Critical Literacy & Performance: Language In Action

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Abstract

My Bachelor of Arts in Theatre Arts degree was originally undertaken as a performance emphasis degree, in which I hoped to acquire the training to become a professional theatre artist and actor. I have since realized that I hope to inspire students to feel the same way that I did about the stage: confident, empowered, engaged in my learning. This project and paper depict the beginnings of the process by which I will teach and empower students through storytelling, writing, and acting in order to help them develop critical literacy skills that will help them critically analyze and engage with their society. Through these non-traditional media of education, students will discover new and exciting ways to learn in the classroom, as well as to apply their classroom educations to their real-life experiences, connecting the theoretical with the practical.

One will notice that this project, while containing a syllabus, a syllabus rationale, and three lesson plans, this course plan is far from finished; this is intentional. My advisor and I determined to set specific goals for the end of this semester, but that I would not submit a project that will be a ‘capstone’ project, ending my college career and simply providing a ‘time capsule’ of my efforts on campus. I intended to create a project that would both show the trajectory of my education at this school and propel me onward into the next phases of my life. This class outline will never be entirely completed because my education will be a lifelong endeavor, and I will constantly be revising my educational practice and adapting it to the needs of the students I am with. That is the goal of a truly liberatory education: to serve the needs of the students. My thesis project takes this form because it not only shows what I have done, it indicates what I will do, serving my need to help guide me onward from this University as I seek to become an educator and activist for social justice.
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The primary goal of this class is to uncover social injustices perpetuated through language and empower students to enter into dialogue with and question the texts they encounter. This language arts curriculum for English Language Learners focuses on the analysis of those ‘texts’ -- both written and spoken language that effects a change in its consumers -- and the examination of their social intents and effects, in order for students to become more critically aware of the messages they both receive and create. Students of this curriculum will cultivate an awareness of the ways that producers of language intend to persuade, inform, entertain, or manipulate audiences, and to help students discover the ways they can decode, reappropriate, and transform language to serve themselves instead.

Throughout the semester, we will explore a variety of texts and source materials, analyzing them for content and intent. These texts will then inform the creation of original performance and writing that either resists or supports these narratives, adding student voices to an intellectual and artistic dialogue. As an English language class the studied texts will be written primarily in the English language, although some texts may be studied in other dialects. Students will examine these alternative texts in order to prompt discussion about the multi-faceted nature of literacy, dialect, and ‘artistic languages’ -- including “theatre, photography, puppetry, films, journalism” -- all of which contribute to a holistic understanding of the English language.

Through theatre and performance, students will engage with their language learning in an activated process of meaning-making. They will be provided with a unique opportunity to work within the ‘multiplicity of literacy’, as exemplified by Brazilian theatre practitioner Augusto Boal’s work with the ALFÍN (Integral Literacy Operation) project: “We are going to ask you some questions. For this purpose we will speak in Spanish.... But you can not speak in Spanish: you must speak in ‘photography.’” The students in this course, much like those in ALFÍN, will learn to express themselves in a variety of languages, including English and ‘performance’. Through this work in different mediums, students will develop a greater understanding of literacy as a social practice and hone their personal artistic practices as means of self-expression.

In order to promote a more democratic distribution of educational authority, groups of students will lead various portions of the class periods (i.e. warm-ups or acting games initially) throughout the semester. By the end of the semester the groups will lead the majority of the classroom work, including the rehearsal and creation process for their show of original works. Through this revision of the traditional
teacher-student dynamic, the students will create an educational structure for themselves, assuming full creative control over the presentation of their voices and reclaiming authorship of their own learning.

The 15-week-long class contains four parts: Foundations, Liberation, Creation, and Presentation, the first segment of which will provide conceptual and structural foundations for the work of the class. The second will allow the students to experiment with a newly-democratic space of learning in order to reimagine the process of knowledge creation and language acquisition. The third segment will continue this radical transformation of the educational sphere by facilitating the creation of a social justice performance, which will be performed in the fourth segment. Through this progression of the classwork from theory to practice, students will act upon their ideas and also reflect upon their actions as they discover the continual process of social transformation.

In Segment 1, FOUNDATIONS, the groundwork for the semester’s work in fostering critical literacy and exploring issues of social justice will be laid by reviewing basic concepts in language and grammar and establishing their intersectionality with new themes: performance and social justice. This first segment will set the tone for the rest of the semester, as the instructor and students will mutually question the traditional educational power structure. This action will seed the desire for self-agency and leadership in the students, providing a foundation for educational activation and engagement. Primarily, the action of this segment will be comprised of building a cooperative educational and artistic community in the classroom, examining systematic oppression, how we can recognize that oppression’s employment in language, and what the ethics and responsibilities of self-agency and choice are. For example, in the first week of class, students will recall, retell, and transform fairy/folk tales that they were told as they grew up. By sharing their personal histories through writing and acting, students will develop trust with each other and build community, while also expressing their own and appreciating each other’s individual perspectives.

Segment 2, LIBERATION, will investigate specific issues of social justice, focusing on those that resonate the most with students. After considering the responsibilities and ethics associated with choice in the previous segment, students will consider a structural choice of their own: do they continue with the instructor-prepared syllabus and consciously relinquish self-agency, or do they radically transform the course to better serve them and enter into a dialogue with the instructor to redesign the syllabus? This opportunity for transformation will recur over the course of the semester, with the students reflecting on their desires and needs, and noticing their own actions and urges either toward or away from a liberatory education. An example of this work occurs in the fourth week of class, when the students will write
personal manifestos, assertive statements of belief or desire, which will inform the transformation of our classroom and syllabus. Students will go through a process of self-reflection and assertion in order to create these written records of their thoughts and hopes, and this will result in a tangible representation of their ideology for them to later re-examine and revise over the course of the semester as they put their ideologies into practice.

