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'FINDING ONE'S WAY' THROUGH A RADICAL CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

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<mailto:%20garcia@unt.edu%20?subject=ATR> inquiry

Abstract: Drawing on McLaren's notion of radical critical pedagogy, I begin this essay by examining the reflections of Wayne—a 21-year-old, African American university student. His reflections, as those arose in autobiographical essays, not only illuminated a particular stance towards teaching and curriculum, but also directed attention to what he was teaching. By naming his environment 'racist,' he reveals the uneasy meaning associated with connecting the term 'racialized' to public space—a juncture related to continuous efforts by critical education theorists to address students' stage essence and negotiate difference in their efforts to gain full recognition for who, what, and how they want to be considered. Reading Wayne's essays through the lens of a radical critical pedagogy brings into focus the importance of teaching that education can be a process of repositioning—that is, for moving to dislocate boundaries, negotiate meaning, and enable change and transformation. Taking seriously Wayne's attempts to understand his own teaching and use of theatre in the classroom, I end by reflecting on how I might want to create a critical classroom attentive to the interrogation of 'identity' and its intimate relationship with 'culture' and 'community.'

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Article

Wayne¹ is a 21-year-old, African American male born in Dallas, Texas, and raised as the eldest of three children. His entrance into the university classroom is difficult to ignore as he stands well over six feet tall. The pre-service teachers and I move to the center of the classroom in preparation for sharing what they had written in their autobiographical essays. After listening to several responses, Wayne discloses that many hours of his childhood were spent playing 'teacher.' He also articulates a belief in education as 'the path to future success' and an unwavering determination to make something of the life chances he has been given. However, his daily reality challenges these feelings of opportunity and brings him face to face with the harsh fact, as he states, that 'the [theatre] department is a racist environment.' Another student refers to Wayne's comment as 'an extreme view,' and this unleashes a torrent of passionate responses.

For some time now, I have been puzzled by the dynamics associated with working through concepts, such as 'racism,' 'belonging,' and 'difference,' and a better understanding as how these might be related to the concept of identity. The 'extreme view' incident that involved Wayne did not last more than a few minutes, yet embodied an important question: What does it mean to assume the identity of teacher when it may involve encountering instructional practices that reproduce social relations a pre-service teacher is trying to critique? It has always been a challenge to negotiate the emotional distances between myself and those who have been touched by what Zand Abrams refer to as 'the dark side of human nature' that takes the forms of hatred, fear, anger, prejudice, and discrimination. The presence of homophobia, sexism, and racism within and beyond my classroom has increased my yearning for collaboration and coalition. In this post-civil rights era of U.S. education, questions surrounding identity seem to require moving beyond models based on separatist stances (Joseph 596) to new ones based on relationality and interconnectedness (Munoz 75).

I begin this essay by examining the reflections of Wayne, a pre-service teacher about to graduate with a major in theatre performance from State University (SU)—a large, state-supported research institution located in the

southwestern portion of the U.S. His reflections, as those arose in autobiographical essays, not only illuminate particular stances towards teaching and curriculum, but also directed attention to who was teaching. Henry L. Gates, Jr., writes of his own experience as an African American student university student in 1969: 'True, the [curricular] unit on Blackness wasn't going to be on the final [exam]; but you still were responsible for it, resp in a big way. Were we going to sell out or keep the faith? Were we being trained to be race men,' like Thurgood Marshall, or soul-less, colorless opportunists' (xii-xiii)? With Wayne, negotiating an identity, something like what Gates described, seemed to be happening, and in theorizing what that might have been, I draw on critical pedagogy theory. More specifically, my first objective is to call attention to the ideological positions he engages while discussing his anxieties about and desires for participating in theatre and the teaching profession. The focus for the question, 'On what grounds does a student like Wayne want membership' to be extended?' The second objective of this inquiry is to reflect upon the pedagogic implications of sustaining a critical classroom within and to confront what Britzman refers to as 'difficult knowledge,' the personal material that experimentation with new expression can produce, both directly and indirectly (117).

