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## Journal Aim and Scope

The Journal of Visual and Performing Arts, Sri Lanka (JOVPA-SL) is a biannual research publication issued by the University of the Visual and Performing Arts, Colombo. The journal seeks to capture a broad spectrum of scholarly work in the fields of visual and performing arts, while also promoting multidisciplinary approaches within the humanities and social sciences. JOVPA-SL welcomes contributions from both academics and practitioner-researchers engaged in arts-based research, fostering critical dialogue and innovative perspectives on creative practice and inquiry. It serves as a platform for critical engagement, experimental methodologies, and creative pedagogy, addressing themes that are either discipline-specific such as dance, drama, performance studies, music, or visual arts or situated at the intersection of multiple disciplines. The journal invites original, rigorous, and meaningful research in creative arts and performance studies, both within and across academic boundaries. It encourages critical debate and cross-disciplinary exchange through diverse methodological and theoretical approaches. Topics of interest include, but are not limited to: theatre studies, performance studies, dance studies, ethnomusicology, music education, popular culture, dance and movement analysis, art history, art theory, visual and cultural studies, crafts, digital arts and design, film studies, and fine arts.

Cover Photo: Final Year Dance Production, 'Oracle' performed in 2018 at Panibharatha Theatre. Dept. of Theatre, and Oriental Ballet and Modern Dance.

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## Devising Playwriting Pedagogy in Sri Lankan Higher Education: Insights from the *Devadoota Sangramaya* Performance Project

### ABSTRACT

*Incorporating playwriting into teaching merges creative practice with pedagogy, balancing artistic skills and educational goals. This balance can be challenging, especially with large groups and subjective standards for creative outcomes. There is a notable research gap in analytical practices within Sri Lankan higher education, despite theoretical discussions on creative writing pedagogy in general. This study primarily explores strategies to overcome the challenges encountered during playwriting within course modules of a higher degree program. •This research seeks to conduct a reflective analysis of the process involved in developing a devised play text, Devadoota Sangramaya, for identifying the challenges and strategies associated with teaching, learning, and assessment in higher education. This research employs an inductive approach to observe phenomena and convey pedagogical knowledge for identifying and testing effective strategies over two months. This predominantly qualitative research focuses on the performance writing projects of final-year students enrolled in Acting and Playwriting-Directing degree programs at the Department of Theatre, Ballet, and Modern Dance at the University of the Visual and Performing Arts, Colombo. The playwriting process was documented using reflective journaling. The journals of two target groups—lecturers and students (n=10)—were analyzed thematically. Factors such as students' lack of commitment, time and peer pressure, creative abilities, along with poor communication and pedagogical strategies, have contributed to persistent challenges in the educational process. Empowering students through the pedagogical framework has been discussed with theoretical suggestions.*

### KEYWORDS:

Devise playwriting, pedagogy, andragogy, playwriting strategies, playwriting challenges

## INTRODUCTION

In the context of creative arts education, artistic practitioners play a crucial role in shaping both the discipline and its benchmarks. When playwriting is incorporated into a teaching module, the creative practice evolves into a pedagogical process which is deeply connected with the development of artistic skills. The competencies related to playwriting and similar creative arts practices support a pedagogical approach that aligns with competency-based education (CBE) and outcome-based education (OBE), rather than solely emphasizing knowledge acquisition typical of traditional educational models. However, the challenge lies in balancing artistic objectives with educational goals, especially when working with larger groups of students while aiming to produce creative outcomes that meet subjective standards.

Though playwriting is an individual practitioner-based process in traditional creative practice, devised work requires collaboration and collective creativity among artists or students. In terms of developing theatre performance, Allison Oddey highlights the process of devising enables performers to participate in physical and hands-on creativity while working together to develop and enhance an original piece that emerges from collecting, altering, and reshaping the varied experiences each person gathers from their surrounding (2013).