Segment 3, CREATION, will see the class transition from experimentation to generation. We will spend these three weeks adapting the work done in the previous segment and generating new material, shaping it into a performance that truly showcases the voices of the students. At this point we will situate our theoretical and practical ‘laboratory’ work in a real-world context, making personal and global connections to the themes we have explored until this point. We will enact a tangible social transformation component during this segment, including workshops in the school with other classes. The students of our class will facilitate the workshop, both presenting their work as a model for other classes, as well as helping them create their own work that promotes their voices. In this way, they will help to strengthen their own social justice practices (gaining crucial input from their peers) while simultaneously sharing their experiences through teaching others.

By Segment 4, PRESENTATION, the students will have ideally realized some of the class goals in themselves: a more developed social awareness, a deeper critical engagement, and a joyful creative activation. The students will rehearse their pieces for most of this time, revising and generating new work as need be, up until the performance of their piece. Students will take full leadership of these rehearsals, a total realization of self-agency and a positive relegation of the instructor to an observatory and facilitation role. Augusto Boal wrote: “We should be creators and also teach the public how to be creators, how to make art, so that we may all use that art together.” Similarly, during this segment there will be a public workshop of the work done in the class after the final performance. This occurs so that the students may share the process and work they have devoted time to in this class, which will strengthen the bonds between these students and their communities and move the work they have done beyond the theoretical framework of the classroom and into the actualized sphere of their lives.
Framing Quotes

• “Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.” – Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed

• “Theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it.” – Augusto Boal, Theatre of the Oppressed

• “It’s all boredom and bitterness at the Ritalin pill that does a legitimate business makin’ kids keep still Yeah but still ain’t motionless Test the restless hands for shakes and see them flutter when the patience breaks” – Dessa & P.O.S., “Dots and Dashes”

Course Description

This class will blend the practices of critical literacy, performing arts (theatre, music, etc.), and writing in order to help you decode and analyze the English language as you further your studies in it. Language is not simply a tool for communication purposes; it is never neutral. Language, text, speech, and communication in general are all created by people for specific purposes. Therefore, they hold within them certain ingrown values and ideologies, and are used to promote those values and spread them to other people. It is our job as conscious consumers of language and communication to understand both what messages we are receiving and transmitting.
What do you think critical literacy and theatre are, and how do they affect learning a language? Why is this important?

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Course Objectives

During this course, you will:

• Develop an understanding of language and writing as non-neutral social practices.
• Build a stronger sense of local community while strengthening tolerance and cross-cultural understanding through exploration of a variety of cultures and genres.
• Make broad connections between individual experiences and greater social issues.
• Recognize “standards” (linguistic or educational) as opportunities to unlock language and culture, rather than a “right way” of learning or being.
• Question society, authority, and producers of information in order to enter into a social dialogue with them.
• Cultivate a self-reflexive awareness of the social effect of one's actions and speech.
• Use play and imagination as a laboratory for creative transformation.
• Discover the power of your voice in narrating your own life through art and writing.
• Engage with your education and social issues in a more personal, energizing way.

Grading

30% Final Performance
25% Attendance & Participation
25% Homework Writing Assignments
20% In-Semester Performance Projects
Course Expectations

Instructor Expectations for Students:
1. Homework assignments are due in-class on the day they are assigned for.
2. Students will be in class both in body and mind. Attendance is not simply showing up, it means actually engaging with the work.
3. Students responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to and including an “F” for the course.
4. If a deadline for an assignment cannot be met, the student will notify the instructor and alternatives will discussed.

Student Expectations for Instructor:
1. ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

2. ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

3. ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

4. ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

Course Calendar

• **Week 1: INTRODUCTION & REVIEW (F1)**
  • Discuss syllabus and plan for semester, incl. Instructor expectations for students and student expectations for instructor
  • Begin ensemble building through games and group activities
  • Discover prior knowledge of English & German languages and cultures and begin to explore these ideas
  • Discover prior knowledge of drama/performance
  • “Review” foundational concepts of language & drama that the class will be built upon
  • Having students teach and demonstrate for each other whenever possible
  • Begin writing with poems or short stories, jokes, etc.
  • Share stories and tales, esp. any folk/fairytales they grew up with and act them out
  • Write out hopes, dreams for themselves and the world around them

• **Week 2: ENSEMBLE BUILDING (F2)**
  • Create a general cooperative and healthy sharing atmosphere between student-student and
Use Boal and Mandell's ensemble building exercises to foster ensemble and community
Experiment with non-verbal communication in language instruction, examining what messages we give off with body language
Explore how we communicate with each other and what we represent in ourselves verbally and nonverbally
Work on improvised situation dialogues in writing and writing only through action (Act Without Words I & II, etc.)
Image Theater
One Word Answer game (even improv scenes that way?)

Week 3: QUESTIONING & CHOICE (F3)
Examine the conveyance of messages and coded ideologies through folk/fairytales and how they get used in commercials, politics, pop culture, etc.
Seed critical literacy by questioning these media and exploring the purposes behind these
Discuss the politics of making choices and the responsibility thereof; explore autonomy and self-authority
Do we really have free will to make choices?
What influences our choices (economic, political, action, ways-of-thinking, morals, etc.)?
What is “free speech”?
Discuss and explore with structures of power in our lives and analyze their effects on us, what purposes they serve
How do they support us, how do they repress us? What ways can we improve on the way school is run, families are run, friendships, etc.?
“Discipline & Punish” - Michel Foucault
Continue writing by beginning to implement Gianni Rodari exercises
Integrate questions of critical literacy through exploration of popular culture
Write and act mock “way-too-honest” advertisements
Examine rebellion and revolution in historical contexts as a model for revising the system
Is it effective? Is it ethical?

