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## **Scholarly Articles**

- An Examination of Family-Targeted Hurtful Messages Used  
In Romantic Relationships 1  
*Tyler M. Louk-Marinelli, Scott A. Myers,  
Megan R. Dillow and Matthew M. Martin*
- The Good and the Bad and the In-Between News:  
African American Women Newsreaders' Responses to  
St. Louis Newspapers 28  
*Elisia L. Cohen*
- Millennial Students Meet Baby Boomer and Generation X  
Teachers: The Learning Curve for a Successful  
Educational Intersection 49  
*David A. Wendt & Lora L. Wolff*

## **States Advisory Showcase**

- Integrating Teaching and Interdisciplinary Scholarship to  
Enhance Student Learning Outcomes 65  
*Traci M. Cihon & Christopher J. Stephens*

## **Teaching Resources**

- Perfect 10: Crafting the Ten-Minute Play 83  
*David A. Crespy*
- Make-up & Lighting: A Theatre Primer 102  
*Louise Herman*
- The Use of Oral Interpretation in the Secondary Classroom 115  
*Susan P. Millsap*

**Journal of the Speech and Theatre  
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**Journal of the Speech and Theatre Association of Missouri**  
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The editor of the 2012 *Journal of the Speech and Theatre Association of Missouri* is presently accepting manuscripts. Scholarly articles, book and resource reviews, and teaching resources are all encouraged. Scholarship from a diversity of areas from the discipline encompassing communication, speech, and theatre will be considered. These areas include, but are not limited to: Speech, Debate, Theatre Instruction and Performance, Communication Theory, Interpersonal Communication, Intercultural Communication, Health Communication, Rhetoric, Persuasion, Organizational Communication, Political Communication, Family Communications, Listening, Communication Ethics, Mediation, Public Relations, Film, Mass Media Theory, Mediated Communication, and New Communication Technologies.

All submissions should be in Microsoft Word. References should follow the latest edition of the American Psychological Association style manual. Submissions should be sent to the editor electronically and should include an abstract and author information. Author information should be limited to the title page. All submissions should be received by February 20, 2012, to insure full consideration for publication.

Updated submission information for volume 42 will be available in October of 2011 at the website for the Speech and Theatre Association of Missouri – <http://speechandtheatremo.org/>

Submissions can be sent to:

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## **An Examination of Family-Targeted Hurtful Messages Used in Romantic Relationships**

*Tyler M. Louk-Marinelli, Scott A. Myers Ph.D.,  
Megan R. Dillow Ph.D. and Matthew M. Martin Ph.D.*

### **Abstract**

*Using an Intergroup Communication perspective, the purpose of this study was to identify the types of family-targeted hurtful messages used within the romantic relationship, examine the proximal and distal factors associated with the hurtful messages, and identify the types of responses to the hurtful messages. Participants were 277 undergraduate students enrolled in a communication studies course at a large mid-Atlantic university. It was found that (a) romantic partners use seven types of family-targeted hurtful messages; (b) intergroup membership does not influence individuals' perceptions of the proximal factors of the hurtful messages, but does influence positively individuals' perceptions of the distal factors of hurtful messages; and (c) partners most commonly use active verbal responses to respond to hurtful messages.*

Across relationships, people say things that hurt each other. These things range from messages that criticize each other's family members, romantic partners, and friends (Young & Bippus, 2001) to messages that criticize an individual's intelligence or physical characteristics (Vangelisti, 1994). Even though researchers have examined the types of hurtful messages individuals use in the context of romantic relationships (Parker-Raley, Beck, Surra, & Vangelisti, 2007; Vangelisti, 1994; Vangelisti & Crumley, 1998), one area that has received less examination is the hurtful messages a romantic partner composes and sends to the other partner about the receiving partners' family. Because the family is an involuntary relationship (Vangelisti & Maguire, 2002) of which individuals are generally protective (Vangelisti & Caughlin, 1997), it is advantageous to identify the types of family-targeted messages that elicit hurt by a relational partner. Thus, this study was undertaken.

## Review of Literature

A common misconception is that words do not hurt as much as any physical injury, but contrarily, words can hurt as badly or more than any physical form of pain (Vangelisti, 1994). The emotion of hurt is classified as a negative emotion and is highly related to other negative emotions, such as sadness, anger, and guilt (Leary & Springer, 2001). Although hurt is a negative emotion, hurt is unique in that it is neither a fully self-centered emotion (i.e., guilt) nor is it a fully other-centered emotion (i.e., anger) (Vangelisti & Sprague, 1998). The emotion of hurt tends to fall somewhere between guilt and anger (Vangelisti, 1994; Vangelisti & Sprague, 1998). Hurt commonly occurs when an individual has been emotionally harmed by another person, often through some transgression that occurs within a relationship (Folkes, 1982; L'Abate, 1977). One type of relational transgression identified by Vangelisti (1994) is an individual's use of a hurtful message, which she defined as a message that causes emotional harm to the receiver (Vangelisti, 1994; Vangelisti & Crumley, 1998).

In the study of hurtful messages, researchers have identified consistently types of relationships within which hurtful messages occur. These relationships include romantic relationships (Parker-Raley et al., 2007; Vangelisti, 1994; Vangelisti & Crumley, 1998; Young, 2004; Young & Bippus, 2001); nonromantic relationships such as strangers or acquaintances (Snapp & Leary, 2001) and friendships (Leary, Springer, Negel, Ansell, & Evans, 1998; Young, 2004; Young & Bippus, 2001); and family relationships, including the mother-daughter dyad (Kennedy-Lightsey & Dillow, 2008) and the parent-child dyad (Mills, Nazar, & Farrell, 2002; Myers, Schrodt, & Rittenour, 2006). Across these relationships, researchers have found consistently that people are most hurt by the messages occurring within their most intimate relationships and least hurt by the messages received from a stranger or acquaintance (Leary et al., 1998; Martin et. al., 1996).

Because hurtful messages do not occur randomly (Vangelisti, 1994), it is important to understand the aspects that comprise a hurtful message. Seminal research examining hurtful messages in the broad context of interpersonal relationships indicates that senders of a hurtful message deliver messages through particular forms that target specific topics. Vangelisti (1994) identified 10 forms (i.e., delivery method) of

hurtful messages which include accusation (i.e., blaming), evaluation (i.e., describing value or worth), directive (i.e., giving commands), advice, express desire (i.e. a statement indicating preference), information (i.e., truthful disclosure), question, threat, joke, and lie. Of these 10 forms, accusations, evaluation, and information are considered to be the most hurtful, in part due to the receiver's inability to debate the message with the sender, and jokes and threats are considered to be the least hurtful, in part due to the receiver's ability to rebut the message (Vangelisti, 1994). Additionally, Vangelisti identified nine topics (i.e., specific targets of a hurtful message) that a sender can target in a hurtful message. These topics are an individual's romantic relationships, nonromantic relationships, sexual behavior, intelligence, abilities, personality traits, self-worth, use of time, and ethnicity and religion (Vangelisti, 1994).