Such a diverse approach cultivates exceptional skills in playwrights, enabling them to become writer-devisers who can adapt and thrive in collaborative contexts that are not attainable in individual creative processes. By engaging in collective creation, playwrights and actors alike can explore narratives that emerge organically from their interactions, resulting in unique theatrical experiences that challenge traditional notions of playwriting. This collaborative process enables a more profound connection to the material, as it often reflects the diverse voices and experiences of all participants, thereby enriching the artistic output.

The devising approach encourages student agency, fosters creativity, and enhances problem-solving skills, making it an effective pedagogical tool in university theatre degree programs. However, while its benefits are well-documented, challenges such as assessment

complexities, institutional constraints, and student resistance remain significant.

Playwriting is not a properly constructed teaching and learning pedagogy in the Sri Lankan higher education system. There is a notable research gap in analytical practices within the Sri Lankan higher education. This immense claim has been made based on this researcher's first-person experience and observation as a playwriting educator and practitioner-researcher for more than 20 years. This discussion employs an inductive approach to respond to creative and pedagogical challenges that emerge from the case study of the *Devadoota Sangramaya* performance project at the University of the Visual and Performing Arts with a theoretical discussion.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

This study primarily aims to comparatively explore theoretical discussion and identify challenges and strategies associated with teaching, learning, and assessment in the final year theatre performance project at the University of the Visual and Performing Arts in Sri Lanka. This research discusses the foundational pedagogy associated with devising a play text, then employs it in the context of the case study of the final year theatre performance project at the UVPA.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This predominantly qualitative research employs an inductive approach combining observed phenomena of the first-person view over two months and the analysis of pedagogical and devised playwriting concepts. The qualitative data were collected through the playwriting process of the final-year Theatre performance Project in Acting and Playwriting-Directing degree programs at the Department of Theatre, Ballet, and Modern Dance at the UVPA in 2024-2025, which was documented using reflective journaling in the form of Gibbs's Reflective Cycle writing structure. The journals of two target groups—lecturers and students (n=10)—were analyzed. Addi-

tionally, key relevant theoretical discourses relevant to the devising practice are discussed.

## **CASE STUDY**

In November 2024, this researcher was appointed as one of the supervisors to facilitate the course module, Performance Project of Dramatic Theatre, for the 2018/19 academic year. This module is aimed at students completing their SLQF level 6. The Department of Theatre, Ballet, and Modern Dance offers three-degree programs: Playwriting and Directing, Acting, and Mudra Natya and Modern Dance. These programs collectively produce two major performances within two clusters: Writing and Directing, and Acting; and Mudra Natya and Modern Dance. In this course module, performance evidence-based assessments serve as a cumulative showcase of the creative skill development achieved by the student cohort, who are specializing in acting and playwriting-directing over the course of their four years of study.

The module aims to help develop advanced skills in various theatre-related disciplines and prepare students to cultivate their capacities as professional theatre artists. It is the culmination of a four-year undergraduate degree, showcasing the skills gained by students in a comprehensive performance project. The objectives indicate that On completion of this module, the student will be able to:

1. Demonstrate professional skills in theatre arts
2. Apply research and practical skills gained through the years to professional performance projects
3. Develop a capacity to engage in critical assessment and self-evaluation
4. Apply various creative modes to develop and construct a performance
5. Articulate creative approaches and concepts clearly
6. Plan and organize information sharing
7. Generate a vision as a lifelong learner in theatre-related arts

The goals are categorized as follows: developing and showcasing specific professional skills and soft skills, adapting them to different contexts, employing various technical applications, and reflecting analyzing progress in work and personal development.