Week 4: DECONSTRUCTION/REVOLUTION (L1)
Present choice of “revolution” based upon discussion of choice and rebellion in Week 3:
Redesign the syllabus with student/instructor dialogue and lay foundation for new democracy in classroom (plot trajectory of middle segment of class anew)
Delve into language of manifestoes and self-assertions, what do they achieve and how? Are they effective ways of communicating ideas?
Write personal initial statements of belief or manifestoes, then respectfully question them as a class and discuss the nature of collective movements (individuals working together for a common cause to benefit all)
In spirit of revolution or at least analysis and deconstruction of structure, fully implement Gianni Rodari writing games and ideas to deconstruct typical associations with language (Lewis Carroll)
Embody same idea with acting games, improv gibberish and maybe rhythm dance exercise
• Begin work with Forum Theatre to explore the way we wish to improve our class & school
• Act out and enact a ceremonial revolution against systemic forces; what are the ethics of embodying revolution (or choosing stasis)? What sort of revolution do we want to enact?

• **Week 5: OPT. MODULE #1 (L2)**
  • We will explore this module as a group, presenting different pieces of research and thoughts thereupon, setting a foundational basis for group presentations to launch off of in subsequent weeks

• **Week 6: OPT. MODULE #2 (L3)**
  • Group 1 will lead instruction part of Wed. & all of Fri. this week

• **Week 7: OPT. MODULE #3 (L4)**
  • Group 2 will lead instruction part of Wed. & all of Fri. this week

• **Week 8: OPT. MODULE #4 (L5)**
  • Group 3 will lead instruction part of Wed. & all of Fri. this week

• **Week 9: OPT. MODULE #5 (L6)**
  • Group 4 will lead instruction part of Wed. & all of Fri. this week

• **Week 10: OUR OWN STORIES (C1)**
  • Explore generative themes in own lives more in-depth by telling personal stories of both joy and oppression
  • Review and reinforce the tools, genres, and material we've explored for six weeks for use as tools of expression and helpful mechanisms to generate performance with
  • Examine differences between personal belief systems and ways-of-being by writing personal 'creeds' or 'manifestoes'

• **Week 11: CREATIVE TRANSFORMATION (C2)**
  • Explore transformations of reality toward social justice through sessions of Forum Theatre using the personal stories as a basis
  • Write Utopian Tales to explore ideal worlds through writing and offer up ideas for improvement on reality
  • Relate to extralocal issues and topical situations through Newspaper Theatre
  • Discuss historical social movements and how they turned ideal into action in order to prepare for next week

• **Week 12: PRAXIS (C3)**
  • Develop script for performance, collaborative writing, and workshop pieces with other students
  • Continue Forum Theatre work to determine script and pieces used
  • Final personal presentation in-class (personal expression of semester's culmination), using
the genres we discussed during Liberation (or something entirely different, but negotiated with facilitator)

- **Week 13: REHEARSAL FOR REALITY I (P1)**
  - Each group leads class warm-ups and acting exercises one day this week
  - Rehearsing pieces led by students
  - Students determine show order/through-line of the final performance

- **Week 14: REHEARSAL FOR REALITY II (P2)**
  - Each group leads class warm-ups and acting exercises one day this week
  - Rehearsing pieces led by students
  - Final run-throughs of performance, led entirely by students

- **Week 15: ONE FOOT GROUNDED, ONE FOOT MOVING (P3)**
  - Perform in-school or at local middle schools and hold workshops, facilitated by students(?)
  - Documentation of creation and rehearsal process in book/video/etc. form (portfolio)
  - Final self-evaluation of engagement with material and growth in class, prompting discussion (look at self-designed syllabus and rubrics to examine work we did and see how we succeeded and failed)
  - Develop ideas to present to school administration to increase student role in decision-making by examining rubric process
  - Public performance along with talk-back/community discussion of work
January 21st, 2013 – Week 1, Day 1

- Themes: Whose voices do we hear?
- Media: Fables & Storytelling
  - Main story: Aesop’s “The Wolves & the Sheep” (ed. Jack Zipes)

- TO BRING IN: Be prepared to tell a fairytale, folk story, family legend, or song you learned as a child that has stuck with you and reveals something about yourself.

- WELCOME & INTRODUCTION
  - Immediately break away from sitting in desks in rows
    - Circle up
  - Ask everyone to introduce themselves and share something important to them
    - What’s on your mind, what you want to do with your life, something awesome that you did this week?
  - Find out what they already know about critical literacy and performance
    - What do you think it is?
  - Pass out and discuss syllabus
    - Unpack quotes
    - WRITING EXERCISE: After discussion about ideas, students write into “course description” what they think the class will be about, what they hope the class will be

- CLASS EXPECTATIONS:
  - I share with them my expectations for the class (written in the syllabus too)
  - Ask them to consider why I ask for these things, and if anything seems outrageous, we will have the chance to mutually edit it
  - CLASSROOM CONTRACT: At the end of class, we’ll come back to the syllabus, and then I will ask you what you all expect of me. We will mutually determine what your expectations for me and for this class will be, and I will adhere to those rules too.

- WARMUP/GAME:
  - Games that deal with shared power (or imbalanced) and communication
    - Colombian Hypnosis
    - Mutual hypnosis
    - The Greek exercise
  - Debrief games

- STORIES:
  - Share my story first, explain what it means to me.
    - Gesture toward making myself vulnerable first so the students will be willing to meet me on an even playing field
  - Ask for volunteers to share their stories
    - Unpack the ‘meaning’ of each story after each telling, ask students what it means to them
  - Share Aesop’s “The Wolves & the Sheep”
    - Have student read it aloud
• What’s bogus about this story? What do we see happening here?
• Briefly discuss purpose of a fable (to teach a moral) and what this particular fable is trying to teach us.
• What value system is this promoting to us, and is that okay?
• Why is it effective or ineffective in its purpose?
• What about the stories we all told? What values are they promoting? What values are we promoting (consciously or unconsciously) by telling these stories again?

