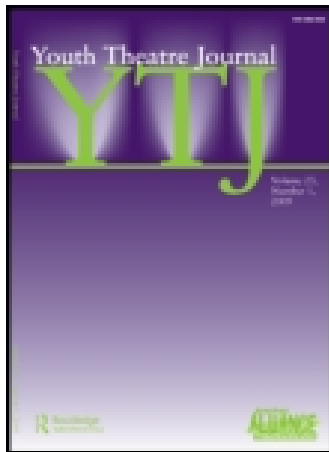


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### A Critical Performative Process: Supporting the Second-Language Literacies and Voices of Emergent Bilingual Learners

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## A Critical Performative Process: Supporting the Second-Language Literacies and Voices of Emergent Bilingual Learners

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*This article presents illustrations from a Boalian theatrical intervention in a Southeastern U.S. middle school designed to enable Latina students to enact experiential performances depicting common problems they face in their daily lives with discrimination and hostility as well as possible solutions to those challenges to their feelings of inclusion and well-being. The work relies on theories that emphasize the role of drama as personal and educational, particularly with regard to young people's growing political awareness and understanding of the agency they have in contesting bigoted conduct toward them and their immigrant communities. The authors present data from an ongoing ethnographic study of a Southeastern U.S. middle school classroom and demonstrate the students' use of various modalities—discussion, performance, art, and others—through which to mediate their growth into more socially aware and active citizens, as evidenced by their understanding of appropriate forms of resistance and their public performances for academic communities that embody their learning of new dispositions and strategies. Central to the argument is the need for teachers to learn about social conditions from their engagement with immigrant students and to develop intimate knowledge of how social institutions and practices work both for and against them. There is a consequent need for teachers to use this knowledge to inform their interpretation of academic standards concerned with taking a critical global perspective and to inform their pedagogy to include more performative opportunities through which youth may learn to depict and act on their worlds. The article concludes with suggestions for the role of theatre in youth education that dialectically informs teachers' and researchers' growth into more sensitive and nuanced educators.*

In an all-girls middle school English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classroom, six emergent bilingual (EB) girls dramatized their lived experiences, wrote family stories, researched local burning issues, and discussed their responses to them. Through their consideration of how the local police had treated them and their immigrant families harshly, unsympathetically, and unjustly, they coauthored with their teachers a dramatic script that they performed at two national academic conferences, while focusing their theme on the basic human right of due process before the law.

In this excerpt from their drama, a Mexican family is visited by two aggressive police officers:

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(Family eating dinner. Music playing.)

MAMA: ¿Alguien quiere más tamales? [Does anyone want more tamales?]

ALYSSA, CLARITA: ¡Yo! ¡Yo! ¡Yo! [I do! I do! I do!]

MAMA: Aquí tienen. [Here they are].

CLARITA: ¡¡Mamá!! Alguien está tocando la puerta. [Mama! Someone is knocking at the door.]

(Large knocking on door. Two police officers looking angry.)

ALYSSA: I will get it. Don't worry.

OFFICER 1: (large knocking) You need to open up!!

ALYSSA: (opens the door) What do you want?

OFFICER 2: Young girl, move over. We are in a hurry. I betcha have some illegal activities going on in here. Let me pass.

MAMA: We have no choice. We need to let them in.

TAMARA IN AUDIENCE: Stop! (She taps Alyssa on the shoulder and takes her place).

TAMARA: I am sorry, officers, but do you have a search warrant?

POLICE OFFICERS: (looking annoyed) Well, no, okay, but that doesn't stop us. (Goes to push by her)

TAMARA: You do not have the right to come in here without a search warrant!! (Police officers leave)

The point of this activity was not to produce professional-grade drama, but instead to reconstruct and depict a recurring social drama that had a profound impact on the students' senses of self and agency as immigrants in what they have found to be a hostile and forbidding environment. They enacted a continually experienced and feared event among their friends and families: the moment when police knocked on their door and demanded to search their home without warrant or provocation. At the end of the scene, in Lines 11 through 13, Tamara, the young girl from the audience—playing a type of role from the Boalian theatre that we will explain shortly—enacted a form of resistance that illustrated the students' growing understanding of the laws governing their rights.

We see this performance embodying a set of intersecting theoretical orientations for teachers, students, viewers, psychologists, and other educators. It draws on the “growth model” of education (Dixon 1975) in which the purpose of education is to promote human development, with drama—not so much staged productions, but dramatic work integrated in everyday classroom activities—serving an essential role. The conception of human development proffered in the 1960s and 1970s, when Dixon and his British colleagues introduced these ideas to US educators, was decidedly individualistic (see Smagorinsky 2002), consistent with the ethos of the times (Yankelovich 1998). Our adaptation of this value on education-as-development shifts the attention from the individual to the group, with a focus on how drama might concern not just individuals but people in relation to others in social, cultural, and historical contexts (Harman and McClure 2011; Smagorinsky and Coppock 1995a, 1995b).