The playwriting process for this course module is considered a devised work, although practices may vary from year to year. This module encompasses a year-long, two-semester program, typically lasting 30 weeks of direct teaching and directed practice, culminating in a full-length production. The module offers 8 credits out of a total of 120 credits spanning over four years of study. 8 credits consist of a minimum of 400 notional hours, which generally exceeds more than one and a half of the estimated hours due to rigorous rehearsals and designing, including the playwriting process. Students from two primary degree programs, Acting and Playwriting-Directing, must choose one main subject area and a sub-area based on their interests, regardless of their designated degree program. The module is assessed on a formative assessment of 30%, final performance of 50%, viva voce of 10%, and attendance of 10%. However, thoughtful rubrics and different evidence gathering tools are associated with all assessments, including the marking for attendance percentages.

It is generally recommended that students align their main task with their degree program while also exploring sub-sections in other areas, including music creation and scenography practices such as set design, costume design, lighting design, and makeup design. While the primary responsibility for the playwriting and directing process lies with final-year students in the Playwriting-Directing Degree Program, which usually consists of 8-10 students in each batch, other interested individuals from the Acting Degree Program are also encouraged to participate in this collaborative playwriting process.

In November 2024, three playwriting supervisors were appointed to guide the process. The playwriting process for the academic batch of 2018/19 was conducted as a devised collaboration, with input from senior staff members. All participants from the playwriting and directing cohort (n= 41) were encouraged to contribute to the

### development of the play

After a few initial meetings, a workshop was held on December 17, 2024, where all the learners were invited to propose dramatic themes, styles, and genres they preferred. From these proposals, the contemporary political theme, combining realistic and non-realistic styles, emerged as the most popular choice. The learners were then divided into groups based on their student numbers, utilizing a random generation application. Each group was tasked with researching contemporary political stories using their mobile devices with internet access. They selected themes within broader categories, including political issues, gender and sexual matters, religious and cultural issues, and topics related to job perspectives and immigration. Each group was instructed to maintain separate notice boards where they could post images, stories, and information they found during their research. Next, learners were asked to retell the stories they discovered, selecting five stories per group, using five body images of actors in an image theatre format, accompanied by music, sounds, or narrations. From these image-based narratives, each team was required to perform two stories.

The Easter Day bombing attack was chosen for presentation based on the combined preferences of the students and supervisors. The divided groups of the students were asked to research the socio-political situations ranging from the pre-Easter Day bombing attack to the post-Easter Day bombing attack, including media reporting, legislation, legal procedures, commission reports, statements of religious parties, statements of victims and families, and promises of political parties who make an advantage on seeking power. Subsequently, the teams gathered information from various media sources, tracing stories from present situations at the time of the writing to five years before the Easter terrorist attack up to the present, to represent the significant periods surrounding the event.

Due to a lack of focused attention from the groups primarily composed of students in the acting subject stream, the writing team has been limited to those in the playwriting stream and those pursuing an acting degree who have an interest in playwriting as either a primary

or supplementary assessment.

The writing process was structured around a foundational skeleton, following pedagogical writing principles conceptualized by Lajos Egri (1960), which focus on establishing a premise and the protagonist's journey to prove that premise. To further develop the play, activities based on image-based performance were integrated, incorporating elements of passion play, chanting, and biblical stories to organize the plot into acts, units, and beats. The religious and cultural sources were integrated in this play because the intertwined context can reflect the socio-political present.

Developing a cohesive plot that satisfied all student practitioners was proved to be challenging. Although the supervisors had various alternative plot constructions for different premises, they refrained from imposing these options on the students to ensure their empowerment throughout the creative process.

The entire production was structured around a backwards-designed plan aimed at achieving a full-length performance. Although it was essential to finalize the playwriting by the end of the first semester, the plan did not meet this deadline due to insufficient contributions from the students and disagreements regarding the plot. As a result, only a few fragmented beats were developed. From the supervisors' perspective, it became clear that these students required more direct writing intervention rather than general advice. A growing concern arose when students began to favor one supervisor over the other two, likely due to his hands-on approach to writing intervention and his previous successes in working with student groups similarly.

