Teresa Farrell

Poster

Free Comic Improvisation Course

A research project examining the use of comic improvisation to build skills towards dialogue is being conducted at Vancouver Island University.

In total there are seven Saturday sessions

from 10 AM – 12 AM from Oct 19'13 – Nov.30'13.

Held at the Nanaimo campus at VIU. Building 305 rm 444

Included are 2 sessions on dialogue and 5 sessions on comic improvisation

Participants will learn the basics of comic improvisation and have the opportunity to participate in an optional Comic Improv performance

Participants must be over 18 years of age

Interested ?

Come to an information session Oct. 7 or at 12:30 in building 305 room 444 (go up the stairs left of the Java Hut)

Or

Contact Teresa.Farrell@

I am currently faculty member in the VIU Education Department and am doing this study as part of the requirements of my doctoral program at Simon Fraser University. I have taught Performing Arts courses at VIU and as well having experience in comic improvisation as a troupe member and director.

Appendix B

Participant Consent and Debrief Forms

Consent Form



PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PROJECT

Using Comic Improvisation to Improve Skills Towards Generative

Dialogue September, 2013

Teresa Farrell

Allan MacKinnon, EdD supervisor

VIU instructor Ed. Faculty/SFU student

Faculty of Education SFU



Who is doing this study?

My name is Teresa Farrell and I am the principal researcher in this study. I am using this study as part of the requirements of my doctoral program in Educational Leadership at Simon Fraser University. I am also an instructor at Vancouver Island University in the

Faculty of Education where I have taught a number of performing arts courses. I also have a history of being a comic improvisation company troupe member and director.

Purpose of the research

This study is being done to see if building skills in comic improvisation will improve the ability to dialogue. For the purposes of this study 'dialogue' refers not to just any conversation but to conversation focused on intentionally increasing understanding, addressing problems, and questioning our thoughts and actions. Improving people's ability to dialogue increases the ability to understand each other and work together towards solutions. Comic improvisation is known for its appeal and accessibility. The purpose of this study is to see if comic improvisation is worth further investigation as a vehicle to improve and develop skills for dialogue.

Description of the research (What is actually going to happen?)

This study will include 7 Saturday sessions. Each session will be two hours long between 10AM-12AM and held at the VIU Nanaimo campus.

The first session will include a brief explanation of the study. Participants will then participate in a brief dialogue with another participant. There will then be a short survey to complete. This will be followed by a short 3 question interview. The interview can be completed following the initial session or at a mutually agreed upon time in the following week. These interviews can be done in person or over the phone. The final or 7th Saturday session will also include a partnered dialogue, survey and interview. It will also include a focus group or group discussion.

There will be 5 sessions of comic improvisational classes each for two hours on Saturdays from 10AM-12AM. These will include various warm ups and exercises to build and increase skills in comic improvisation as well as in class performances in front of other participants.

I am also going to include an opportunity to do a Comic Improv show. This is entirely voluntary and only participants interested in participating need do so.

Potential risks

There are no foreseeable risks to you in participating in this study past what would normally occur in attending a comic improvisation class. Every effort will be made to make the classroom a safe and comfortable place for all participants.

Potential benefits

The immediate benefit of participant in this study is an opportunity to attend and participate in a comic improvisation classes led by a trained instructor at no charge.

There is also the opportunity, if you wish, to have a chance to perform in a comic improvisational performance. Given the nature of this study there is also an opportunity to learn about the nature of dialogue and a possibility to improve your ability to dialogue. Your participation will also help further research in the field of dialogue and comic improvisation.

Voluntary participation

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Even if you agree to be in this study, you may choose to withdraw at any time and need not give a reason.

What information is going to be collected?

The information collected will be the following: surveys, transcripts from the dialogues and interviews, as well as some audio recording of the dialogues and video recording of the improvisation classes. There will also be a focus group conducted following the last comic improvisation class. The data or information examines participants' experience moving into a place of uncertainty, being responsive to the 'other', letting go of a plan and co-creating something new. Participants will be given a review of the interview transcripts and have the opportunity to delete or revise their responses as desired. Participants will have an opportunity to view video recordings prior to the completion of the study and withdraw recordings of themselves from the data collection. Participants have the option to participate in the study and not consent to the recordings. All the data will be stored on a USB memory stick that is secured in a locked filing cabinet by the principal researcher.

Confidentiality

Your confidentiality will be respected. Information that discloses your identity will not be released without your consent unless required by law and will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. All documents will be identified only by code number and kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. Data collected electronically will be stored on a USB memory stick also in a locked filing cabinet that only the principal researcher, I, will have access to. Subjects will not be identified by name in any reports or publications of the completed study and any quotes that will be used will only be identified by code. If you chose to participate in an interview by telephone, as opposed to an in person interview, identities cannot be guaranteed as the telephone is not considered to be a confidential medium.

By consenting to participate in the focus group, you confirm that any information you encounter will be kept confidential and not revealed to parties outside the focus group. Although the objective is to maintain confidentiality, it cannot be guaranteed. Audio recordings of the dialogues and final focus group will be secured in a locked filing cabinet and only kept till they are transcribed (before June, 2014) at which point they will be erased.

What will be done with the results?

The results of this study will be reported in a graduate thesis and may also be published in academic journal articles and books as well as presented at academic conferences. Electronic copies of the results of this study may be obtained at its conclusion by any or all participants providing they supply the principle researcher with contact information. Please note that only global results, not individual results, will be disclosed.

Contact for further information about the study

If you have any questions about the study please feel free to contact Teresa Farrell at ■■■■■
■■■■■

Contact for Concerns

If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, you may contact:

Dr. Dina Shafey, Associate Director, Office of Research Ethics Simon Fraser
University at ■■■■■

or The Research Ethic Officer for VIU at ■

“Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact. “

- *Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.*
- *Your signature below indicates that you consent to participate in this study.*

Participant Signature

Date

Printed Name of the Participant

- *Please sign below in the space provided if you consent to allow activities that you participate in the study (such as dialogues) to be audio recorded for the purpose of transcription which will be analysed and may be quoted in the thesis or further publications.*

-
- *Please sign below in the space provided if you consent to allow activities that you participate in the study (such as dialogues and improvisation classes) to be*

videotaped. This will be analysed and may be used for my thesis defense and future conference presentations.

DEBRIEFING CONSENT FORM

Using Comic Improvisation to Improve Skills Towards Generative Dialogue

Ethics Approval XXXXXX, 2013

Teresa Farrell

Allan MacKinnon, EdD

supervisor

VIU instructor Ed. Faculty/SFU student

Faculty of Education SFU

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The purpose of this research is to explore whether participants perceive an improved ability to engage in dialogue after being actively involved in 5 comic improvisation workshops. The central research question is: Can comic improvisation be used as a method for gaining skills and embodied experience and awareness transferable to generative dialogue?

In order to collect data to explore the research question participants will have:

- completed a pre and post survey
- completed an initial and final paired dialogue
- completed a pre and post interview
- participated in a focus group
- participated in 5 comic improvisation workshops

If you are interested in further information on dialogue, you can go to the following link: www.spaceforlearning.com/dialogue.htm. If you would like more information

specifically on generative dialogue this article is available online through the VIU library system: Gunnlaugson, O. (2007), Exploratory perspectives for an AQAL model of generative dialogue, *Integral Review* 4: 44-58.

If you have any questions or concerns following this study please feel free to contact the principal researcher. If you are interested in the results of this study, please contact the principal researcher, Teresa Farrell at Teresa.Farrell@viu.ca 250-753-3245 (loc. 2334). Please note that only global results, not individual results, will be disclosed. The study should be completed by June'2014.

If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, you may contact Dr. Dina Shafey, Associate Director, Office of Research Ethics at Simon Fraser University: [REDACTED] or the VIU Research Ethics Officer at [REDACTED]

Appendix C

Participant Backgrounds

Participant Background Information

This information will be used for the following

- *To contact you regarding the study*
- *To anonymously be linked to your coding for participant information for the study*

Name_____

Contact info

Phone #_____

Email_____

Age circle one grouping

18-25

26-35

36 – 55

56 and over

Previous theatre/improvisation experience

Occupation or course of study

Reason for participating in the project

Table 6-1 Participant Backgrounds

All the participants that did not complete the study are shaded in grey. I have included even those who did not complete the study as I think they influenced the experience. Participant 09, for example, was a professor in music. Some of his insights such as noticing silences and rhythms were enriching. He also attended all of the comic improvisation workshops and unfortunately became very ill and was unable to join us on our last day.

