

# PTO

A global forum designed to promote critical thinking and social justice

## Pedagogy and Theater of the Oppressed

### Newsletter Fall 2005

**PTO To Host its 12th Annual International Conference**

**Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA**

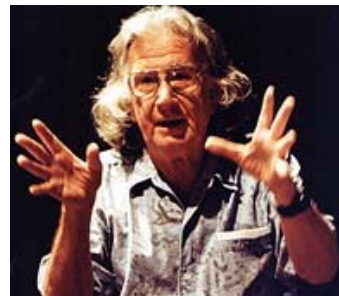
**May 18-21, 2006**

**Deadline for submitting proposals has been extended until January 23!**

This year the theme of the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual International Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed Conference is "Engaging Community: Creating Critical Praxis." This theme reflects the priorities expressed by the members of PTO at last year's conference: local and global community action and involvement combined with critical reflection and analysis of society, education, politics, and our own roles and effectiveness as we work for change. The theme challenges us all to reflect on our epistemologies as well as our pedagogies and consider how they might impact our local and global communities. All are invited to submit proposals to present at the conference, and/or to attend workshops and conference sessions. You can submit your proposal and/or register for workshops with Augusto Boal and Michael Rohds at the PTO website [www.ptoweb.org](http://www.ptoweb.org). The Board of PTO is

reaching out to a variety of practitioners, activists, and educators in North Carolina, the US, and around the world. We hope this conference will bring together people from a variety of communities and, as always, will be exciting and provocative.

This year Janet Mittman will be hosting the conference at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Janet and Ellie Friedland—our president—are co-chairs for the conference committed to make this one a meaningful, accessible and inspiring experience for all attendees. UNC-Chapel Hill as a site offers inexpensive rooming at the University, as well as a surrounding community that is diverse, and rich in activist work. We are looking forward to the participation of local community organizations, students, educators, and theatre artists at the Conference.



This year we will offer pre-conference workshops led by Augusto Boal from May 15-18 and a post-conference workshop by Michael Rohd from May 21-22. Our featured guest list for the conference is just as impressive: Dr. Lilia Bartolomé and Dr. Geneva Gay are highly respected scholars in the area of critical pedagogy and multicultural education respectively. Linda Parris-Bailey is the Executive/Artistic Director for the Carpetbag Theater, Inc., of Knoxville Tennessee. For 35 years Carpetbad Theatre has produced theatre that features stories of marginalized communities and people. Last but not least, the conference will have the honor of hosting Sojourn Theater, a multi-ethnic, multilingual ensemble-based theater company from Portland, OR. Their work is a perfect fit

for this year's theme as it brings together urban, suburban and rural communities through dialogue. Please join us this May in Chapel Hill.

### **Submitting Proposals, Conference Information and Registration**

You can register for the conference and for all workshops at the PTO website [www.ptoweb.org](http://www.ptoweb.org).

**You will also find guidelines for proposals at the website, and you can submit your proposal online. The deadline for proposal submissions has been extended to January 23, 2006. We prefer that you send your submissions on-line, however, if you must mail them please send them to Dr. Janet Mittman, University of North Carolina, School of Education, Peabody Hall, CB #35900, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3500.**

### **Latinos and our Challenge in Chapel Hill**

#### **Maria Estrada**

*Maria Estrada is finishing her dissertation at the University of Utah. She is also a community worker within the Latino community and works as a volunteer on-air radio host for the midday public affairs show with KRCL, the community radio of Salt Lake City.*