Since Vangelisti's (1994) seminal research, other researchers have identified additional typologies of hurtful messages that occur within interpersonal relationships. Leary et al. (1998) identified six forms of hurtful messages, including active disassociation (i.e. rejection from the other relational partner), passive disassociation (i.e. being ignored by the relational partner), criticism, betrayal, teasing, and feelings of being unappreciated. Young and Bippus (2001) extended Vangelisti's (1994) original nine topics of hurtful messages by adding an additional nine items: reevaluation, negative labels, idiosyncrasies and background, value as a relational partner, behavioral criticism, third party evaluation, de-escalation and avoidance, hopes and plans, and threats. Within romantic relationships, infidelity and deception are identified as types of hurtful messages in addition to passive disassociation, active disassociation, and criticism (Feeney, 2004).

Individuals identify several reasons for sending hurtful messages. These reasons include trying to be helpful and being thoughtless (Leary & Springer, 2001); accidentally stating (Leary & Springer, 2001; Vangelisti et al., 2005); humiliating the receiver and displaying verbal or nonverbal aggression (Martin et al., 1996, Vangelisti, Young, Carpenter-Theune, & Alexander, 2005); telling their partner or relative the truth (Zang & Stafford, 2007; 2008); devaluing the relationship (Vangelisti et al., 2005; Zang & Stafford, 2007); identifying an intrinsic flaw (i.e., focusing on a personal defect) (Vangelisti et al., 2005; Zang & Stafford, 2007); trying to shock, stating ill-conceived

humor, and attempting to discourage (Vangelisti et al., 2005). Although the reason behind sending a hurtful message is important, the receivers' perception of the message characteristics ultimately predicts how they respond. These characteristics include intentionality, intensity, and sentiment (Young & Bippus, 2001).

An intentional hurtful message causes the receiver much pain and thus takes a toll on a relationship (Vangelisti, 1994, 2001). Across all relationship types, research indicates that if receivers perceive a hurtful message as intentional, they are more likely to distance themselves from their relational partner (Vangelisti, 2001; Vangelisti et al., 2005; Young, 2004; Young, Kubicka, Tucker, Chavez-Appel, & Rex, 2005; Zang & Stafford, 2007). Although individuals who are more satisfied with their relationship are less likely to be hurt by a hurtful message (Vangelisti & Crumley, 1998), if they feel the message is intentionally hurtful, they will engage in relational distancing with the sender (Vangelisti et al., 2005; Vangelisti & Young, 2000). The receiver of an intentionally hurtful message also can have greater feelings of hurt, become less satisfied with the relationship, and begin to feel emotionally distant from the partner (Vangelisti & Young, 2000). Even if an individual is trying to be truthful but is still intentional with a hurtful message, the hurtful message will ultimately be positively related to the level of hurt the receiver feels (Zang & Stafford, 2007). However, if the hurtful message was perceived as being stated unintentionally or in a joking manner, the receiver is more likely to overlook the message (Leary et al., 1998; Vangelisti, 1994; Young & Bippus, 2001).

Intensity is defined as the overall strength of the message (Myers et al., 2006). The more intense the hurtful message, the more a receiver feels that the message was less helpful, less comforting, and less likely to be stated out of concern (Young, 2004). Consequently, the more intense the hurtful message, the more likely the receiver will be hurt (Leary et al., 1998, Young, 2004). Myers et al. (2006) concluded that when adult children's perception of the level of intensity of a hurtful message from their parents regarding their academic performance did not affect their educational self-esteem, intensity was inversely associated with a child's educational motivation.

The hurtfulness of a message indicates the receiver's perception of the amount of hurt the sender's comment was meant to elicit (Young & Bippus, 2001). In their examination of the effects of humorous versus

non-humorous hurtful messages, Young and Bippus (2001) found that the level of hurtfulness the receiver associated with the message was related positively to the amount of hurt consequently felt by the receiver. They also noted that if the statement was made in a humorous manner, the more likely the receiver perceived the message to be less hurtful (Vangelisti & Crumley, 1998; Young & Bippus, 2001).

When a hurtful message is received, receivers engage in an appraisal (i.e., evaluation) of the message (Lazarus, 1991). When engaging in the appraisal process, Young (2004) argued that individuals evaluate both proximal (i.e., message characteristic) factors and distal (i.e., relational quality) factors. Proximal factors include the intentionality, intensity, and hurtfulness of the hurtful message (Vangelisti & Young, 2000; Young, 2004). Distal factors include the level of closeness between the sender and the receiver, the receiver's satisfaction with the relationship, and the receiver's commitment in the relationship (Young, 2004). In addition to the distal and proximal factors, it also is important to identify the frequency with which hurtful messages occur, because the more frequently hurtful messages occur, the more likely an individual is to be hurt, thus responding in a negative manner (Dailey & Le Poire, 2003). Even in close relationships, a high frequency of hurtful messages can lead to relational distancing (Kennedy-Lightsey & Dillow, 2008; Vangelisti & Maguire, 2002; Vangelisti & Young, 2000).

The appraisal of the hurtful message is central to the hurt an individual feels and the impact on the future of that relationship (Vangelisti, 2001; Vangelisti & Young, 2000; Young, 2004), because during the appraisal process the hurtful message characteristics are evaluated in order for the receiver to formulate the proper response. Individuals who receive a hurtful message and appraise their relationship as unrewarding are more likely to end their relationship (Bachman & Guerrero, 2006), whereas those individuals who receive a hurtful message in a satisfying relationship are more likely to stay together (Snapp & Leary, 2001; Vangelisti & Crumley, 1998; Vangelisti et al., 2005; Young, 2004). However, no matter how satisfied individuals are in a relationship, if they appraise a hurtful message to be a frequent occurrence then the hurtful message will be positively related to relational distancing (Kennedy-Lightsey & Dillow, 2008; Vangelisti & Maguire, 2002; Vangelisti & Young, 2000).