Our critical approach in this article is not available in either the individualistic conception of Dixon (1975) or the more social perspective taken by Smagorinsky and Coppock (1995a, 1995b). In this analysis, we discuss how the students and teachers, one of them being the first author of this article, engaged in a dialogic performance process that

supported engagement in a series of authentic literacy events (Edmiston and Enciso 2003; Gutiérrez 2008). Critical engagement with drama, argue Medina and Campano (2006), “may disrupt the cycle of ‘literacy for domestication’ that narrowly circumscribes teaching and delimits the learning experiences in so many culturally diverse multilingual schools” (333; cf. Harman and McClure 2011; Weltsek and Medina 2007, 2014). In our case, the *critical performance pedagogy* (CPP) through which this drama was conceived and produced supported educators and bilingual students in transforming a fifty-minute ESOL classroom daily period into a participatory process that included storytelling, drama, research, poetry writing, and staged performances. Furthermore, in extending this dramatic interpretation to more public spheres, the students took an activist stance designed to move beyond their own personal epiphanies and realizations and toward a more civic means of engagement to promote change of the problems critiqued in their performance.

### Theoretical Framework

We first provide an overview of CPP. In the second section, we use examples from one qualitative study to illustrate key elements in the performative process and how this cycle of literacy events supports students in discussing, writing, researching, and performing texts related to civil rights issues, one of the standards in the students’ seventh-grade curriculum. In our final section, we discuss the limitations of the approach and also suggest ways that kindergarten through twelfth-grade educators could modify their literacy curricula to include some elements of the critical performance approach, even possibly in highly restrictive contexts.

#### *Arts-Based Participatory Processes*

To grapple with virulent anti-bilingual and immigration discourses and accompanying hostilities (Acosta 2013; Moser 2004)—a problem that is hardly new (Nieto 2013)—educators have turned increasingly to critical sociocultural literacy perspectives when enacting language literacy praxis with multilingual adolescents (Martínez-Roldán and Fránquiz 2009). The concept of *double bind*—an emotionally distressing communicative dilemma involving two or more conflicting messages, with one negating the other (Bateson 1972)—illustrates how language-*minoritized*<sup>1</sup> students’ everyday conflicts and challenges with inequitable social structures can lead to complex problem-solving practices that are motivated by the desire to collectively transform particular sociocultural conditions (Pacheco 2012). Canella (2008) argued that youth participatory pedagogies may compensate for the failure of educational institutions to encourage collective investment among culturally diverse students, a process that engages their rich cultural repertoires.

Second-language acquisition research emphasizes how newly arrived emergent bilinguals benefit from participatory and dynamic learning opportunities that support their evolving integration into new cultural communities of practice (Chapell and Faltis 2013; Gibbons 2006; Haneda 2008). Davis (2009) stressed the importance of engaging students in critical inquiry that challenges normative language policies and pedagogy and that positions

<sup>1</sup>We have borrowed the term “minoritized” from Irizarry (2011), who highlights how Latin@s currently are schooled in school districts more segregated than during the civil rights movement.

them as agents of their learning process in predominantly African American and Latin@<sup>2</sup> school environments (Alleksaht-snider, Buxton, and Harman 2013; Gutiérrez 2008; Portes and Smagorinsky 2010).

EB youth have created counternarratives to express new perspectives on their sociohistorical lives that emerged through collective arts processes such as drawing, film making, performance, and poetry writing (Chapell and Cahnmann-Taylor 2013; Chapell and Faltis 2013; Faltis 2013; Ginwright 2008). Medina and Campano (2006) reported how their critical use of performance supported students in reimagining and reinterpreting aspects of their personal, interpersonal, and institutional lives. L. G. Garcia (2013) engaged his high school students in a critical analysis of immigration policies in which they analyzed stereotypical portrayals of immigrant families and redesigned them to produce antiracist art that they displayed to the public, thereby connecting “their own experiences and background to current policies, political actions, state legislation, and education issues that directly affect their well-being” (133). Gutiérrez (2008) called for the creation of a resistant educational “third space” that privileges and builds on students’ culturally learned approaches to learning, including discourse, social practices, and political stances and argued that the use of *teatro* (theatre), critical theory, and discussion supported students in reframing everyday and institutional literacies into “powerful literacies oriented toward critical social thought” (149).