I recognize that analyzing one student's attempts at forging a narrative identity in order to transform teaching has its limitations. First, my own teaching experiences and interactions with pre-service teachers generate both questions and responses. Though Wayne's responses are rooted in the context of his particular historical moment at SU, the information for this inquiry is nevertheless based on his responses to course assignments that require writing of autobiographical essays. Admittedly, in this instance it is difficult to escape the possibility of creating what McLaren and Tadeu da Silva call a 'coercive text' that restricts the way students make sense of their experiences (61). Second, because I provide summaries of his essays and, thus, mediate his texts, there is a risk that I speak rather than with Wayne. However, I believe the greater risk is the one of replicating silences around counter-narratives from students like Wayne. Though I write in the spirit of fully acknowledging Wayne's way of knowing and naming his world, I do not intend to romanticize his experience, offer it as 'representative' of the African American community, or privilege it over others that may exist within the social terrain. My hope is that this inquiry will illuminate the various challenges we as practicing practitioners still face in our efforts to remain responsive in the multiple contexts in which we find ourselves.

Entering the Debate: Acculturation and a Radical Critical Pedagogy

According to Feagin and colleagues, the tendency of faculty and students to valorize the university setting as singularly open and tolerant place . . . without serious prejudices, barriers, and impediments' (84), along with glorifying a progressive discourse around issues of social mobility, democracy, and equal opportunity, only serve to highlight a persistent emphasis on 'a one-way acculturation' of African American students (20). Education as acculturation (a process of adopting the social traits and patterns of another group) attempts to eliminate student conflicting feelings towards academic culture by weakening their commitment to their primary culture and offering to improve their lives (Lu 890, 908). It treats their sense of fear, contradiction, ambiguity, conflict, and struggle as barriers and anachronistic to their academic success. Yet even while claiming to embrace the achievement of some African American students may weigh the value of an academic program based on its capacity to provide support for the development of the 'whole black person' who wants to function with moral vision and personal sacrifice for the good of the African American community (Gates xii-xiii). It is in the context of current debates over variable emphases teachers and students place on acculturation that I place the terms and questions with which Wayne grapples in his responses.

As I am interested in gaining a complex understanding of acculturation and its impact on African American student academic choices, I find critical pedagogy particularly pertinent because, as McLaren states, it centers the question of identity and representation firmly within matrices of social and material circumstances (163). I use 'identity' to account for 'the sense of self that emerges from the interaction between the individual and social experience' (Rhoads 12). In skeletal form and pitched to address issues of identity, McLaren's description of critical pedagogy goes something like this:

Premise #1: A critical pedagogy encourages teachers and students to continually think about the various beliefs, values, and assumptions they use to make sense of the world in and outside the classroom (226). Understanding 'difference' involves coming to terms with how they and their social relations are shaped through various social formations such as race, class, gender, and sexuality.

Premise #2: A critical pedagogy asks teachers and students to examine how various groups are provisionally situated within U.S. society and question why some social locations are legitimated and celebrated over others.

Premise #3: Understanding how one's social position (individual and collective identity) is constructed and exercised in both political and pedagogical. Emancipatory practices can be viewed as a form of criticism that challenges normalizing practices, assumptions, and representations, and seeks to intervene in the uneven distribution of privilege, and social goods.

The significant point in McLaren's vision of radical critical pedagogy is that achieving the goals of self- and social

transformation cannot be pursued by those who believe a classless, egalitarian social order already exists. If subject has agency in that he or she recognizes being positioned by relations of power and is resistant to the positioning.