• ACTING RESPONSE:
  o Fable: “A short tale to teach a moral lesson, often with animals or inanimate objects as characters.”
    ▪ “Humans tend to be complicated characters, an animal can fairly simply represent a virtue or a vice: a kind of moral caricature.” Stock characters, stereotyping, oversimplification: how does this make a difficult issue more difficult to understand, though?
  o Groups will each take the perspective of either the sheep, dogs, or wolves and are presented with this prompt:
    ▪ “Fables are an entertaining form with a goal: to persuade us that one idea or way of being should be followed. This is much like the purpose of a talk show, where panelists or correspondents come onto the show to convince audience members to buy their product, watch their show, or behave like them, etc. Each of your animal communities has been given five minutes on national TV to explain your side of this story. What does the public not know about what happened? Why did events happen the way they did? Why should we believe you and not the others? What little nugget of wisdom should we really learn from your story?”

• WRITING EXERCISE:
  o In a debrief of the acting exercise, write down your thoughts about how a small, non-complex story like a fable can do so much to convince you of something, especially any questions you’re churning around in your brain.
  o Besides talk shows, what other media uses persuasion or metaphor to instruct us about a way we should be in our lives?
  o Do they do this with our permission?
  o Also consider how point-of-view changes the story. Whose voices are represented when we hear the moral of the story, and whose aren’t? What nuances are lost when we hear only one voice?
  o Who gets to decide what we need to learn from a story?

• DISCUSSION:
  o If anyone wants to share some thoughts or questions that they wrote down, invite them to speak.
  o Return to “Class Contract”: What do you expect of me as your instructor? What do you hope for in this class?
    ▪ Finish this for now, and a copy of this will be typed up and returned to the students on Wednesday. Everyone will sign a central copy, entering into a mutual system of responsibility and authority.

• WRAP-UP:
- Hand out homework prompt (Assignment 1: Transform the Tale), discuss what is expected
- Games
  - Untangling the knot (community building, working together)
  - Rhythm Machine to prepare for Wednesday’s class
January 23rd, 2013 – Week 1, Day 2

• Themes: Language, Foreignness, & Access
• Media: Fables & Storytelling
  o Main story: “The Toy Princess”

• TO BRING IN: “Transform The Tale” assignment.

• WELCOME & CHECK-IN
  o Immediately break away from sitting in desks in rows
    ▪ Circle up, bring notebooks and writing utensils with
  o HOUSEKEEPING
    ▪ Any remaining thoughts from last class? Have any questions come up since then?
    ▪ Who wants to share your tale transformations? Why did you make the changes you did?

• WRITING EXERCISE:
  o Writing game introduction: Fantastic Binominal
  o Prompt: “Places you go to get errands done” and “Groups of people”
  o Share stories

• INTRODUCTION
  o Foreign language
    ▪ What is ‘foreignness’? Is it relative or absolute? How do the dynamics of language change by the social situation? What does being able to speak a language allow one to do in society?
    ▪ What about ourselves or others makes us different? Are these differences positive or negative?
  o Access/Privilege
    ▪ What are these things? How do they relate to the idea of foreignness and language?
    ▪ What different signifiers give or take away our statuses of privilege?

• WARMUP/GAME:
  o Leading the blind through an obstacle course.
  o Simon Says
  o Debrief games

• STORIES:
  o Share “The Toy Princess”
    ▪ Have students read it aloud
    ▪ What’s bogus about this story? What do we see happening here?
    ▪ How do we see social groups interacting? Where is there an inability to communicate between one group and the other? Are there any instances of successful communication?
    ▪ How could they have resolved the conflicts?
    ▪ How does this story relate to foreign language?
• Which characters had access to certain things and which didn’t? Is this fair? Why or why not?

• WRITING EXERCISE:
  o Think of a time when feeling ‘foreign’ or ‘out of place’ in a social situation presented a difficulty for you. Describe that event in a few sentences (no more than a paragraph), including what in specific (or who) made you feel that way. How did you react to that circumstance? Did you try to adapt or did you remain in your own way? At the end of this story, think of a title or headline for this story.

• ACTING RESPONSE:
  ▪ In groups, you will share the headlines of your stories, but not the story itself. Each person will have their headline silently sculpted by a classmate, using the others in the group as their ‘clay’. Through this image you will convey the story that this headline describes.
    • Boal’s ‘Living Sculpture’
  ▪ After the groups do this, one headline image from each group will be selected by the group to show to the rest of the class.
  ▪ The audience will then consider this image and how it presents a problem in communication, if possible proposing solutions to that problem.

• DISCUSSION:
  o If anyone wants to share some thoughts or questions, invite them to speak.
  o How does being unable to speak while trying to communicate an idea affect the accuracy of that communication?
  o What are other ways of communicating ideas or thoughts besides language? Do these increase access to ideas, or detract from them? Who gets left out there? Who gets privileged?
  o Can we ever be fully accessible in language (consider Esperanto)?
  o When is differing from others helpful and when is it problematic?

• WRAP-UP:
  o Hand out homework prompt (Assignment 2: This I Believe), discuss what is expected
  o Games
    ▪ “What are you doing?”
January 25th, 2013 – Week 1, Day 3

- Themes: Entering the Dialogue
- Media: Fables & Storytelling
  - Main story: “Mastermaid”

- TO BRING IN: “This I Believe” assignment

- WELCOME & CHECK-IN
  - Immediately break away from sitting in desks in rows
    - Circle up
  - HOUSEKEEPING
    - Any remaining thoughts from last class? Have any questions come up since then?

- WARMUP/GAME:
  - Warm-up today will be guided by the “This I Believe” assignments
    - In groups of two, they will share their belief statements, then show the class a physical manifestation of a mutual belief.
    - The actors will then depict a physical manifestation of conflicting beliefs that they hold.
    - They will then put these two manifestation-images into “conversation” with each other and come up with a final image.
  - Debrief game

- STORIES:
  - Share “Mastermaid”
    - Have students read it aloud
    - What’s bogus about this story? What do we see happening here?
    - Who has the most power in this story initially? Does this change by the end? If so, what are the actions taken that change this power dynamic?
    - Whose voice do we hear the most? The least? Is the power of these people’s voices the same as the power of their actions?
    - Who “belongs” in this story (both at the troll’s home and the kingdom)? Who is “out of place”? Is this remedied?
    - If there were a moral to this story, what would that moral be? Is this still relevant to us today in 2013?