Participant	age	Heard about the study	Experience in theatre or comic improvisation	Occupation	Reason for joining
01	45-65	VIU email	none	Counsellor/literacy coordinator	Self-development new skills and fun
02	45-65	Poster at Seniors centre	One line in high school	Retired ESL teacher taught in Asia	amusement

03	25-45	VIU email	none	VIU IT worker	General interest in skill development and voice acting
04	45-65	VIU email	Minor in theatre many years ago	ESL teacher at VIU	Applying ideas from the course to my teaching
05	25-45	VIU poster	zilch	Education student/farmer	I think I will like it
06	45-65	VIU email from wife	Some acting/directing in amateur theatre	Retired mental health worker	Interested in stand-up comedy
07	Under 25	VIU poster	none	VIU business student	Interested in comedy and communication
08 attended 3/5	45-65	VIU email	no	VIU chef	Curiosity, laughing and experience

09 attended 5/5	45-65	VIU poster	no	Professor in music	I love telling jokes and think the art is being lost
10 -attended 2/5	Under 25	VIU email	Some stand up comedy	Psych student at VIU	Learn to be funny

Appendix D

PowerPoint: Comic Improvisation as a Way to Build Skills towards Generative Dialogue

Patricia Romney declares dialogue as essential as “an increasingly diverse and conflicted world calls us to collaborate with one another to survive and share the planet...all kinds of individuals and groups need to come together and talk about the controversial matters that affect our survival and progress” (2005, p.1). For the purposes of my research ‘dialogue’ refers not to just any conversation but to conversation focused on intentionally: increasing understanding, addressing problems and questioning our thoughts and actions. Improving people’s ability to dialogue increases the ability to understand each other and work together towards solutions.

Figure D-1

Talking Nice	Talking Tough
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Polite cautious• Listening while projecting/infering• Holding back thinking and feeling	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Debate/clash• Listening while reloading• Identifying with own point of view• Rule revealing

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoiding possible unpleasant topics • Rule re-enacting 	
<p>Reflective Dialogue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inquiry • I can change my point of view • Listening with empathy • The other is you • Rule re-flecting 	<p>Generative Dialogue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presencing: Time slowing down • Boundaries collapse • Listening from my future self • Rule generating

What do we need for generative dialogue? We need to let go of our own preconceived ideas and move into uncertainty. This is called by Martin Buber 'The Holy Insecurity' and is "emergent, unfolding, unpredictable and ...developed through relationship" where one goes forth into a place of uncertainty and insecurity trusting it will take you to the next moment.

We also need to be in heightened awareness practicing suspension where we suspend our own thoughts, judgements and ideas. This is a state of meta-cognition where we are aware of our thoughts, judgements and ideas but bracket them to allow new understandings to emerge.

We need to be responsive. Being attentive, accepting and responsive to the other and fully present for them; being aware of what is actually being said in the

moment. This called relational responsibility in dialogue. “We move away from the individualistic planned communication with an intended outcome to a spontaneous responsive collective dialogue that emerges in meaning” (McNamee & Shotter, 2004, p, 93).

We also need to be in what Martin Buber refers to as the “I-Thou” relationship. The I-It relationship sees the other person as a static object. In this relationship we can have our needs met and exchange information. In contrast the “I-Thou” relationship sees the other person as emerging and whole where there is mutual respect and care and where we focusing on each utterance as new and seeing ‘the other’ as unique and separate without judgement.

We also need to make a creation out of the blue where we can “see connections and relations within a living currently emerging whole created from different fragmentary parts” (McNamee & Shotter, 2004, p. 100) and there is no intended outcome in true dialogue; there is a letting go of a plan to allow something new to emerge. Where we co-generation of new ideas, perceptions, or understandings. Generative dialogue is difficult and requires the skills of being present, suspending one’s own preconceived ideas and being authentically responsive in heightened awareness.

So what does this have to do with comic improvisation? Comic improvisation is fun and intended for entertainment, built to be appealing and is designed to be accessible to the masses. During a class in dialogue I heard the description of the holy insecurity where dialogue happens. This place where let go of what we know and understand and step into the unknown. I had been there..... So I began to wonder if dialogue is so important and difficult to learn and comic improvisation (that is so appealing and accessible) has some of the same skills; could comic improvisation be used to teach skills towards generative dialogue? In Comic Improvisation we: Go big or go home, dig deep (face the void), go with the flow (of other troupe members), Yes and..... (accept the offers of the other troupe members and add), and create something new in the moment that is unrehearsed.

Figure 6-1: Common Threads Between Comic Improvisation and Generative Dialogue.

Dialogue	Comic Improvisation
Moving into the holy insecurity – the unknown in between place	Dig deep –face the void
Practicing Suspension – framing and being aware of your own thoughts but bracketing them	Going with the flow (of fellow actors)
Turning to the ‘other’ and being responsive	Yes and.....
Letting go of a plan and creating something new for the first time	Culminating scene moment of creation when together actors have dug deep, gone with the flow and discovered a new idea

Appendix E

Dialogue Topics

1. Prison terms should focus on providing an opportunity for criminals to revision themselves and receive rehabilitation such as drug treatment, education, life skills and training rather than punishment.
2. What are the rights that Indigenous Canadians should have over their historical territories?
3. Co-habitation is the new marriage.
4. It is morally acceptable to do medical experiments on animals that could save human lives.
5. School classes should be segregated by ability to ensure appropriate resources and teaching for each student.
6. Affirmative action is necessary to allow marginalized people an opportunity

Appendix F

Interviews, and Focus group Questions

Interviews

All participants will be given a copy of the interview questions prior and during the interview. The questions are as follows:

Describe the experience of trying to listen and be responsive to your partner without preconceptions and opinions interfering.

Can you comment on whether there were new ideas and understandings that you gained from this dialogue?

Why was this?

What was the most challenging part of trying to dialogue with your partner?

Included post intervention interview

Were there similarities that you experienced in participating in comic improvisation and dialogue?

Did the training in comic improvisation assist you in being able to dialogue?

If yes – how? If no –why not?

During the interview, I may also give prompts ask for additional information like “can you tell me more about that?” and for clarification like “can you explain that again for me.”

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

11 AM Dec. 7'13

1. Was the idea of moving into 'the holy insecurity' or that unknown in between place evident in your work in comic improvisation? Can you comment on this?
2. Was the idea of moving into 'the holy insecurity' or the unknown in between place evident in your work in dialogue? Can you comment on this?
3. Were you able to connect your work in comic improvisation to your dialogue in so far as being in 'the holy insecurity' or the unknown in between place? Can you comment on this?
4. Was the idea of being responsive, aware and accepting, of other people's offers evident in your work in comic improvisation? Can you comment on this?
5. Was the idea of being responsive, aware and accepting, of other people's offers in dialogue and did you feel it was evident in your work in dialogue today? Can you 7

6. Were you able to connect your work in comic improvisation into your dialogue in so far as being responsive, aware and accepting, of other people's offers'? Do you see that connection in dialogue and Comic Improv ?

7. Was the idea of co-generating a new creation evident in your work in comic improvisation?

8. So was the idea of co-generating a new creation evident in your work in dialogue?

Appendix G

Comic Improvisation Workshops and Antidotal Notes

Workshop 1

Warm up – stretch, move, engage!

Name Game with actions

One Word Story Whole group

- each person says one word around in the circle

People really struggled with this. Lots of pauses and stop and starts. It seemed to get better.

One word story couples

- In pairs do one word stories (back and forth)-

Comments were made about how this was a tennis match. Murray who teaches ESL was extremely aware, as was Greg the counsellor, on the types of words that were being used (adjectives, propositions, verbs) and the results of placement and usage. Greg even asked that if an article or preposition was your word could you add another. I agreed. A comment was made that this was like playing tennis. There was

also a comment that you felt more responsible and there seemed to be general agreement.

Switch partners and do one word stories with action

- Switch partners and do one word stories with action again

Some found this to be more difficult and others found it easier. There seemed to be some people who weren't able to move into action and others who found the actions helped more the story along. Another comment that had lots of agreement was the amount of 'things you are doing at the same time' This came up as well later on in class. You are met cognitively aware of moving the story along, while you are searching for your next word and trying to come up with an action.

Switch partners and do one word stories with action again

Cues were given on exaggeration go big and go home

Fatal story

- Tell a story while the host is pointing at you and then stop as soon as you are not pointed at
- If you keep going or pause to get started or repeat words or don't make sense you can be killed by the host or audience

This really showed how people were not necessarily listening to one another. This also , though began to really showcase how expression and exaggeration were already being used by many of the group

Freeze - by choice

- Freeze is yelled and the actions stops
- Tap out a person and adopt their position
- Begin an entirely new scene based on the same position
- Keep going until freeze is yelled

Cues were given on going with the flow. People really began to do some interesting development here. Often times people were stuck in the “what next” place after the initial activity was done but sometimes they broke through and began to create something new.

Switch

- 4 people go up and each are assigned a channel and a type of show
- When they channel is yelled out they start there show
- When channels are switched everyone freezes and the person for that channel comes up and begins the scene based on the position
- One person is up for channel 1, two for channel 2 etc...

This went similarly some as previous game. There were some wonderful moments and also the struggle of plot development. This is so expected at this stage.

Workshop 2

2 participants were away

Today we are going to be looking at some traits in comic improvisation. Although comic improvisation is spontaneous, there are underlying principles that we rehearse. One is "Go Big or Go Home." This is the principle of exaggeration.

Mime

- As we often have no sets or props in comic improvisation using mime can be important.

The elements of Mime are: resistance, consistency, and exaggeration.

