

# Connecting the World to the Word

## Living Newspapers and Intercultural Communication Pedagogy

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### Abstract

In this study, I examine a dialogical approach to intercultural communication instruction. First, I explain an intercultural communication instruction philosophy grounded in the work of critical pedagogues, the dialogical concepts of Jurgen Habermas and Martin Buber, and a performance studies praxis based on the Living Newspaper Theatre. Then, I illustrate my experience using this type of performance as a tool for critical pedagogy in the intercultural communication classroom. I conclude by sharing implications and suggestions for applying such pedagogical techniques in the intercultural communication classroom. I argue the use of performance creates a receptive, dialogical classroom environment which enables participants to examine course content, as well as the power dynamic necessary to understand intercultural communication.

**Keywords:** *dialogue, critical pedagogy, performance, intercultural education, Augusto Boal*

### Introduction

At the 1996 National Communication Association conference in San Diego, California, Jo Sprague used four metaphors to describe the state of communication education (Sprague 1998:195-199). The first metaphor, “nets,” stood for an information-oriented perspective that focused on training employees and transmitting content (i.e., examining how to transmit information to students). A second metaphor, “webs,” represented the relational aspects of instructional communication (i.e., scholarship investigating teacher-student interactions and developing teacher education programs). Her third metaphor, “scaffolds,” situates teaching as an active process, one where teachers help students by posing questions and providing verbal cues as part of the learning process. And her final metaphor, “tightropes,” she reserves for the “most artful and risky” as this dialogical approach allows learning and communication to unfold so that all participants shape events, and power is balanced among participants.

While Sprague’s overview certainly provided a comprehensive survey of the trajectories instructional education in communication might take, communication scholarship in instructional communication has reluctantly embraced each of the trajectories in equal measure. As Rebecca Rubin’s preface to the communication education section of *Communication: Views from the Helm for the 21st Century*--a book based on the essays of the 1996 conference—indicates, our research in communication education tends to be about 1) training and developing employees for specific careers or professions, 2) preparing teachers for the classroom, 3) investigating learning in the basic course, or 4) examining characteristics of competent teachers and effective classroom behaviors in basic courses (1998).

Research about instruction in the intercultural communication classroom, however, has been somewhat more encompassing. The content or transmission angle is well represented in articles that explain how to convey information about race (i.e., Simpson, Causey, & Williams 2007; Martin & Davis 2001), identity (Kim 2007; Chan 2007), or ethnocentrism (Borden 2007; Toale & J. McCroskey 2001); about how to use instructional technology in the intercultural classroom (Manning 2001); or about training and developing a work force savvy in intercultural relations (Ting-Toomey 2007; Mahoney & Schamber 2004). Some intercultural scholars, as Sprague notes, fall under “scaffolding,” a performance metaphor, in their

research (Cooks 2003; Eblen, Mills, & Britton 2004). However, most instructional research in intercultural communication education addresses relational issues. This relational trajectory is well-represented with the work of scholars examining topics such as perceived differences in how American students respond as they do to non-American instructors (L. McCroskey 2002, 2003; Chiang & Mi 2008) or how immigrant students learn to acclimate (Yeh, Okubo, Pei-Wen, Shea, Dongshu, & Pituc 2008).

Yet, interestingly enough, the paradigm that often gets to the heart of intercultural communication instruction, dialogue, is almost conspicuously absent in the intercultural communication instructional research. One reason for the absence may be because so much instructional and intercultural research is derived from interpersonal communication theories as well as research methodologies grounded in empiricism. Intercultural communication instruction, indeed most instructional communication, more typically addresses topics about communication climate, teacher immediacy, and other relational dimensions. While these studies are clearly valuable in providing a survey of various communication phenomenon and contexts, they are less helpful in terms of explaining behavior that deviates from the general, considering contextual and cultural aspects of the behavior, and providing insight about why such behaviors are manifested. Dialogue, in contrast, is derived from a more philosophical approach—one often based on the work of scholars such as Martin Buber (1958, 1965, 1966)—and grounded in constructivism. The “most promising niche” (Sprague 1998:198), the dialogic perspective focuses on the communicative act, situates instruction as a contextual act, and insists attention be given to how communication and instruction are embodied. As Sprague notes, this perspective goes beyond transmitting, relating, and helping, in order to establish an environment that allows knowledge to emerge and power to be negotiated between participants (1998).