The area around Chapel Hill has been dubbed the "Southern Part of Heaven" partly because people still consider it small town living even though the area has all the advantages of a cosmopolitan environment. The population of the area is indeed worldly. What was a black-white duopoly is now *The Destination* for new Latino/Latina immigrants, a trend that started with the economic boom of the 90s. Poor and hard working Latinos/Latinas arrived to fill the huge demands for unskilled labor in the construction, meat processing and hospitality industries. My fear is that they will be—as in

many other places in the U.S.—the force that drives the economic prosperity of the area at the expense of their own advancement. My hope is that this environment—full of opportunities—will embrace and support these new immigrants. Latinos/Latinas, like many of the other southerners who arrived in the area earlier, embody strong family and religious values; Sunday mass can already be heard en Español; ESL is a feature of the public schools; there is a state-wide advocacy group called El Pueblo; there are superb colleges to attend and a high-tech boom in research park. Because our PTO conference has stated that one of its goals is to bring together different communities, I challenge all of those who will gather in Chapel Hill to ask pressing questions around what the strong Latino/Latina presence in the area will mean for the whole community. We can also think through ways in which the communities in the area, as well as other parts of the country, can work together through creative engagement and praxis to ensure that Latinos and Latinas have access to good quality education, living wages and the recognition they deserve.

## Hip Hop: A Window to Revolution

### Kevin Carberry

*Kevin Carberry just graduated from Prescott College in Arizona. He has been doing his student teaching in the area where he has also taught at the Free Skool—a community owned and organized school.*

In the New York of the 1970s, Hip Hop burst forth as a beacon of subversive culture. It came from working class groups with scarce resources looking to create new cultural meanings and to develop a voice reflective of their struggle. Hip Hop was the answer. It required easily accessible resources: breath, movement, soul, and spray cans. Yet, the form was a powder keg of revolutionary potential. Fast-forward thirty years. Today in New York, consumerism and Hip Hop go hand in hand. The once revolutionary impetus is now a multi-billion dollar industry marred by materialism, misogyny, homophobia, and glorified violence. And still, youth swoon for Hip Hop; from the shoes they are sporting to the songs they are singing, Hip Hop is prevalent and present even in classrooms. Yet, I think this generation of youth is growing around a Hip Hop devoid of dissent and subversion.

In an effort to put “the movement” back into Hip Hop I designed and implemented a Freirian inspired curriculum I called “Hip Hop as a Window to Revolution.” The course

brings together youth and youth educators to develop a critical consciousness of Hip Hop and its potential as an educational tool and subversive praxis. We use the four elements of Hip Hop: emceeing (rapping), DJing, break-dancing and graffiti-codifications of Hip Hop culture. We listen to a song and decode it, analyzing the contradictions of poverty and its paradoxes: poverty and materialism, family and misogyny, etc. In another class, students have “tagged” their name and put it up in the room using this as a springboard to discuss the potential for eliciting feelings of ownership, voice, and a chance to reclaim space.

Throughout the course we place Hip Hop in its socio-historical context. If someone points out, for example, that a lot of emcees rap about police harassment or being imprisoned, we examine these experiences as larger societal problems. Themes like liberation and oppression as well as privilege and poverty sometimes take the fore and become lenses through which we examine, for example, the prison-industrial complex, racial profiling, drugs, consumerism, and police brutality, together with an examination of the art form. Sometimes our dialogue moves quickly from limit situations to untested

feasibility. The students want to know why Hip Hoppers want equity, respect, economic opportunity, and a voice. From here we explore the potential within Hip Hop as an organizing tool. We look at the work of organizations like the Hip Hop Action Network to understand how Hip Hop might be an agent for change; or the efforts of the Freechild Project to sponsor and lead youth through action for change; at the same time we brainstorm for ways in which Hip Hop can be used in our own community organizing.

From the course, students walked away hungry to find and create “conscious” Hip Hop and to educate others about how to view Hip Hop critically. Also, they found that material which is personally relevant can be profound fodder for empowerment and intellectual growth. When people have control of their education, when they construct meaning from threads woven from their lives, and when they can look without and within for answers, they begin to develop control of their lives.