Following Hoffman, I argue that the theme of resistance in much of the critical education literature is inadequately theorized and, thus, presented as somehow inevitable and with universalizing and idealizing tendencies. But Hoffman points out, 'To think about and question our own assumptions about what kind of selves we are, what is to be admitted into the realm of self,' necessarily leads to reflections on how difference, conflict, and identity take form . . . [thus] offering a better appreciation of the levels of culture that affect the definitions, experience and perhaps outcomes of resistance' (684). Uniquely, Sandoval whose framework allows for multiple ways of resisting to oppression undermine the domination/resistance binary and contest tendencies to whitewash internal contradictions by expanding constructions of resistant identities. By 'resistance,' I refer to 'the popularized Foucauldian sense where resistance signifies a way of refusing the normalizing power of the status quo' (Ellie Sandoval, focusing on the theoretical work by U.S. feminists of color, describes 'an oppositional consciousness or 'tactical subjectivity' that not only accounts for the fluidity of identity categories themselves, but also for the dynamic and spatial movement between and among them. The five modes of oppositional consciousness she identifies are 'equal rights,' 'revolutionary,' 'supremacist,' 'separatist,' and 'differential.' The question of opposition, then, becomes a question of oppositions in the plural--namely, oppositional ideological stances deployed at any particular moment by positioned subjects and 'with the capacity to recenter depending upon the kinds of oppression to be confronted' (Sandoval 14 -15).

Critical Witnessing: A Way of Reading

I approach this inquiry from my vantage point as observer, participant, and instructor in 'Creative Drama,' a course I teach within the undergraduate theatre program at SU and required for pre service teachers prior to their entry into public schools for field experiences.² In the creative drama classroom--as in any classroom--is a rich mixture of personalities, beliefs, purposes, lifestyles, and ages that resonate against each other. Because the nature of discussions and the values implied by those discussions are interactive, the untangling of elements that create potential for tension seemed to require oversimplification, at least at this point. Therefore, the pertinent information for this inquiry comes from Wayne's autobiographical essays written for 'Creative Drama.' I focused on Wayne because he had expressed an interest in implementing a multicultural approach to his theatre teaching and his essays, taken together, offered a portrait of a pre-service teacher who, despite perceived obstacles, was earnestly committed to a process of inquiry that involved thinking through 'difference.' Admittedly, I initially perceived Wayne as asserting himself solely as African American. Through specifically addressing women's subjectivity Davies explains that the assigning of a given social category (e.g., African American) refers to 'the experience of being discursively, interactively, and structurally positioned as such' (54). While the practice of categorizing oneself (in this instance, the researcher) in relation to others in particular ways, Davies advocates that effort is spent on 'bursting open' the absoluteness of experience,' namely searching for ways to disrupt binaries such as male/female, straight/gay, or Black/White (66-67). As I read his textual staging of autobiography, I attempted to engage in what Hesford refers to as 'critical witnessing' that claims no neutrality, but instead aims to sustain autobiography's political efficacy by acknowledging acts of self-disclosure as interventionist practices (138-140). A specific purpose in reviewing his essays is not about revealing his 'real' self but rather calling attention to relevant fragments that revealed how an African American student like Wayne argues about identity, culture, and community.

To portray how he grappled with making his world at SU sensible and reliable, I first found a short phrase act written by him ('I am the other') that encapsulated his response and then formulated a summary of the entire play. Throughout each of the summaries I weaved in his own words as a way to prevent his story--his ideas and beliefs--from being completely drowned out by my efforts to condense. Originally Wayne wrote separate four essays, each of the questions I designed were extremely similar and, hence, generated responses that I believed could be condensed into one summary. I labeled his approach to making sense of his efforts as 'finding one's own way' and this framing device 'finding one's own way' depicted the uncertain status and risks I believed he was taking. It also honored his sense of control in the educational environment and attempts to define the circumstances. Reflecting on how his issues of identity were strategically claimed raised questions about how I can participate in my 'finding my own way,' that is, in my own oppositional efforts to connect the idea of 'becoming' a teacher to wider political and social contexts within which it may occur. This inquiry is by no means a complete account of Wayne's personal practical knowledge about teaching or even of our overall collaboration in past theatrical productions and ongoing drama sessions for children.

Reading Wayne's Opposition: A Beginning

Question #1: What has been your 'experience' in school or in theatre? How has your ethnic identity (or gender or sexual orientation, religion) ever been a factor in your school/theatre work? Response: 'I am the Other'

For Wayne one need not look too far to discover that, as he writes, 'I am the Other.' Numerically he knows he

'Other' because he is one of only eight African American theatre majors (out of a total of 150) within the theatre department. But, he also constructs his competence in theatre as 'Other' from his theatre peers and admits employing this construction to further distinguish himself from the 'typical' artist within SU's theatre department. Although he values 'getting along with everyone,' he describes two important forms of cultural otherness that separate him from his peers within the department.