### ***Critical Performative Pedagogy***

CPP as conceived for this study borrows elements from Boal’s (1979) image and forum theatre (TO) and from the Lincoln Center Institute for the Arts in Education. The performance elements of CPP interweave with critical analyses of texts, research, and multimedia to deepen students’ understanding of the inextricable connections among language, literacy, and culture (see Harman and French 2004; Harman with French 2011). Greene (2001) has asserted that only through experiential and aesthetic activities can students develop a deeper critical awareness of art and themselves as embodied social agents in everyday life.

Boal (1979, 1992) used theatre to engage communities in embodying and challenging local social inequities. In TO, participants are asked to reimagine and perform scenes representing oppression from their everyday lives. When watching the scenes that revolve around collectively experienced oppressive issues, “spect-actors” from the audience are encouraged to interrupt the scene’s key moments and take on the role of the protagonist when they feel they can embody a more effective strategy, as illustrated in the dramatic excerpt we reported previously.

Informed by these approaches, a CPP is defined as a *dialogic* and *multidimensional* process that provides teachers and students with a rehearsal space to embody and critically engage with local issues in playful and embodied ways that promote academic literacy development and social agency (Chapell and Cahnmann-Taylor 2013; Conrad 2004; Gallagher, Wessels, and Ntelioglou 2013; Greene 2001; Medina and Campano 2006; Weltsek and Medina, 2007, 2014).

### ***Context of Culture***

The setting for the study on which we report is Chestnut School, a middle school in a U.S. Southeastern semiurban school system. Although the city houses the state’s namesake

<sup>2</sup>We use the term “Latin@” rather than “Latino/a” as a way to diminish the foregrounding of either gender in referring to this population. The @ symbol places the *o* and *a* in the same figure such that neither is dominant. See, e.g., Fránquiz and Salazar (2007).

university, it resides in (and fully comprises) the nation's sixth most impoverished county. The largest group in the citywide population is European American (62 percent), with African American (27 percent) and Latin@ (10 percent) people comprising the largest minority groups. The middle school on which we focus in our study, however, enrolled only 6 percent European American students, with African Americans making up 60 percent and Latin@ making up 33 percent of the school population, a typical distribution across the city's schools. These figures suggest how European Americans control city institutions while not sending their children to the public schools.

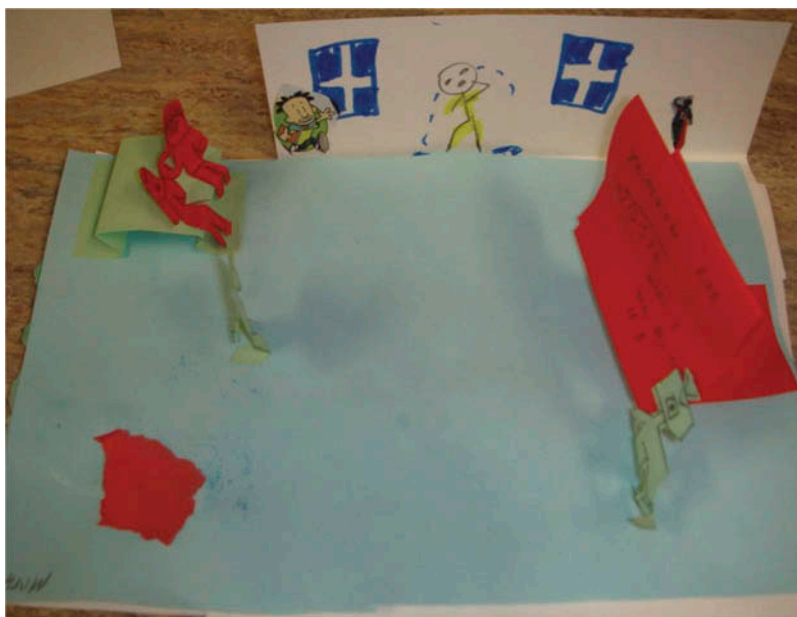
The Latin@ population's numbers indicate the city's status within the New Latin@ Diaspora (NLD), an area that includes:

places that have not traditionally been home to Latinos and where educators must manage language barriers, find ways to support a new population, and work with families and students to fully engage them in schooling. At the same time, precisely because NLD schools typically don't have structures to support such students, educators can be flexible and develop innovative ways to meet the challenges. (Wortham et al. 2013, n.p.)