Three ways in which receivers respond to a hurtful message include an active verbal response, or responding immediately by verbally attacking the sender (e.g., attacking the other, defending the self, asking for an explanation); an acquiescence response, or yielding to the hurtful message and avoiding confrontation with the sender (e.g., crying, apologizing); or an invulnerable response, or indirectly responding to the hurtful message (e.g., silence, laughing, ignoring the message) (Vangelisti & Crumley, 1998). Vangelisti and Crumley (1998) found that individuals use some responses to hurtful messages more frequently when they occur within certain relationships. For instance, they found that individuals in a romantic relationship were most likely to respond using an acquiescence response, when they felt greater psychological closeness to the sender and when they felt the message was extremely hurtful (Vangelisti & Crumley, 1998). Adding to the understanding of how individuals respond to hurtful messages, Myers et al. (2006) found that college students use an active verbal response the most frequently and an invulnerable response the least frequently when responding to parents' use of hurtful messages regarding their academic performance.

Knowing that the receiver's familiarity with the sender influences the amount of hurt a receiver experiences in response to a hurtful message (Snapp & Leary, 2001; Vangelisti, 1994), it is important to explore further the role familiarity plays. One explanation of why familiarity influences the amount of hurt a receiver feels can be attributed to intergroup communication. Intergroup communication occurs when individuals define themselves and their interactional partner in terms of their individual group membership (Harwood, Giles, & Palomares, 2005). Intergroup communication, which is rooted in the principles of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), states that individuals categorize themselves through their personal identity (i.e., individuals' perceptions of their unique preferences and traits) or their social identity (i.e., individuals' perceptions of themselves based on the groups to which they belong). Intergroup communication occurs, then, when individuals identify themselves through their social identity instead of their personal identity (Harwood et al., 2005).

Intergroup communication operates under three assumptions (Harwood et al., 2005). The first assumption is that senders and receivers alter messages based on their individual group membership (e.g., it is not

the communication that occurs between romantic partners who are members of two unique families, but instead it is how romantic partners' identify with their family of origin that affects the way they send or receive a hurtful message). The second assumption is that individuals do not need to perceive a conversation through an intergroup perspective in order for intergroup communication to occur (e.g., romantic partners may not be aware that a hurtful message about their partners' family is a form of intergroup communication). The third assumption is that when individuals categorize themselves in a particular group, then it is linked to how they categorize others (e.g., if romantic partners use the words "your family" in a hurtful message, they are classifying their romantic partner as part of that family group while making it clear that they are themselves not part of that family group).

To provide a better understanding of how familiarity affects intergroup communication, researchers have examined the intergroup communication that occurs between family members (e.g., grandparent-grandchild relationship) (Harwood, Raman, & Hewstone, 2005; Soliz & Harwood, 2003, 2006). These studies have provided support for the argument that long-term relationship contact or familiarity influences positively perceptions of an out-group (Pettigrew, 1988). One area that has received surprisingly little, if any, attention from intergroup communication scholars is how individuals within a romantic relationship categorize their and their partners' social identity based on family membership. The lack of examination in this area is surprising because as Lay, Fairlie, Jackson, Ricci, Eisenberg, Sato, et al. (1998) noted, the family is the most salient in-group within which individuals categorize themselves.

Although the family is the most salient group individuals use to categorize themselves, it also is important to remember that within romantic relationships, individuals' perceptions of their partner can change based on their increasing familiarity. To explain a shift in categorization, intergroup communication scholars have turned to the concept of Social Categorization Theory (Turner, 1987). Researchers note that Social Categorization allows for a more fluid categorization of in-groups and out-groups (Reid, Giles, & Harwood, 2005). Much research demonstrating this fluid categorization has examined how individuals of different age groups categorize themselves (Harwood et al., 2005; Soliz & Harwood, 2003, 2006; Williams & Garrett, 2005).

Within these studies of age groups, researchers have posited that there are different stages in life that include certain ages (e.g., child, young adult) (Reid et al., 2005) as well as transitional periods between each stage in life (i.e., moving from being a child to a young adult) (Berger & Bradac, 1982). These prior studies by Harwood et al. (2005), Soliz and Harwood (2003) and (2006), and Williams and Garrett (2005) indicate that group membership does not remain constant and people can change perceptions of the groups to which they believe they, as well as others, belong (Reid et al., 2005).

Ultimately this fluid categorization can work to explain how individuals categorize themselves as well as their romantic partner in terms of group membership with their family. For example, the longer the length of individuals' relationships or as their commitment to one another increases, romantic partners may start to categorize their significant other as part of their family in-group. Thus, the length of relationship can predict how individuals will appraise the communication from their relational partners (Pettigrew, 1988), which provides a better explanation for how familiarity in a romantic relationship affects the hurt a partner feels in response to family-targeted hurtful messages sent by their romantic partner.

### **Rationale**

Although much research examining the use of hurtful messages in the romantic relationship context has been conducted (Parker-Raley et al., 2007; Vangelisti, 1994; Vangelisti & Crumley, 1998; Young, 2004; Young & Bippus, 2001), little research has examined the types of messages romantic partners send to their partner targeting their partners' family. As Myers et al. (2006) and Mills et al. (2002) found, different typologies of hurtful messages exist in the family context as do unique message topics. To identify the types of hurtful messages romantic partners send regarding their partners' family, the following research question is advanced:

RQ1: What types of family-targeted hurtful messages do romantic partners report receiving from their partner?

Prior research on hurtful messages has indicated that all four proximal factors (i.e., intentionality, intensity, and hurtfulness) are related positively to the perceived hurtfulness a receiver feels (Leary et al., 1998; Myers et al., 2006; Vangelisti, 2001; Vangelisti & Crumley, 1998; Vangelisti et al., 2005; Young, 2004; Young & Bippus, 2001; Young et al., 2005; Zang & Stafford, 2007); however, the receivers' familiarity with the sender can influence how the receiver interprets the hurtful message (Snapp & Leary, 2001; Vangelisti & Crumley, 1998; Vangelisti et al., 2005; Young, 2004). One explanation for why this occurs is the idea of intergroup communication, in which researchers argue that the more familiar individuals are with their interactional partner, the more likely they will have positive perceptions of their partner (Harwood et al., 2005; Pettigrew, 1988; Soliz & Harwood, 2003, 2006). Additionally, other research has indicated that as the intimacy level in a relationship increases, the more likely it is for partners to have a positive illusion of their romantic partner (Murray & Holmes, 1997; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996). Thus, as individuals move towards more committed types of relationships where the intimacy level is increased, the more likely that their categorization of their romantic partner will become positive and their perceptions of any hurtful message committed by their partner will be less negative. Based on these notions, the first hypothesis is extended:

H1: The more familiar the receivers are with their romantic partner (i.e., the type of relationship), the less negative they will appraise the proximal factors (i.e. intent, intensity, hurtfulness, sentiment) of the hurtful message.