- Do the wall – round the corner with an expression
- Throw a ball: Fast slow, big small

Fly a Kite

- First player starts flying a kite
- Second player asks "What are you doing" the answer must be anything BUT flying a kite and the second player does suggested action. A third player comes up and says "what are you doing?...etc"

Players performed exaggerated characters and varied their 'what are you doing'/'

This demonstrates quite a bit of skill

In a , With a, What

- 3-4 players are chosen. All but one go away out of hearing. Audience chooses a setting (in a), occupation (with a) and an object (what.)
- Using only gibberish and mime the first player must act out the In a , With a, What. The what (object) must cause their death. Then the third player comes on and the second person must act out the In a , With a, What. The what (object) must cause their death.
- At the end, starting with the last player, everyone reveals their ideas of where they were, what the occupation was and what object caused the death

Participants did fairly well. They didn't simply mimic what their pervious player had done – unusual. They were also very quick. This is also unusual as most often people keep on till the other player seems to understand. I did highlight, however, that getting it wrong is the comedy so this may have effected this.

Pick a setting

- Pairs chose and act out a setting
- Incongruity: Of setting and characters, characters and characters, problem and solution
- Characters

Bus stop

Theory chat

Dig DEEP – facing the holy insecurity ;

Elements of a scene are made up of Setting, characters then a problem (which builds) and an out of the box solution/. Often times the characters or the characters and setting are incongruous. The problem that arises – the action/plot- must have an out of the box solution..

Setting

- In Pairs a setting is given and acted out and audience guesses
- In pairs Player A establishes the setting and their character and player B comes in and is incongruous - END

Building Scenes

- The first person establishes the setting and a character and then the second person arrives and interacts with the player and setting. A problem arises and an out of the box solution is found. Players must always say yes to the offers.

In introduced the idea of yes and as people were moving into scene. There was a lot of talking over and people really struggled with saying yes. There seemed to be a belief that conflict was the 'real' scene. I constantly had to stop and get them to say yes.

Emotional switch:

- In pairs people are assigned a setting and each an emotion
- suggestion of setting and object and two emotions
- The first person establishes the setting their character and their emotion.

The second person arrives and interacts with the player and setting. A problem

arises and an out of the box solution is found. Players must always say yes to the offers.

Very similar to above. After class we talked about it. There was agreement that the talking over was nervous energy and a resistance to sitting in the holy insecurity. People also stated that we are uncomfortable with silence. Everyone agreed that saying yes was a huge shift in their thinking

Evidence in video tapes of people talking over each other.

Workshop 3

Responsiveness

Today we are going to focus on being responsive. We need to really pay attention to the offers that our troupe members are giving us. A term used to describe when an offer is not taken is a block. Give example

Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves

- Everyone in a circle. We are going to establish a rhythm, by saying, all together `Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves`. Keep repeating this. One person starts making a gesture to this rhythm, say, tapping your head with you left hand. When the sentence is repeated, the player next to her takes over this gesture, while the first one starts a completely different new gesture. Third time the sentence is done, player three does the first gesture, player two does the second gesture and player one invents a new one again. And so on.

-so hard and so great – really worked

Experts

- *One word at a time where two people speak as one and are interviewed as experts form an audience suggestion*

People enjoyed this. When asked why it worked, they said it worked because the built on the previous word and that all answers were accepted.

Radio interview

- Three players. One is the radio interviewing a famous person who is played by two players speak who speak
- *People found it extremely difficult to speak as one.*

Sporting event

- A sport and an incongruent offer is made. There are two sport casters and two athletes. The athletes must follow the directions of the sports casters.

He said; she said

- 2 players; each player will state the action the other player must perform, followed by his own line.

1: "I want a divorce"

2: "She said, while grabbing a knife from the kitchen table." At this point player 1 needs to take a knife. Player 2 continues with his own line. "Sure Honey"

1: "He said, while turning to the sports page of the paper." Now, it's quite clear that player 2 should be paying more attention to the paper than to his wife. Player 1 continues with her own line. "You're not listening to me" and so on.

Players refer to each other as `he` and `she`, and endow each other with the next action to take.

This was difficult to remember to follow the premise of the game. The first time playing it became a 'make the other do something unpleasant' but in later scenes it became more

about forwarding the scene. This game maybe too difficult for this stage of skill development.

Interrogation

- 3 players – two are detectives questioning (good cop, bad cop) and the suspect
- The crime is known to all but the suspect

Again got better. People talked over each other here a lot.

Emotional Switch

- Each person is given an emotion from the audience. Each player must display there emotion and find a reason to adopt the other emotion through the course of the scene.
- *People are still blocking each other*

Workshop 4

Suspension: this is where we are aware we have ideas in our head but we hold them separate in order to be responsive and aware to what is going on in the scene.

Warm up – yes lets

Sporting event

- A sport and an incongruent offer is made. There are two sport casters and two athletes. The athletes must follow the directions of the sports casters.
- *The first game was gopher bowling. Players that were athletes established their setting and characters but did not move into anything other than the bowling for quite some time. Scene development was slow. This seemed to also occur with the next scene.*

Sit, Stand Lay

Get a setting and a character assigned to a group of three. One person must be laying, one sitting and the other standing at all times. If the persons standing sits then the sitting person must take a different position.

A little lack lustre but the idea of motivating to change position did not move the scene forward. Is this a case of not staying in the holy insecurity long enough?

Enter and exit 1,2,3,4

- Players are numbered 1,2,3,4 A setting is given as well as an activity
- Player 1 starts and when 2 is called player 2 must find a reason to join, then 3 and then 4. Players must also leave 4,3,2,1 and Make it work

- *Again the characters and action was fine and people were able to find motivation for their entrances and exits but were not able to focus, slow down and dig deep enough to develop a scene much.*

First Line Last Line

- 2 players: an offer of a setting is given, The first and last line are read out for players and audience, One player has the script and the other must react authentically
- *Players are rushing to the last line without slowing down and developing an offer. Offers are made and acknowledged now but skipped over rather than dug into. I think that there is a still a lack of trust in the process.*

Integration game

Much better this time. I think because they understand how the game works.

In a with a what – worked well really fun!

Workshop 5 Comic Improvisation

One word story

- This went so much smoother. Participants were able to listen and respond much easier than when we first played it.

Fly a kite

- This game really got us to face the holy insecurity. People tended to build on the old idea rather than create a new one; For example: cleaning your toe nails, flossing your finger nails

Freeze

- Participants were able to do some inventive creative ideas with the freeze positions that worked. Did not develop plots necessarily. They were, however, quite responsive to each other.

Switch 1,2, 3 4

- This game worked very well. I think because what happens is that all you need to do is develop the setting and characters and an action as opposed to plot – this game showcases where the participants are.

Athletes Commentary

- This became much better as athletes played with their mime more. Commentators still had some difficulty following the athletes actions at times.

In and Out

- This went smoothly. The person coming in does tend to just stand a little but more involvement seemed to be happening than last time.

Criminals

- This worked better as participants began to see how the game worked and how questioning leads to hints as to the crime.

1,2,,3,4 enter and exits (on a word?)

- These went fairly well. 4 people was a lot for the stage. Offers were heard but often not developed and I frequently redirected them back to develop their offers.

First Line last line

- These scenes seemed to go quickly. Participants developed their setting and characters and started an action and then wanted to use the last line as an out instead of facing the void.

Generally the responsiveness and suspension seem to be improving. The digging deep or, in dialogue terms, into the holy insecurity is still difficult.

Appendix H

Participant Codes and Pseudonyms

Participants' number	Pseudonym used in study
1	Bob
2	Hank
3	Jess
4	Murray
5	Mike
6	Greg
7	Sam

Appendix J

Interview #1 Results

Interviews #1

1. Describe the experience of trying to listen and be responsive to your partner without preconceptions and opinions interfering.

Participant

1	I am always aware of that challenge as a counsellor. I felt more artificial as the topic was big and we were always waiting to see who would speak. As a counsellor normally I would let that silence go but here I was aware that it was dialogue so I spoke. I was able to do this - be responsive.
2	I found it was ...there was no conflict. I was doing a lot of echoing. I found once I contradicted "What do you mean by that" with a rising intention. I don't think it clouded my ability to listen. I said to him - "how about hedonistic Unilateralism. I should be careful of the terms I use.

3	He was very quiet and that was difficult and it required effort to draw him out. It wasn't a convincing debate as we both agreed so not much difference of opinion. Not terribly difficult.
4	The first concern was we would fall into question and answer. It wasn't preconceptions as much as moving the dialogue along that was a challenge. Both of us were aware of trying not to be negative.
5	When I listen to a person, I usually explore their idea and want to know more about their ideas and don't do a quick turn of subject matter. I have practiced these skills before so I allow people to continue on and don't hijack their train of thought. I practice suspension. In a dialogue there is some sensitivity to the length of time a person is speaking. I tend to interject when there is too much going on for me to digest or if I am feeling distant.
6	I can't say that I am a naive subject matter as I have been a counsellor for 40 years. Both of us focused on moving the discussion forward. No disagreement. We tried to tease out ideas.
7	Decent experience, done this thing lots of times. I was totally attentive; it was easy and he had better opinions than me.