CPP conceivably could serve this innovative role, although within fairly rigid institutional structures provided by tradition and increasing state and federal mandates for uniformity across schools (Portes and Smagorinsky 2010). A key element in developing a critical performance process is to investigate and respond to the sociocultural environment and discourses that shape and are shaped by local classroom literacy practices. The first author's encounters with EB youth in the Chestnut School have been inspirational in terms of their insights and also disillusioning in terms of their everyday lives. For example, when asked to draw how he perceived himself in the classes he liked and the ones he dreaded, a male student from our focal middle school, Mexican immigrant Manuel,<sup>3</sup> depicted himself as an isolated figure crying in mathematics class because he could not understand the teacher or the material (see Figure 1).

Clarita, an El Salvadoran immigrant, wrote that in her social studies class, "Sometimes he (the teacher) just be speaking so fast that I don't even know what he is saying, I also don't have nobody to work with. I really don't talk to nobody in that class." The difficulties that Manuel, Clarita, and many of their EB classmates encountered in content classrooms were informed by a host of sociopolitical and language education policies that have impacted dramatically the lives of bilingual students and their families in the Southeastern United States (Harman and Dobai-Varga 2012; Portes and Smagorinsky 2010), where there is no requirement for first-language academic literacy instruction for language-minoritized youth, although two-way bilingual immersion programs exist. For the most part, however, students are not taught in their home languages, nor are they encouraged to speak or write in their home languages at school, as they are taught primarily by monolingual teachers (a national circumstance; see Frankenberg with Siegel-Hawley 2008) who feel that they are under incredible pressure to teach to testing mandates that are insensitive to immigrants' circumstances. Southeastern immigration policies and practices have compounded these difficulties for Mesoamerican immigrant students (Alexsaht-snider, Buxton, and Harman 2013; Altman 2013).

<sup>3</sup>All names of students, teachers, and the school are pseudonyms, and participants' facial features have been digitally obscured in the illustrative photographs.



**Figure 1.** Manuel's depiction of himself.

### Illustrations From the Classroom

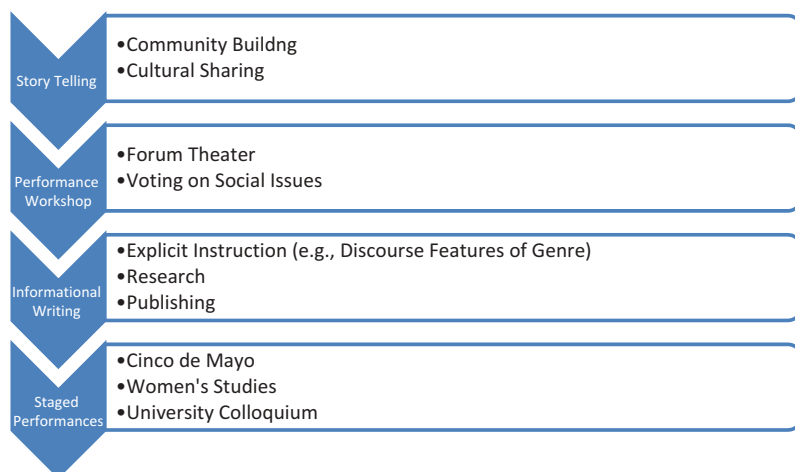
We next explain the process through which Boalian theatre became a central dimension of the focal classroom, provide examples from the students' work of the ways in which they grew socially and academically through performance, and consider the importance of teacher and researcher learning through the process of collaborating with students on dramatic enactment of pressing social issues.

#### *Teaching Cycle*

Freire-influenced ESOL teacher Kristen Bailey collaborated with the first author in teaching a sheltered ESOL class (i.e., one in which English fluency is taught in the context of learning the school curriculum) with learning built on the base of students' prior linguistic and cultural knowledge so as to support academic and social language and literacy development. This partnership assumed that the multimodal literacy practices of bilingual learners improve most significantly when the students see themselves as social agents who need to speak, write, or read to accomplish a social goal (Gebhard, Harman, and Seger 2007; Macken-Horarik 2002; Rothery 1996).

The team planned the first stages of the unit, then worked with the all-girl class *in situ* to plan the remaining stages (see Figure 2) and developed community through theatre games, storytelling, and improvised chats about our lives (Edmiston 2013), while assuming that performance would support participants in accessing experiential, cultural, and embodied ways of knowing (Gallagher, Wessels, and Ntelioglou 2013). For example, one of our first activities was the "name game" in which we improvised gestures that we felt went along with our names. Figure 3 illustrates the movement that one girl, Alyssa, initiated with her name, with the whole group following her lead and balancing on one leg to say her name.