Similarly, individuals will appraise distal factors (i.e., the level of closeness between the sender and the receiver, the receiver's satisfaction with the relationship, and the receiver's commitment in the relationship) (Young, 2004) when they receive a hurtful message. As intergroup communication researchers suggest, individuals' familiarity with their romantic partner will be positively related to their perceptions of the distal factors in their relationship. As such, the second hypothesis is forwarded:

H2: The more familiar the receivers are with their romantic partner (i.e., the type of relationship), the more positive they will appraise the distal factors (i.e., closeness to the relational partner, satisfaction of their relationship, relational commitment) of the hurtful message.

When individuals receive a hurtful message, their appraisal of the message will ultimately lead to how they respond (Vangelisti, 2001; Vangelisti & Young, 2000; Young, 2004). Vangelisti and Crumley forwarded three ways in which individuals can respond to a hurtful message including an active verbal response; an acquiescence response, or yielding to the hurtful message and avoiding confrontation with the sender; or an invulnerable response. Researchers examining these three response types have concluded that within unique contexts receivers of hurtful message use these response types differently (Myers et al., 2006; Vangelisti & Crumley, 1998). With these prior findings, it would be beneficial to address how romantic partners' use these three responses when they respond to family-targeted hurtful messages they receive from their partner. Thus, the following research question is extended:

RQ2: How do romantic partners respond to the hurtful messages received from their partner about their family?

## **Method**

### *Participants*

Participants included 277 college students in three communication courses at a large mid-Atlantic university. Participants consisted of 109 male students (39%) and 169 female students (61%) who were currently in a romantic relationship, in which the length of romantic relationship varied from one month to 420 months ( $M = 39.90$ ,  $SD = 71.47$ ). Participants' age ranged from 18 to 60 years old ( $M = 23.6$ ,  $SD = 8.05$ ).

### *Procedure*

Following the procedure utilized by Young and Bippus (2001), participants reported a conversation in which their partner used a hurtful message targeting their family in general or a specific family member. Participants detailed the conversation in which the hurtful message took place in script-like form. Once the participants detailed the conversation, they then placed an asterisk next to the hurtful message within the conversation. Based on the hurtful message each participant identified, participants then completed eight scales. These scales included the type of relationship, message intentionality, message intensity, message hurtfulness, relationship satisfaction, relational commitment, and relational closeness.

### *Measures*

*Relationship type* was assessed using Umphrey and Sherblom's (2001) classification of relationship types. Relationships were classified in one of the following five categories: *married*, *engaged*, *serious relationship* (i.e., individuals are beyond dating and the relationship is possibly heading towards engagement), *dating exclusively* (i.e., both individuals can not date any other people), and *dating casually* (i.e., both individuals can date other people). Thirty-three participants were *married*, 49 participants were *engaged*, 57 participants were in a *serious relationship*, 96 participants were *dating exclusively*, and 41 participants were *dating casually*, with one participant failing to specify a type of relationship.

*Message intentionality* (Young & Bippus, 2001) was assessed using a scale consisting of three items measured using a 7- point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree* (1) to *Strongly Agree* (7). Statements included "My partner intended to hurt me," "My partner was trying to get me back for something I had said to him/her," and "My partner was not trying to hurt me" (reverse coded). Previous reliability coefficients ranging from .71 to .85 have been obtained for a two-item version of the scale (Myers et al., 2006; Young, 2004; Young & Bippus, 2001). For the current study, a reliability coefficient of .70 ( $M = 3.17$ ,  $SD = 1.45$ ) was obtained.

*Message intensity* (Young, 2004) was assessed using a scale consisting of four items measured using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree* (1) to *Strongly Agree* (7). Statements included “The language use in this message was harsh,” “The wording of this message was abrasive,” “The way this message was worded seemed intense,” and “The wording used in this message was extreme.” A previous reliability coefficient of .85 was obtained for a similar scale consisting of five items (Young, 2004) and a reliability coefficient of .80 was obtained for a similar scale consisting of three items (Myers et al., 2006). For the current study, a reliability of coefficient of .84 ( $M = 4.50$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ) was obtained.

*Message hurtfulness* (Young & Bippus, 2001) was assessed using a scale consisting of two items measured using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree* (1) to *Strongly Agree* (7). Statements included “This message was extremely hurtful,” and “This message caused me a great deal of emotional pain.” Previous reliability coefficients ranging from .79 to .86 have been obtained for this two-item scale (Myers et al., 2006; Young, 2004; Young & Bippus, 2001; Zang & Stafford, 2008). For the current study, a reliability of coefficient of .78 ( $M = 4.45$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ ) was obtained.

*Relational closeness* (Vangelisti & Caughlin, 1997) was assessed using three subscales that measured how romantic partners perceive psychological closeness, everyday centrality, and similarity. The scale consists of 15 items. The psychological closeness subscale consisted of seven items measured using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from *Not at All* (1) to *Very* (7). Statements included “How close are you to your romantic partner?” and “How often do you talk about personal things with your romantic partner?”. Prior reliability coefficients ranging from .92 to .94 were obtained for measure (Myers, Brann, & Rittenour, 2008; Vangelisti & Caughlin, 1997; Vangelisti & Crumley, 1998). For the current study, a reliability coefficient of .95 ( $M = 6.03$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ) was obtained. The everyday centrality subscale consisted of three items measured using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from *Not at all* (1) to *Extremely* (7). Statements included “How often do you see your romantic partner?” and “How often do you talk to your romantic partner?”. Prior reliability coefficients of .74 to .90 were obtained for this measure (Myers et al., 2008; Vangelisti & Caughlin, 1997; Vangelisti & Crumley, 1998). For the current study, a reliability coefficients of .79 ( $M = 5.79$ ,

$SD = 1.16$ ) was obtained. The similarity subscale was assessed using five items measured using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree* (1) to *Strongly Agree* (7). Statements included “My romantic partner and I like a lot of the same things” and “My romantic partner and I are very similar.” Prior reliability coefficients of .82 to .88 were obtained for this measure (Myers et al., 2008; Vangelisti & Caughlin, 1997; Vangelisti & Crumley, 1998). For the current study, a reliability coefficient of .78 ( $M = 5.21$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ) was obtained.