### **Drama as Action: From Praxis to Education**

#### **Jase Teoh**

*Jase Teoh is an Ed.D Candidate in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Illinois State University. Prior to being a doctoral student Jase was involved with Action Theater of Southeast MN for two years. The group is a non-for-profit created to promote social justice issues in the area.*

The introduction to Wessel’s (1991) book entitled *Drama* begins by quoting an old Chinese proverb: “I hear and I forget, I listen and I remember, I do and I understand” (p.237). In these few lines lies a succinct truth: that action, the act of doing, is the key to genuine understanding. Indeed, drama is action. It is this direct, hands-on experience which imbues rich meaning to learning. Acting is one means of facilitating learning, for through acting, a student is required to feel and think and do as his or her given role dictates. Theater of the Oppressed (TO) with its strong affective component can help students talk about and reflect upon their prejudices in ways that other classroom practices cannot. By allowing participants to step into the shoes of another, TO can compel students to challenge their assumptions and learn that our thinking around social issues is politically constructed. Thus TO is an effective, efficient means to help students achieve a deeper level of insight (Boal, 1974, 1985).

In addition, Piaget (1967) emphasizes that new knowledge must be linked to what students already know in order for it to be useful. A dramatic mode bridges the gap between what people already know and what they are learning. Dixon (1975) explains, “Drama means doing, acting things out rather than working on them in abstract

and in private. When possible, it is the truest form of learning, for it puts knowledge and understanding to their truest test in action" (p. 43).

Over the fall of 2004, I co-taught a graduate class in education entitled "Drama and Literacy." In the class we utilized process drama techniques using pre-text in the form of a fairy tale—Rapunzel—to re-create places of intersection between the real world and the fictional. From the story students were able to connect with the characters around issues of their own interest such as adoption, freedom, and love. Subsequently, we used Forum Theater to modernize the original text and create our own stories.

I presented some of this work at the PTO conference last year emphasizing how and where Theater of the Oppressed meets Process Drama. Bringing these methods of teaching into conversation has helped me provide students with the opportunity to explore ideas stemming from both traditions. Throughout the duration of the class, we used poems and journal entries to provide guided, imaginative, embodied inquiry into students' insights. In return, the students were able to take what they learned from our class and apply it to their own classrooms. During our last class meeting, some students shared their reflections on the transforming power drama had for them and for their own teaching. Others shared of how drama and TO as forms of knowing peaked their own students' interests in reading and writing.

#### References

- Wessel, C. (1991). *Drama*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Boal, A. (1974, 1985). *Theater of the Oppressed*. Trans. Charles A. & Maria-Odilia Leal McBride. New York: Theater Communications Group.
- Piaget, J. (1964, 1967) *Six Psychological Studies*. Trans Anita Tenzer. New York: Random House.
- Dixon, J. (1975) *Growth through English: Set in perspectives of the seventies*. New York: Oxford University Press.

### **Utopian Concerns in Pedagogy**

#### **Daniel Cho**

*Daniel Cho is a doctoral candidate in Education at UCLA. His interests include Marxist theory and Psychoanalysis.*

At the "Memory, Curiosity, and Utopian Imagination," panel of the 2005

PTO conference in Los Angeles I presented a paper which used the following statement of Freire's as its point of departure: "No oppressive order could permit the oppressed to begin to question: Why?" (p. 86). Clearly, for Freire, curiosity is an affect with deep

political resonance and should therefore be fostered in students. Indeed, we might say, the students' curiosity serves the basis for a problem-posing educational model. The intent of my paper was, simply put, to question where we are today in relation to curiosity. What is the status of curiosity? Do we even feel it anymore? It seemed clear to me that one of the problems we face today politically is an extreme lack of curiosity—for example, questioning the connection between US foreign policy and the attacks of 9/11 was not and is not widespread, and, in fact, curiosity aimed in that direction is often condemned as "un-American."