6 of the participants felt they were able to listen to their partner and 4 of those felt they were able to be responsive.

4 of the participants spoke of conflict or being negative. Participant 3 speaks says “it was not a convincing debate.”

- It seems that some, 2, participants felt that to have a ‘real dialogue that you need to have conflict. This is interesting as I do not want a debate but a generative dialogue. Participants have been told this but of course only briefly and once when the characteristics of generative dialogue were explained.
- Another participants, in contradiction, spoke of ‘trying not to be negative’ so trying to avoid disagreement for the dialogue.
- 2 of the participants felt this was easy or familiar and 3 felt it was difficult or artificial.

2. Can you comment on whether there were new ideas and understandings that you gained from this dialogue?

Participant #

1	No not actually in terms of the topic but I was super sensitive to the fact it was a generative dialogue and that it was new
2	I think I gained a better understanding of - watching my use of terms. We both had similar opinions and understanding of the topic.
3	No new ideas or understandings
4	In the topic I was interested in some language of the topic and we explored that. Such as "people ," "revision" , "rehabilitation." We also dealt with the word "prison."
5	Yeah the idea of experimenting on animals and eating them is not entirely discrete
6	Some new understandings but not necessarily new ideas-new facets of the idea
7	yes some new understandings

Only 1 of the participants felt that a new idea was generated but 4 of the participants (including the one who felt that there was a new idea generated) felt there were new or better understandings. The co-generation of new ideas and understandings is probably the most difficult to the dialogical skills and characteristics being assessed here so these results, particularly on the first dialogue are not surprising.

Why was this?

Participant #

1	Because it was such a broad topic and we hardly got to begin. I think we were both on the same page and also we were aware this was a generative dialogue. We were conscious of what a generative dialogue was supposed to be.
2	Both of us are Canadians with similar ideas
3	2 Because there wasn't a lot of different views to adopt.
4	We were searching for new understandings to try and make sense of it. We were heading there.

5	Because there was an element of play. We entertained farfetched ideas. There was pretending...a little crass. Yeah I may have my judgements but keeping it in play we could explore more.
6	I think we were both active listening and reflective listening
7	Maybe because there were some points I touched on and the other participant said more ideas on those points. He had the basics and we talked more about it.

3 participants felt the ideas were too similar #2 “we had similar ideas” #3 “there wasn’t a lot of different views” and three others felt they were starting to explore or ‘getting there’. #4 “searching for new understandings.” I would say that once again participants felt if there was no conflict there were not able to really dialogue.

3. What was the most challenging part of trying to dialogue with your partner?

Participant #

1	I think it was that as we had that presentation on what generative dialogue was and I wanted to make sure that I was respectful- I was in a state of hyper arousal.
2	I didn't feel challenged because he was a real talker and all I had to do was provide feedback and show that I was listening.
3	Getting him to talk. Maybe this is because of the 5 minute thing [time limit]
4	I think it was the first time trying generative dialogue and the first time we had met. We began to feel comfortable with each other and that this was something we didn't have to fear but this may not be true of another partner. Greg my partner also improvises music so also had experience. I have a background in ESL so in my work I have to improvise and have confidence in that.
5	I don't have a fully formed idea or firm stance. I am flexible and not so convincing. In dialogue, I am more about connecting. In past conversations I know I come across as open and sometimes

	in our explorations they discover my stance or what tends towards my stance.
6	A little tentativeness because of the newness of the relationship and loaded topic.
7	Unfortunately it was because before the dialogue my partner said " I know you are hungover' and I said "I don't drink." This was off topic and I wondered why he asked this. This was distracting. He also said that " your ideas are conflicting with yourself. I don't know if you are aware you are doing that."

6 of the 7 participants recognised there was a challenge and 1 did not feel there was.

Themes that came up were the newness of the relationship (2), the artificial nature of 'doing' a generative dialogue, and 2 felt the challenge was the topic and 1 the short amount of time allocated for the dialogue. These are not mutually exclusive categories

Appendix K

Interviews #2 Results

1. Describe the experience of trying to listen and be responsive to your partner without preconceptions and opinions interfering.

Participant #

1	Aware on a metacognitive level where I tried to when I tried the first dialogue. This time I was aware in my body. I think it has a lot to do with this 5 week embodied experience of the workshops- getting comfortable with these skills.
2	I think we interacted more than last time, more probing. I was looking for differences in opinion. We were on the same wave length.
3	Definitely not natural...not what we are trained to do.
4	How I did today is how I did it before I changed because we tried to listen, get the jest of what they were saying and hopefully build on it. In my opinion I was more conscious of it today.

5	When we first started we formed an understanding of the question and that formed a common ground and when we work to fill in the gaps instead of just assuming. I didn't feel so conscious of listening but he was supporting and it was less effort.
6	It went so fast. I think there was more comfort than the first dialogue because of relationship. I had a lot more respect for ***** so it was easy to just really listen and I knew he would have something good to say.
7	very nice experience-smooth experience. Previously we had more bouncing of thoughts. The ideas were very innovative...a very constructive dialogue

In the second dialogue 6 participants felt they were able to listen – same results as first dialogue interviews- but 6 also mentioned being responsive (an increase of 2). This self-assessed increase in ability to be responsive is echoed by the surveys where participants assessed themselves as better able to be responsive a listen. 5 participants specifically mentioned they felt they had improved in their ability to be responsive and listen from the first dialogue and 5 mentioned an increased awareness of trying to listen and be responsive.

2. Can you comment on whether there were new ideas and understandings that you gained from this dialogue?

Participant #

1	No new ideas or understandings
2	not really
3	There wasn't from this dialogue.
4	Well first of all when he was looking at the idea; he gave an example of what he thought. The idea of learning like this was quite good.
5	Yes
6	Not lots as it was such a quick thing.
7	There was new ideas.

Why was this?

Participant #

1	Because we didn't have time but a new embodied wanting to have that feeling. The idea of being open and inclusive is something I have been doing.
2	because we both had the same ideas
3	Positions were aligned but there was potential
4	Generally there was nothing as we were on the same wave length. In terms of the four ways of speaking we were in nice talk with some reflection.
5	It was a new metaphor that articulated the concept. He used a metaphor of marginalized people - from there it was easy.
6	If we had more time we could have gone into the unknown. All the elements were there.
7	The new ideas simply turned out to be good. Ideas not expressed lose their value. You don't know what you have got till it is gone.

3 participants felt there were new ideas generated in the second dialogue as opposed to 2 in the first. The first dialogue, however had 4 participants say they gained a better understanding and only 1 mentioned this in the second interview?

Why was this?

4 participants felt that they were getting close to generating new ideas but 2 of these felt there wasn't enough time and 2 felt their ideas were too similar to their partners.

3. What was the most challenging part of trying to dialogue with your partner?

Participant #

1	Suspension - trying to slow down. The whole idea of dialogue is back and forth. I could have done 5 minutes on my own.
2	Finding something to disagree on. If two people don't disagree we can't move on. We need to have different opinions.
3	There wasn't much challenge because the viewpoints were similar.
4	Not being judgemental and continuing from our work with comic improv and saying yes.
5	My hesitation to share my judgements - a little political correctness. Not comfortable putting it out on the table right away.
6	Well yeah the time element. We were just starting to get warmed up. There was a certain artificialness. If the topic was given out more than 1 time we might have found areas where our values came out more strongly.
7	Not at all a challenge. There was no criticizing system. It was a little neutral not trying to spill the beans.

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5 participants felt there it was challenging to dialogue in the second dialogue, as opposed to 6 in the first dialogue.

- The challenges mentioned are: the time limit and suspension, the need different opinions, suspending own judgments, taking risks, and the topic. These are very similar to the challenges mentioned in the first dialogue; however, newness of relationship and drawing out the partner were mentioned in the first dialogue and are absent in the second. I believe this is simply due to the opportunity the comic improvisation sessions provided for participants to build relationships with each other.
- Participant 7 felt that the second dialogue was less of a challenge because “there was no criticizing system.” This could be as a result of an increased ability for responsiveness in his partner but this is not conclusive.

Included post intervention interview

4. Were there similarities that you experienced in participating in comic improvisation and dialogue?

Participant #

1	The ability to be open, responsive, to suspend, to be comfortable in that uncertainty and know something good will come and trust it will be positive and new.
2	In comic improvisation I was trying to listen and agree but in dialogue I was trying to listen but not agree. In both we trying to get to the same place.
3	Yeah having to pay attention if you want the process to work or it decays into chaos.
4	Not allowing your ego to interfere in direction; it is not about you. It is about the topic and how it can be explained.
5	Some uncertainty. Do we really want to get into this - taking the risk and putting it out there?
6	Both were somewhat artificial. Comic Improv because of the rules and the dialogue because of the topic and the task. I felt the shortness really limited the experience.

7	There are because after the original bump it is very similar. There is a normal slow flow of things so there is a response time.