*Relational satisfaction* (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998) was assessed using 10 items measured using a 7-point Likert Scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree* (1) to *Strongly Agree* (7). Sample statements include “I feel satisfied with our relationship,” “My relationship is close to ideal,” and “Our relationship makes me very happy.” Prior reliability coefficients ranging from .92 to .96 were obtained (Rhatigan, Moore, & Stuart, 2005; Rusbult et al., 1998). For the current study, a reliability coefficient of .94 ( $M = 56.02$ ,  $SD = 12.15$ ) was obtained.

*Relational commitment* (Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986) was assessed using a four item measure. The first item assessed, “For what length of time would you like your relation with this romantic partner to last?”, which participants scored on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from *A Week* (1) to *A Lifetime* (7). The second item assessed, “To what extent are you attached to your romantic partner?,” which participants scored on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from *Not at All Attached* (1) to *Extremely Attached* (7). The third item assessed, “To what extent are you committed to your romantic partner?,” which participants scored on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from *Not at All Committed* (1) to *Extremely Committed* (7). The fourth item assessed, “How likely is it that you will end your relation with your romantic partner in the near future?” which participants scored on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from *Not Likely* (1) to *Extremely Likely* (7). Young (2004) obtained a reliability coefficient of .82 for this scale and Panayiotou (2005) obtained a reliability coefficient of .75 for a four-item modified version of this scale. For the current study, a reliability coefficient of .89 ( $M = 5.74$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ ) was obtained.

*Reactions to hurtful messages* (Vangelisti & Crumley, 1998) was assessed by having participants indicate the type of reaction they used in response to the family-targeted hurtful message.

## Results

The first research question was interested in determining what types of family-targeted hurtful messages romantic partners reported receiving from their partner. Seven types of family-targeted hurtful messages emerged. To assure the seven types of family-targeted hurtful messages were properly categorized, two coders analyzed 25% ( $n = 69$ ) of the hurtful messages reported, resulting in a coefficient reliability of .81.

The first type of family-targeted hurtful message was *no family-targeted hurtful messages* ( $n = 3$ ), in which participants did not complete the hurtful message section of the questionnaire. The second type of family-targeted hurtful messages was *family-targeted hurtful messages do not happen* ( $n = 6$ ), in which participants indicated that hurtful messages do not occur in their relationship. One participant indicated that “there has yet to be an instance where my boyfriend has said something hurtful to me concerning my family.” The third type of family-targeted hurtful message was *partners expressing a lack of desire to interact* ( $n = 7$ ), defined as a message that indicated the partners’ unwillingness to spend time either with the targets’ family or a specific family member. Sample messages expressing a lack of desire to interact included “I do not want to go to your family’s house, your [sic] family is too boring for me,” “My boyfriend and I were talking about my parents and he said that he didn’t like being around my mom,” and

He didn’t say anything directly about her [my mother] but implied that he did not want to be around her [my mother] by refusing to join me while visiting her. He did this more than once thinking of different lame excuses not to come with me.

The fourth type of family-targeted hurtful messages that emerged was *name-calling of a specific family member or of the entire family* ( $n = 11$ ), defined as a message in which the partner called the target’s specific family member or entire family a name. Sample messages in which the partner called a specific family member a name included “Your dad’s a jerk,” “She called my dad a wasteful pig,” and “Your father is a hustler.” Sample messages in which the partner called the entire family a name included “Your family is all hicks” and “My family is from Pittsburgh

and my boyfriend said all people from Pittsburgh are stupid retards.” The fifth type of family-targeted hurtful message was *criticism of a specific family member or the entire family* ( $n = 27$ ), defined as a message in which the partner expressed disapproval of the target’s family or specific family member in any of the following areas: relationships, life choices, behaviors, appearance, and intelligence. Sample messages included “Your mom doesn’t care about you like mine does,”

“Your older sister gets on my nerves. She is always talking down to people and she thinks she is always right about everything” and “Your sister is extremely overweight, she’s fat.” The sixth type of family-targeted hurtful message was *comparisons to a family member* ( $n = 13$ ), defined as a message in which the partner compared the target to a negative attribute of a specific family member. Sample messages included, “You are going to be just like your alcoholic sister,” “She said I was just like my dad cold and emotionless,” and “You act just like your father.” The seventh type of family-targeted hurtful message was *none of the above* ( $n = 2$ ), which included any message that did not fit in to the previous types of hurtful messages such as “They [your parents] won’t like me because I’m black”, and “Was she [your mom] like oh no way are you with a truck driver.”

The first hypothesis predicted that the more familiar receivers are with their romantic partner (i.e., the type of relationship), the less negative they will appraise the proximal factors (i.e., intent, intensity, and hurtfulness) in the hurtful message. To evaluate this hypothesis, four ANOVAs were computed for intent, intensity, hurtfulness, and sentiment. Only those participants who indicated they received a family-targeted hurtful message from their dating partner were included ( $N = 241$ ) in these analyses. There were no statistical differences between the five relationship types and message intent,  $F(4, 235) = 2.26, p = .06$ ; message intensity,  $F(4, 231) = 2.15, p = .75$ ; and message hurtfulness,  $F(4, 235) = 2.11, p = .08$  (see Table 1). Thus, the first hypothesis was not supported.

The second hypothesis predicted that the more familiar receivers are with their romantic partner (i.e., the type of relationship), the more positive they will appraise the distal factors (i.e., closeness to the relational partner, satisfaction of their relationship, relational commitment) associated with the hurtful message. To evaluate this hypothesis, five ANOVAs were computed for closeness to the relational

partner (i.e., one ANOVA each for relational closeness, everyday centrality, and similarity), satisfaction of their relationship, and relational commitment. Again, only those participants who indicated they received a family-targeted hurtful message from their dating partner were included in these analyses. Significant differences were observed between the five relationship types and physical closeness,  $F(4, 227) = 27.98, p < .001$ ; everyday centrality,  $F(4, 227) = 23.22, p < .001$ ; similarity,  $F(4, 240) = 6.67, p < .001$ ; satisfaction,  $F(4, 238) = 21.98, p < .001$ ; and commitment,  $F(4, 238) = 51.83, p < .001$ . A closer examination of means in a Tukey's post-hoc analysis (see Table 2) indicated that those individuals casually dating consistently perceived the lowest distal factors for all five factors; married individuals always perceived the distal factors of the family-targeted hurtful message more positive than did those individuals in a casual dating relationship; and those individuals in an exclusive dating relationship perceived the distal factors as more positive than those in a casual dating relationship for all five factors. Thus, the second hypothesis was supported.