The writing process became particularly demanding as the performance began to require production through rehearsals, starting with casting. An inauguration was held as a customary event, and another supervisor was appointed from the outset to lead the theatrical production along with the main writing-directing supervisor. The supervising director organized an introductory performance for the inauguration, incorporating fragmented pieces of writing along with devised improvisation. Notably, this inauguration performance included an interactive opening that aimed to create a sensory expe-

rience in an open performance space. This element had been omitted from the written material due to student resistance. These elements were included based on strong choices made by the directing supervisor during the rehearsal phase.

After a break for the first semester exams, which involved applied performance development based on field experiences with specific communities, students returned to the writing process following a three-week pause. Even during the applied performance development, some student groups continued to rely on their supervisor's intervention for their writing needs. During this subsequent writing phase, students were presented with four options:

- 1) Continue completing the script under the same supervision as before;
- 2) Select a translated play text or a play script in another language (preferably English for better understanding) and adapt it for their cultural and theatrical context;
- 3) Write the script themselves without constant oversight;
- 4) Have the supervisors write the play text while students observe the writing process.

The majority of students opted for the fourth option, but this choice contradicted the course model's aims and objectives. Consequently, the plan was revised to allow supervisors to provide ongoing intervention, helping to write fragmented sections of the acts they selected from the plot while the students developed the play based on this guidance.

In practice, however, students were resistant to this agreement, as they preferred to have the supervisors write for them or great intervention. This may have stemmed from peer pressure, with many awaiting the production to begin with a complete script. Despite ongoing close monitoring by all supervisors, two supervisors for play-writing decided to stop active instruction on their own accord. This

decision was made due to a conflict between the module's aims and objectives and the students' intentions, as well as to prevent any potential confusion in instruction given by peers. Eventually, the play was developed with input from the remaining supervisor, who assisted the students with writing. The play has been named *Devadoota Sangramaya*. The play was then directed by the directing supervisor and ultimately performed at the Panibharatha Theatre of the UVPA on 10th March 2025.

### **CHALLENGES IN THE PLAYWRITING PROCESS**

After analyzing the journals, it can be summarized that the process encountered several challenges, including:

- 1) a lack of commitment and teamwork
- 2) disagreements regarding artistic choices
- 3) predetermined preferences and strong suggestions
- 4) insufficient creative solutions due to a lack of subject knowledge and socio-cultural awareness
- 5) anxiety about completing the task
- 6) issues with pedagogical communication.

These challenges are not uncommon in devised playwriting projects.

Observations and experiences revealed that the target learners' willingness was uncertain, primarily due to a lack of commitment among students in the playwriting process. Most students who were in the acting degree program showed little interest, while those in the playwriting and directing degree program needed to collaborate through the process. Students noticed this issue, even in the beginning. A student's journal reported that on 17th December 2024. "The process was delayed until 9:30 am due to low student attendance, which had originally been scheduled for 8:30 am. I believe that the responsibility fell on the regular attendees, who took the initiative for all related tasks". On the same day, a journal reveals "people constantly avoided taking responsibility and placed that responsibility on others". On December 19, 2024, a journal input indicated "Like

every day, today too we were unable to arrive as previously agreed. we were unable to start the work on time due to everyone arriving at different times”.

The journals also reveal the artistic disagreements of participants delayed and created tensions in the writing process. on December 19, a journal entry specified,

*I believe that the frequent disagreements that arise among us are due to an underlying problem in our collaboration. On certain occasions, I feel deeply saddened by the lack of respect shown to ideas generated within our group by different individuals.*

Similarly, another entry noted that,

*We must always respect the ideas of others. If an idea is to be rejected, proper reasons and evidence must be sought, and it should be dismissed only with the consensus of all members. It is very important that everyone works together in a spirit of cooperation.*

On 20th December, a journal entry also revealed that “students' arguments were a bit aggressive when they tried to correct their issues in the writing of the prologue, as we are still working on it”. Additionally, on December 23, 2024, one student reported, "We are experiencing disagreements as we continually forget that we are all working toward the same goal." The latter statement is the awareness that all the participants must follow in devising playwriting work; however, it is difficult to maintain in the initial stages when working with amateurs.