The similarities found between comic improvisation and dialogue during the second interview were: listening and paying attention (4), risk taking and uncertainty –(3), suspending own judgement (3) – these are not mutually exclusive.

5. Did the training in comic improvisation assist you in being able to dialogue?

Participant #

1	Yes I do think it did but I don't know if it is demonstrated.
2	Yes
3	yeah
4	Definitely
5	In using this specific dialogue hmmm built relationship with **4. Yes certainly.
6	I think it would have if the process had more time to unfold.
7	Yes. Definitely

All 7 participants felt that the comic improvisation assisted them in their ability to dialogue.

If yes – how? If no –why not?

Participant #

1	[Yes] it gives my counselling skills added validity
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2	[Yes]I think it improved my ability to probe a bit and to listen a bit.
3	Mainly due to the reinforcement of paying attention - being aware of what was going on and being said to then respond to it.
4	[Yes] it did bring about social skills of listening more and accepting more. That is the way improvisation will survive. Looking at the bigger picture I speak different languages. I practice a monologue in my head but the reply is what you build on. It gives you context and direction.
5	[Yes} Using the yes and to affirm other people. This is small but has a big impact on relationship building. To bring play into relationship.
6	I think it would have if the process had more time to unfold. The intervening relationship and trust is an intervening relationship that shifted the dialogue.
7	Comic Improv opens up new ways- shakes up ways of thinking.

4 felt they were better able to listen and be attentive, 2 felt they were better able to respond, and 2 felt they were better able to accept.

Appendix L

The Focus group Transcripts

FOCUS GROUP

11 AM Dec. 7'13

Was the idea of moving into 'the holy insecurity' or that unknown in between place evident in your work in comic improvisation? Can you comment on this?

4: Ummm. I'll start . Now I would hope so. The idea of hope is whether or not it is there because I think it was very difficult to get into. I was too concerned at first with control and where I was going but then I found there was really a need to listen and work with the other person. Like when you are talking about the "I-It" and "I –Thou" and making that transition so that's been a huge learning process for me.

1: yeah I mean ahhh like the idea of being aware of the holy insecurity and to be comfortable in that was something I was trying for from the very beginning because you had made that very clear that that was what comic improvisation was all about. I think I went in and out of it. Sometimes I was able to do that depending on the game, depending on where I was. Other times I was still, because you would call out "Oh you missed it! There was that." So I realised I was still in my process of either not responding properly or maybe thinking I was directing. So it was a process of I think

for the most part. I think by the end I was understanding and getting more and more comfortable with that place in the comic stuff that we were doing.

6. I yeah I ah there were moments umm when I felt that I had achieved that but it is not a very easy thing to get into. Umm especially some of us who have spent our time developing ourselves so we can be in control or so that life is predictable so we can be in charge what we need to be in charge of and this is the opposite of it. So I found it a little hard to become aware of when I wasn't doing it so it was a process and it changed over our time with the classes I think.

2: Yeah still not really sure about this holy insecurity. How does that compare with what you do in method acting?

1: Sorry How does it compare with....?

2: Method acting where you go into the role and become that person. Is that the same thing?

1: No because I would think in method acting when you become that person there is no uncertainty in that so if I am suppose to be an angry cop that has a tough childhood and my father beat my mother so I am really really upset with anybody that is doing violence my method would be I would get angry and there would be no uncertainty with that. I think what I have read about that.... like Dustin Houghman was always using method acting so when they were doing *Marathon Man* he would have to go for a run before the scene and Lawrence Olivier said it is called acting (group laughter) just act (group laughter) that what it is called. So he would have to get into it. So I don't think there is so much uncertainty in the method.

3: To kind of carry on with that ...the acting as opposed to Improv , the acting you have a role and script. You have something to guide you but with this you are winging it.

2: I took those rules as something to guide us. She told us you have to start with this line and finish with that line

3: yeah

2: So there is a sort of script there. There is boundaries there

3: Yeah there is boundaries but I wouldn't go so far as to call it a script.

1: The rules would almost be like you know nothing. You can't feel nothing so I mean it is a guiding principle but I don't know if would give a rule to how something would unfold in a game if it is just sort of an organizing principle.

Teresa: so was the idea of moving into 'the holy insecurity' or that unknown in between place evident in your work in comic improvisation? What do you think ***?**

2: I have taken a course before but I had forgotten. I took this summer course at UBC and it was more like method acting. Anytime I did something that wasn't in character you know they would prostrate but any way I sort of had this idea of method acting but I didn't know what my character was I was trying to develop a character so maybe that was a whole insecurity not really knowing what that character I was trying to develop was.

Teresa “ so for the Comic Improv that you did here. Did you feel you were in the holy insecurity...in that place?

2: ahhhh I was trying as I said. I was trying to discover what kind of person I was so it was sort of like method acting except I didn't know the script.

5: Hmm I would say that this insecurity I think there was ...I felt there was a certain amount of pressure on me to have something to say you know in this pieces instead of going into a passive kind of observing place there was defiantly a pressure so as the weeks went on like I felt a little more familiar and willing to sit in that place of insecurity and not get anxious about it so much but be able to say this is what we are suppose to be in. Whereas earlier on I think I felt that I was put on stage and ahhh yeah it felt uncomfortable and if that uncomfortable escalates then my ability to then show up and present something to act like this is kind of.....

6: so are you saying as time went on you felt more comfortable being in

5: yes

6: unknown place and as time went on you felt that you didn't have to perform as much or you felt that you had permission to not

5: there is a safety you know ahhhh. When I think of 'holy insecurity' say in the biblical sense "God is like a burning bush" and you are like what is going on (group laughter) so much fear there but I think the more you get experience in that place you are not going to die there is not a whole bunch of pressure for you to do anything then it becomes a little bit more playful and you are in a more playful state.

3: You move from apprehension to ahh to a curious ahhhh there is another name

5: to...acceptance?

3: ahhhanticipatory.

5; ahhh ohhh (from group) yeah you move to wanting to contribute instead of oh my God I have to contribute now . Yeah

1: Actually one of the things that happened is there was almost a for me ahh as we got further along kind of looking forward to that. To get to that place where it felt like that so I knew that I was there. I couldn't always stay there but it became almost like I want that. I want to get to that place where I don't know. It is a lovely thing to not know and not have to figure something out and just go with what comes up. I didn't think of it till you said that closer along kind of that , to use an analogy, that little kid looking forward to Christmas excitement...kind of an excitement about that. I found that I don't know what is going on ...(laughter)

3: There is a whole industry around that feeling (group laughter).

1: and a a self help industry to make money off it too.

Teresa: Any other comments about

6: to me it is about trust and at the beginning it is hard to trust people you don't know and so you trust yourself and this is where you get locked into your own agenda but then after several weeks seeing how amazing these people are and you start to trust them and you think I am not going to push something out there that is mediocre. I know one of

these guys is going to do something better. So the more familiar you are with each other and with the process the more you can suspend your own anxiety and then go into that moment. That's my feeling.

2. Was the idea of moving into 'the holy insecurity' or the unknown in between place evident in your work in dialogue? Can you comment on this?

5: I would say that it is a very different structure. There is just like one on one interaction without 7 other people watching me so there is a different kind of pressure there or absence of pressure to perform. Ummm so yeah there wasn't as much intensity about what we were saying and in terms of the holy insecurity like what came up for me was when ***** (4) and I were talking our conceptions. I don't even know what his concepts of affirmative action is so you know I found he explained it in a visual sense. It ahhh there was space for him . It created space for us to share our understandings. For me I like I had to put the picture together and it kind of took awhile so suspending judgement for understanding and just allowing and share that you know would be my example of dwelling in the holy insecurity. I guess.

4: Yeah that was yeah one of the interesting points of doing this one on one was the matter of you both have your own view point and then trying to establishing what the view point is and going from there into the holy insecurity .

1: Yeah. I also thought when you are doing one of those games you have an organizing structure but what is going to happen is just totally ahh is just going to unfold and the

holy insecurity is kind of where you have to be but in this case you get a topic and there is words on it. So our topic was segregation, resources, education and I have history of my own experiences and a history of what has happened in the world so words like segregation automatically I gotta sit there and in my mind and all this stuff is coming up so I kept in mind the holy insecurity as something I was trying to find but I didn't find it. It wasn't easy to do that because trying to suspend there is almost this little guy with his little thing so we don't want to have that here I am trying to get that clear so I can focus on whatever *****(^) is going to say about this topic and we are going to build something together so maybe if we had 15 minutes to talk about this I might have found that I could get into more of that ' I don't know where this is going and that is good'. I think there were moments even in that 5 minutes where I had that thing where ' I really don't know where this is going' and I was ok with it but I was still working with my emotional process of the words like segregation and testing and liability and all the connotation personal and professionally that I have been carrying about that.

6: Let me just add and put into my own words what I think you are saying and what I had. When you read the sentence; you have to unpack each sentence and these sentences have a lot of content in them. There is hot button words and so you are going back into your memory of what these are and your associations so you have to unpackage it first before you even get to the point where you can be holy insecure and I think in five minutes we didn't have enough time. We were still unpacking and trying to diverge from our own platforms as you will. We hadn't really gotten into the unknown yet. So I think if you were to do this again a longer dialogue might introduce more dynamics.