In this study, I examine a more dialogical approach to intercultural communication instruction, one concerned with local knowledge and participant empowerment. First, I explain an intercultural communication instruction philosophy grounded in the work of critical pedagogues such as Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren; dialogical scholars such as Jurgen Habermas and Martin Buber; and the pedagogical capacity of performance studies. Then, using an aesthetic-based inquiry, I describe a praxis based on the Living Newspaper, a theatre genre for heritage shaped by a revolutionary Russia, a depression-era United States, and agitprop performances in Brazil. In this section I provide an overview of using performance as a tool for pedagogy and summarize the history of the Living Newspaper. Third, I illustrate my experience using this type of performance as a tool for critical pedagogy in the intercultural communication classroom. I conclude by sharing implications and suggestions for applying such pedagogical techniques in the intercultural communication classroom. I argue the use of performance creates a receptive, dialogical classroom environment which enables participants to examine course content, as well as the power dynamic necessary to understand intercultural communication.

## Critical Pedagogy and the Intercultural Classroom

In 1999 Howard called on communication scholars to examine their institutional cultures and instructional philosophies and to put forth a critical pedagogical movement that required academics to examine their teaching in the same way McKerrow (1989, 1991) asked them to think about rhetorical research and Conquergood (1991) asked them to think about ethnographic research. Accordingly, this movement would focus on contexts associated with political and social structures that influence instruction and communication in the communication studies classroom. Similarly, Shi-Xu noted a similar problem when explaining how instruction related to intercultural communication has been concerned with imparting knowledge of language and culture—“competent expression rather than a process saturated by power relations and the textual practice of domination” (2001:279). Shi-Xu argued that few have examined the system of imparting knowledge or the social activity embedded in educational practice. Shi-Xu concluded by insisting such neglect is to “collude with the existing order” (2001:280).

Both Howard and Shi-Xu look to critical pedagogy as a potentially powerful way to liberate and transform the intercultural communication classroom by focusing not just on skill acquisition, but also by expanding exposure to and understanding of diverse perspectives, beliefs, and ways of being in the world. Such pedagogy would better prepare students for ethical intercultural actions and provide good strategies for communicating openly and respectfully across cultures. In short, they posit understanding cultural

differences as more than a set of skills to help students navigate the difference; it is constructing a learning environment based on “response-ability,” featured by collaboration and creativity, a place where people combine unique experiences, skills, and histories with the capacity and desire to listen to those assembled (Makau 1997:55).

These ideas are hardly recent discoveries in much of the academic world. Paulo Freire, exiled from Brazil in the 1960s because of his controversial ideas, claims the problems and failures in education systems arise not from inadequate teachers, but from an institutional approach severing teaching strategies from ideological concepts; excluding sociopolitical structures embedded in the world; and privileging objectivity over subjectivity, exclusivity over inclusivity, and passivity over activity. Over the last twenty years, advocates of critical pedagogy have argued that educating students to read cultural codes critically and creatively can establish habits of inquiry needed to decipher social interactions and the historical structures shaping those interactions (Giroux 1989, 1992; Giroux & Myrsiades 2001; Giroux & McLaren 1989; Fisher 2001; hooks 1994a, 1994b; McLaren 1993, and Trend 1992). These scholars assert education is not only what happens within the confines of a classroom, but as an introduction to the life and world beyond campus. These scholars reconfigure the role of the teacher from one who provides facts, or, in the case of college professors, who professes, to one who transforms by facilitating student experience (Trend 1992). They insist the role of student should correspondingly shift from passive recipient of knowledge to a collaborative partnership contributing to civic discourse and the enactment of social transformation. Moreover, not only must students be active participants, but they must bear some of the responsibility for the educational process, since such education is not an individual achievement but a collaborative, communal effort. Thus, pedagogy is not only critical in nature, but public in form and focus.

