SIMULATED PUBLIC ARGUMENT AS A PEDAGOGICAL PLAY ON WORLDS.

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The teacher sits at the head of the classroom, feeling pleased with herself and her class. The students are engaged in a heated debate. The very noise level reassures the teacher that the students are participating, taking responsibility for their own learning. Education is going on. The class is a success. But look again... On closer inspection, you notice that only a few students are participating in the debate; the majority of the class is sitting silently, maybe attentive but perhaps either indifferent or actively turned off. And the students who are arguing are not addressing the subtleties, nuances, or complexities of the points they are making or disputing. They do not have that luxury because they want to win the argument-so they must go for the most gross and dramatic statements they can muster. They will not concede an opponent's point, even if they can see its validity, because that would weaken their position. Anyone tempted to synthesize the varying views would not dare to do so because it would look like a "cop-out," an inability to take a stand.

-Deborah Tannen, The Argument Culture (pp. 256-57)

In her recent book, sociolinguist Deborah Tannen provides this vignette from a debate held in Patricia Rosof's high school history class, to underscore the limitations of traditional "agonistic" and "adversarial" models of argument pedagogy. According to Tannen, the "ethic of aggression" (1998, p. 22) instilled through such teaching has resulted in widespread "slash and bum thinking" (p. 19) in educational contexts and the culture at large. Tannen spends much of her book chronicling the symptoms of this malaise: proliferation of war metaphors in public discourse, exclusion of women from deliberative spaces, and widespread citizen alienation from public life, to name a few. Tannen's objections to the zero-sum, either-or logic of typical debate training raise serious questions about the merits of traditional argument pedagogy. However, argumentation teachers will be pleased to note that in the end, Tannen is not entirely hostile to their craft. "My aim is not to put a stop to the adversarial paradigm, the doub ting game, debate-but to diversity," she writes in the conclusion of The Argument Culture;, "Like a well-balanced stock portfolio, we need more than one path to the goal we seek" (p. 276).

Rather than reading Tannen's book as a lethal indictment of adversarial debate models, it is more constructive to take her work as a cue to invent and refine new forms of teaching designed to supplement traditional methods of debate instruction. Indeed, this would appear to be a crucial task in the present environment, since it is a safe bet that in the coming years, there will be a growing need for schools to provide the necessary learning experiences for students to navigate their ways through the dense and complicated terrain of contemporary public arguments. It is likely that this need will intensify as the challenges of citizenship and political participation grow more complex in our era of rapid technological and social change. In the context of higher education, Gerard Delanty made this point recently, suggesting that "[u]niversities must recapture a sense of public commitment... [t]he university is an institution of the public sphere; it is not above civil society but a part of its cultural tradition , in particular it is a part of the public sphere and its tradition of debate and reflection" (1998, p. 22). This observation carries with it weighty pedagogical responsibilities, since the ripples of today's teaching efforts will undulate far into the future, as citizens draw upon their schooling experiences to shape their contributions to the public arguments of tomorrow.

Working toward development of argumentation pedagogies designed to complement traditional modes of debate teaching, in this essay, I explore role-play simulation as an exercise that promises to deliver uniquely valuable opportunities for learning about the dynamics of public argument. As an "active learning" strategy (see Brookfield 1987; Collard 1994; Eble 1988), role-play simulation is a classroom exercise that can break up the teacher's communication monopoly and flood the classroom with diverse and expressive rhetorical performances by students. The role-play technique also has unique potential to facilitate exploration of the many layers and perspectives embedded in public arguments that are sometimes obscured by either-or / yes-no debating formats. My exploration of this topic moves through four stages. A brief consideration of the history and dynamics of role-play pedagogy (in part one) gives way to discussion of the potential pedagogical benefits of role-play (in part two). The pitfalls and challenge s involved in role-play curriculum are then highlighted (in part three), setting the stage for reflection on ways to prove the pedagogical value of role-play to administrators and improve role-play curricular methods and classroom materials through teacher collaboration (in part four). Finally, concluding remarks will be offered about role-play's usefulness as a pedagogical device for cultivating acumen for citizens to participate powerfully in public arguments.

EXPLORING PUBLIC ARGUMENT THROUGH ROLE-PLAY PEDAGOGY

Many of the received approaches to pedagogy are not up

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to the task of energizing students to play positive roles as public deliberaters. Learning is difficult in settings where teachers monopolize the communication flow, and student silence is too often symptomatic of the lifeless and dull pedagogical space that is a frequent byproduct of top-down lessons. "Classrooms die as intellectual centers," according to Shor, "when they become delivery systems for lifeless bodies of knowledge" (1993, p. 25; see also Shor 1992). In such "passive learning" environments, students mechanically write down material but rarely reflect on it (see Brookfield 1987; deNeve and Heppner 1997; King 1993), with the quick evaporation of such ephemeral knowledge leaving students illprepared for practical encounters with interlocutors in actual public arguments. "In traditional classrooms, students develop authority-dependence," argues Shor; "[T]hey hear their futures as passive citizens and workers by learning that education means lis tening to teachers tell them what to do and what things mean" (1993, p. 29).

Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat This is the "banking" concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits... But in the last analysis, it is the people themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system. For apart from inquiry, apart from praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other (Freire 1970, p. 53).

Freire's alternative to the "banking" concept of education is a "dialogic" pedagogy, where mutually supportive and interactive communication stimulates learning on the part of students and teachers alike. "A dialogic relationship-communication and intercommunication among active subjects who are immune to the bureaucratization of their minds and open to discovery and knowing more," explains Freire, "is indispensable to knowledge" (1997, p. 99; see also Escobar et al. 1994; Freire 1990, 1970). Resisting the tendency to locate sources of knowledge in static canons of objective Truth, Freire points to interactive dialogue as the wellspring of curiosity and understanding in education.