One form of cultural otherness is between his pride in being African American and his view of what is emphasized in SU's theatre program. Being African American within the theatre program resides in the color of his skin, the language he speaks, the dialect he speaks it, how he dresses, and even the food he talks about eating at Sweet George Brown, his favorite restaurant. His participation as a cast member in a production of *Fences* holds special significance in that it represents a time when his African American heritage occupied a prominent place in the department's activities. Articulating a desire for additional experiences with African American literature, he relates:

I loved these characters. It was personal. I knew these characters, and they were singing to me. These characters were my family members. The laughter was not just at Bono [a character in the play] but at my uncles and the people I knew, people who had died and I missed. It wasn't about me; it was all about us [African Americans]. I craved more but received little satisfaction.

On the other hand, the theatre curriculum presented throughout the program tends to emphasize a 'Euro-American' focus on theatre history and dramatic literature with little reference to the cultural views, history, and contributions of African Americans. Even the pride he takes in his ability to facilitate discussions with high energy and through provoking questions does not have the same 'respect' in the university classroom as being proud of 'being an actor' or 'having an agent.' Instead, his 'talent' in facilitation seems to be viewed as 'a teaching thing.' The fact that his talent is framed as teaching further emphasizes his impression that the role of 'African American,' like the role of 'teacher,' is considered an 'Other.'

The second form of cultural otherness directs attention to the type of theatre Wayne finds satisfying. With a Eurocentric emphasis comes, as Wayne points out, 'preferred ways of speaking, behaving, and doing theatre rather than worrying about 'leading roles' and 'becoming a star,' he is involved in theatre as a way of 'trying to understand various peoples and their particular struggles . . . [and] representing people in an honest and true way.' He believes that theatre, when combined with a focus on cross-cultural understanding, can communicate complex ideas and intense feelings, and from Wayne's perspective, its value lies in its capacity to illuminate profound truths. He writes:

As an artist, I find myself focused on doing theatre that is meaningful. This new focus is now the center of my experience. This is my way of giving back to my community and making sure that our voices are heard. Theatre is something that reaches people and gives them something to identify with. The most powerful part of theatre is the message and the passion.

As a theatre teacher Wayne wants to promote 'face-to-face interaction, multiple interpretations, and effective communication.' Theatre, then, is 'an information gateway,' a learning strategy through which students directly grapple with various ideas. Elaborating this orientation to theatre, Wayne states:

Being in theatre is so much more than a way to get praise. Instead, you're saying something. You have a point, is such an important part of being an artist. To me being an artist means presenting something that people will understand, teaching people something, and sharing what I've learned.

Question #2: What do you seek to accomplish in your teaching? As an artist? Response: 'I am a militant'

Wayne discloses being initially unprepared to deal with the resistance to course content on or by African Americans. This resistance, he states, 'only goes to show how power can lie in the hands of one group to select voices that are given validation in ways that others are not.' Instead of succumbing to demands to maintain the status quo, he proclaims, 'I am a militant.' Wayne describes the concept of 'I am a militant' as a game of contestation in which 'power confronts power.' Assuming the stance of militant, he explains, provides the grounds for personal and professional achievement in a significant way.

First and foremost, Wayne wants to use his self-proclaimed sense of self as a 'militant' to make his cultural presence felt within an educational setting. Because he believes the overall view of African Americans in the U.S. is one of 'poverty and welfare,' he wants everyone to know him as 'a person of high moral purpose' and 'someone who does not want to accept the lower position.' Making his cultural presence felt may also mean that he reveal the ways both teachers and students might be complicitous in the perpetuation of limiting views of African Americans. He has already pointed out on many occasions that not all African Americans are 'sports enthusiasts'; that many African Americans like himself, even attend college 'on an academic scholarship;' and, rather than aspiring to join the ranks of professional basketball, their goals, like his, may involve 'becoming a successful teacher and artist.' On a personal level, he hopes that his militancy will draw attention to how the term 'African American' can also encompass a

importance he gives to other elements of self, such as 'being gay, extremely religious, and of working class background.' In brief, he advocates taking action by rejecting any classification that involves sharp lines of demarcation and clear boundaries for 'being Black.' Unfortunately, the limiting views sometimes originate with own ethnic group, as he elaborates: It's even in my own culture. We [as African Americans] have our own stereotypical ideas about what we are supposed to be. Why if you're not listening to a certain thing or if you do a certain way, then you must not be a real Black person. We want to have diversity within the U.S., yet we are willing to have diversity within ourselves.