While many educators find that critical pedagogy appeals ideologically, many have found the transition from ideology to praxis difficult. Some have tried to adopt the “Paulo Freire Method,” ironically one action Freire specifically argued against (A.M.A. Freire & Macedo 1998). Thus, instead of seeing critical pedagogy as an educational philosophy, many have tried to export his practices without re-writing them in a way meaningful for the educational context or specific learning outcomes. As A.M.A. Freire and Macedo explain:

*...Freire's method to teach the peasants how to read was not designed to be a method as an end in itself but as part of a larger goal of politicizing the Brazilian peasants so they can also read the world and be able to connect the world with the word (1998:9).*

Others have assumed that establishing an opportunity for students to engage in conversation with each other is a way to realize the tenets of a critical pedagogical philosophy. While such communication does enhance the classroom climate, it, too, falls short if the leap is not made from psychological-individual terms to political-social terms.

## The Dialogical Attitude

The scholarship of Jurgen Habermas and Martin Buber provide guidance to communication scholars in terms of translating the philosophy of critical pedagogy into actions that transform. Although Habermas refrains from using “dialogue” in his works, his scholarship clearly describes a climate that embraces the dialogical turn suggested by scholars such as Martin Buber.

Habermas (1990) asserts that the ideal speech situation, what he calls communicative action, consists of normative insights obtained while individuals participate in a situation free from constraint, distortion, and exploitation. That is, individuals have equal opportunity to initiate and engage in communication; to present every significant opinion; to express honestly interpretations, intentions, feelings, and attitudes; and to prevent directive statements that forbid, permit, and command. These observations emerged from his early work with the Institute of Social Research, where he outlined various conceptions of democracy and their connection to political participation and individual self development. Like critical pedagogues, Habermas encourages an examination of social structures and political functions, and their ability to

encourage and discourage transformation. Habermas argues the public sphere comprised one way to negotiate the private concerns people have in their personal lives with the public concerns (and demands) evident in their social lives. By creating the public sphere—public places where citizens could engage in public, socio-political discussion—people could voice ideas that could shape public opinion and society while simultaneously opposing state power.

If Habermas's ideas develop a site that nurtures open discussion and rational debate, Martin Buber further articulates a quality of communication that requires honesty, empathy, and acceptance of the other. Buber distinguishes genuine dialogue from a technical dialogue that is not prompted by a need to understand and from a monologic dialogue that functions as self validation (c.f. Arnett 1986). Genuine dialogue occurs when participants establish a "living mutual relation" (Arnett 1986: 6) between self and other; Buber calls this an I-Thou relationship (Buber 1958/1970). This type of dialogue focuses on reciprocity, openness, and experiencing the other by walking "the narrow ridge" (1966: 5). Dialogue promotes mutual respect and understanding by encouraging participants to appreciate difference and to accept responsibility to nurture the I-Thou relationship. Dialogue, then, is more than speaking to another person; dialogue is about establishing a certain kind of relationship marked by respect, a willingness to listen, and the intent to value others. Dialogue, from Buber's perspective, is not a process but an attitude or approach that facilitates honest interaction and mutual confirmation despite difference. Buber claims this orientation can only be found when one can express without reserve and feel free to maintain one's convictions while remaining open to the identity of the others and their ideas, even when those ideas are in opposition to one's own stance (Buber 1966). This orientation differs significantly from Habermas, who offers consensus and compromise as virtues of public discourse. Buber negates these in favor of a continuing, ongoing communicative interaction where all involved transform. Buber's perspective reminds us that people can agree to disagree, and that they can remain open to multiple views and undetermined possibility. Perhaps the distinction explains his use of "the between," the space that links self to others, where meaning is co-written by participants and resides in the relationship, rather than individuals (Buber 1958/1970: 164).

A dialogical approach to intercultural communication and related instruction asserts that to be effective intercultural interactions should assume a quality that encourages individuals to walk that "narrow ridge." This approach situates mutual respect, an open mind, and a willing attitude as central to understanding cultural difference. This approach nurtures a classroom space where all voices are apparent, rather than transparent and encourages a deep, genuine "presentness." Consequently, students obtain experience negotiating difference, developing mutual respect, and practicing an attitude that enhances intercultural interaction and understanding.