There is a fundamental element in interaction, which takes on greater complexity in relationship. I am referring to curiosity, some sort of openness to comprehending what is in the orbit of the challenged being's sensibility. It is this

human disposition to be surprised before people, what they do, say, seem like, before facts and phenomena, before beauty and ugliness, this unrefrainable need to understand in order to explain, to seek the reason for being of facts (1997, p. 94).

Despite the communication discipline's historical opposition to top-down learning, as Tannen's observations in The Argument Culture illustrate, debate pedagogy does not automatically encourage "dialogue" in the Freireian sense. While many argumentation teachers extricate their classrooms from the "banking" concept of education by using competitive policy debates to involve students, a different but profound set of pedagogical limitations attach to the traditional formats for such debates as recommended frequently in the standard argumentation textbooks. The adversarial nature of such debates injects a competitive (even combative) element into the classroom that tends to polarize discussion, penalize communicative cooperation, and alienate some students (see Crenshaw 1995; Fulkerson 1996; Gehrke 1998; Tannen). The formal rules of evidence and logic underpinning many models of debate pedagogy work to exclude and devalue arguments couched in emotional, affective, or aesthetic registers. These limitations presen t teachers with a challenge to enhance the pedagogical dynamism of debate by theorizing innovative formats and approaches that can more deeply fulfill the profound potential of debate education.

Simulated public argument represents a form of academic debate that promises to redeem more fully debate's potential as a method of "dialogic" learning. In the next section, I explore the basis for such optimism by sketching the historical roots and logistical dynamics of role-play as a classroom exercise. Since ancient times, schools have served as sites of dramatic performance in society. The idea of the "school play" is rooted in a venerable theatrical tradition that treats drama as an independent field of academic study, marked off from the "mainstream" curriculum. Only in this century, however, have teachers begun to recognize the value of dramatic role-play simulation as a generic pedagogical tool for teaching a wide variety of subjects, ranging from psychology to political science. The origin of this transition from drama as public performance to role-play as a general teaching tool can he traced to the 1930s, when "a growing interest in small-group behavior by psychologists, psychiatrists, and sociol ogists led to the use of role-play as a vehicle for extending research into human behavior in varied learning environments" (Taylor and Walford 1972, p. 19). According to McCaughan and Scott (1978, p. 22), this pedagogical technique was "first written about seriously" by Jacob Moreno, who suggested in a 1953 book, Who Shall Survive, that role-play exercises might have broad

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applicability in schools. During the 1960s, role-play teaching entered its "most prolific stage of development in the USA and UK" (McCaughan and Scott, p. 101), growing in popularity as interest in simulation gaming surged in schools and universities. Today, one can find a wide variety of role-play exercises designed by organizations and individual teachers to teach subjects as diverse as Bushmen hunting in the Kalahari Desert, inner-city community organizing, pollution control, and the legislative process (see Taylor and Walford, pp. 147--172).

The basic concept of the role-play technique is easy to grasp. "The idea of roleplay," as Van Ments explains, is asking someone to assume the dramatic posture of "another person in a particular situation. They are then asked to behave exactly as they feel that person would. As a result of doing this, they, or the rest of the class, or both, will learn something about the person and/or situation" (1983, p. 16). In their book, Simulation in the Classroom, Taylor and Walford explain that "[r]ole-play relies on the spontaneous performance of participants, when they have been placed in a hypothetical situation" (p. 19). In their formulation, Taylor and Walford isolate three key aspects of the role-play process: 1) Players take on roles which are representative of the real world, and then make decisions in response to their assessment of the setting in which they find themselves; 2) They experience simulated consequences which relate to their decisions and their general performance; 3) They 'monitor' the results of their actions, and are brought to reflect upon the relationship between their own decisions and the resultant consequences (1972, p. 17).

Moore provides additional detail in his description of role-play as a pedagogical approach. Emphasizing pre-performance brainstorming as an essential feature of the process, Moore suggests that initially, students "[f]reewrite a practice paragraph about the topic from the point of view of the character. Try to assume his or her voice. Imagine the character being asked to speak about the subject and write what he or she would say" (1995, p. 194). After this initial brainstorming process, a secondary discussion takes place, where students meet in groups to "review others' papers, look for stereotypes and misconceptions ... [and] [g]ive suggestions to the role-player on how to improve the character's argument" (Moore, p. 194).

After scenes are developed and character sketches completed, role-play participants move from the realm of invention to performance, where students engage in simulated dialogues with each other, working to fashion statements that fit their character sketches and draw creatively from assigned readings and background knowledge. Throughout such exchanges, students present themselves and fashion arguments not from the perspective of their own self-identities, but rather from the perspective of hypothetical identities constructed to fit their interpretations of a dramatic role. Traditional debate contests encourage a similar kind of perspective-taking, with students assuming the roles of affirmative and negative advocates speaking for and against particular propositions. However, opportunities for identity experimentation are limited in this context by the expectation that debate adversaries present arguments in the voice of omniscient commentators, delivering overarching assessments of issues that "clash" directl y with positions staked out by opponents. On the other hand, role-play exercises encourage students to speak not as transcendent, pro/con commentators, but as situated actors in everyday circumstances, able to assume a variety of flexible rhetorical postures, and freed from the agonistic impera-tives of competitive debate formats.