In some approaches, strong suggestions could be effective for working with amateur playwrights. The following statements can be evidence of it.

*The lecturer (name removed) assigned us the task of en-*

*gaging in a writing exercise for the development of the drama script, using several dialogue extracts from the character Isō—which depicts a church damaged and weakened by an attack being restored*

On January 10, 2025, a journal entry stated;

*After pausing at a certain point in our previous writing, we were given the exercise of writing a monologue by the lecturer (name removed), which was considered to occur at the end of the play. I first worked with a fellow student to compile the assigned character traits, and then engaged in writing the monologue individually. In this exercise, since our knowledge of the subject matter had grown further, I carried out the task with great enthusiasm.*

In contrast, a well-constructed instruction or guidance can be misleading or rejected because of prejudice. In addition, communication strategies can play a vital role in smooth engagement. The open instructions or over-explanations could make situations as mentioned in the following journal input.

*When arranging the events of the play in sequence from the beginning to the present, and when developing them towards climactic moments by introducing conflicts, I encountered a somewhat confusing situation in trying to fully grasp certain points explained by the lecturer (name removed).*

However, some working with theoretical underpins of technical playwriting could be advantageous when the playwriting process has no time pressure for meeting deadlines. The following journal inputs are from the earlier stage of writing on December 23.

*That morning, the lecturer's (name removed) lesson*

*made it very clear how to build a plot for dramatic action. That afternoon, the lecturer's (name removed) lesson was greatly helpful in enhancing our knowledge regarding the development of the first scene of our theatrical production.*

A few days later, a journal entry exposed the following;

*On this day, we had an in-depth discussion on characters, during which (name removed) lecturer presented various ideas about characters and explained how the inherent traits of a character are created. Although we brought the characters onto the stage as we imagined, it was not possible to do so exactly in that way. I came to understand that any character should have a definite journey and destination. In this sense, developing a character is somewhat difficult, especially because we still do not have a definite ending.*

Despite the prior learning on playwriting, some students' concerns about their lack of socio-cultural awareness and insufficient practice, on December 21, a journal revealed;

*I realized that one reason might be our insufficient use of books and resources in various fields, and also the lack of high-level social awareness among us regarding the Easter Sunday attack.*

On the same day, another journal disclosed;

*We developed beats for the play. I learned how to manage actions and reactions (of characters) today. I acknowledge that we lack fundamental knowledge of it. The lecturer (name removed) helped to make us aware of it. It may be the result of our lack of exposure to the*

*subject knowledge through books and the outside world.*

When the deadlines are overdue and the pressure can be mounted from all participants, despite the writing process being a part of learning. On December 30, a journal entry of students exposed;

*Because our time is limited, we can't write this lightly. This is because we need to quickly prepare and hand over our work to our fellow students who are doing the staging. A drama script is not something that can be done within a certain time frame for a fixed date—it is an artistic creation of aesthetic value that requires a mind working in harmony. Therefore, quickly writing a drama script is not only difficult but can also, in some instances, erase its beauty.*

The pressure can cause a failure to apply effective teaching methods. Additionally, diverse artistic perspectives in lectures can complicate the playwriting process, especially when they incorporate biased approaches into their practice. A student journal revealed;

*The fact that there are certain differences in the lecturers' ideas is influenced by the different nature of their fields of study and the way they look at Easter, which in turn also affects students' perspectives and leads to disagreements.*

A journal entry from a lecture on January 22, 2025, stated;

*I wish to cease this practice. Our peer lecturer excessively assisted students with their writing, despite our agreement to empower them instead. I believe students might exploit the supportive supervisor's approach [...] These students' behaviours and our malpractices might be contributing to our current problems. We could have*