The second research question was interested in determining how romantic partners respond to the hurtful messages they received from their partner about their family. Twenty-five percent ( $n = 69$ ) of the responses were coded into the three response types identified by Vangelisti and Crumley (1998), achieving a coefficient reliability of .88. It was found that targets receiving family-targeted hurtful messages were most likely to use active verbal responses ( $n = 42$ ; "I raised my voice and told him that my bother was not a loser," "I then responded with a comment calling him annoying and told him that he does that same thing," and "Tell [told] her that he family is not perfect"), followed by invulnerable responses ( $n = 12$ ; "I walked away from the situation," and "I gave her a blank look and walked out") and acquiescence responses ( $n = 4$ ; "I burst into tears," and "I cried"). Nine participants indicated they did not receive a hurtful message and two participants did not specify the response they used after the received the family-targeted hurtful message.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was multifold. The first purpose was to identify the types of hurtful messages romantic partners send about their partners' family; the second purpose was to (a) examine the proximal and distal factors associated with the hurtful messages and (b) identify the types of responses romantic partners use when receiving a family-targeted hurtful message. The results revealed that romantic partners use six types of family-targeted hurtful messages; indicated that intergroup membership does not influence individuals' perceptions of the proximal factors of the hurtful message, but does influence individuals' perceptions of the distal factors of the hurtful message; and revealed that partners most commonly use active verbal responses in response to the hurtful message.

The results of research question one identified seven types of family-targeted hurtful messages that partners report receiving from their romantic partner. With a majority of respondents indicating that they have experienced a family-targeted hurtful message ( $n = 241$ ), the findings indicate that individuals can, in fact, be hurt by third-party hurtful messages. These findings add to Young and Bippus's (2001) argument that third-party evaluations are a unique typology of hurtful messages, in which their investigation concluded that individuals used third-party evaluations to comment on a third-party (e.g., "Your boyfriend is a loser") or comment on the type of relationship the target had with a third-party (e.g., "You are too bossy with your boyfriend"). Additionally, the results indicate that some family-target hurtful messages are similar to the typologies forwarded in prior research. For example, both *criticisms* and *name-calling*, which can be considered a type of negative label, were previously identified in typologies of hurtful messages used in the romantic relationship (Feeney, 2004; Young & Bippus, 2001). In this investigation, senders criticized and used name-calling to target their romantic partners' family instead of their romantic partner as previous research would suggest; however, the statements used were very similar to statements obtained in prior research findings (e.g., "Your mom is fat" or "Your dad is a jerk").

Although the following categories are seemingly similar, the meanings behind the categories of *comparisons* (Myers et al., 2006) and *expressing a lack of desire to interact* (Feeney, 2004; Leary et al., 1998) were different from typologies extended previously. Although Myers et al. (2006) discovered that parents use comparisons when remarking on their child's poor academic performance, in this investigation comparisons to a family member were different in that the sending partner used this type of hurtful message to critique both the family member as well as the target of the hurtful message (e.g., "She said I was just like my dad, cold and emotionless").

The category *expressing a lack of desire to interact* had a unique meaning in this specific context. Even though prior research indicated romantic partners express their lack of desire to interact with their partner through active and passive disassociation (Feeney, 2004; Leary et al., 1998), in this investigation, the sending partner used the family-targeted hurtful message to express their desire to spend less time with their partners' family (e.g., "My boyfriend and I were talking about my parents and he said that he didn't like being around my mom") as well as to express the a lack of desire to interact with their romantic partner in the future due to the target partner's family (e.g., "Remind me to never marry into your family.").

The first hypothesis predicted that the more familiar the receivers are with their romantic partner (i.e., the type of relationship), the less negative they will appraise the proximal factors (i.e., intent, intensity, and hurtfulness) of the hurtful message. This hypothesis was not supported, as there were no significant differences in proximal factors scores among the five different relationship types (i.e., dating causally, dating exclusively, serious relationship, engaged, and married). One explanation for why this hypothesis was not supported is potentially that the way the family-targeted hurtful message was composed and delivered affected the way in which the target perceived the proximal factors in the messages. Young and Bippus (2001) indicated that individuals perceive messages as having fewer proximal factors when the message is said in a humorous way. Zang and Stafford (2007, 2008) suggested that when a message is perceived as honest by the target, an individual's perceptions of the message change. Thus, in this study, if targets perceived the family-targeted hurtful message as honest or stated in a humorous manner, they may have perceived the hurtful message as

less hurtful than had the message been stated or delivered in a different manner, which may explain the lack of support for the hypothesis.

Additionally, this investigation did not examine the relationship the target romantic partner had with his or her family. The type of relationship that target partners have with their family could explain the lack of support for hypothesis one in that if target partners are not emotionally or relationally close to their family or the specific family member, their perceptions of the intent, intensity, and hurtfulness associated with the message may be altered due to a lack of or lesser investment in their familial relationship. Myers et al. (2006) reasoned that adult children who do not reside with their family anymore may be less likely to be hurt from a hurtful message from their parent that targets the child's academic performance. In a similar vein, it is possible that if target romantic partners no longer live with their family, they may perceive the intent, intensity, and hurtfulness associated with a family-targeted hurtful message differently than those targets who still live with their family, which may explain why there were no significant differences in proximal scores amongst the five relationship types.

One final explanation for the contradictory findings for the first hypothesis is that the frequency of family-targeted hurtful messages was not examined. As Kennedy-Lightsey and Dillow (2008) found, when hurtful messages are used more frequently, the more likely the target will be hurt by the message. Based on their findings, it is possible that, in this study, the family-targeted hurtful message either may have been an isolated occurrence or not used frequently, which might explain why the targets may have perceived the intent, intensity, and hurtfulness to be similar in all five of the relationship types.

The second hypothesis predicted that the more familiar the receivers are with their romantic partner (i.e., the type of relationship), the more positive they will appraise the distal factors (i.e., closeness to the relational partner, satisfaction of their relationship, relational commitment) associated with the hurtful message. This hypothesis was supported and indicated that those individuals in a casual dating relationship were less close, satisfied, committed, similar, and perceived their partner as less central in everyday life than individuals who were involved in exclusive, serious, engaged, or married relationship. This finding fits with the intergroup communication prediction in that individuals in casual relationships are less familiar and intimate with

each other than individuals in any of the other four relationship types (Harwood et al., 2005; Murray & Holmes, 1997; Murray et al. 1996; Pettigrew, 1988; Soliz & Harwood, 2003, 2006). This finding also is consistent with the notion that distal factors are less important in early relationships, but grow as the relationship becomes more intimate (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2007).