Consider the public argument over corporate investment in public education. One way to convey the political and economic dynamics of this debate to students is for the teacher to deliver a lecture highlighting key aspects of the controversy. Although this strategy may be useful for limited pedagogical purposes, if lectures become the only means by which students can acquire knowledge of the topic, significant learning opportunities are foreclosed. The student passivity reproduced in this top-down approach would run counter to the goals of a "dialogic" pedagogy designed to situate students as active producers of knowledge. Such an approach would likely fail to cultivate students's practical acumen for rhetorical performance in public argument. A second way to teach such a segment would be to conduct a series of adversarial student debates on fixed resolutions designed to focus argumentation on key aspects of the issue, casting students as "affirmative" and "negative" advocates for each resolution. Compared to the lecture approach, this strategy succeeds in drawing out student voices in a more active fashion, but suffers from the limitations inherent in polarizing, formal models of academic debate discussed earlier.

A third possibility would be to simulate a concrete public argument over corporate financing of public education in the classroom, where students enact various currents of dialogue corresponding to the roles played by key stakeholders in the controversy. Role-play exercises conducted at Mann Elementary School (Pittsburgh, PA), Washington Communication Academy (Rockford, IL), and the University of Pittsburgh (Pittsburgh, PA) point to the effectiveness of the role-play technique as a viable pedagogical option to teach about some of the political, social, and economic dynamics involved in the public argument over corporate funding of public education. In

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these exercises, initial group discussion centered on the case of senior Mike Cameron, who was suspended from Greenbrier High School in Evans, Georgia on March 28, 1998, for wearing a Pepsi T-shirt on his school's "Coke Day." This event was part of Greenbrier High School's participation in a $10,000 national contest sponsored by Coca-Cola, Inc.

After airing initial reactions to the Cameron case, students in the role-play exercise were invited to imagine a similar case involving their own schools. For this purpose, a hypothetical scenario involving an offer by Reebok, Inc. was formulated based on an actual corporate arrangement negotiated between Reebok and the University of Wisconsin ("This School" 1998, p. 12A). The specific terms of the hypothetical offer were:

Reebok's gifts. 1) $1 million to be used by the school for educational purposes; 2) Free pair of Reebok shoes given to each student.

Conditions on gifts: 1) Students are not allowed to wear competitor shoes or apparel to school; 2) Students are not allowed to "talk badly" about Reebok on school grounds; 3) Violations result in suspension from school.

After an explanation of Reebok's hypothetical offer, students were asked to imagine a public meeting held in their school gymnasium, where Reebok executives would pitch their offer to a general audience, field questions, and participate in the ensuing public debate. To generate a list of possible characters who might populate this hypothetical scenario, students were asked to name various sorts of people who would have a stake in the outcome of this public argument. A list of such characters (including parents, teachers, students, Reebok executives, members of the school administration, journalists, etc.) was written on the chalkboard during this brainstorming process. After this list of characters was generated, students were then asked to imagine the various perspectives each character might take in approaching the argument. In the ensuing character "sculpting" process (McCaughan and Scott, p. 139), it not only became clear that each character type possessed a unique perspective on the argument, but that within character types, differing viewpoints emerged as well. For example, students suggested that some parents (e.g. those with little money to buy shoes) might be favorably inclined toward Reebok's offer, while other parents (e.g. those with strong beliefs in academic freedom), would tend to be more skeptical of the offer.

With a scene established and a cast of characters generated, students chose roles to play, with each student selecting a character type. Students were asked to inhabit these roles completely, imagining how they would react to the Reebok offer from the perspective of their particular character, whether a zealous Reebok pitchmaster, cash-starved principal, rebellious student, or whatever role students crafted for themselves. After some basic rearrangement of the classroom space to simulate a public meeting in the school gymnasium, attention shifted to students playing Reebok executives, who initiated the role-play by outlining the terms and conditions of their offer to the school. With the school principal presiding over the meeting, the floor was then opened for questions and discussion of the proposal. In the ensuing public argument simulation, teachers queried the executives about enforcement of the ban on competitor apparel, parents asked the principal how the $1 million would be used by the school, student s raised concerns about free speech, and a host of other arguments were voiced in a lively, back-and-forth exchange. When the argumentative currents began to wane, it was suggested to the principal that the time was ripe for resolution of the public argument. In some cases, principals closed the proceedings by calling for a community vote on Reebok's offer, while in other instances, more controlling principals issued unilateral judgments on the offer, explaining how the sentiments expressed in the public meeting informed such pronouncements.

When time permitted, spin-off scenes were fashioned to explore additional dimensions of the public argument. For example, in some simulations where the public meeting resulted in acceptance of the Reebok offer, students were asked to consider a follow-on scenario involving a case where the terms of the offer were tested. One such scenario featured a student sent to the principal's office for coming to school with a Nike "swoosh" symbol patterned into her haircut. Reebok executives visited the school to press for the student to be suspended on the grounds that she violated the conditions of the school's corporate agreement, and the student's parents were called in to participate in a dialogue about their child's fate. In a simulated argument held in the principal's office, the stakeholders debated the issue, and the ensuing dialogue highlighted some of the subtle complexities involved in corporate arrangements of this sort.