- WRITING EXERCISE:
  - Today, we will be writing our own modern fables based on the work we’ve done so far this week. The fables we write will consider power structures, access & privilege, and communication between different groups.
  - Remember the definition of a fable we talked about on Monday:
    - Fable: “A short tale to teach a moral lesson, often with animals or inanimate objects as characters.”
    - “Humans tend to be complicated characters, an animal can fairly simply represent a virtue or a vice: a kind of moral caricature.” Stock characters,
stereotyping, oversimplification: how does this make a difficult issue more difficult to understand?

- Consider deciding on a moral important to you first (using This I Believe statements as a basis), then merely framing the story. Think of the characters that will best get your moral across to an audience. The rest will be filled out in the…

- **ACTING RESPONSE:**
  - Share your modern fables with each other in groups. Choose one to activate and illustrate for the class as an audience.
  - The class will observe and, after the fable is told, will try to guess what the author and group were trying to convey to an audience.
  - Also the class will discuss how the fable approached the intended themes, and what ways they incorporated those themes.

- **DISCUSSION:**
  - If anyone wants to share some thoughts or questions, invite them to speak.
  - Discuss and debrief the challenges of creating a message for an audience and communicating it clearly. What were your successes? What were productive failures?
  - For any actors that did not share a belief that was a moral that they had to act out, what was that like? Did it give you a new perspective?
    - IMPORTANT to be respectful
  - Recap the week as a whole: where is there confusion? Have we met or missed any goals yet that we’ve set for ourselves mutually?

- **WRAP-UP:**
  - Hand out homework prompt (Assignment 3: Silent Speech), discuss what is expected
  - Games
    - Rhythm Machine (I love this game)
    - Magical Item Transformation
Assignment 1
Transform The Tale!

Due Date: Wednesday, January 23rd in-class

Just a quick refresher before we get to the prompt… This is the story we heard in class today:

The Wolves and the Sheep

Once the wolves sent an embassy to the sheep to make a peace treaty between them for the future.

“Why should we continue such deadly strife?” the wolves asked. “The dogs are the cause of it all. They’re constantly barking at us and provoking us. Send them away, and there will no longer be any obstacle to our eternal friendship and peace.”

The silly sheep listened, and the dogs were dismissed. As a result, the flock was deprived of their best protectors, and the sheep became an easy prey for their treacherous enemies.

Moral: Change not friends for foes.

PROMPT:

For Wednesday, using the acting response we did in class as a basis, you will re-write the fable of “The Wolves and the Sheep” and transform it to be more beneficial to the group that you were a part of. Remember from the game what outcome your group would most have liked and use that as a starting point. You may increase the amount of power your group has in the story, you may make your group look better in the aftermath of this event, you may change the ending entirely, or provide context that the reader of this story doesn’t get from the original. Transform this story and see where your imagination takes you!

The original story was not long, and yours need not be either. Use your best judgment on length but keep the story simple. BE CREATIVE! If it helps to tell the story you would like to tell, change the setting or the groups represented in the fable. MOST IMPORTANTLY, transform the moral of the story. What should a reader learn from this now?

As you re-write the fable, consider and then answer at least two of these questions on a separate sheet to turn in:

• Was acting in the best interests of my group harmful or helpful to any other group? Why or why not? What affect does my choice have?
• To me, the writer, is the outcome I created more or less socially just? Explain.
• Consider the original moral of the story: “Change not friends for foes.” What is the moral of my story now? Why is it important for readers/listeners to think about this moral?
Assignment 2
“This I Believe”

Due Date: Friday, January 25th in-class

What is it you truly believe in? What ideas, influences, or beliefs helped to make you the person you are today? What do you hope for someday? This assignment will ask you to consider these central beliefs deeply and use them to help you state for yourself how you see the world and what you want out of it.

PROMPT:

For Friday you will write a personal statement of belief, or personal manifesto. This will become a document that will help guide you through your interaction with the material and ideologies in this class by stating for yourself what your own personal ideologies are. By knowing what you believe and defining what you are certain of, you will allow yourself to enter into an honest and productive conversation with the theories and thoughts we will be discussing in this class. We will revisit and revise these at the end of the semester to discover for ourselves the changes (if any) that our personal beliefs have undergone.

Your personal statement/manifesto should be, for this exercise, between 1/2 – 1 page in length. You may use slightly more or less length but do so for good reason. BE CREATIVE! You can make a list of your beliefs, you can tell the story of a formative event that helped frame your beliefs, you can write a poem or song about them, you can take pictures (discuss with me first, though, and we’ll figure out the specifics of this option). This should be a representation in writing of who you are and what you think, so it should not only have the content you want, but the form that best suits it, and that is for you to experiment with and decide.

As you write your statement, consider and then answer at least two of these questions on a separate sheet to turn in:

• What does this act of self-definition allow you to do? Does it feel empowering or frightening? Why? How does this differ from others defining you?
• What were some challenges you encountered in creating this document? Explain how you negotiated these hesitations and hindrances.
• Consider how your environment has shaped who you are. Can you name some of these influencing people, events, places, etc.? How have they either introduced you to some of these beliefs, or pushed you away from their ideas toward your own belief system.
Introduction to Process Notes

These texts are included to illustrate the process of my project from theorization to development (which will hopefully someday lead to practical application). In these process notes, I included some of the most important notes from my theoretical readings that have helped to frame my educational practice, as well as evidence of my writing and theorizing about the material (how to utilize that work in the creation of a class model).

Herein, I discuss Brazilian educator Paulo Freire’s theory of conscientização (critical consciousness) and its use in creating a democratic and liberatory classroom, where students have a shared authority and vested interest in education as the educators. I also, though this did not become part of the final paper, theorize the connection between Freire’s idea of ‘true learning’, educator and theatre artist Dorothy Heathcote’s idea of ‘authentic teaching’, and professor emeritus and Neighborhood Bridges founder Jack Zipes’s idea of ‘genuine storytelling’ as liberating and honest ways to approach the educational process.