Although research suggests that the perceptions of distal factors will increase throughout the relationship (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2007), additional findings indicated that individuals who were married are just as close, satisfied, committed, similar, and perceive their partner as central to their everyday life as those individuals who were engaged or involved in a serious relationship. This finding can be explained by the idea that individuals in committed types of relationships (i.e., serious relationship or engaged) that are heading towards marriage can be as satisfied, committed, and close to their romantic partner as those individuals whom are already married (Umphrey & Sherblom, 2001). Thus, it makes sense why married, engaged, and serious relationship partners perceive the distal factors of the family-targeted hurtful messages in a similar manner.

The results of research question two, which examined how romantic partners respond to the hurtful messages they received from their partner about their family, indicated that partners most commonly respond to a family-targeted hurtful message by using active verbal responses. As well, individuals are far less likely to use invulnerable and acquiescence responses when receiving family-targeted hurtful messages. These findings suggest that individuals who receive a family-targeted hurtful message are more likely to get defensive and verbally respond to their romantic partner. Vangelisti and Caughlin (1997) suggested that individuals are protective of their family, so it makes sense that receivers would use active verbal responses when receiving family-targeted hurtful messages.

Despite the positive implications of this study, there are two limitations of this study. The first limitation, which was alluded to earlier, is that the target's perceptions of the composition and delivery of the family-targeted hurtful message were not examined. As Young and Bippus (2006) and Zang and Stafford (2007, 2008) indicated, composition and delivery can affect individuals perceptions of hurtful messages. Future researchers should consider investigating the effects

that both honest and humorously stated hurtful messages have on the target's perceptions of the family-targeted hurtful message. A second limitation is that the sending partners' perceptions of the family-targeted hurtful message were not examined. Prior research has indicated senders have unique reasons for sending a hurtful message (Leary & Springer, 2001; Martin et al., 1996; Vangelisti et al., 2005; Vangelisti, Young, Carpenter-Theune, & Alexander, 2005; Zang & Stafford, 2007, 2008) and both senders and receivers differ in their perceptions of hurtful message (Zang & Stafford, 2007). Thus, it is important for future researchers to determine the sender's perceptions of family-targeted hurtful messages to ultimately uncover whether senders and receivers have similar or differing perceptions of the family-targeted hurtful message.

In conclusion, the results of this study suggest that family-targeted hurtful messages are a unique typology of hurtful messages. As well, the intergroup communication prediction was supported for the targets perceptions of the distal factors (i.e., closeness to the relational partner, satisfaction of their relationship, relational commitment) of a hurtful message, in that the more familiar receivers were with their romantic partner, the more the receivers perceived themselves as close, satisfied, committed, similar, and central to their partner. Finally, it was found that targets used active verbal responses most frequently, followed by invulnerable responses, and acquiescent responses the least frequently when responding to a family-targeted hurtful message. Although there was some contradiction to this investigation's original predictions, explanations for why this lack of support existed were addressed. Thus, researchers should consider these ideas for future research to provide a better understanding of family-targeted hurtful messages.

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**The Good and the Bad and the In-Between News:  
African American Women Newsreaders’  
Responses to St. Louis Newspapers**

*Elisia L. Cohen*

**Abstract**

*This case study explores how 49 African American newspaper readers (in four focus group interviews) articulated their perceptions of the news coverage in the St. Louis American Black newspaper and its general audience counterpart, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. African American women reported turning to the American as an accessible, credible source of information. The newspaper readers described their struggles to integrate differing orientations to the St. Louis American and the St. Louis Post-Dispatch: information-seeking and avoidance, caution about these newspapers as a mouthpiece for positive and negative news coverage of the community, and resolve and reluctance to read “the good and the bad and the in-between news” in the papers. Women reported the St. Louis American engaged in a “positive” style of journalism distinctive from the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, and described the ways in which they believed the newspapers could be a source of community and health information.*

When considering newspapers as information resources for African American women, many questions must be considered. What information do Black newspaper readers seek to gain from Black newspapers? How does such information differ from what they read from larger, commercial general audience newspapers? What are the central characteristics of the news stories newsreaders perceive to be personally relevant and important to their daily lives? How have Black newspapers succeeded in sustaining their community appeal and staving off a gender gap in readership, which appears to affect daily general audience newspapers?

As a first step to address these questions, this study takes a case study approach toward understanding the perceptions of African American female newspaper readers in an urban newspaper market. A focus on African American female newspaper readers is particularly

needed, given the trend of many newspapers to reach out to women in an attempt to bolster their readership amidst trends of declining circulation numbers (American Society for Newspaper Editors, 2000; Cook, 2000; *Media Report to Women*, 1998; Stein, 1997; Nelton, 1994; McGrath, 1993; Wagner, 1990; Garland, 1982).

This case study examines African American female newspaper readers and their perceptions of a Black newspaper serving the African American community of Saint Louis. The Black newspaper under consideration, *the St. Louis American*, not only produces a significant amount of local news stories, but labels and advertises itself as a newspaper that plays a significant “niche” role in the community it serves by drawing attention to community concerns such as health and education (*St. Louis American*, 2008).

The *St. Louis American* was singled out not only because of its public claims of a community orientation with success in cultivating a female readership, but also because it has claimed a high level of success or improvement in readership and financial stability traced to this orientation to serve the local community. As a choice for case study, Saint Louis also offers an important opportunity to study the reach of a free weekly Black newspaper in an urban center where African Americans are the majority population (52%) that circulates alongside a successful, daily, subscription-based newspaper with paid circulation numbers that are similar to the free weekly (see Table 1). Thus, readers’ perceptions of the *St. Louis American* are considered in comparison to its daily, general audience counterpart, *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

A focus on the unique connection between Black newspapers and their readers is important given that Black newspapers were established in antebellum America as a counterpoint to negative representations of African Americans, and as a voice for a “beleaguered” people struggling for recognition and civil rights (Hutton, 1993). Early studies of Black newspaper readers indicated that the majority of African Americans viewed Black newspapers as supplemental to a daily paper, which often was regarded as a “mouthpiece” of the white power structure (Bayton & Bell, 1951). Historically, there has been a special connection between Black newspapers and African American women, as many Black newspapers advocated for the equality of women alongside racial integration and nonviolence (Hutton, 1990). Hutton (1990) argues that

given these benefits, African American women, in turn, brought financial and editorial support to the Black press.