3: The insecurity of comic improv is big and in your face the insecurity in the dialogue portion is a more subtle restrained insecurity. You can't just "oh there is an elephant!"

because you are talking about something. So the insecurity while still there is more contained.

2: The problem was I was trying to find points where we disagree. It wasn't available so more or less we had the same view point so if an animal rights activist who said "Oh we can't do this. It is immoral!" or something then I think there might be some holy insecurity possibility.

7: As far as the comic improvisation is concerned it is like suddenly jumping into. As far as certain characters are concerned there is a certain way I would think about it maybe in a completely different way like. For example how some people think of cops I might think of cops as heroes. I might think of cops as punks. So I would act like a punk. It is different. And as far as I am concerned In our dialogue topic on the prison system there was no friction at all. There was though a great discussion.

Teresa: Anyone else about Holy Insecurity and dialogue?

5: Ummm I think yes there is a piece. Because I had some things I could have said that would have stirred the pot a little bit more but I wanted to come across as very open and very understanding so I didn't want to like put out what my judgements were initially. You know unless there was enough trust. Like I don't but I feel like even just to stir the pot to generate a little more depth or add to the conversation because in can be just like 'nice talk' .

3: so not sure if you want to expose yourself

5: yeah

3. Were you able to connect your work in comic improvisation to your dialogue in so far as being in ‘the holy insecurity’ or the unknown in between place? Can you comment on this?

1: I think on an intellectual level I really wanted that. I could say five weeks doing Comic Improv and think about some of those things and remember sort of experiences of being totally and absolutely not know what is going to happen next and liking it and wanting that for the dialogue. I don't know that I got there but I think the fact that we had had that experience and even after the PowerPoint being reminded of what we are looking at here so I it sitting right here the thought I really want that and I am going to really try for that . Whether I was able to ? I don't know because as I said before there was all that other stuff I was working with and maybe , as ***** (06) already said in a longer conversation I might have been able to. But in the five minutes it seemed like most of it was just trying to keep down and not keep talking about all these emotional charged concepts that I could bring into the conversation. So maybe that was helping because I was really trying to work really hard on just trying to get to that place.I don't think I got there but I think I was aware of it.

3: I don't think for us there was enough of difference in position or to find a lot of insecurity. We were, to some extent, on the same side of the river. At different points but not a lot of unknown space.

2: Unless one of us wanted to be a devil's advocate.

3: then we are back to that method acting thing (laughter).

6: I didn't find there was too much in terms of the holy insecurity . Ummm and partly it might be the experience with the Improv worked against it because I felt really comfortable with ****(1) in the second dialogue compared to the first one. So there was more insecurity in the first one than the second one

Teresa: the relationship?

06: Exactly and again the points I said before. Where we were just sort of sorting out the basics ideas and stuff before we started to get beyond that so there might have been some points and I think I felt more prepared to get into the unknown because I felt more secure. Yeah more trust exactly. But we didn't.

3: but because there is more trust there is less insecurity .

Teresa : Maybe there was an awareness but not necessarily an application? As this is a self assessment do you feel going forward this is an awareness and an application you can take with you in your life? It maybe not demonstrated in that five minute dialogue but maybe this is something you can take and look at and apply but I won't have any evidence of it from the little dialogues we did today?

1: yeah I would agree with that (**Maybe there was an awareness but not necessarily an application**)?

6: so you are asking really if there is a carryover effect?

Teresa: yes and I mean we are only speculating and it is self assessment but yes as that is truly what we are looking at.

5: I am just throwing something out there. I am with my teacher training looking at play and ahh at trauma therapy and all this stuff and often times when a kid has been traumatized and then in the therapy the play therapy it allows this kid to approach these wounds approach these things but they are in full control because it is a play situation and they can kind of work around this thing and be more comfortable with this problem this challenge that they face and I know that there are relationships and friendships that I have like we can joke around something serious and just be creative and silly and just make up the most bizarre kind of things kind of like we did in Improv Theatre and we are just starting to like there is not like there is a wound or a challenge but there is a hot topic since there is some fun around it; it takes the pressure of having to be so serious because we are able to laugh about it and see the absurdity of just the absolute craziness of these things. So that is where I think that this play or this Improvisational Comedy helps like applied to looking at harder tighter situations in life you know. A bit of sarcasm definitely but the way to relate about these things ...yeah

3: I think that it really fits with the Improv bit connecting to the you know whatever playing around the outside of some trauma because ordinarily you want to be really serious around something like that. Oh you know this big bad thing happened to you oh you gotta take this seriously but if you can use the Comic Improv skills if not making fun of it but to work with that then instead of forcing the person into the being serious about this they can actually deal with it.

1: Yes and the other thing about trauma is that you are working with someone who is all about their safety. Safety has to do with how much control they feel so in that case because it gives them an ability to laugh and look at it playfully. They have more control which allows them to feel that they have that ability to keep away from the stuff that

could traumatize or trigger and maybe work through something in a creative way so I would agree with that.

05: the Improv comedy though there was a lot of non control over situations (laughter). Like with 'yes and...' you just said something ridiculous and I have to agree with it (laughter) . It was not like well I didn't have any kind of control like actually....ehhhhh (laughter)

4: Like what is wrong with you

yeah (laughter)

1: Yeah but thinking about that , there was something that was liberating about the fact that you knew you didn't have control. We have our director saying "No you gotta do this" and a lot of times people don't do that they don't push up against really important places where if you have pushed through then something wonderful could happen and that is what was happening in the improv something wonderful was happening. I think because we had to keep pushing through.

3: That thing with the rules actually just occurred to me that was really interesting because you give up the normal, if you will, rules of society. How you are suppose to think and talk and respond but we've adopted this other set of rules that says you have to accept what that person just said which is in of itself a very strict rule so you have traded one set of straight rules for another.

6: In terms for me in terms of the comfort with the holy insecurity spilling over is mitigated by what *(3) and *(1) were just saying and that is that what makes Improv

safe is that everybody agree to follow this set of Improv rules so then let's say I walk away feeling more comfortable with the holy insecurity there is still no contract for me to go out and be bizarre in public (laughter) because nobody else has agreed (laughter). Nobody else has agreed to this new set of rules right ? So the question is are there contexts in my life where it is ok for me to be improvisational and go into the holy insecurity and not be carted off to the looney bin.

1;wouldn't it be great to be an Improv specialist and just go in and throw the pot open everything up in the air. (lots of laughter)

06: Ok give me a line just give me a line....(laughter)

4. Was the idea of being responsive, aware and accepting, of other people's offers evident in your work in comic improvisation? Can you comment on this?

3: yeah for the most part I mean right there were obviously times when it didn't work quite right but just by the very nature of being perceived with the sketch of whatever there is that ripple effect.

1: Yes and I think that last workshop where we didn't do anything new we just umm we just revisited some of the games and the fact there was only half of us we were always engaged it seemed. It seemed to get, not just easier, but, for me , part of what I was doing. Just everything was accepting and everything was responsive . I am not saying I

could do it all the time but it seemed that the flow was a lot easier .It seemed there was a lot more energy and it just felt that I am going to have this and just go with whatever. You have that kind of umm default. Just waiting for...give me something I am ready for it while in the beginning learning those games and everything just because it is new and just because there was still that sense of feeling awkward and trying to get this. So....I think it was definitely I walked away from last Saturday feeling, I was exhausted by 11:00AM, but had this incredible high realising you gotta stop saying hi to people that don't know you (loud laughter) because you just want to keep having this energy and lets just keep going . (laughter) My wife wanted to know if we had some kool aid or something. Did you guys have a stimulant? No I just ...it was really.....

3: Sometimes it is just easier to drink the kool aid.

Teresa: so the idea of being responsive, aware and accepting, of other people's offers is what we are exploring

7: So it is obviously a learning process right? Especially going with business because in business where there is a lot of dialogue going on a lot of [argumentative] going on. Especially when there is business involved.

Teresa: so a lot of that level 2 where you are not generative

7 : yes yes in the very process of trying to get something and the psychological thing is you want generally to say no. The situation going down and the reaction is no. It is a learning process when the reaction is yes. Normally it is "oh that was bad it was terrible" so the reaction is always no. It is a learning process. Don't go with that reaction that was

negative. Go with the flow and have a reaction that is positive. And in question number three. What was the essence of this question?

Teresa: Were you able to connect your work in comic improvisation into your dialogue in so far as being in ‘the holy insecurity’? Do you see that connection in dialogue and Comic Improv ?

7: In dialogue you slog slowly and have a chance of coming back to it. It cycles around. With comic improvisation you are reacting with an audience. Think about it; it is significant. They are watching that you are responsive in your reaction and you can't say no.

5: I don't know here this fits into the questions but it seems like in the time frame how we perceived the temporal experience like . I keep on going to like big decision at like the U.N. here your future is at stake and then you go into Comic Improv where it is like the present moment is at stake. This is where it is at and there are no repercussions in the future and so my mental state is very much in a different place. There are future outcomes that can have huge consequences for millions of people or for yourself or whatever and then with the comic improv is let's see where we can take this right at this moment.