These documents show the development of this idea from a simple list of research questions (“Can theatre be a language to cross cultures in the classroom?”) to a list of educational goals (“What do I want the students to take away at the end of the semester?”) to a full-fledged syllabus, rationale, and curriculum.
Cynthia Lewis: CI dept. (College of Ed.)

La'chia, Chi, & Alexia: ELL's in Sheridan
- Children should be telling their own stories, not just being told stories.
- Children as subjects, not objects

PRAXIS: effective research → content & form
- connecting language to image?

How to study students but still do job?
- words, body positions, physicality, mental & emotional positioning

- What stories are selected? What is left out?
- What is the goal?

MY RESEARCH QUESTIONS:
- Can theatre be a language to cross cultures?
- Is there a way to foster creativity within restrictive systems? (Standards vs. Democracy)

African American Vernacular English @ Sheridan, Shannon has
Progress from theoretical research to studies on structure/practice? Or accumulate a mass of information and filter as I go?

- Critical literacy (anthologies)  
  Case studies  
  Practical activities
- Theatre language learning
- Pedagogical approaches to language education
- Drama education
  - Breadth of field
- Philosophy, syllabus, & rationale

- Experiment with different research methods

- How it works, critiques of it, how people are writing about it
- Map out the field, find the connections
- Imminent criticism - Theodor Adorno
Define/import
- English as a Second Language
- Critical Literacy
- Drama/Theatre in Education

Marginalized Literacies by Cara Mulcahy
Harste (2003): "No longer should we think of literacy as something a person does or does not have; but, a social practice and multiple literacies (more than simple reading/writing) but a lens for understanding and meaning making."
- redefining beyond traditional "encoding/decoding" of words

Four types of literacy in history (Tozer 2009):
- Conventional: read, write, sound out words (1980 census); no comprehension of context, analysis, etc. necessary
- Functional: being able use R&W skills to perform in society; can write a check, read a bus schedule, but ignores depth of comprehension needed to evaluate question → Freire says "a domesticate education"... developed in conjunction with military (Jacobs, 2008)
- Cultural: in order to fully comprehend what is read, the reader must have some contextual knowledge of the text, cannot disentangle language from cultural contexts that give it meaning (Hirschl, 1988); legitimizes "classics" without considering individual or community experiences, elites define what is cultural & common knowledge; important = white, European worldview
- Who is creating this knowledge? What social constructs does this perpetuate? Memorization of facts, reinforces BMoE
• Literacy is not a commodity to be granted, but a process to create meaning and a lens to understand.
• Illiteracy is not simply the absence of literacy, but a tool used to reinforce the dominant ideology by silencing people's standard dialect, privileges, but wouldn't colloquial privilege that group?

• Map out CL visually in relation to critical theory, other literacies, and each approaches goals and shortcomings.

• What do I mean when I say "critical literacy"? What am I hoping to empower the students to challenge the school system's policies, their society, the government? Or am I simply helping them discover the tools to do each of these things? What does Bridges do in regards to this? Where do they fall on the map? And does that become "functional" then?

"In an empowering literacy (CL), authority is shared between the reader and the text."

Like Marx questions "Who controls the means of production (materially)"
CL questions "Who controls the production of knowledge? To what end?"
- Who is Cara Mulcahy? Dr. @ CCSU, Dept. of Healing & Lang. Arts, School of Ed. & Prof. Studies
- Materials (PPT) from CCSU.edu
Freire: conscientização - recognize social & economic contradictions and take action; "Reflection without action is insufficient."
- the oppressed often internalize failure; educating for critical consciousness becomes necessary
- "generative themes"?

Edelsky (1992) interview with Feale: "whole language"?

What are you pushing back against specifically?

October
- Theory to practice, "framing piece" philosophy and action

Functional Literacy vs. Critical Literacy (four total points)
D.F. Wallace "Present Tense" white dialect
- clear concept, then articulate tendrils

Methodology

Chap 2: Marj. Lit

Writers'/Readers' Workshop? Workshop Approach
- Writing is non-linear & recursive (D. Greaves 2003)
- Developing one's own voice
- Whole language:
  1. learner-focused curricula, holds to conception of "whole child,"
  2. active learners, classroom as community & teachers-students continuum.
Meeting Points of TIE & Critical Literacy
as pedagogical format

- Democratization
- "fulfillment of present" which causes "rehearsal for living"
- an understanding of moral issues
- focus on developing social awareness through role play
- lack of challenging the status quo is implicit support for it
- change is demanded
- challenge accepted truth as part of enabling child to
discover his or her responses
- 'authentic teaching' ≈ genuine
- storytelling (Zipes) ≈
- 'true learning (Freire)'
- activation of object status of the traditional
- objects (audience/students) towards an educational
goal
- child-centered philosophy: subjects not objects
- clash with standards as they must work within it,
but by nature present alternatives

Wales National Theatre
After reading a number of sources on critical literacy and Theatre in Education practices, I believe I have narrowed down some of the important principles in each that I want to reflect in my own educational practice. Both come out of very progressive social and educational movements in their respective settings (progressive education after in USA, but Brazil started modern CL thought; TiE from UK) and were accepted as mainstream only in that social, political, economic, etc. climate, but both come out of “alternative” or “progressive” cultural avenues and contexts and are rooted in very humanistic, “folk” practices. CL, best vocalized by Freire, is a tool used to assist the “backwards,” “illiterate” people of Brazil in decrying their rapidly power-codifying and modernizing world. It is intended to be, as Boal put it in Theatre of the Oppressed, “a weapon. A very efficient one. For this reason one must fight for it.” It became the common’s main tool for liberation. TiE carried with it many of the same “folk” principles: it was a practice taken to schools by touring companies, groups that sought also to a means used by bands and theatrical groups since the Middle Ages. They too, indiscriminate about who they went to or their education (educational), used their practice to empower children in public schools, children in more rural schools who may not have had the cosmopolitan opportunities that they...
select the parts of it that worked, revamping the ones that didn’t. They, like the British theatrical group “Nelke State International”, embody the Indian principle of parampara, which literally translates to “one foot on the ground, one foot moving.”