## Performance and Pedagogy

One of the ways to realize critical pedagogy involves using techniques borrowed from performance studies. If schools, as Giroux and others suggest, are a site that preserves hierarchies and inscribes cultural knowledge, then they can also serve as a site of liberation, and performance, like other forms of aesthetic-based inquiry, stands on the forefront of such liberation. Long considered an important tool for understanding, performance is also an important mechanism for generating change. As a symbolic, embodied activity, performance as a method and an event encourages performers to sense the other by trying on unfamiliar experiences. Performance can be a helpful, involved mode to make the concrete abstract and the abstract concrete. In this way performance is a constructive, generative force, what Conquergood (1992) calls *poiesis*. However, when seen as a theory for moving beyond experience and expression to focus on a transformative potential, performance becomes a type of *kinesis* which Conquergood (1992) associates with revolution and change. Performance as *kinesis* implies an urgent motivation to break and remake social structures, norms, and beliefs that perpetuate status quo. Of course, this type of performance may lack stability and structure; however, in the dissonant, liminal space the performance takes new form and meaning to meet the needs of specific people in specific situations, rather than historically mandated systems of power and knowledge. Performance, then, entails a "triad of theory, method, and event" (Madison & Hamera 2006:xii) that can display knowledge in the tradition of a dialogic inquiry packed with potential to shake the human consciousness. Performance is a public, critical practice that encourages educators to explore the possibilities (Madison 1998). By drawing upon what

Gaston Bachelard calls the “poetic imagination,” performance practitioners look toward the future by describing the “threshold of being” and the “reverberation of experience” (Bachelard 1969:xii); performance, then, assumes multiple roles with endless possibilities. Just as Freire (1998) recognizes dialogue, caring, community, courage, ethics, and responsibility with a “pedagogy of freedom” and Denzin (2006) uses similar characteristics when describing a “pedagogy of hope,” performance practitioners establish *performances* of freedom and hope when performances display social behaviors and structures, interrogate consequences of those behaviors and structures, and (re)position participants as social agents, or citizen-activists with knowledge and will to transform. As Alexander observes, this type of transformation is only possible when performance pedagogy is

*seen as a complex and productive site of possibility that both disrupts and transforms the process of knowing in the reified location of the classroom and, maybe more importantly, in the broader social, cultural, and political contexts of everyday life (2006:254).*

Consequently, by using performance, students enter an authentic relationship to the text and the experience. That entering is the first step toward experience with capacity to transform.

## The Living Newspaper

The Living Newspaper refers to a form of documentary theatre pulled from the headlines of newspapers. The style combines live action with newspaper accounts of contemporary events or court documents, and is in some instances often accompanied by large-scale projections as backdrops. The performances veer away from realism and naturalistic performance styles to put forth a presentational, direct, experimental theatrical form. From its inception in Russia during the Bolshevik Revolution, these Living Newspaper performances contain some form of social message and urge some form of action.

According to John Casson (2000), in 1919 the Central Committee of the Soviet Union advocated public readings of newspapers in order to explain the new policies and procedures in its newly formed communist state. Mikhail Pustynin, a poet and theatre director, developed the theatrical technique to make news and propaganda accessible to a primarily illiterate population (Casson 2000). However, the Living Newspaper also served an active role as a weapon for the Soviet revolution. As Rice explains, “It revolutionized everything: economics, social and personal relationships, moral standards, education, living habits, religious attitudes” (Rice 1959:53). Thus, power changed hands through “conversion, not coercion” because while the Soviet Union’s media sources were poorly developed and schools were ill-equipped to provide adequate information, the country had large numbers of theatres (or building that could be converted into theatres) (Rice 1959).

The most famous Soviet troupe was the Blue Blouse Theatre, so named for its blue smock-like costumes that mirrored the uniform of Soviet factory workers. The Blue Blouse Theatre was formed by Boris Yuzhanin, a teacher of journalism at the Moscow Institute of Journalism. Although their subjects were usually current events and their tone political in nature, performances also spread general information the public should know. For example, some productions addressed what people should know about typhus or how to maintain a flock of hens (Casson 2000). This group was so successful, it served as a model for similar groups in Germany, China, England, France, Czechoslovakia, and the United States.