**Figure 2.** Community building.

Through these activities, the students and adult participants learned about each other's histories and also learned to develop a collective sense of play when moving around the room. Rothwell (2011) argues that one of the most important modes in digital and traditional communication is the kinesthetic. Through the theatre games and discussion, Alyssa was provided with a space to express her name through movement in the theatre games (see Figure 3) and then to explain the history behind her chosen name. The active listening by other participants in both the game and the postplay discussion validated her responses in ways that were different from her frustration about how she was being shut down in some content-area classrooms.

In response to deficit discourses, Cummins (2001) and Ntelioglou (2011) stress the importance of supporting emergent language learners in producing multimodal visual, dramatic, and verbal identity texts that they remix for their own communicative and aesthetic purposes. The availability of such means of expression in her ESOL classroom appears to have contributed to Alyssa's growth not only in academic understanding and English proficiency, but in her sense of self and confidence in her social agency as well. Through her participation in the CPP project, Alyssa became so comfortable expressing herself that she volunteered to sing a solo at the end of the national conference presentation in October 2011.

### ***CPP Workshop and Voting***

The engagement of minoritized youth in everyday acts of resistance mediates new cultural resources and learning that should be leveraged by culturally sustaining educators in school contexts (Pacheco 2012; Paris 2012). We used techniques from the Boalian *Theater of the Oppressed* (Boal 1974) to encourage participants to connect their schoolwork with social issues in the school and city. As Figure 4 illustrates, the class used sculpting and mirror activities to support participants in displaying and enacting the two counteremotions (fear and calmness) that they felt were most relevant at school (see Boal 1992). These emotions depict the emotional double bind referenced previously—a condition in which a successful response to one message produces a failed response to the other so that the person caught in the bind will inevitably feel wrong.



**Figure 3.** Aimee's name gesture.

A key element of the CPP process is to position adult and student participants as collaborators in the performance. After sharing their thoughts about this exercise, all except for the first author had the chance to free-write a compelling memory they had about their lives at the school or in the town. In small groups, they then selected three scenarios to workshop and perform for the group. After rehearsing the scene, the first author, the Boalian “joker” (i.e., facilitator) used “role reversal” and “stop and think” techniques to encourage the spect-actors to stop the scene midway and step in to enact a new set of power dynamics. The theatre work supported a third space of resistance (Gutiérrez 2008) in which the students and teachers invoked lived experiences but also reimagined ways to challenge them.

The story that follows was based on Kristen Bailey's (the teacher) memory of teenage friends in the car with her while driving who started shouting vulgar epithets at an African American youth on the street. Alyssa stopped the scene and took the place of one of the participants to shift the negative name calling:

KRISTEN: Whoo hoo! This is good music. We're going to go to this, it's going to be so—Hey look at that guy. (*She starts to shout; two girls in the back of the car also shout.*)

ALYSSA: Hey, hey, what did you say?

KRISTEN: Uh, well, uh, I was just. You know, come on, he's a—

ALYSSA: No. What you say? Stop.

KRISTEN: He's a—

ALYSSA: No. He's my friend.

KRISTEN: Oh.

ALYSSA: Oh what. Oh what.

KRISTEN: Oh. Is that not cool? I'm sorry I'm trying to be—

ALYSSA: No, it's not good.

KRISTEN: It's not cool?

ALYSSA: No it's not [inaudible]

KRISTEN: Oh my God. I'm so—



**Figure 4.** Sculpting and mirroring.

ALYSSA: It's not. You need to step out.

KRISTEN: I feel stupid. OK. (*leaves car*)

ALYSSA: Okay! Bye bye.

Alyssa used repetition, overlapping, and imperatives in the scenario to signal clearly to the other youth that racist bullying was not acceptable. Alyssa's participation engaged her and the others in an authentic everyday use of language that demanded quick reaction, appropriate contextualization cues and lexical choices, and careful listening. Alyssa and her classmates showed how they were able to intervene in the problem with strategic and imaginative use of language, gesture, or action.

In the second scenario (see [Figure 5](#)), Monique and Alyssa performed the roles of a bilingual learner trying to begin a writing test at the school and a harried teacher. Alyssa intervened and this time showed how she could shift the experience of Monique as isolated student to a collaborative teacher–student relationship:

RUTH: (*typing*) I have so many reports to write!

MONIQUE: (*sighing*) I am so confused. I don't know what to write.

(*Alyssa comes in and takes Ruth's role.*)

ALYSSA: (*moving to Monique*) We can do this together.