The sense of peace and comfort he strives to obtain can only come from what he calls 'knowing oneself':

You have to know who you are. If you are not confident about yourself inside, if you don't know what your purpose is, if you do not see what you really have something important to say, if knowing who you are depends on what people think you are, if thinking who you are depends on how many people are at a performance, or if you get thinking about where your show is, then you're as good as lost. You must really believe in who you are and what you have to say.

Question #3: What is the purpose of education? What is a personal teaching metaphor(s) that captures who you think you are as a teacher? Response: 'I am a coach'

Wayne's priority as a teacher is to create 'an appropriate learning environment' that provides occasions for 'interaction and growth.' Though he admits that creating an appropriate learning environment is an ideal, an abstraction that is not specific to a particular classroom, he makes a promise to use the ideal as a standard against which he will measure himself and toward which he will strive.

According to Wayne, the central task in providing the appropriate learning environment is making students feel they are part of 'the team.' Because children may get lost in the struggle to cope with the realities and pressures of life, team-building is synonymous with good teaching. Casting himself as 'the coach,' he has to remind himself constantly to think in terms of 'participation' and 'involvement,' not in terms of 'control.' Yet, team-building is predicated on 'taking action [and] . . . pulling together just the right conditions for academic success.' Such conditions include: 'laying down the rules of the game,' 'making sure that students are on a fair playing field,' 'putting you [as teacher] out there,' 'trying things that may seem very awkward,' and 'going with the flow.' Within the team-building process he must find multiple ways to understand who his students are and where they are developmentally. In his notes, 'Often, that's where we [as teachers] miss the boat.' He adds, 'If disagreements occur, one must be willing to talk things through, be flexible, and compromise, if necessary.' The aim is not to create 'look-alikes' but perhaps through a continuous exchange of ideas he as 'coach' can develop a cohesive group who work together to create meaning and skill. Placing students in small groups and setting aside class time for open discussion are for Wayne viable means of encouraging growth and learning, and making students feel valued and respected for who and what they bring to the discussion.

Finding One's Own Way: Recognition Through the Staging of Essences and Differences

By naming his environment 'racist' and, by extension, contesting the possibility of acculturation, Wayne reveals an uneasy meaning associated with connecting the term 'racialized' to public space. As I look across his essays 'The Other,' 'I am a militant,' and 'I am a coach'--a key theme in his oppositional activity, that I have termed 'finding one's own way,' is the notion of recognition. Feagin and colleagues define recognition as 'the feelings, intentions, and actions of a self [that] are rendered meaningful in the looking glass' provided by other selves' (15). In Wayne's work, a focus on recognition seems to revolve around two critical points. So, at this juncture, I want to step back from not dismissing the specific issue of racism and examine the essences and interlacing differences Wayne appears to strategically claim in his effort to be recognized. Significantly, this focus cycles back to the first objective of the inquiry to investigate on what grounds does a student like Wayne seek 'membership' (my word) in a profession of theatre or teaching.

The first critical point relates to the issue of visibility that contests the experience of not being seen (Feagin 1993). Clearly, being in the world as an African American is an essential part of Wayne's subjectivity, and it may be essentially different from the theatre faculty and peers who do not share the same cultural alignments. This sense of 'African American' essence also exhibits an assurance 'to represent mimetically the observable [Black] body' (Wiegman 9). Hall describes this claim to inherent difference as an investment in a political identity that requires the need to make conscious commitments . . . around which political lines have been drawn.' Hall further explains: 'You need all the folks together, under one hat, carrying one banner, saying we are this, for the purpose of this fight, we are all the same, just black and just here' (qtd. Grossberg 380). Similarly, Wayne's claim to inherent difference based on the category of 'race' is a positive source of identification that may begin with visible phenotypical characteristics, but also moves to endorsing a shared history and collective struggle with other African Americans against racist and coercive relations of power. From Wayne's perspective, the general lack of visible African Americans' presence and their achievements within the theatre department hints at the peripheral sta-

granted to the home culture with which he and other African Americans grow up.