The Reebok simulation provides one detailed sketch of the role-play process when used to investigate a particular topic in a classroom setting. The flexibility of role-play pedagogy as a method for teaching public argument is evident when one considers the range of possible topics that can be explored through role-playing. For example, students at Westinghouse High School (Pittsburgh, PA) recently studied controversies about boxing in role-play exercises that featured a simulated hearing by the Nevada Boxing Commission on whether or not to grant a new

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license to suspended boxer Mike Tyson. In another role-play simulation designed to teach about the political and economic dynamics of managed care, students at the University of Pittsburgh recently simulated an appeals hearing conducted by executives of Purple Cross, an imaginary HMO. In this scenario, one student played the role of a patient suffering chronic back pain. This patient's request for insurance coverage of an alternative medical treatment was denied initially by Purple Cross, so in the appeals hearing, Purple Cross executives heard testimony from mainstream doctors, non-traditional healers, financial analysts, and other covered patients on the question of whether or not the HMO should reverse their initial decision to deny benefits.

Yet another role-play enactment found University of Pittsburgh students investigating the controversy over the recent U.S. missile strikes against Sudan and Afghanistan, in a series of dramatic scenes related to the issue. One scene simulated a floor debate at the U.N. General Assembly, where students assumed roles as ambassadors representing the United States, Germany, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sudan, and China, in order to debate the merits of a proposed resolution condemning the U.S. attacks. The controversy was localized in a related scene that simulated a general public meeting at the University of Pittsburgh, called by administrators to decide the fate of the school's "Semester at Sea" program. In this hypothetical scenario, the "Semester at Sea" program was put in jeopardy following the decision by insurers to hike premiums on foreign travel because of the heightened risk of terrorist retaliation against students following the U.S. missile strikes. Students playing the roles of administrators, students, parents, and insurance agents debated about whether or not to call off the program or increase tuition substantially to cover the costs of the insurance hike.

With the historical origins and basic dynamics of the role-play process introduced, it would next seem appropriate to reflect more specifically on the promise of role-play exercises as tools for teaching public argument. In the following section, I pursue this task by framing closer examination of the particular examples of role-play exercises just described against a backdrop of theoretical material drawn from rhetorical argumentation and critical educational scholarship. The categories and concepts outlined in this theoretical material illustrate aspects of the role-play approach that have unique pedagogical value.

ROLE-ING UP LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

The dynamic communicative interplay generated through role-play exercises carries with it a number of significant pedagogical benefits. Most basically, by foregrounding

students' oral performances as the key sources of knowledge, "[a]n appropriately timed role-playing exercise can stimulate involvement and enhance the learning environment" (van der Meulen Rodgers 1996, p. 217). For those who witness a classroom role-play exercise for the first time, one of the most striking features of the activity is the radical heterogeneity of argumentation generated through the performance. When role-play scenarios are designed to dramatize the way in which actors from a multitude of different worldviews and voices participate in public arguments, spaces are opened for students to experiment with forms of logic, styles of presentation, and modes of thinking that are often excluded from "mainstream" treatments of political issues.

For example, public arguments about corporate partnership agreements between public schools and big businesses frequently unfold in austere forums like boardrooms and legislative chambers, where the resulting deliberations are invisible to most citizens. However, consider the role-play simulation placing a high-ranking Reebok executive at a public meeting to answer questions and counter arguments from ordinary parents and students regarding a proposed corporate partnership agreement. This arrangement recasts the public argument over corporate involvement in public education in new light, by bringing previously excluded voices into the discussion.

This maneuver jibes with Goodnight's call for argumentation pedagogy "to repopulate its social imagination by making less dominant abstract decision makers or remote audiences, and foregrounding friends, teachers, parents, truant officers--the significant and marginal 'others' framed in argumentative engagements routinely encountered by students" (Goodnight 1991, P. 7; see also Fuller 1998). Because role-play participants must fashion their unfolding scripts in relation to the sequence of shared dialogue on which layers of meaning are constructed by students, the role-play process steers performers toward an increased awareness of the feelings of others (see McKeachie 1990).

When the communicative space of the classroom is transformed in such a positive way, the potential is also created for students to learn in multiple intellectual and affective registers. With role-playing, "the learning involves more of the self--it demands a creative output calling on both the intellectual and affective areas of the learner" (McCaughan and Scott, p. 9). For example, if a student interprets a certain role by generating a character identity predisposed toward emotional appeals instead of so-called "rational statements," the classroom space is open for him or her to express this type of persuasive reasoning. There seems an inherent value in providing students with opportunities that teach them how to transpose the

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vernaculars of private pain or personal experience into language intended to persuade broader publics. Olson and Goodnight argue that such opportunities clear the way for democratic moments of "social controversy" to spring from deliberative milieux.

A social controversy is an extended rhetorical engagement that critiques, resituates, and develops communication practices bridging the public and personal spheres. The loci of such controversy include participation in governance, distribution and use of economic resources and opportunities, assumption of personal and collective identities and risks, redress of common grievances, assignments of rights and obligations, and the processes of social justice (Goodnight 1991). Social controversy occupies the pluralistic boundaries of a democracy and flourishes at those sites of struggle where arguers criticize and invent alternatives to established social conventions and sanctioned norms of communication (Olson and Goodnight 1994, p.249).

Consider the Purple Cross role-play scenario, where a student playing a patient suffering chronic back pain appealed to insurance executives with the argument "My back hurts! Can't you do something about it?" Such an appeal called into question the validity of cold, bureaucratic responses such as "I'm sorry, it's against procedure for us to help you." As a "discursive oppositional argument in social controversy," the suffering patient's emotional appeal not only clashed with the insurance executive's denial of coverage; it also directly challenged "the implied norms of participation signaled by the communication" (Olson and Goodnight, p. 251). This sort of argument has the potential to validate expressions of self-identity in public spheres and help students explore the limits of such assertions as reasonable arguments advanced in public dialogue.