**Figure 5.** Testing anxiety.



**Figure 6.** Voting on burning local issues.

Cammarota and Fine (2008) highlighted the importance of collective cultural organizing, a process that consisted of encouraging students to become politically involved in their own social contexts and to think critically about the power dynamics within these contexts. In our work, the enactment and Boalian rehearsal of real-life scenarios heightened students' awareness of the role of discourse choices in challenging or perpetuating oppressive conditions in everyday encounters. Although mostly silent in our first times together in fall 2009, they increasingly chose to tell us what they felt through heightened use of gesture, language, and movement. Figure 6 shows the girls voting on burning local issues they felt needed addressing right after the extended performance workshop.

### *Writing, Research, and Publishing*

Gallagher, Wessels, and Ntelioglou (2013) maintain that “when moments of local importance of historical significance happen in a cultural context, they will very likely make their way into a drama classroom, especially one headed by a teacher who believes in the significance of social identity to any learning process” (8). What emerged in response to the collective work in the performances was students' desire to use their collective sense of agency and frustration to challenge abrupt deportation and job discrimination against immigrant communities in our county. When asked what they would like to do about these issues, the following exchange occurred:

KRISTEN: Does anybody have any strong feelings about what you want to do next about these issues?

ROMA: Write about them.

KELLI: Write about them. What'd you say? Who are we going to write to?

MONIQUE: Oh, we can write to [the mayor].

Monique showed an understanding of the importance of collective literate action when attempting to challenge social injustice for their communities. The students decided to write an informational newsletter they could distribute to their own communities and politicians. The collective desire of the students also motivated the adult members of the team to design explicit genre-based teaching of informational writing using a newspaper article about the eviction of residents of immigrant communities from local trailer parks to show features of the genre (cf. Gebhard, Harman, and Seger 2007).

### *Teachers as Students*

During the CPP process where participants shared stories, performed, wrote, and drew together, the students showed a deep understanding of local issues and strategies of resistance that could easily be leveraged in content-area classes such as social studies or English language arts (Pacheco 2012). Often, the first author felt as if she were the student of the students. For example, when the students started talking about the immigration vans that were prowling the local neighborhoods, Sandra explained: “Wal-Mart wants to see how much money they can make . . . without the Mexican people.”

Such interactions were quite instructive in helping the first author to understand not only the girls in the class, but the experiences of their broader community and the issues that inevitably influence their relationships with and trust in established social institutions such as schools (cf. McIntyre 2000). In our study, the adult educators became increasingly more involved in social justice action related to immigration issues as a result of their learning process as students of the girls. This shift in power dynamics differs considerably from the majority of high-stakes classrooms where teachers and students are forced to engage in reductive learning processes that position students as passive receptacles.

The interrelated use of theatre games, performance, writing, and discussion expanded the cultural repertoires and investment level of the emergent language learners who expressed themselves through multiple modalities (cf. Medina and Campano 2006). In the class newsletter, Clarita explained her definition of job discrimination against minorities by reporting her interview with a member of her community who “didn’t get paid the same amount as workers that had citizenship. She went to the manager and the manager told her that it doesn’t matter because she was not a citizen. She felt discriminated against.” Clarita’s final draft developed from a cycle of intertextual literacy events that the critical performance process elicited, such as listening to a lecture by a Spanish-speaking expert on immigration, participating in role-playing interviews, interviewing community members, and translating the interview into English and tailoring it for the newsletter. The students seemed highly motivated because they had selected the topics, chosen how to reach their audience, and received instruction on how to develop informational texts. Figure 7 illustrates the sense of ease among the group when writing.



**Figure 7.** Literacy as collective process.

Another phenomenon that occurred in the CPP process was the increasing participation in the project of other members of the school and university community who came through direct invitation or because they had heard about what we were doing or had joined the class as newcomer students to the school. In this expanded group, the students frequently shared their experiences about the performance process and their thoughts about the social issues they had selected, thereby producing a chain of literacy events that were connected to the use of play and performance in the classroom and that supported an increasing use of different modalities in participating in the group process (Bauman and Briggs 1990). In the excerpt that follows, Kristen asked students to tell a group of university students who had come to help them in writing the newsletter about what they had done so far in the unit:

TEACHER: We wrote about a story, a personal experience, and then we acted it out. And then, we decided on burning issues. Can you tell us about that?