3: It is meaningless so the moment is everything

5: yes

4: If you don't take the moment it is meaningless there are no consequences beyond with generational dialogue it is the opposite right? Or it can be well yeah.

2: There is difficulty understanding for me to find out what accepting meant. For example you said “push the red button” so I pushed the red button, because I thought that was accepting, and then said “But it doesn’t work” but you said “No No you said that’s not accepting”

Teresa: That is a grey area. Are you saying YES to the red button AND your offer is it doesn’t work or are you saying YES to the red button BUT it doesn’t work which is a rejection. It is interpretative.

4: The idea of accepting what another person says it immediately you accept it and it puts you to where can we go from here? Once you have accepted it, how can I build on this? The only time I wasn’t accepting is when I realised that it was time and somehow we had to wrap it up and come to an end and I found myself trying to manipulate the dialogue so we could get to that end without making it seem like I was.

Teresa: Was that the *first line last line* so your exit ticket was that line?

04: I think so and I think there was that other one.

03: Like those *one word stories* (noises of agreement) sometimes wondering how am I going to push this in that direction where it is going to wrap up... with one word

02: Oh I think in all of them we could come up with an ending. I think we were thinking about the ending. Sometimes the ending was too soon. That is why I didn’t want to press the red button because I didn’t want to solve this problem so easily. I think in all of them we were deciding how long do I want to make this.

Teresa: so anything more about being responsive and accepting in Comic Improv?

6: Yeah I think it was there but it was there because it was reinforced by the rules. You had to do it to make it work and you as the moderator were policing that if you will. Where as in the ...well ahh so if it is not there the Comic Improv won't work .

1: but sometimes I think that if you are all coming together as a group to do something and it is going to be where you are going to continue to work together the accepting and the responsiveness is sort of almost embedded depending on what you are doing. Say a teaching situation or say you are doing a process group. But generally the idea is that when we are going to come together every week and we are going to do something. Sometimes it is a written norm and sometimes it is not an explicit norm but we are going to accept everybody's contribution here. We are going to try and respect everybody in this process by the nature of being together as a group doing something. That is just off the top of my head. Maybe it isn't all that explicit? I think in all the groups I have ever been say a meeting for the neighbourhood and you are going to work towards you know parenting...safe parents or safe neighbourhood or whatever but the idea that you are going to come together and try to be respectful positive or we are going to be accepting of other people's ideas and stuff it has almost been conditioned at the time you start going to school. Coming together as a group because we are here together to do something.

Teresa so now we are moving into sort of that next piece:

5. Was the idea of being responsive, aware and accepting, of other people's offers in dialogue and did you feel it was evident in your work in dialogue today? Can you comment on this?

1; Yes yes I think also just my way of being in the world I have always tried to do that any ways but because we have gone through this 5 weeks and because I know what the connection is suppose to be and everything it sits right here . This is what we are trying to do; this is what I want to do so whether I had embodied it and was doing it or whether I was just aware that this is what we wanted to do. We wanted to have this connection. I was aware even more so than the first dialogue that of trying to be responsive and willing to jut go for it wherever he was.

Teresa: so there was a meta awareness that was intensified through the Comic Improv. If this is what accepting feels like here I am going to take that construct and try and put that in here. Yes?

1: For me I think so yes and having that experience of the comedy exercises and everything I get a little more comfortable with that and a little more exposure to doing it. It felt like instead staying here in the mind ; it was actually going all the way through my body. So there is a body awareness I getting more settled and more comfortable with that. You know maybe if the dialogue had been a little longer we might have actually been able to feel that happening.

So anyone else thinking of being responsive, aware and accepting, of other people's offers in dialogue and did you feel it was evident in your work in dialogue today?

2: it may have affected us and made it a little more boring. (laughter)

3: Comedy: fun and exciting; dialogue: boring (laughter)

6: For me the dialogue was very different from Improv because the dialogue was embedded in reality and there were real issues and most of us around the table have spent our lives collecting information and observing society ; so we have a lot of opinions about reality which are immediately jogged by the question right. Where as in Improv, to me the beauty of it and the uniqueness of it was it was completely unknown . I mean you put things together that you would never ever occur together in reality and so you have this conjured reality you have to affect and interact with . So I don't know. Yes I felt it was there to some extent but it was it was more trying to understand what ****(1) ideas were . Yeah again it might have changed if it had gone longer than the five minutes. Because we would have gotten through that initial stage and there would have been more room for the unknown.

1: Hearing you say that reminds me of something **** (5) said about playfulness in Improv There is a sense of spontaneity and freedom. So I am more aware of with the dialogue questions I mean those are really heady and emotional and as I said before there was a lot of variable tied to it and it didn't feel so playful. We are going to talk about something and we are going to take these things that we learned in Comic Improv to help us be playful but how can you be playful when you are talking about these things like segregation and allocating resources and testing?

5: One thing that is coming up for me is around um the energy. So in terms of if we were to have done this dialogue and prior to doing the dialogue we had done a few

exercises some comic improv stuff then the energy carries ...you know how you were just bubbling across the Saturday afternoon and evening sort of thing

1: yep

5: and that carries into it and I have seen other eh now when you see these you know big town gatherings the transition movement where people are trying to address big oil and climate change. Where people are coming together to face really challenging questions whether planetary, locally or whatever but they incorporate within these gatherings all sorts of ti-chi exercises and ways for people to emote and having some playfulness into it. Like yeah we are having some shitty situations but we still have to have a hopeful optimism about the future you know and um I think it is by pairing these activities side by side that the energy can feed off of one another rather than you know wake up in the morning and at Saturday morning at 11 o'clock we are already dialoguing about affirmative action (haha).

3: You build up the energy some other way. It is there so you take that with you into your next dialogue as opposed to, like you say, dropping straight into it. Because the energy is not there.. it just dissipates because you have stopped having fun.

6: But I think sometimes when I think that when you are in a [generative] dialogue kind of thing around serious issues the issues themselves define the energy.

3: oh yeah

6: I think of an Israeli, Palestinian discussion right about how to solve the West Bank. I mean that is so loaded with generations of hot buttons and stuff how can you get that playfulness in it ?

3 No that carries its own energy.

6 yeah yeah so maybe that is one of the problems with [generative dialogue] it is so loaded to begin with the issue itself. How so you get beyond that ?

3: Well part of that is the insecure aspect. Being able to step into the insecure where you both . Let's take that instance where both sides are so firmly entrenched that there is no unknown. Both sides are totally correct

6: there is no room for the unknown.

3: yeah yeah you need to allow a little bit of wiggle room into it.

4: isn't that the nature of satire/

4: to deal with these emotional issues and back away from it. For example we had affirmative action and I thought of, I don't know how many of you are into Doonesbury

3: yes

4: with Gary Trudeau, but he was looking at one student who was really ticked off because everyone else was getting A+ and he got an A. He was really angry because he didn't get an A+ and he said that it was because he was a Greco

American wrestler who is interested in such and such and I feel this is not inclusiveness. (laughs). So the thing is though we are looking at it as being serious ok but at the same time working through, as **** (5) says, the talking nice, talking tough and how far can you really get into that in a dialogue in 5 minutes? So we are operating under rules that are self imposed ok before we can move on. So when we get into then we want to build on what each other is doing but we do feel at least I feel some kind of constrictions because of this matter of talking nice as ***** (5) says and not saying “well what he said just really sucked” ...but not that I felt that way (laughter). But it is just that matter of you want to keep building and that is the nature of generative dialogue. You are trying to generate new ideas but by the same token though . How do you move forward? You have to build on what is said before. You have to accept what the other person says. (pause) Or do we have to ?

7: I was hoping that all these things we learned through Improv can be brought out into reality. Improv is hyper reality. It is born out of reality but it is a lighter way of addressing something that is serious. It can be painful getting into a serious issue. It is more lighter with satire. Dialogue floats around with the seriousness in 5 minutes but if I want to get into something really serious a subject that is political, ethnic or religious one of those things there won't be any serious clash or friction in 5 minutes. But with Improv, I loved the yes to the situation and letting that lead the way. So those issues are born out of reality but they are addressed in a lighter way.

5: I think one pieces that comes up is ah what is that term when someone can make fun of themselves? Like make light of themselves?

1: Self deprecation

5: Self deprecation but you are able to some of your faultiness and laugh at yourself you know. Being able to laugh at yourself but also holding your dignity. Having that confidence in yourself. When people bring that to the table rather than being so fixed and so “my way or the highway” or I am so ...I keep on thinking of that vision of Palestine where their view is so strong they can't see their own frailties. I think of people that can laugh at themselves like my Great Grandma who could laugh at herself and everybody felt so comfortable around her you know and that formed relationship.

Teresa: not taking yourself too seriously?

5: Not taking yourself too seriously...that's what it was. So there is some humour in that right? And that is what helps facilitate connection.