“Authentic Teaching”, “Genuine Storytelling”, “True Learning” 4/15/12

These three names are, I believe, related concepts in pedagogy. To varying degrees one way or the other, they concern the interaction between the teacher-student and the student-teacher (to crib a Freire term), and how the T-S can serve to facilitate a learning experience for the ST that engages them with learning in a way that helps them decode the world around them and make meaning for themselves. It is predicated also on the progression of “fulfillment of the present” to “practice for life,” and the idea that students are not consumers of meaning & knowledge (nor are teachers vendors of them), they are the generators and producers of that knowledge and meaning.

“Authentic teaching” is a concept formulated by Dorothy Heathcote, based around the idea of shaping instruction to students, rather than imposing some structure on them which they will not benefit from. Heathcote herself writes:
Jack Zipes discusses the concept of "genuine storytelling" in the introduction to his book "Speaking Out." This is an idea that means sharing stories in a way that not only tends toward social justice, but seeks to share stories with its listeners rather than dispense the stories to them. Through the communal act of storytelling, a meaningful moment of understanding of oneself is created (Walter Benjamin calls this Erkennen) and a site of struggle with moral questions is fostered. Through story, Zipes argues, we can allow questions for and challenges to the status quo to be formed, thus resulting in an act of social transformation.

By nature, genuine storytelling resists established power structures and subverts preconceived notions in order to point to places of injustice or misunderstandings in the world, then asks us to transform those places.

Zipes offers this definition for genuine storytelling: "The frank presentation and articulation of experience and knowledge through different narrative modalities in order to provide a listener with strategies for survival and pleasure and to heighten one's awareness of the sensual pleasures and dangers of life."

He goes on to say later that it is more often spontaneous and unrehearsed than it is planned and studied, which hearkens to the idea present in authentic teaching.
urban counterparts at private schools would. In these ways, both practices are rooted in a very communal, "traditional" ideology, yet both are considered to come from the progressive schools of thought in their respective areas. CL intends to educate not as a means to achieve function within society (merely assuming one's assigned station in life), but rather to analyze, critique, and reform society to make it more socially just and accessible to all (challenging status quo). Similarly, Theatre in Education had the goal of empowering children through acting to speak up about injustice and to "rehearse for life" (a la Bad's To), thus causing social awareness and code-reading by them in order to make them the subjects of education and life, rather than the objects of instruction.

Therefore, a common trait of these two practices is finding a grounding, a base, in the historical and traditional, but not continuing to reside there; instead, they propel themselves into reform and deeper understanding and shaping of what is to come. "Looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are so that they can move wisely build the future." - Freire. The intent is not to disregard the past's experience wholly, to say "this hasn't worked so far, so none of it is worthwhile." These practices both analyze the past as a trial and then
"It will mean devising more systems of approaching work and tasks than transmission & direct approaches, encouraging student interaction and decision-making processes, giving more leeway to students to discover other ways of tackling situations, engineering a greater variety of hands-on techniques, taking more risks with materials, to break more ambiguity in classroom set-ups, in devising fruitful encounters between self, pupils, ideas, knowledge and skills we have to become process-oriented."

What stands out in this list is the sharing of authority over curriculum with students, adapting curriculum to students' needs, and making the learning process an open and democratic experience. This is the essence of liberatory education, a curriculum which accounts for the needs/desire of its learners (and what they bring already to the table) and creates a site for mutual exploration of the world. The students are asked to risk, and the teacher risks with them. These are all principles I hope to emulate in my teaching. Though the idea of relinquishing control in the classroom makes me a bit nervous, I relish the opportunity to share my nervousness with the students (who must be feeling the same) and create a safe space for everyone to learn and grow.
that the curriculum arises from student needs and desires. A story is told for a specific purpose, suiting a specific occasion, and is chosen to benefit the listeners much in the same way a lesson is created to achieve certain goals, suiting specific impulses from the class, and to benefit specifically these students at this point in their lives.

One area where Zipes supposes Heathcote, however, is his acknowledgment that this practice does not occur in a vacuum; it is affected by certain factors outside of the student-to-teacher relationship and it must account for those factors. "Genuine storytelling today cannot pretend that ideal communities and cultures are within our reach. If it is to capture the essence of our contemporary societies, then genuine storytellers must reflect conditions that produce alienation and invent plots and strategies to combat the conditions."

Freire - "true learning"
Goal: To develop a philosophy and methodology for using drama to foster critical literacy in English Language Learners.

- I believe that drama is an effective tool to be used in education.
  - Curricula that activate the learners give them a path to engaging more with the content, rectifying the prevalent "mind-body split" approach.
  - Dramatic practices allow for a variety of learners with different skill sets to participate in ways that they normally are uncomfortable, but often serve as my grounds for pushing out of their comfort.
  - Drama, image theatre, physical mediums present ways of relating to educational content that force learners to process things in a different way than normal.

- I believe that critical literacy is the goal of truly empowering educational endeavors.
  - Critical literacy allows its practitioners and students to do more than simply fit into society (functional literacy) and it does not exclude based on cultural practices (cultural literacy); it seeks to question and engage with society in a truthful manner, rather than avoid conflict.