In the later 1920s, Mike Gold, an American who had been exposed to Living Newspapers in Germany, attempted to set up a workers’ theatre in the U.S. similar to the Blue Blouse Theatre. However, not until the mid-1930s with the development of the Works Project Administration, did the idea take any substantial form in the U.S. Hallie Flanagan suggested Living Newspapers as a way to create jobs for unemployed theatre and newspaper workers. According to Casson (2000) she experienced a Blue Blouse production while traveling to the Soviet Union in the late 1920s. Elmer Rice, the state director of the New York Federal Theatre Project, also supported utilizing the form. Initially, in the United States, Living Newspaper performances replicated the news; however, it soon became evident that a dramatization of the news would be stale, since in the U.S. people had more access to the media. Consequently, the Project developed performances based on topics in the news and conveyed a critical interpretation of that news.

Over a period of four years the Federal Theatre Project developed Living Newspaper Theatres throughout the United States, although in many cases the production started in New York and then traveled to other cities. According to Ray Billington (1961), the Project encompassed 158 troupes throughout the U.S. who played to 25 million people, many who experienced drama for the first time. Project performances addressed such issues as agricultural reform (*Triple- A Plowed Under* 1936), labor relations and big business (*Injunction Granted* 1937), utility ownership (*Power* 1937), public housing (*One-Third of a Nation* 1938), and public health (*Spirochete* 1938).

The Federal Theatre Project was never without controversy. Although Flanagan was devoted to creating a new, socially relevant American Theatre, Congress was less than supportive. Many scripts were censored because of political sensitivity (Taylor 2008). In one of the earliest performances, Elmer Rice resigned in protest, when Congress censored its production of *Ethiopia* (1936), because the performance impersonated heads of foreign states. Some called for the program's immediate demise when they discovered some performers were immigrants fleeing persecution in Europe and many troupes had Communist sympathies. In other instances, the Federal Theatre Project became a political pawn for all sides:

*...Federal Theatre was accused of propagandizing Communist ideology, the Democratic Party's agenda, specifically Roosevelt's New Deal, while simultaneously fending off attacks that Federal Theatre did not support Roosevelt and his New Deal...the political commitment of many project artists, specifically, their belief that dance should be socially relevant and foment change in society, made it daunting to create works of integrity that would be deemed sufficiently non-partisan by a watchful administration, and increasing suspicious Congress with its newly formed House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), and powerful morality groups such as the Catholic Legion of Decency (Cooper 2004:233)*

Despite Flanagan's defense of the Federal Theatre Project, Congress disbanded the program in 1939. Many Living Newspaper productions were left unfinished, including several addressing race relations (*Liberty Deferred*) (Nadler 1995).

## **Augusto Boal and Newspaper Theatre**

Although Brazilian performance practitioner Augusto Boal is best known for his Theatre of the Oppressed and Rainbow of Desire techniques that use the concrete experiences people bring to the performance event, he also turned to newspapers as inspiration for drama. A contemporary of Paulo Freire, Boal approached theatre in much the same way Freire approached education. Just as Freire looked for a pedagogy that would inspire students to see themselves as subjects, rather than objects, Boal devised a theatre that would transform performers and audience members into "spec-actors" who could use theatrical embodiment as a rehearsal for social change.

After training in New York with John Gassner, Boal returned to Brazil in 1956 and joined the Sao Paulo Arena Theatre and began directing traditional dramatic productions with social significance. In 1964, however, the Brazilian president was overthrown by a military coup. Under the new regime, drama was censored, so most productions were impossible without attracting military attention. Consequently, Boal developed a different theatrical language derived from the practice of Bertolt Brecht to continue his work. His form of improvisational agit-prop theatre allowed troupe members to present a story while simultaneously commenting on the story. He called this arsenal of techniques Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal 1985, 1992).