*set clear ground rules and introduced the pre-established Departmental guidelines to the students earlier.*

A student journal also captured the aftermath as follows;

*Due to certain tensions that arose during the final-year drama production work, and because the lecturer (name removed) withdrew from writing the production script, it was difficult for me on that day to resolve the problematic state of the existing script. Nevertheless, I actively contributed to the lecturer's (name removed) guidance.*

## **DISCUSSION WITH THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS**

The process of the *Devadoota Sangramaya* playwriting mirrors Kolb's (1984) four-stage learning cycle in Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) underscores the importance of learning through action and reflection. Devised playwriting follows.

The four stages are:

- 1) the Concrete Experience in which students engage in improvisational exercises;
- 2) Reflective Observation, they analyze their work through discussions and feedback;
- 3) Abstract Conceptualization, in which participants can refine their ideas and integrate new insights;
- 4) Active Experimentation, in which practitioners implement changes and perform their devised work.

After gathering initial performance presentations, the playwriting process and devising started with theatre strategies ranging from improvisation, image-based theatre, and storytelling. In the concept of Theatre of the Oppressed, Augusto Boal introduces Image Theatre in which static configurations, crafted from physical forms or symbolic objects, embody complex ideas or emotional states (1992). This method allows participants the power to shape and transform

theatrical meaning collaboratively. Norris (2020) emphasizes that image-based methods are influential in experiential pedagogy, especially when aiming to engage students in an audience to promote and perform socio-cultural matters and harmony. In addition, employing theatre improvisation in higher education teaching and learning enhanced empathy, creativity, and interpersonal communication skills of students (Phelps et al., 2021), which is inherent in the performance practice. In addition, improvisation could enhance creativity by preventing prejudiced text-based thinking and encouraging participants to respond spontaneously to the contexts and improvisations of others, as Johnstone suggests (2017). *Devadoota Sangramaya* playwriting process adapted such techniques; the group presentation through image-based storytelling was most effective when selecting a powerful, dramatic narrative for continuation at that stage.

The playwriting process tried to collect information about the selected dramatic event through the historical encounter and make it a more embodied story through familiarizing it by retelling and performing. Educational theories such as constructivist learning theory by Piaget (1950) and Vygotsky (1978) are also impactful in devising. The theory emphasizes that knowledge is actively constructed through experience. The Easter Day bomb attack intertwined their lives as they recalled the day when the student group sat for their university entrance aptitude test. Five years after the incident, they began writing the play. They faced challenges in constructing a dramatic plot that reflected the lives of the victims in both the aftermath of the event and the present time.

The process also resembles the Scaffolding Model based on Bruner's (1960) Scaffolding Theory. The Scaffolding Model provides structured guidance that gradually diminishes as students gain confidence and independence. In university settings, scaffolding may involve guided improvisation exercises, dramaturgical frameworks, and instructor-led feedback sessions. This process helps students transition from structured learning to autonomous creative exploration (McCammon & Betzel, 2020). Similarly, Lev Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) describes the gap between what a learner can do independently and what they can

achieve with guidance (1978). During the project, several students lacked the foundational knowledge and confidence required for devised playwriting. The foundational knowledge was provided, and the semi-open tasks were completed through guided instructions and writing sequences with students as part of the ZPD sequences. However, the independent stages were not successful. This indicated that even when scaffolding was in place, the shift to independent creative exploration was delayed because students were unfamiliar with collaborative writing methods in the context of aiming for results, such as a finished play text, within a shorter timeframe.

Based on the Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (1984), Gibb developed a model for self-developing through reflective analysis own work (1988). Through the reflective journal's following the model of Gibbs' Reflective Cycle, the learners were allowed to understand their engagements and transitions by recording their experience, while allowing them to reflectively correct their actions through different perspectives:

1) description of the event that the practitioner engaged in an event;

2) the feeling of the practitioner during each situation of an event;

3) evaluation of the emotional experience that the participant encountered through the event; analyses of the event through logical reasoning and any theoretical underpins.