- Critical literacy helps to connect the narrative with behavior.
  - Critical literacy fosters a personal and self-reflexive engagement with education that helps students connect their studies to lived experiences.
  - Rather than demanding answers of students, critical literacy encourages questions, which helps students to form social awareness.
Jan. 22nd, 2013

- What do I hope my class achieves by the end of the semester? What are the goals we hope to meet?
  - I hope that the class writes and develops its own performance piece, as well as a body of self-generated written creative projects.
  - I hope that the class has a fuller exposure to the differences (both linguistic and sociopolitical?) between "Standard" and dialect in both English and German.
  - I hope to develop the use of intonation, stress, and other nuances to convey deeper meaning.
  - I hope to explore such subversive literary genres as hip-hop/spoken word, punning, folk tale, manifesto, etc.
  - I hope to serve as an assistant decoder of the English language for the students, rather than a high priest, exploring its potential for conveying meaning rather than dictating its proper usage.
  - I hope to discover with students the messages/hidden agendas that permeate text in our world, and begin to experiment with how we can use text to benefit us and make us aware of the world.
  - I hope that through the performative aspects of our class, students gain an awareness of themselves, confidence in what they believe, and gain another tool that they may use to narrate their own lives (as well as cherishing the ability to learn through play).
What are the main themes or sections of the class, then? How might I divide the semester's time into logical units to accommodate the process?

Perhaps, in segment 1, we ought to discuss the very basics of what we will be exploring over the course of the semester. This segment can be three weeks (9-2-hour sessions) long. We will establish a baseline understanding of each other, the big ideas we'll be looking at, and some of the foundational concepts and terminology of English, theatre, and critical literacy (and German, for my sake). This can be where we play community-building games, begin discovering how we work together, generate some creative ideas and improvise or write extemporaneously, and review standard grammar. I will title this segment "Foundations."

The semester will culminate in a student-written, primarily student-led performance, which will incorporate the work we've done over the course of the class. This will be a reflective application of the work, an introspective expression of the students' feelings on an issue (we will choose to focus our EL work on), and a prospective foundation-laying for a lifelong journey through critical reflection and praxis.
I intend the performance to take the form of whatever style or genre of performance & expression the students decide to apply to their work. We will take material generated in other segments through creative assignments (and/or generate new material) and begin to rehearse and refine it in this segment. I hope that each piece of the performance is directed by the students (students performing each piece will also have a director-student in a non-rehearsing piece to help shape the scene), which may be accomplished by having the author of each piece lead the rehearsals of that piece. In this way, I can intervene as an outside eye and critical questioner but not have the burden or false authority of a pure director. I will function more as an artistic director and producer of the whole performance, and the students will have their autonomy to explore and develop their creative process.

This is something that I want the community to share in and experience also, be that the whole area or simply the school community, because I believe it is important that these students’ voices are not simply expressed, but also heard and received. Also, for the actual performance, no piece will be forcibly performed and no actor will be put into an uncomfortable position, especially in front of loved ones. The rehearsals will be where we take risks and find those limits.
This segment will likely last for three weeks (6 sessions), and more or less follow the arc of a production schedule for a play. I would hopefully find a weekend performance time to get everyone together for, so that the sessions could be used solely for working purposes. This segment will be titled "Creation: Production."

Wks 1-2: Foundations: Review, Ensemble Building
Wks 3-5: Rehearsal Construction: Using the rules to see what can be done; Rose's good questioning of Rose's rules
Wks 6-9: Liberation: Explore the rules & experiment
Wks 10-12: Creation: Begin synthesizing the experiments into pieces and messages
Wks 13-15: Production: Polish and show
I think here, in Week 4 (liberation 1), is where I have to take a break and re-think/read/theorize. This is the first week where we destroy traditional classroom norms and build something new in its place, something democratic, liberatory, and challenging. This is the place where I, the teacher-student, have to accept the fact that I have no true authority other than that which is vested in me by the students and dictated to me by the school. Therefore, this is the place where I am liberated from dictation, and the students from subservience; I from force-feeding and they from passivism.

I would like to give them the opportunity at least once a week (maybe more) to teach things to each other or lead class work. By the end, I'd like them running rehearsals with/for each other for the production. In the first week or two, maybe they each lead a game or activity (worked on with me to decide, but ultimately up to them), and this begins the process of liberating the education. Day 1, I'd almost like to tear up whatever syllabus I give them and say that from Weeks 4-9, we have the ability to make this class whatever they want it to be. I would like to push their boundaries, but have it be a consensual push so I want them to take the initiative in the class and teach as well as learn.
In designing the lesson plans for these weeks, I would love to have a bunch of different options/ideas, and in Week 3 or 4, plan the lessons/topics for this span of time with their input. Week 1 could be entirely student-led, student-taught, student-designed.

Maybe one week's lesson plans focus on hip-hop culture, spoken word, rap as performance of oppression, and the way these forms manipulate "Standard" English to a subversive purpose.

- Spoken word, hip-hop
- Politics/News
- Clowning, miming
- Absurdism
- Advertising, marketing
- Street Performance
- Theatre of the Oppressed
- Futurism
- American Postmodern (Shepard, Chuckin)
- Poetry
- Jazz
- Recording (Audio/Video)
- Visual media (Graphic novel, film)
- Heritage & folk tales
- Create a ritual

Begin each week by looking at examples and ideas (late on Monday), but start by doing. The rest of the week is playing and relating, re-analyzing.

Open up with writing game or acting exercise.
What do I want the students to take away at end of the semester?

- A more developed **Social Awareness**. They will:
  - Develop an understanding of language and writing as non-neutral social practices
  - Build a stronger sense of local community while strengthening tolerance and cross-cultural understanding
  - Make broad connections between individual experiences and greater social issues

- **A deeper Critical Engagement**. They will:
  - Recognize "standards" (linguistic or educational) as opportunities to unlock dominant modes of discourse, rather than a "right way" of learning
  - Question society, authority, and producers of information in order to enter into social dialogue with them and discern codes of power in language
  - Cultivate a self-reflective awareness of the effect that actions and speeds have on our surroundings

- **A joyful Creative Activation**. They will:
  - Use play and imagination as a laboratory for creative transformation, rehearsing for reality
- Discover the power of their voices in narrating their own lives through art and writing
- Engage with their education and social issues in a more personal, energizing way
WORKS CITED