One Theatre of the Oppressed technique involved using daily newspaper stories as the basis of drama (Boal 1992). Since newspapers were censored and produced by the government, these texts could be performed without additional government permissions. Performers could say lines verbatim from the paper but use vocal inflection and body movement to convey a completely contradictory message. Newspaper Theatre, to use Boal's terms, was a way to expose the mediation of events by the newspapers and, thus, Brazil's oppressive government officials and programs.

Although Boal did not acknowledge the connection between Newspaper Theatre and Living Newspaper in any of his scholarship, it is unlikely he would have been unaware of this form of theatre and its socio-political controversies when developing his own techniques. As one might expect, the military dictatorship ruling Brazil in the 1960s began to close the cultural centers and arrest members of the intelligentsia; Boal was accused of treason, imprisoned, and tortured in the Department of Political and Social Order for several months before being exiled for his radical ideas (Boal 2001).

The Living Newspaper projects in the Soviet Union, United States, and Brazil have some similarities, but some very important differences. First, the Living Newspaper projects in the Soviet Union and the United States were federally organized and funded, whereas Boal's Newspaper Theatre exercises were organized by artists in a grass roots effort in protest to the government. Second, both Soviet and Boalian newspaper performances used lines as written in the paper to form a performance script, whereas the U.S. Federal Theatre Project used articles as inspiration for script development. Third, although the Living Newspaper in the Soviet Union and Boal's Newspaper Theatre aimed to spread revolution, the Living Newspaper in the U.S.S.R. was sanctioned and encouraged by the government to spread its message via drama; Boal's theatrical troupe risked raid with each performance and had even more revolutionary functions as it used enactment to suggest alternative meanings to articles overtly supporting the regime in place. And finally, while the U.S. Living Newspaper Theatre project criticized government policies and the behavior of some of the nation's leaders, its aim was not to overthrow the government and incite violence, as was the case in Boal's application, but as a form of civil disobedience aimed to point out changes necessary to meet the needs of the times.

## Methodology

This project began as an assignment in an intermediate-level intercultural communication course. Data was collected over a two-year period from 100 students enrolled in four sections of the course. Each class session lasted 2.5 hours, so students had quality time to work in collaborative teams on their newspaper theatre assignment.

Students enrolled in the course for a number of reasons. In addition to being an elective in both the communication studies and international studies majors, the course met our university's general education requirement that students be exposed to the study of global communities. The course also provided a way for the mass communication majors to meet their ethnic cognate standard as required by the Accreditation Council for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. During the course of this study, students majored in communication studies, public relations and advertising, Spanish, international studies, psychology, biology, business administration, and elementary education. This project was reviewed and approved by the university's institutional review board, and all participants were aware that their work was being analyzed as part of a research project. The assignment portion of the activity as well as the goals and methods section of the research project related to the assignment were described in the course's electronic blackboard site. Students were required to participate in the assignment, as it was a graded in-class exercise for the course; however, students had the option to withdraw their responses from the data being used in the study at any time.

Like many courses of its type, this course in intercultural communication aimed to offer a general orientation and overview of intercultural communication, to help students theorize intercultural transactions, to provide insight into cultural difference, to examine issues associated with language and "voice," and to establish an arena to discuss how cultural knowledge is represented, mediated, and appropriated. Throughout the semester, students had both theoretical and experiential exposure to cultural differences. They were asked to keep a journal reflecting on their experiences and to use intercultural theories or concepts to help them understand those interactions.

The day prior to beginning the Living Newspaper assignment, I broke students into three groups and asked them to find articles in newspapers that related to our course content and to bring them to class the next day. One group examined local, independent daily newspapers; a second group examined a national newspaper such as the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, or the *London Times*; and a

third group examined stories in a chain newspaper group (i.e., a paper from Gannett, Scripps Howard, or another large newspaper chain).

The next day students taped the articles they found on the classroom walls, and circled the room to read each article. This process took 45 minutes to one hour depending on the number of articles students brought to class. After each student read the articles, I facilitated a discussion to see what articles students found most interesting. In the study, five or six articles garnered student focus for each class. Students then formed groups based on their interest in a particular story.

Student groups were asked to write a Living Newspaper script that dramatized the events in the news article. They could add words, edit copy, or use multiple stories covering the same topic or event. Their job in this portion of the assignment was to enact the story as they saw it written. Often these performances took on the aura of objectivity. For example, they often performed a scene in which one student took on the role of reporter-as-narrator, while other group members enacted the story being narrated.