4) conclusion of the event;

5) action plan for future engagement with corrections. At the beginning of the program, students were instructed to keep a journal to document their experiences using Gibbs' Reflective Cycle Model (1988). While some students recognized their mistakes, such as not contributing enough and lacking creativity, their journals did not contain clear suggestions for improvement, and these issues were not addressed during meetings.

Devise theatre writing is creating new knowledge and new insight through the learned knowledge, skills and conveying. Robin Nelson's model for "Practice as Research" (PaR) in the arts emphasizes rigorous and personal engagement with creative practice. 'know-how' – is a tacit and embodied form of knowledge that the learner

developed through the practice over time, ‘know-what – is the tacit made explicit through critical reflection, and ‘know-that’ – is conceptual frameworks and ‘outsider’ knowledge. The arts ‘praxis’ (theory imbricated with practice) sits at the center of this model (2013).

This model is important because it suggests that cumulative performance outcome is the result of three combinations of knowing in this context: prior learning skills at least gained through the degree program and industrial practice, the learner’s reflective knowledge of employing the implicit knowing for explicit demonstration by knowing what works and what does not and awareness of existing knowledge in the field.

Balancing experiential student writers and learners is challenging. Limited students had an experience in dramatic writing. The benchmark is set up for the claim that either their play text was performed in a national performance festival or at least a student-led performance festival. Only those who had potential did not have experience in devising playwriting. Because of this conflict, performance work was shadowed with predetermined preferences, intention to follow the styles of prior idolized creations and dialogue writing patterns of both learners and educators. predetermined preferences arose with the influence of previous students' led productions and the expectations that built the benchmarks of the performance. The pre-determined preferences can be traced in selecting themes, dramatic style, language, theatrical choices, including the theatre space of the performance.

It is possible that those students had tacit, embodied knowledge limited to individual writing, and they were unable to convert it into explicit demonstration. Additionally, tacit knowledge and external knowledge can sometimes be harmful. This performance work was shadowed with predetermined preferences, intention to follow the styles of prior idolized creations and dialogue writing patterns of both learners and educators. Many students who familiarized with structured scripts may feel uncomfortable with the open-ended nature of devised playwriting. The absence of a predetermined plot and dialogue can lead to uncertainty and anxiety among learners. To address this, educators should implement strategies that build

confidence. These strategies could include structured improvisation exercises and collaborative trust-building activities, as suggested by Heddon and Milling (2006).

While it may hold that developing a play text becomes more effective when all participants share similar artistic qualities and objectives, the feedback from students indicated that they primarily viewed artistic intention as the main objective. However, their actions during the process that led to rewording for assessments suggested otherwise. Additionally, the dynamics of small clusters among participants influenced the playwriting process through shifting micro-power positions.

A lack of TPACK (Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge) (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) among writing supervisors could lead to resistance. In the TPACK model, Mishra and Koehler emphasize the importance of three areas independently and in combination within teaching and learning practices: the content knowledge related to the subject; pedagogical knowledge, including teaching techniques that can be utilized; and technological knowledge concerning the use of technology in teaching. Reflective analysis by teachers reveals that a deficiency in prior practice of devising playwriting pedagogy caused some disruptions. The teaching process can become problematic when the appropriate teaching techniques for the specific content are lacking, knowledge of how to teach with the necessary tools is not applied, and understanding of how technological tools work with the content is not updated.