Role-play performance thus works as a springboard to appreciation and critique of prevailing communication norms that lock in expert authority in public debate. When role-play exercises highlight contrasts between participatory classroom spaces and the frequently closed and restrictive public spaces beyond the schoolyard walls, room is created for students to question the appropriateness of the formal rules and informal presumptions governing public discourse. Students can use the apparent cleavage between simulated and actual public spheres to leverage salient critiques of contemporary practices in public argument, such as the manner in which power and money are used to exclude persons with important viewpoints from discussion. In this way, visions of possible public spheres enacted through classroom performance can serve as benchmarks for re-visions of prevailing communication norms in wider public spheres outside the academy.

The "kinetic" knowledge (Kincheloe 1993, p. 83) generated by active student involvement in meaning-making is differentiated from the reductive and detached knowledge transmitted to students through top-down didactic exercises. One difference that separates these two kinds of knowledge is mnemonic value. "The role play simulation shows promise as an active learning technique which fosters student interest, helps students apply material to real world situations, and may be remembered by students well after the course ends" (deNeve and Heppner, p. 244). For example, a follow-up evaluation of students eight months after the conclusion of an industrial psychology course that featured role-playing as a pedagogical technique "showed a tendency for students to remember more information from the role play simulations than from the lectures" (deNeve and Heppner, p. 243).

One explanation for these findings is that the excitement and drama of role-play scenarios can serve as significant motivators for students to conduct research. The anticipation of public performance and the desire to act well for one's peers are strong incentives prompting students to conduct research in order to generate a believable and colorful character interpretation, as well as orient themselves vis-a-vis other roles featured in role-play simulations. For example, to prepare for role-play deliberations in the U.N. General Assembly over a proposed resolution condemning U.S. missile attacks on Sudan and Afghanistan, students playing the roles of Afghanistani, Pakistani, and Sudanese ambassadors carefully researched primary news sources from those countries in order to generate realistic character interpretations. These research efforts produced novel findings that disputed mainstream U.S. news accounts alleging, for example, that the targets of the American missile attacks were unambiguous sites of terrorist activity. Further, since these findings were introduced through the praxis of student dialogue, the process of research and oral presentation was intrinsically empowering, representing a reversal of the debilitating pedagogical dynamics of the "banking concept of education" described by Freire (1970, p.53).

When these novel research findings were introduced into the role-play scenario as public arguments in support of the U.N. resolution under consideration, the ensuing dialogue stimulated additional types of student research activity. As Shor explains, the pedagogical dynamic of dialogic student interchange in the classroom transforms classroom discussion into research in its own right, distinct from traditional modes of library investigation.

The critical classroom functions as a research center in a

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number of ways. First, the teacher examines student life and language to create a curriculum situated in their themes and thoughts. Second, students are invited to join the teacher in studying their community and conditions, as co-researchers of their own culture. Third, once a generative, topical or academic theme is posed as a problem for critical dialogue, students and teacher become researchers once again, investigating a specific subject matter. Fourth, both teacher and students research the learning process under way, to discover how teaching and learning are progressing (Shor 1992, p. 170).

As a form of research, dialogic student exchanges can generate a wide array of different types of understanding. Insight about facts, players, and currents of arguments featured in contemporary public controversies comprises only one dimension of wisdom that can be gleaned from creative student discourses in role-play exercises. Intensive argumentation of this sort can also enable students to experiment with their self-identities and grasp the constructed nature of role fixity in social life. In role-play activities, "provided the learning climate is one that affords both trust and challenge, the possibility of receiving feedback and the opportunity to change direction, correct errors and observe the consequences in the here and now, permits the learner to risk extending the boundaries of the restricted self" (McCaughan and Scott, p. 9).

This insight brings to mind a fifth grade student at Mann Elementary School playing the role of an angry parent in the Reebok role-play scenario. Lifting a shadow telephone to his ear and simulating a fiery call to the principal to complain about the suspension of his son for wearing Nike shoes to school, the student-playing-parent spun a dramatic and convincing argument: "Mr. principal, my son did nothing wrong. Your deal with Reebok is the real problem!" Couching this point in the distinctive idiom of parental authority by assuming a dramatic, take-charge posture, with an accusatory finger wagging to underscore his character's angst, this student simultaneously presented a slice of his interpretation of parenthood to the class and experimented with what it feels like to act as a parent in a rhetorical situation with significant stakes in play.

When we assume the posture of the other in dramatic performance, we tap into who we are as persons, since our interpretation of others is deeply colored by our own senses of selfhood. By encouraging experimentation in identity construction, role-play "helps students discover divergent viewpoints and overcome stereotypes as they examine subjects from multiple perspectives. . ." (Moore, p. 190). Kincheloe points to the importance of this sort of reflexive critical awareness as an essential feature of

educational practice in postmodern times. "Applying the notion of the postmodern analysis of the self, we come to see that hyperreality invites a heteroglossia of being," Kincheloe explains; "Drawing upon a multiplicity of voices, individuals live out a variety of possibilities, refusing to suppress particular voices. As men and women appropriate the various forms of expression, they are empowered to uncover new dimensions of existence that were previously hidden" (1993, p. 96).

This process is particularly crucial in the public argument context, since a key guarantor of inequality and exploitation in contemporary society is the widespread and uncritical acceptance by citizens of politically inert self-identities. The problems of political alienation, apathy and withdrawal have received lavish treatment as perennial topics of scholarly analysis (see e.g. Fishkin 1997; Grossberg 1992; Hart 1998; Loeb 1994). Unfortunately, comparatively less energy has been devoted to the development of pedagogical strategies for countering this alarming political trend.