However, rather than endure a context that limits his abilities to name his own experiences, he seeks to exist with authority and expertise. From this perspective, his staging of essence closely resembles Sandoval's 'equal right stance in which 'subscribers . . . will demand that their own humanity be legitimated, recognized as the same as the most favored form of the human in power' (12). For example, in 'I'm the other' Wayne advocates recuperating cultural experiences and theatre traditions of African Americans that have been erased through omission from the curriculum offered within SU's theatre program. In 'I am a militant' and 'I am the other,' he writes against the institutional grain by asserting subject positions through which he attempts to displace stereotypical representations and exclusionary practices. In contrast to Karamcheti, I do not view Wayne's adherence to immutable racial difference as politically conservative because it is 'safely contained within the recognizable [but limiting] role of the grass-roots peasant, living oppression' (143). Instead, I concur with Kondo that such essentialist identification carries the possibility to 'subvert precisely in its versimilitude, in its authentic' representation of a reality' of marginalized peoples in ways not captured in dominant cultural representations' (109). But, visibility is only part of the challenge recognizing his cultural presence and, thus, achieving institutional equality.

The second critical point relates to an assumption once visible he wants to be visible in a certain, albeit complex manner. This particular aspect of recognition stands in direct response to the notion of hierarchized identities that allows one category at a time to be addressed as mutually exclusive concepts (hooks, *Feminist Theory* 29). In addition, it draws attention to the idea that a single identity category, such as 'African American' or 'gay,' in and of itself may not adequately sketch the contours of his identity. But, negotiating expansive zones of cultural difference more than engaging in a process by which 'severed or separated pieces merely come together' (Anzaldúa 79) Wayne, imagining new worlds of possibility as a future African American teacher and artist goes hand-in-hand with search for allies with whom to engage in meaningful interaction and understanding. At the very location where personal difference converges with curricular issues, his 'finding one's own way' takes on a special significance as a continuous effort to negotiate relationships of mutual respect, trust, caring, and support. Anzaldúa makes a strong point in that nothing short of a 'continual creative motion' will work in the fracturing of received identity configurations (80). In this light, his emphasis on an interplay of difference parallels closely the oppositional ideological stance Sandoval labels 'revolutionary' in which individuals 'claim their differences from those in power and call for a social transformation that will accommodate and legitimate those differences' (12). For Wayne a place for social transformation can occur in what he calls an 'appropriate learning environment' that is attentive to students' histories, experiences, commitments, and concerns.

Despite obvious distinctions, a similar desire for recognition, that is, for valid representations and positive images appears to link the two critical points of staging essences and negotiating differences. This corroborates with hooks' suggestion that there are moments and locations in which subjects assume an essentialist position and at the same time are in support of those practices that grasp the specificity of one's selfhood (qtd. in Chabram and Fregoso). Put in another way, Wayne appears caught up in what Minh-ha terms 'an impossible, truthful story of living in-between regimes of truth' (322). His engagement in oppositional activity does not so much expose the truth as it challenges an educational institution's partiality to acculturation as it creates a space in which he can speak a little more truth. Under this condition, living in the 'in-between' can be a positive place, or as bell hooks points out, an 'occasional radical openness and possibility' (Yearning 153). Connection and renewal through theatre are both necessary and possible-- first in himself and then, by extension, in the educational community at large. The alternative is clearly to separate his doing and use of theatre in the classroom from its promise of connection and renewal may mean that it loses relevance as a valid source of knowledge for him as a prospective teacher and as an African American concerned about equity and cultural dislocation.