From a Freudian psychoanalytic perspective, curiosity is not a natural human instinct; rather, it is evoked and instilled in people through the work of a traumatic event. I concluded in my paper that from a Freudian perspective what is missing today is an event to spark curiosity. In the panel's discussion, an incisive perspective was brought up that challenged my thinking on curiosity. One of the attendees provocatively posed (and I am now paraphrasing) that the problem is not so much that a curiosity producing event is missing but, much rather, that we are not able to feel the moments of our life and times as such events. Put this way, the question is not whether or not 9/11 is an authentic

event (however authenticity may be determined) but why 9/11 was not felt as an event on a wide, even, global scale?

I want to contribute this thought to that conversation: if we cannot feel today's times as a series of events, then, perhaps, the event we seek must come from the future in the form of Utopia. I take here as my point of departure Freire's reversal of Karl Jaspers's concept of the "limit-situation." Whereas, for Jaspers, every situation is limited, therefore it constrains the number of possible actions, for Freire, it is just the opposite; the limits that bound a situation indicate to us that something else is possible. something that lies outside the situation itself. The limit-situation emerges from a background of a tripartite model of time—past, present, and future.

The future, what can be possible, gives us the notion that the limit-situation is a changing present and not an enclosed temporality. The future is precisely what is possible though not yet realized presently—what Freire refers to as "untested feasibility." I suggest that Freire's concept of untested feasibility is exactly what Utopia is meant to embody. Far from fantasy or empty wishing, Utopia means to mark out a future that makes our present a limit-situation and therefore surmountable

and transformable. Utopia can also spark our curiosity to wonder what else is possible other than the status quo. Utopia, in other words, is the event that derives from the future; it is literally an untested feasibility.

Underscoring the Utopian elements in Freire, I want to suggest that we can no more ignore the concepts of the future, the beyond, and Utopia itself,

than we can ignore on-the-ground politics. As educators, we must, as Freire reminds, instill in our students a questioning spirit, which is, of course, embodied in the affect of curiosity, through the problem-posing model of education. Today, more than ever, we must allow Utopia to teach us how to question the present—it must be an essential part of our pedagogy.

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### **Message from the president of Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed**

Many thanks to Maria Estrada for compiling this newsletter, and to those who submitted their provocative articles. If you would like to see another PTO Newsletter this year, please contact me with your ideas for articles ([efriedland@rcn.com](mailto:efriedland@rcn.com)). If we receive enough submissions, we will create another newsletter later this year.

Please send in your proposals for the PTO Conference in May. The deadline has been extended until January 23, and we hope to receive more proposals that will make this conference stimulating, provocative and inspiring. We know that Boal's and Michael Rohd's workshops and the plenary speakers will do just that, so also please sign up for Workshops and register for the Conference. You can find Conference information, proposal submission, and registration for Workshops and the Conference at [www.ptoweb.org](http://www.ptoweb.org).

PTO is an organization that exists and functions because of the work of a volunteer Board and volunteer Conference Coordinators. The organization has existed for 12 years to create the Annual PTO Conference. For many of us this Conference provides us opportunities unlike all other conferences we attend. The PTO Conference is a small international gathering of social, education, health, and theatre activists, practitioners of critical and liberatory pedagogy, and those who combine these in our work in the world. For me (and I think for others) it is the only Conference I attend that is always fresh, surprising, and deeply provocative. The people who attend are activists

who live their commitments and values. We come together to share our often differing values, beliefs, and strategies and to critically examine the effects we are having in the world. We share the value of curiosity (as described so well by Daniel Cho) and critical questioning.

If you haven't attended a PTO Conference before and are deciding if it's worth it, I encourage you to come to Chapel Hill this May. It will be a time to meet others whose work is related to yours. Sometimes it will be so similar you will find new colleagues and support (maybe from another part of the world), and sometimes it will be so different from what you know and do that your thinking will be expanded and challenged. There will be theatre workshops and performances, discussions and presentations of a wide variety of ideas and practices, and lots and lots of creativity, critical thinking and conversation.

What could be more fun?

More information on our conference can be found at

[www.ptoweb.org](http://www.ptoweb.org)

See you in Chapel Hill!