After their dramatization, we used the same news article to script a different version of the article. In this version, I asked students to look beyond what was apparent in the story to examine language used by the reporter; to compare what was included in the story with what was (conspicuously) absent; and to investigate power dynamics suggested by people, groups, or institutions mentioned in the article. This time, students could only say what words were printed in the story; they could rearrange sentences and paragraphs, but they could not add words or rearrange words within sentences. Their task for this portion of the assignment was more critical than descriptive. Each student was required to write a short reflection paper for submission at the next class session based on a series of open-ended writing prompts placed on the course's electronic blackboard.

## **Analysis & Discussion**

To assess the effectiveness of the Living Newspaper Theatre project and to evaluate what students learned as a result of participating in a Living Newspaper Theater assignment, I analyzed the answers students submitted to the open-ended prompts placed on the course's electronic blackboard site. Following Creswell's (1998) guidelines for qualitative analysis and Strauss and Corbin's (1998) explanation of open coding, I reviewed student responses to fracture the data and link them with similar data to create inductive categories or taxonomies. The data placed in each category was exclusive to the category; every data was placed into a category. The emergent categories I identified serve as the foundation for the results of this study as they reveal patterns about what students learned as a result of the Living Newspaper Theatre project. They reported a better understanding, for example, about working in groups and reducing communication apprehension when performing in front of peers. One student learned she could learn from activities other than lecture or "boring old textbooks," and others explained they learned to craft messages with a specific point of view. However, most students consistently reported learning about 1) the power and influence of the media, 2) ways of reading and interpreting news articles, and 3) how enactment might contribute to understanding culture and cultural difference.

### **Exerting Power and Influence**

Students reported they learned more about the power and influence of the media as a result of the Living Newspaper Theatre assignment. Although several students indicated an appreciation for learning about current events in terms of an international or co-cultural angle, most students expressed a greater awareness about the power of journalists and what role truth might play in reporting news. Students recognized how journalists use words or organization to reflect a certain point of view. One student wrote, "having to produce a segment from what was already written meant you had to concentrate on the language, and so the power of words was obvious. This [assignment] really shows how a journalist can/could weave a story and their viewpoint and still technically give the direct details." Other students wrote, "I learned that from any text you can take out things to make the text appeal to the audience," and "it can be very easy for the news to mislead people when covering a story because of personal bias and word choices based on those biases."

Another concern regarding the power of journalists involved the role of context. Many students felt some of the papers did not provide adequate context to understand the story or points of view. As one student wrote, “news can be manipulated based on the context of the event since what we see in the news is someone else’s interpretation of the event.” Students liked trying to determine how context affected the story, and if an understanding of the context revealed a more complex story: “I was surprised at how much culture and context was needed to understand the stories... this assignment was a good way to learn about context.” For many these observations may seem obvious or commonly known; however, for these students—as I suspect for other American students—the observations were revelatory in nature as they had never considered culture as a mediated text.

## Consuming the News

A second key area for learning concerned how much students learned about the processes of reading and interpreting newspapers. Prior to the assignment, few students had ever examined an actual newspaper as many said they preferred to get what news they wanted off of the internet. Only three—all international students—had ever examined a national newspaper other than *USA Today*, and some were unaccustomed to the length of the articles. One student explained, “I liked that we had to look at different kinds of newspapers because I didn’t know the local news is very different from the national.” Another student wrote, “I learned that sometimes you as a reader have to read past the main content and see what the writer is not telling you. Why, for example, did the writer put the death toll of American soldiers at the end of the article?”

Other comments pointed to the assignment’s role in getting the reader to carefully consider interpretation. For example, as one student wrote, the assignment “made me really think about the article being written and if the information was true and happened in the way the writer said it did.” Another student said studying the article in preparation for performance made them think more carefully about what was written, how it was written, and why. This “new way of looking at a newspaper” made the news more appealing, one wrote. One student explained he wanted people “to mix up the words in the performance even more, to turn the subject around to see what should have been written.” In the most cynically expressed support for a critical interpretation of the media, a student wrote,

*...the things we read in class were newsworthy but they were only considered newsworthy because they create concern for the consumer. News is a profit organization and the only way to create profit from news is to find a story that strikes a concern from the consumer.*

The assignment made them cautious about what they read and made them interested in how all information—context, unreported facts, and cultural worldview—could influence ones’ interpretation of the newspaper articles.