Speaking the Unspeakable Within a Critical Classroom

Without a doubt, there is a real danger of misdiagnosing emancipatory practices as simply advocating sameness or accommodation (Hoffman 674)--especially when the identity-work of African American, pre-service teachers is part and parcel of their institution's body of professional knowledge (see Perez), or when the myths of acculturation, color-blindness, and meritocracy are the only truths that give meaning and integrity to their stories (see Rios). Many descriptions of theatre in the classroom suggest open and comfortable places where students experiment with new forms of expression, what Wayne reveals about the unspoken topic of recognition raises pertinent questions with respect to making the classroom a place where all students can engage such markers as race, class, and gender. 'Reading' Wayne's essays through the lens of radical critical pedagogy brings into full view the importance of teaching that education can be a process of repositioning--not for the sake of moving to a better place, but rather for moving to unpack difference, negotiate meaning, dislocate boundaries, and widen the circle to include diverse voices (Kumashiro 'Toward a Theory' 46). From Wayne's perspective an important criterion for 'membership' seems to revolve around the unspoken topic of recognition. Its exclusion, I argue, may have produced the impression of racism. If we as critical educators take seriously the multiple and contested identities of students like Wayne, their demand for recognition, then we must turn to the second objective of this inquiry and consider seriously

might act within a critical classroom to challenge harmful reading practices and, in the process, disrupt the norm of how things are (Kumashiro, 'Supplementing Normalcy' 506).

The invitation to examine our actions inside and outside the classroom poses both challenges and opportunities. If teaching practices are connected to teacher identity, then it matters that we who work with pre-service teachers acknowledge who they are--their particular knowledge, values, styles of action, and ways of being--especially as Perez discusses, 'proceeding . . . from communities that historically have been and continue to be multiply oppressed and disempowered' (269). The language of critical pedagogy provides a vocabulary through which to discuss about certain circumstances as involving power but not always consent, while the metaphor of repositioning asks us to expect a certain amount of change and struggle. Our teaching goals by conscious design must include giving students the chance to speak what may have been heretofore unspeakable. No simple formula can make us comfortable with the concerns and emotions that speaking the unspeakable may induce, yet our reactions, our choices, and validation remain crucial. In these moments of speaking, we have the unique opportunity to make cultural repositionings less difficult for students. We might choose to address directly through a mid-semester review of student's teaching progress and the anxieties it may arouse. Or, we might choose to move indirectly, encouraging students to read and write about troubling issues, such as the prevailing institutional silences surrounding the treatment of gay and lesbian youth or the physical and psychological violence children experience. Or, we might require students to structure literature-based drama sessions that explore 'text-to-life' and 'life-to-text' connections (Cochran-Smith). Or, we might simply choose to ask students to recognize for themselves that experiencing moments of failure, loss, rupture, and ridicule are inevitable and that more is going on at those moments than they can know, control, or respond to appropriately (Pignatelli 412). I am convinced that interrogating various approaches to theatre education with concerned practitioners such as Wayne can create if not an ideal classroom world, the least a responsive one in which to attempt a synthesis of identity, experience, beliefs, and dreams. Perhaps the success of our praxis/practice can be measured best by the pre-service teacher's belief that theatre education is about things that really matter in his or her life.

Notes

1 The names of students and schools are pseudonyms.

2 At the time of this inquiry, Wayne was enrolled in 'Creative Drama.' According to Knowles and Holt-Reynolds, 'the practice of autobiographical writing is 'rooted in the process of coming to terms with oneself.' In the writing of autobiographical essays I ask students to sort out the puzzles of their experiences by selectively choosing what particulars to make vivid. In addition to the writing of autobiographical essays, students like Wayne enrolled in the course engage in a wide range of in-class activities such as trust-building exercises, theatre games, integrate projects, the crafting of drama structures, and participation in discussion groups modeled on Freire's 'culture circles' (Lankshear 111). Beyond instruction in the classroom application of creative drama, the course was framed by two additional goals. First, I wanted students to explore the use of theatre in the classroom within a framework that would gain an understanding of themselves as teachers and artists. Finally, I wanted them to link this understanding to the development of culturally responsive approaches to teaching about and through theatre.

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