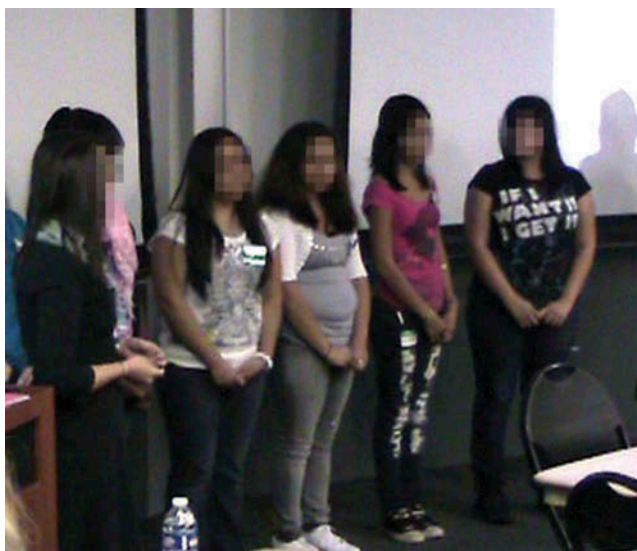
MONIQUE: Oh, yeah, like everybody had to write a story that had happened to us, and then we have to act it out.

ALYSSA: Before that we do some adjectives, we picked some adjectives, like we do “sad” and “happy,” like the contrary of the adjective, and then we chose the adjective confused, and we have to choose like when in your life it was confusing.

For EB learners, this process of taking a previous text that was informed by different modalities (the theatre games, the voting, and the sculpting) and recontextualizing it into a new stretch of oral or written discourse for a different audience—the process of what Suhor (1984) called *transmediation*, the translation of ideas through a series of semi-otic systems—is quite a complex undertaking (Gibbons 2006; Harman 2013; Smagorinsky 2001). Through engagement in a cycle of literacy events that stretched across many modes and audiences and that included the production of several identity texts (Cummins 2001), the students were asked to show understanding of civil rights issues in experiential and discursive ways.

Several additional venues emerged as opportunities for continued participation. After writing a collective poem together that expressed their views on anti-immigration discourses (see the Appendix), the group decided that they would perform their poem at a school community event on Cinco de Mayo, when they would also distribute their newsletter to parents and other involved community members. Figure 8 illustrates how the girls stood on stage at a national conference to share their views on immigration policies, to perform their script, and to share their poem. In addition, Alyssa sang a song about multicultural acceptance, a performance that appeared to follow from the confidence she had gained through her participation in the class activities.

Monique and Alyssa explained that having people listen to what they perceived as just the work of “young girls from middle school” was a very important moment for them. Several language researchers have pointed to the pivotal importance of providing students with an array of authentic purposes and contexts that engage them in learning how to use literacy as a resource to become agentive members of society (Chapell and Faltis 2013; Dyson 2003; Gibbons 2002), leading in the case of bilinguals to feelings of validation, recognition, and acceptance, consequences that we observed in these students.



**Figure 8.** Chestnut Middle School students at national conference.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Educators need not only to have an awareness of the social inequities and injustices that their students face, but also need to engage in inquiry into how their classroom practices can “work within and against the systems they are a part of to disrupt or challenge ideologies of social reproduction through the literacy curriculum” (Simon and Campano 2013, 22). As illustrated in this article, a critical use of performance and its interrelated literacy events can support bilingual students in interpreting, using, and embodying rich cultural repertoires that they already have developed in their everyday lives and that can be leveraged for academic and collective social action (Pacheco 2012). This study suggests that teachers can teach curriculum standards by allowing a third space where participants extend their previous understandings about the issues in dialogic and multidimensional ways (see Freire 1970; Gallagher & Ntelioglo 2011; Moje et al. 2004; Nieto and Bode 2008).

Recent second-language research has underlined the fact that for EB learners, knowing a concept linguistically does not necessarily mean understanding the cultural contexts or appropriate use of the concept within a discourse community. Gibbons (2002, 2006) stressed the importance of supporting language learners through transmediation, with non-linguistic modes supporting understanding of how knowledge is not a decontextualized body of facts but involves a rich cultural repertoire that can further students’ and teachers’ understanding of social, scientific, and literacy concepts while also supporting artistic expression, critical inquiry, and academic literacy development.

The critical use of performance has the purpose of supporting EB learners in learning to use academic language in ways that support their understanding of how they can accomplish social and political goals (cf. Harman and Dobai-Varga 2012). A CPP engages students in a variety of contexts, media, and communities that encourage them to play with and challenge normative discourse conventions. Imaginative play, focus on gesture, movement, and voice support “intensive and lasting language learning experiences that go far beyond the stilted dialogues of traditional textbooks” (Even 2011, 304). Such performative opportunities provide students with ways to creatively adapt language in embodied, imaginary, and academic ways (Enciso 2011; Enciso et al. 2011; Smagorinsky 1999).