## Enacting People, Culture, and Context

The last area of analysis explained how enactment generated an understanding of others. Seeing the article performed, according to students, was a good way to learn about other countries and other cultures, as well as co-cultural groups within the U.S. “The project was a hands-on approach to connect what was written with how people really live and think,” one wrote. Other students added, “the assignment made us project ourselves into the mindset of others” and “acting it out made it all seem more real, real stories and real events that actually do happen in other countries.” Another student explained, “It is much easier to learn and understand a culture when you put yourself in their shoes. I liked this assignment because it was an ‘outside the box’ way to learn communication.” “Outside the box” was the phrase students most frequently used in support of the performance/pedagogy strategy; nearly 20 percent of the students included the phrase somewhere in their reflection.

The students also cited the assignment’s ability to expose them to diverse ideas and beliefs. “I learned about problems other countries face, that we don’t face in America, and I wondered how they fix the problem.” A related comment recognized the assignment’s use in “getting other ideas, perspectives, thoughts about certain issues or beliefs in the world” because they could see people act and then visualize what the journalist was trying to explain, or in some cases, what the journalist omitted. With this category,

student learning extended beyond course content to teach students about intercultural communication theories and the role of the media. Student responses suggest the process resembled the dialogical unfolding Sprague uses to describe a dialogical form of communication education. This unfolding features a pedagogy which empowers students to discover, and values their collaboration to achieve that discovery. By enacting that understanding, students stepped away from their own points of view to imagine the world through a lens of intercultural difference and similarity gained as a result of trying on the experience of another.

With the Living Newspaper Theatre assignment, I implemented a dialogical approach to pedagogy that operationalized Freire's and Giroux's philosophy of critical pedagogy. This technique involved connecting students to the world beyond the classroom—and U.S. borders in some instances—and encouraging them to enact not just their interpretations of newspapers but also their understanding of culture, context, and worldview. What had previously been abstract, seen in books or on film, became personalized and local when enacted in the classroom setting. As result, intercultural interaction became accessible as they negotiated what they were learning with what they thought they knew. Furthermore, this technique encouraged a dialogical approach to communication education because it required a collaborative effort by students to be in the world(s) they were attempting to understand, world(s) different from their own.

## Conclusion

If the role of education is to create an educated citizen able to engage in ethical, civic, and global discourse, then creation should also involve a pedagogy that promotes ethical, civic, and global awareness and action. Our curriculum cannot merely contain units about multicultural and intercultural awareness or designate one course as the site for learning about cultural diversity. Educators should integrate pedagogy with course content in a way that is sensitive, practical, effective, and compatible with pedagogical philosophies. We need to help students acquire skills and training so they can act competently in diverse settings and with people from diverse cultures; however, we also need to encourage development of intercultural “be-ing,” a way of approaching others dialogically with openness, respect, reciprocity, and inclusivity, as Martin Buber (1965) suggested.

Likewise, we need to research the effectiveness of that pedagogy in assisting students to respond dialogically. In addition to helping students interrogate events, people, places, and activities familiar to them, we should encourage students to encounter and critique events, people, places, and activities that offer a different perspective. Such critique could generate insight that reduces distance and encourages a commitment to community. Thus, those of us in communication need to revisit the philosophical branch of our discipline so that we are defining “good teaching” and researching “good teaching” in relation to the quality of interaction or ability to promote dialogue—a pragmatic approach to intercultural understanding. We need to ask ourselves what strategies we have that are designed to facilitate our ability and desire to engage in ethical intercultural dialogue. We need to better understand how can we create constructive learning communities and how that climate better serves our students than a less-critical, non-student centered approach that emphasizes individual achievement. Only when we understand how we can create the conditions for understanding the larger world, can the understanding actually occur.

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