However, some scholars have taken up the task of theorizing emancipatory and critical pedagogies, and argumentation scholars interested in expanding the learning potential of debate would do well to note their work (see e.g. Apple 1995, 1988, 1979; Britzman 1991; Giroux 1997, 1988, 1987; Greene 1978; McLaren 1993, 1989; Simon 1992; Weis and Fine 1993). In this area of educational scholarship, the curriculum theory of currrere, a method of teaching pioneered by Pinar and Grumet (1976), speaks directly to many of the issues already discussed in this essay. As the Latin root of the word "curriculum," currere translates roughly as the investigation of public life (see Kincheloe 1993, p. 146). According to Pinar, "the method of currere is one way to work to liberate one from the web of political, cultural, and economic influences that are perhaps buried from conscious view but nonetheless comprise the living web that is a person's biographic situation" (Pinar 1994, p. 108). The objectives of role-play pedagogy res onate with the currere method. By opening discursive spaces for students to explore their identities as public actors, simulated public arguments provide occasions for students to survey and appraise submerged aspects of their political identities. Since many aspects of cultural and political life work currently to reinforce political passivity, critical argumentation pedagogies that highlight this component of students' self-identities carry significant emancipatory potential.

MAINTAINING MOMENTUM OF THE CLASS ON A ROLE

The positive energy generated by roleplay activities can be inspiring, but importantly, such simulations will not automatically deliver meaningful learning experiences if

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the approach is reduced to a formulaic technique. Desultory role-play exercises conducted in an offhand spirit have the potential to deteriorate into comical rows that duplicate many of the drawbacks of more traditional adversarial debate formats. Even more damaging, uncritical role-play simulations can mirror and reify oppressive power relationships that currently constrain deliberation in many public spheres. Indeed, many pedagogical challenges inhere in the project of developing role-play curriculum to energize classroom discussion, stimulate appetites for student learning, and prompt critical reflection on the part of participants. Some of these challenges involve preparatory work essential to transform the classroom into an inviting space where students feel comfortable taking rhetorical risks. Other challenges come into play in the mid st of role-play activities, when the momentum of energetic student dialogue needs to be maintained and channeled into productive avenues of discussion.

The degree to which the potential benefits of a role-play curriculum can be realized in practice depends largely on the prior creation of a favorable learning environment in the classroom. Since role-playing involves risk-taking, mutual trust among students and teachers is necessary to counter the danger that encounters with unfamiliar roles may cause "withdrawal or defensive panic" (Mc- Caughan and Scott, p. 11; see also Kincheloe 1993, p. 227). Indeed, it can be frightening for students to be cast into roles wholly foreign to their life experience (McCaughan and Scott, p. 11), so teachers must build a positive classroom environment that focuses student attention on the broader purposes of schooling, where students are linked together in a common project of educational emancipation (see Freire 1994; Giroux 1997). With the educational enterprise recast in a co-operative and purposeful light, it is easier to cultivate a mutually supportive classroom environment where students can experiment comfortably with the political and affective dimensions of identity construction through dramatic performance.

Such experimentation is necessary to realize role-play's heuristic potential as a source of critical knowledge about social relationships between persons with heterogeneous identities and interests. By playing roles that depart from their own self-identities, students not only learn valuable lessons about how others view the world, but they also experience what it might be like to adopt different notions of selfhood. Because there is a natural tendency for students to choose dramatic roles with which they identify closely, careful teacher interventions into the character selection process may be helpful in stimulating student experimentation in this regard. For example, discussion in the initial role-play brainstorming process could highlight the natural fluidity of identity positions, thereby

encouraging students to step outside relatively settled perspectives and develop characters diverging from their own familiar senses of selfhood. In classrooms where teachers have formed strong bonds of mutual trust wit h students, a more direct approach could be used. This might include active teacher involvement in the role selection process, where teachers suggest or assign particularly challenging roles for particular students to assume.

Even in classrooms characterized by a supportive dynamic that invites all students to speak out, teachers conducting role-play activities still often face the dilemma of role scarcity, i.e. that there may not be enough characters in a simulated public argument to allow each student to play a role. For example, the Nevada Boxing Commission role-play simulation discussed earlier was conducted in a class of fifteen students, but the simulation featured only three characters (Mike Tyson, his agent, and the boxing commissioner). Because active performance is such a critical learning stimulus in the role-play approach, this discrepancy deserves careful consideration.

Fortunately, there are a number of strategies available to maximize student participation even under conditions of role scarcity. One very basic solution is to design role-play scenarios that tolerate multiple players for each role. For example, in the Reebok role-play, there were frequently two or three students playing the roles of parents or teachers in the simulated public argument. Another strategy for broadening student participation involves extending the pre-performance brainstorming process. After a cast of characters is generated for a particular scenario, students can then convene into small breakout groups, with each group assigned to brainstorm arguments and performance styles that would be appropriate for a particular character. Following a robust brainstorming period, each small group can next volunteer one of its members to carry the group's ideas to the larger class, by performing the particular character role in the actual simulation.

As the action unfolds in this way, students from brainstorming groups can act as "alter egos" (McCaughan and Scott, p. 134) of their performing colleagues, watching the drama from afar and offering feedback privately when they notice an opportunity to inject an argument or provide strategic advice. A modification of the Mcaughan and Scott's "alter ego" strategy borrows a dramatic technique from improvisational theater, where performers on the "sidelines" jump in to "freeze" the action with a tap on the shoulder of a performing character, and then restart the drama by redirecting the action with their own contribution. This basic objective can also be accomplished by running a series of role-plays using the same cast of characters,

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but with a new set of students rotating in for each performance.