However, few middle or secondary public school classrooms have the freedom to design their curriculum without conforming to rigorous and detailed district and state curriculum mandates. Our work was made possible because there was a certain amount of flexibility in the sheltered ESOL classroom in terms of how it aligned to the sociocultural-oriented state criteria for ESOL language and literacy development (see World-Class Instruction and Design Assessment 2014). In recent years, however, the first author's work with teachers at the same school in social studies, English language arts, and science has suggested that some content-area teachers also are engaging in the use of debate and visual arts with students to further their understanding of key concepts because of the focus on experiential and project-based learning in the school district. The extent to which teachers can adopt arts-based practices really depends on the understanding of the importance of the arts by administration and education policymakers.

This arts-based participatory approach aims to support students and teachers in grappling with local power relationships that they perceive as dialectally connected to broader institutional and societal practices that marginalize students and teachers based on race, class, gender, and other markers of difference (Nieto and Bode 2008). Our hope is that a better understanding of embodied practices such as the imaginative uses of theatre, collective research, and storytelling can lead to a heightened awareness of literacy as a social process among emergent bilinguals, their teachers, and the broader educational community.

If the potential to learn, as Lave and Wenger (1991) assert, is determined by how students are positioned within the "social structure of the community of practice, its power relations and its conditions for legitimacy" (119), then for EB learners in particular, teachers' discourse and approach contribute to constructing students' identities in ways that affect their ability to succeed. Indeed, for immigrant students in general, the consequences of engaging in reductive literacy practices can be dramatic because often their lived experiences, languages, and histories have been silenced or erased in the regular mainstream curriculum (Cummins 2001; Gutiérrez and Larson 1994; Harman, 2014). Critical use of performance and all the rich literacy practices it engenders is one way to speak back to these trends.

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### Appendix: Communal Poem<sup>4</sup>

Deportation is wrong! Stop deportation!  
Abrupt deportation is a social injustice.

<sup>4</sup>This is the language mix of Spanish and English of one of the girls, used to highlight the intensity of her emotions about the subject.

When the police deport people yo me siento scared<sup>i</sup>.  
 I feel very bad when the police come and take the people away and deport them.  
 I have fears, and I am sad.  
 I am mad about what is happening in Arizona!  
 I feel like we have no rights.  
 My mom was very sad when she found out that the lady in Arizona signed the law saying  
 that they don't want any Mexicans.  
 Immigration is bad for people that don't have papers.  
 No more haters!  
 No more discrimination.  
 No more broken-up families.  
 Before I felt confused, but now I'm strong.  
 I feel powerless alone but stronger as a group.  
 Together we are strong. We must help each other.

### Translation of Abstract

Este artículo presenta los ejemplos de una intervención teatral, a la manera de Boal-en el Sureste de EU, en una escuela de educación media-, diseñada para permitir que las estudiantes latinas representen obras de teatro experienciales, donde se expongan los problemas más comunes que enfrentan en su vida cotidiana, como la discriminación y la hostilidad, así como las posibles soluciones a los desafíos que se plantean a sus sentimientos de inclusión y bienestar. El trabajo se basa en las teorías que hacen hincapié en el rol del drama como personal y educativo, en particular con respecto al incremento de la conciencia política de los jóvenes y la comprensión de la capacidad de acción que tienen para impugnar las conductas intolerantes hacia ellos y sus comunidades de inmigrantes. Los autores presentan los datos de un estudio etnográfico que se está llevando a cabo en un aula de una escuela de educación media en el Sureste de los EU, y demuestran que el uso por parte de las estudiantes, de diversas modalidades-discusión, teatro, arte, entre otras-, a través de las cuales median su crecimiento como ciudadanas activas con una mayor conciencia social, como se pone de manifiesto en la comprensión y la apropiación de las formas de resistencia, y las representaciones teatrales públicas ante comunidades académicas que personifican el proceso de aprendizaje de nuevas disposiciones y estrategias. Central en la discusión, es la necesidad por parte de los profesores de obtener más información sobre las condiciones sociales de su compromiso con las estudiantes inmigrantes, y del conocimiento íntimo que ellas tienen de cómo las instituciones y las prácticas sociales trabajan tanto a favor como en contra de ellas. Hay una consecuente necesidad de que los docentes utilicen este conocimiento para orientar su interpretación de las normas académicas interesadas en adoptar una perspectiva global y crítica, y de orientar su pedagogía con el fin de incluir más oportunidades teatrales mediante las cuales los jóvenes puedan aprender a representar y actuar en sus mundos. El artículo concluye con sugerencias para la función del teatro en la educación de los jóvenes que oriente dialécticamente el crecimiento de los docentes y los investigadores, para hacerles educadores más sensibles y con una perspectiva que tome en cuenta más factores.