1: yes

Teresa: so when we look at this connection between Comic Improvisation and Dialogue and we are talking about this 5 minutes dialogue but I guess I once again want to ask the question if there is an increased awareness, that you were alluding to, will you take that 'saying yes', that 'being responsive' will you take that out into the world past this? Is there transference? Do you think ?

3: yeah I think so. I mean you learn how to do something and it is part of you now from that point forward. You can't help but add that to your tool box as it were whether or not you consciously pull it out to use it or if it just slightly informs the rest of what you are doing is debatable but it is there.

4; You'd like to think that you do but what happens when you think to yourself the other person isn't and sort of change your perspective on where you should go with this dialogue?

3: yeah well it is situational stuff . It depends on whether the other person is an adversary then your immediate reaction is : ok fine we will fight. Now whether or not you can get past that is , yeah, that is a whole other problem.

5: Weren't you saying something ****(6) around ah yeah I am a one man show in terms of I am going on with my day within the context of our little sessions where we are creating these rules where we share as a group and that allows for the play to happen and I think that well I know in my life I am confronted with I want to have a new way of relating with the person you know with reflective listening . Would you be willing to paraphrase what I just asked what I just said you know? It is like engaging them in a in a process that they may not be familiar with and you are kind of sharing that culture. So I think it is like for sharing that culture of play . How to invite people into that so we can also play with them and have a little bit more of a lighter day.

3: Invite them in without giving them a whole lecture on this is what we are doing and how we are going to do it.

5: yeah

3: I know at work every year there is the latest and greatest book out on how to communicate and the problem is that the people that need the skills are the ones totally convinced that this book is so you know how to understand them and by looking at the books, they are pretty much all so you can understand them right?

(silence) I know how I am going to react to what you say vs how I am suppose to interrupt what you say. There is a subtle distinction. Umm I think I screwed that up somewhere in my head (laughter). The book is like what is your Serengeti animal like crocodile's behave this way and that (laughter). It is not so I can identify what your animal is; it is so I can identify what my wn animal is . I know the spin I am going to put on everything that you say. I have totally lost where I was going with this.

Teresa: I am still trying to figure out my Serengeti animal.

3: Believe me it takes up hours of your busy work day and it does nothing.

6: So for my money I think there is an awareness that will carry over but I don't think the behaviour will carry over because there is no consensual agreement on the rules and I could see using this as a toll but I would have to as ****(3) said say OK these are the rules and we are going to switch and try to resolve this issue by doing some Improv so these are the rules.

5: Um Teresa what comes up for me around this is say I was walking . I was in Duncan yesterday going to my school. There was snow on the ground and I love dancing so I just started dancing down the street. Not like way out there just a little shuffle here and there. People were looking and stuff but I was just this is what I want to do. I am not doing it for you guys even if you might hate me for what I am doing I don't care. This is just what I want to do and I am grounded enough in myself that I can play and have fun while I am walking. You know and some people might join like ... who knows? Some little kid might come along and skip with me ...who knows. It is not the norm right? It is not just walking seriously down the street right?

Whatever...why not and that is how I carry bringing a little more play into my life. You never know what might happen. You are kind of a little bit ahhhh I wish other people would. In Italy they use to sing like operas in the morning to each other. They know these collective operas and they would be singing the whole frigging village that my Grama went to visit. That is playfulness man. That is a culture that agreed to it. So umm can we on our own start to bring in these things? The things we want to see in the world ? Yeah and for me I want to see dancing. It was like that in Africa you know people would have this way about them.

3: It is very cultural and societal thing. We in North America totally shun most of that expression. We like the serious business man. A serious man making serious money.

1: Well that is true because the word silly comes from a word that means blessings in Galic. Our ancestor 's use to wish on each other. They use to wish silliness. Somehow silly has become acquainted with being stupid and childish but at one point in our culture silliness was blessing. You want to be that; which says something about our world but I was thinking too that whatever personally that it is one more thing to keep myself open. So the 'holy insecurity' the 'yes and'...I might not be able to engage actively with people because they don't know that rule but for me; it just reminds me of staying open to possibilities: to be flexible, to be responsive, to be respectful, and look for opportunities to enact that in my daily life.

3: ok I got another thought. No Serengeti (laughter) I gotta get this out fast'cause it is going. Umm yeah you can bring it to yourself. I forget where it is from. It is one of these phrases: "you know it only takes one person to fix the relationship" and

depending what mood I am in I can argue that point. But you can bring that tool kit if you will to the discussion and start to use it and then maybe the other participants kind of catch on either consciously or subconsciously. But you can actually bring that force into it which can work; you don't necessarily need the other person to be aware of that.

1: yep

Teresa: Is there any other comments on whether you were you able to connect your work in comic improvisation to your dialogue in so far as being responsive to the other?

05: Well for me ahh when **** (04) brought in a concept or like he made a visual representation of this idea; then I started using that too right. Like thank you for bringing this sort of illustration I will now use that to bring in more information and more ideas I now have about it. If that is being responsive then yes.

Teresa Ok you felt like you were able to bring it in?

5: yes using his allusion using his idea.

Teresa: That was his offer that your were responding to

5: yes

02; I have another idea for the dialogue. That is where you should decide on a topic you disagree on first and then do the dialogue. For example if we disagree on the value of online classes. Ok? As we didn't disagree on any of those topics

7 *Was the idea of co-generating a new creation evident in your work in comic improvisation?*

1: Yes yes

2: yeah Yeah

1: because that was what it was all about.

7: That is a big yes like as you were doing this something was expected to come out of it and then something else came out of it. It was like there were elevations or something.

03: yes and

03: Yes you can't do the whole Comic Improv thing without some else starting or adding.

1: and when we make our director laugh or we feel the yes we realise we are getting there. These things have now worked. This is the way it is suppose to happen. You get that reinforcement. There is lots of examples in the five week including when you write an email to say. There were lots of examples of us touching it...getting it becoming more willing to do that. Getting comfortable. So I would say for all of us I could feel it not just personally. You see as a group it was starting toAs I said before that last Saturday partly because we were always going there wasn't a lot of sitting. Partly it becomes where you didn't have to think of it so much. ...the familiarity of it and the energy itself was kind of a generating force.

5: Umm I'm just noticing that when things clicked there was a whole bunch of pleasurable feelings. Just oh my God this is what we are making of it and it is still going somewhere and that we are agreeing to this. Yeah there were moments definitely where I was so impressed that the absurdity of it was agreed upon and was a consensual part. Yeah we could play. It was play?

Teresa: yes

Right it was play? I was noticing the physical response to that was a gratified feeling when something was able to be translated and understood and moved with yes.

3: I think the biggest co-generation was the one word story. You had to take everything that everyone else put into it. You only had one word. It wasn't like your word was the story in itself. You are all creating this big thing that without the other people it doesn't work so it was definitely a co-generation.

Teresa: Anything else on that?

6. *So was the idea of co-generating a new creation evident in your work in dialogue?*

6: I didn't think it was so much because of the time constraints. The dialogue was too short to get to its natural evolution. As I said earlier I think we were still unpackaging the ideas which were quiet significant and so 5 minutes didn't give us enough time to unpackage and then go and say now what. Whereas of course the 5 weeks of Improv we had lots f time to get into it.

1: yeah but I would say that the hope and what I was trying to do was there. I don't know if we got there because we didn't have enough time but I wanted that .

Teresa: so again the awareness is there and the meta cognition is there during the dialogue

1: yeah it was it was

Teresa: and your prediction is I think I could. It would be interesting if we now did 5 weeks of dialogue.

5: I didn't sign up for that (laughter)

6: That would be a very interesting idea because you could have a control group do just the generative dialogue and then another group doing just the Improv and one doing both.

Teresa: The lifetime commitment in small print (laughter). So looking at that in the two parts: In the dialogue you did today was it evident to you that you were able to do some of that new creation?

3: I think in our dialogue there was potential there were a few points in the short time to identify as, if you will, potential areas of conflict where growth can occur but given the time constraint there just wasn't enough time to probe start deeply into those areas.

4: but I found the Comic Improv it taught us a few, if you will, social skills like acceptance and so when ****(5) and I were talking I think we could both tell we were

being very accepting of what the other person was saying and wanting to build on that. Comic Improv was very important in building that.

Teresa: You had again that meta cognitive awareness that as **(1) talked about.**

7: Comic Improv affected us but to work in the dialogue this should be practiced a little bit. People were falling short in the dialogue. The dialogue was 5 minutes and it was a great conversation but unlike Comic Improv I didn't know how to how to push it.

Teresa so you felt aware of that ?

05: umm like co generating a new creation like what was the new creation being generated from? That's like what was before? Like before something new you had to know what the old is right? That is your background information. It takes time to develop . Boy what comes to me is that like say you are in a foreign country or in business first and you are trying to sell someone this and you are trying to sell someone something. Before you know it you have just bought something and you have no idea what it is . How much it costs you just sold millions of dollars this really expensive gift you have said yes to just because you are "yes and"sort of thing. There is a danger in thatyou don't know what you are agreeing to.

Teresa: Any other comments? (silence)