Yet another strategy for drawing a greater number of students into the realm of performance involves pursuit of "spin-off" role-plays that grow out of initial simulations. For example, in some performances of the Reebok role-play where parties participating in a simulated public discussion agreed to accept the Reebok offer, follow-up scenes were created to simulate difficulties involved in implementation of the agreement in practice. One such "spin-off" scene involved the hypothetical case of a student who wrote a poem critical of Reebok in English class. To simulate a discussion designed to decide the fate of this imaginary student under the Reebok agreement, a new set of students were invited to play the roles of principal, Reebok executive, parent, teacher, and student, called together to discuss the matter in the principal's office.

While readers may now have a more detailed understanding of different role-play strategies designed to maximize the involvement of students, there may still be lingering questions about the role of the teacher in role-play activities. As an intervenor in the unfolding role-play simulation, the teacher "must find a balance between over-involvement and detachment" (McCaughan and Scott, p. 12). Over-involvement on the part of the teacher in scripting the action, controlling the flow of dialogue, and prompting plot twists can simply end up reproducing many of the same power imbalances shot through the more traditional top-down, "passive" learning approaches discussed earlier in this essay. Reflecting on this concern, Taylor and Walford suggest that the teacher err on the side of non-intervention during role-play simulations: "[T]he teacher probably needs to provide just as little rule information as he (sic) dare" (p. 56).

On the other hand, teachers adopting stances of total detachment forfeit crucial opportunities to spark profound learning opportunities for students by tweaking the trajectory of discussion through introduction of subtle plot twists. Minor alterations in the fact pattern established for a scene (e.g. packaged in the form of a "news update" or "urgent memo") can nudge students to rethink their roles and revise their statements in light of challenging new situations. For example, in the Purple Cross role-play, the simulation appeared to be headed for an early resolution after a student playing the role of a financial analyst defused much of the rhetorical exigence of the scenario with the suggestion that the decision by Purple Cross to extend insurance coverage to include alternative medical treatments "would have no negative economic effects for the company." To recharge the controversy and add additional layers of information to the deliberations, the teacher slipped a note to the Purple Cross CEO in the mid

dle of the simulation, reporting that a news leak that the company was even holding a meeting to consider a change in policy on alternative medical treatments had triggered a major sell-off on Wall Street, causing the company's stock to tumble in value. When this information was introduced by the CEO to the meeting, the general controversy over tradeoffs between economic expediency and patient medical rights was re-ignited in a dynamic way. Teacher interventions can also occur on a broader level, where changes of pedagogical venue can introduce heuristically valuable learning opportunities to students as they experiment with performance beyond the formal classroom space for discussion. For example, "changing the physical location of the class or taping the session can add realism and reinforce the extraordinary nature of the role-playing exercise" (van der Muelen Rodgers, p. 219).

PROVING AND IMPROVING THE PEDAGOGICAL VALUE OF ROLE-PLAY CURRICULA

Several organizations have moved toward adoption of debate as a generic tool to deliver oral communication skills in a wide variety of pedagogical contexts (see e.g. Aiex 1990; Littlefield and Littlefield 1989). The preliminary results of these "debate across the curriculum" (Worthen and Pack 1992) projects have been encouraging, especially when compared to the efficacy of incumbent public speaking models of instruction in oral communication (see Cronin 1990). However, it is reasonable to expect substantial reservations to be voiced in discussions about proposals for "debate across the curriculum," given popular perceptions of formalized debate as an intimidating and alienating activity (see e.g. Tannen). Indeed, for attempts to integrate role-play into curricula on a wide scale within educational institutions to be credible, they must be accompanied by well-conceived plans for proving role-play's links to student learning, as well as detailed accounts of how proposed role-play activities would fit within th e overall institutional structure of schools.

Since the role-play approach could reduce the intimidation of engaging in debate activities as traditionally understood, it makes sense to consider role-play as a potential bridge that could carry debate activities to diverse areas of high school and college curricula. In this light, deNeve and Heppner point out that the role-play approach has wide potential applicability as a pedagogical tool in multiple academic fields. "[T]he role play simulation," they explain, "can easily be modified for use in such diverse disciplines as economics, law, medicine, political science, and sociology" (deNeve and Heppner, P. 245). Since administrators contemplating approval of cross-curricular role-play initiatives will likely ask for concrete illustrations of the ways in which role-play exercises can be graded

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and implemented across fields in a co-ordinated fashion, this section provides heuristic reflections on these important questions of assessment and implementation.

The prospect of teacher intervention into unfolding role-play simulations raises some significant questions regarding assessment logistics. How are student performances to be graded? If role-play exercises are truly relational and co-operative projects involving the entire class (including students and teachers), how can teachers evaluate each individual's contribution in a fair manner? Are there ways to create an assessment system so as to encourage students to model particularly desirable dialogic behaviors? The most appropriate answers to these challenging questions are likely to evolve out of the particular curricular constraints and unique pedagogical styles employed by different teachers. However, teachers seeking to integrate role-play exercises into curriculum might consider using a three-part assessment sequence that evaluates student performance in the areas of preparation, performance, and reflection.