As the technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge is essential for educators, learner practitioners also need certain knowledge and skills. Dandeniya's theoretical model for hybrid learning, the Tandem Bicycle Model, explains the following:

[O]n-site, synchronous, and asynchronous learners are the required skills and knowledge 1) Content Learning knowledge and skills (CLKs) is a competency that learners develop to learn content; 2) Pedagogical Learning knowledge and skills (PLKs) is a competency that learners aware the pedagogy associate with their learning; 3)

Technological Learning Knowledge and skills (TLKs) is the competency that learners employ appropriate technologies for their learning and assessments; and 4). Reflective Learning Knowledge and skills (RLKs) is a competency that learners reflectively acknowledge their learning progress through self and program assessment. (Dandeniya, 2025. P 93)

Dandeniya's Tandem Bicycle Model further suggests, Technological Pedagogical Ecological support (TPEs) is essential for devising playwriting. In higher education, such an ecosystem is created with the support of communities including peers, families, educators, administrative staff and industry, as well as with quality curricula, adequate institutional facilities and resources, policies, and economic-socio-political governing of the country. All participating parties must maintain their currency in professional practice, self-development through training, and adaptability to situations (Dandeniya, 2025).

The ensemble model prioritizes collective creation, where all participants contribute equally to the artistic process. This approach promotes peer learning and shared leadership, breaking away from traditional hierarchical teacher-student relationships (Oddey, 1994). In higher education, this model cultivates collaboration, adaptability, and problem-solving skills, which are indispensable in both academic and professional theatre settings. Oddey argues that the interaction among individuals, their relationships, and the dynamics of the group are key characteristics of devising theatre. The connections among individual specialist members contrast with the production hierarchy found in text-based theatre. (2013).

One of the primary challenges in higher education theatre programs is assessing devised playwriting. Devised work is process-driven, making it difficult to apply conventional grading criteria. When it comes to creative assessments, educators often struggle to balance the subjective nature of creativity with institutional demands for measurable outcomes (Hope, 2010). This challenge can be exacerbated when students focus more on securing higher grades than on

the collaborative process of creative work. Boyce-Tillman and de Faria (2012) suggest considering several factors: originality, innovation, rigor, virtuosity, complexity, and dissemination. The *Devadoota Sangramaya* process, which includes completed texts, reflective journals, and viva voce examinations, is insufficient for measuring students' engagement and collaborative creativity as a team. Based on a case study of the UVPA, Liyanage points out that summative assessments were the primary focus, while the creative process and the development of students' skills, important aspects of knowledge creation or learning environments, were previously neglected previously (2017).

Various strategies have been employed for assessments at the Department of Theatre, Ballet, and Modern Dance. With proper rubrics, alternative assessment methods such as self-evaluation, peer review, and portfolio-based grading are being increasingly explored to better address this issue. Three ways of assessment can be effective with an understanding of the assessment philosophy:

- 1) process assessments for measuring scaffolded support toward independence within ZPD as well as knowledge creation in appropriate learning environments under TPEs;
- 2) product assessments; dramatic quality with originality, innovation, rigor, complexity, and dissemination potential.
- 3) reflective articulations, the ability to explain and defend their creative decisions of three knowing.

Students need to possess knowledge and skills in content, pedagogy, technology, and reflective aspects of their learning and assessments (CLKs, PLKs, TLKs, and RLKs), which should be introduced to them from the beginning.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion. Playwriting and devising are insufficiently addressed through the lenses of pedagogy of adult learners in the HE sectors in Sri Lanka. Though some are case-specific, factors such as students' lack of commitment, time management issues, attentiveness,

and creative abilities, along with teachers' and trainers' insufficient communication and engagement strategies with TPACK currencies, can contribute to persistent challenges in the educational process. In addition, an impoverished learning ecosystem and the transitional learning behaviors between devising and individual learning impact student performance and require strategic attention. The assessment of creative practice needs to be carefully considered. Empowering students through activities, peer learning, experiential and reflective learning, and effective time management were identified as key successful elements in the pedagogical framework. In any mode of the educational process, whether face-to-face, synchronous, or asynchronous, the mindset and attitude of both the learner and the educator must be strong to achieve positive outcomes.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> This article acknowledges that Grammarly has been used to check language functions.

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