Initially, student work completed in preparation for actual role-play performances could be assessed using basic and concrete evaluative criteria. In the initial brainstorming stage of role-play projects, students could generate a list of characters populating the chosen public argument, with each student then cast to play a particular role. At this point in the process, students could be assigned the task of preparing written "character sketches" for their selected roles. These documents might contain a general description of the student's fictional character (e.g. name, background), an explication of the character's stake in the controversy, a preview of the likely initial positions the character would take in public argument, and a brief discussion of the style of presentation the character would use to present these arguments. Teachers could assess character sketches based on the degree to which students provide lucid, creative, and detailed treatments of these four areas. This preparation stage of the r ole-play project could be extended in cases where selected topics present opportunities for in-depth research, or where teachers follow Moore's strategy of adding an additional layer of assessment by inviting students to exchange and critique each others' character sketches (see Moore, p. 194).

Assessment in the performance stage of role-play exercises represents a more difficult challenge. In fact, there are compelling reasons to carve out actual role-play performances as relatively "grade-free" zones for students. For example, intense role scarcity or frequent teacher intervention could interfere with the ability of students to "get a word in edgewise," and it would be unfair to penalize these students for circumstances beyond their control. Additionally, since arguments advanced in

role-play simulations involve highly subjective identity interpretations, it would be difficult indeed for teachers to develop evaluative criteria that would judge radically different student performances fairly. Further, if role-play evaluations were based on frequency of participation, competition for performance time could reproduce similar aspects of the zero-sum antagonism found in traditional competitive debate models.

Given these complications, it would seem appropriate for teachers to employ a minimalist evaluation method for assessment in the performance stage of role-play exercises, perhaps simply assigning a satisfactory / unsatisfactory grade to each student, based on attendance. If more specific means of assessment are required, one strategy might involve application of student-generated criteria, solicited during the preparation phase. For example, prior to role-play performance, students could be asked to supply an answer to the question: "What criteria should the teacher use to evaluate your performance?" Answers to this question could generate specific criteria to evaluate the role-play performances of particular students.

Finally, substantial opportunities for graded assessment exist in the post-performance phase of role-play exercises, where participants reflect on lessons learned and issues raised during the course of simulations. Since some of the most significant knowledge to be gained from role-play experiences is likely to be gleaned through such retrospection, follow-up assignments that invite students to generate written responses to thought provoking questions would seem particularly appropriate. This list of questions might include:

* How did your character's contributions affect the course of events in the role-play exercise?

* If the imaginary scenario would have been played out in "real life," how would the course of events have differed from our simulation, and why?

* Which of the arguments advanced in the role-play exercise were most persuasive, and why?

* Looking back on your own contributions to the role-playing exercise, what parts of your performance would you change, and why?

* How could the pre-scripted scenario have been changed to improve the role-play exercise?

* How could the role-play have been moderated differently to improve the simulation?

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Student responses to these questions could be evaluated based on criteria such as detail and completeness, demonstrated evidence of critical reflection, and overall strength of written prose. This post-performance assessment process would not only be useful as an evaluation of student work; feedback could also serve as a vehicle for reflexive critique of teaching methods used in role-play exercises (see Kincheloe 1991). Insights from this process could then be shared with other teachers interested in developing new classroom strategies and curricular materials for improved role-play pedagogies. In a project to integrate debate across the curriculum, such sharing could be co-ordinated through a central clearinghouse, where teachers could work together on projects designed to develop, refine, and spread role-play's curricular applications. Organizational models for such arrangements can be found in numerous "writing across the curriculum" programs currently established in over twenty colleges and universities (see WAG Clearinghouse, 1999).

CONCLUSION

The lifeblood of American democracy courses through the arteries of an active, deliberating citizenry capable of participating meaningfully in public argument on pressing issues of the day. Given this, the surfeit of commentary noting widespread citizen alienation and withdrawal from political affairs should not be taken lightly. It is incumbent upon those directing the processes of knowledge production in society to reflect carefully on the ways in which their own practices structure the character of contemporary public interchange. The fate of efforts to right the course of American deliberative democracy will depend largely on choices made by those who have power to influence prospects for citizen comprehension and engagement in argumentation over salient issues of public interest. Given the gravity of these concerns, teachers and students of argumentation should feel unique pressures, since argumentation pedagogy has long been counted on to empower students as exemplary participants in democratic public spheres of discussion.

In stark contrast to the restrictive pedagogical spaces often generated in traditional, passive learning environments (as well as hyper-agonistic policy debate formats), active student participation in simulated public arguments can provide opportunities for students to develop strong senses of themselves as powerful agents of social transformation. This transformative awareness on the part of students is not likely to result from top-down didactic proclamations by teachers or combative verbal assaults from debating peers. Instead, the most powerful forms of personal agency discovered by students are likely to be those that are found of their own accords, invented in

supportive and reassuring learning environments. "It is through the native language that students 'name their world' and begin to establish a dialectical relationship with the dominant class in the process of transforming the social and political structures that imprison them in their 'culture of silence'" (Freire and Macedo 1987, p. 159; see al so Freiere 1998, 1995; Grossberg).

The experience of role-play simulation provides occasions for students to imagine alternative worlds where everyday characters populate spheres of discussion and receive recognition as important sources of knowledge in public arguments. In this way, role-play exercises free students to conceive of alternative modes of deliberation that receive only limited practical expression in the current general climate of political apathy. In a progressive "pedagogy of hope" (see Freire 1994), the first step toward changing unjust, exploitive or dangerous conditions in the world is to imagine alternative worlds worth seeking. "[H]ope is constituted in the need to imagine an alternative human world and to imagine it in a way that enables one to act in the present as if this alternative had already begun to emerge" (Simon 1992, p. 4).

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