However, today little empirical research has examined the reasons why readers continue to turn to such newspapers, despite the continued reach and relevance of these newspapers (Muhammad, 2003). Few recent studies have been conducted with Black newspaper readers to examine their thoughts and perceptions about modern Black newspapers (Vercelotti & Brewer, 2006). Some scholarship reflects the view that African Americans evaluate the Black press more positively than the daily general audience daily alternative (Johnson, Sears, & McConahay, 1971; Tan, 1978; Gibbons & Ulloth, 1982; Vercelotti & Brewer, 2006). Scholars have sought to explain these evaluations, in part, by studying the distinctive qualities of news stories carried in Black newspapers (Fearn-Banks, 1993; Muhammad, 2003), the ways in which African American newspaper editors and reporters perceive their role in the Black community (Lacy, Stephens, & Soffin, 1991), and the general relationship between African Americans and the print media (Allen & Bielby, 1979). Vercelotti and Brewer's (2006) study of African Americans' use of, and opinions toward, "mainstream" (general audience) and alternative Black media finds a positive relationship between consumption of mainstream and Black media, with a sub-group of politically alienated African Americans reporting more faith in Black media than the alternative. Given the ability of Black newspapers to publicize issues through their newsgathering and reporting practices, scholarship also needs to determine how these issues will be presented to their readership, and to consider their readers' responses.

Although experimental and community-based studies of media agenda setting in the United States have consistently shown the ways in which newspapers select and define issues for the public (Brown & Walsh-Childers, 1992), researchers have not systematically studied the ways in which targeted alternative media, such as the Black press, may similarly select issues and influence what people think about and how individuals will think about the news items. Research examining, based on survey data, racial differences in the agenda-setting process has found that whites and minorities do not have different issue agendas (Miller & Wanta, 1996). However, at least in one general audience agenda-setting study, research suggested that in a study community with a larger minority population, minority respondents reported that topics receiving

little media coverage were more important than did Whites (Miller & Wanta, 1996, pp. 921-922). As a result, Miller and Wanta (2006) concluded that given the availability of minority newspapers in that community, “exposure to the minority newspapers may have given respondents an agenda of issues... that differed from the mainstream news media agenda” (p. 922). Extant data also suggests that African Americans have more faith in what is reported in Black newspapers (Vercelotti & Brewer, 2006), and find Black newspaper reports credible (Gibbons & Ulloth, 1982; Wolseley, 1990). Clearly, understanding how newspaper readers perceive Black newspapers warrants further scholarly consideration.

Clearly, research has shown that Black newspapers and their editors intend to reach large numbers of African Americans in many U.S. cities with coverage that is community- and race-specific (Fearn-Banks, 1994; Lacy, Stephens, & Soffin, 1991; Wolseley, 1990). For example, research has shown that when covering health stories, Black newspapers are more likely to focus on personally relevant health disparities than their general audience counterparts (Author blinded 2008). Yet despite the apparent promise of Black newspapers as a channel for local information and to promote a type of “public journalism,” surprisingly little is known about how readers talk about the Black newspaper in their community as compared to the general audience counterpart, and how readers respond to targeted stories about the community and health issues.

By taking a reader-response orientation to considering the role of a Black newspaper in serving its urban community, this study explores the ways in which female readers approach the newspaper in comparison to other city news organs, consider their local Black newspaper compared to the general audience alternative as an important source for information about public affairs, and discuss personally relevant news coverage in their local papers. As formative research exploring these considerations, the following study focuses on a sample of African American women newsreaders’ perceptions of the *St. Louis American* as a community information resource for African American women.

## The Study

Four research questions were posed—three questions assessing African American women’s perceptions of the Black newspaper and its news coverage compared with that of the general audience daily newspaper and a fourth question focusing on the role of the newspapers as health information resources:

RQ1: What perceptions do African American women have about the *St. Louis American*’s (the local Black newspaper’s) accessibility in the community?

RQ2: What is the difference between the *St. Louis American*, and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, with respect to African American newspaper readers’ perceptions of their newspaper coverage?

RQ3: What types news stories do African American women find to be important in local newspapers? What are their characteristics? What personally relevant stories do they recall?

RQ4: What types of health news stories do African American women to be important in local newspapers? What are their characteristics? What personally relevant stories do they recall?

## Method

To address these questions, a trained focus group moderator conducted four focus groups with African American newspaper readers in Saint Louis, Missouri. Collecting focus-group interview data from the women in this study is helpful to illustrate the ways that individuals create meanings in an interactive, social context and through discussion with others (Blumer, 1969; Patton, 1999). A communicative approach to such meaning-making is grounded in the “human tendency to discuss issues and ideas in groups” (Sink, 1991, p. 197). Group interviews afford researchers the opportunity to observe the give and take of discourse on a specific topic (Frey & Fontana, 1993; Powell & Single 1996). From a journalistic perspective, focus groups enable researchers to “solicit information about citizens’ attitudes, beliefs and community concerns” to help gain new perspective (Willey, 1998, p. 18). Moreover, from a

communication perspective focus groups help researchers understand people's sometimes discordant "views of reality" and to ground interpretations of social problems in the voice of the research participants (Willey, 1998, p. 18).

Following approval by Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects, African American women were recruited from within the city of St. Louis. Flyers were placed on Saint Louis University's campus, recruitment announcements were distributed to community listserves, neighborhood and civic groups, and phone calls were placed to previous African American female participants in formative research. African American women aged 21-65 who had read the free Black newspaper in the past year were recruited and selected for participation in this study. To increase the participation of lower income, African American women who often lack health insurance [and often traditionally left out of research], fliers were distributed to social service agencies and non-profit organizations (e.g., Habitat for Humanity). Focus group participants received a parking or bus voucher, or transportation services to attend the focus groups and were compensated \$50 for their time.

The female focus groups (focus group 1:  $n = 11$ , Age  $M = 51$ ; focus group 2:  $n = 13$ , Age  $M = 52$ ; focus group 3:  $n = 12$ , Age  $M = 42$ ; focus group 4:  $n = 13$ , Age  $M = 45$ ) enrolling forty-nine African American women were conducted by a professionally trained African American female moderator who also worked as a research collaborator on this project. The average age women who enrolled reported was 48 years ( $Md = 50$ ), and most women reported reading the local Black newspaper weekly. Each focus group was audio and video recorded, and was approximately two hours in duration. Verbal and written informed consent to participate and to be recorded and videotaped was granted by all participants.

### Focus Group Interview Procedures

One member of the research team interviewed each group of African American women, while the principal investigator, a collaborator, and research assistants reviewed each group interview, including the questions and techniques used to elicit response. After each focus group, these peer reviewers debriefed with the moderator before the next focus group was conducted. Member checking with participants

was carried out informally in the interview process, with the moderator asking follow-up questions for clarification and verification of tentative conclusions to questions originating from the focus group discussion (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Participants were asked questions about their newspaper reading habits, their perceptions of the *St. Louis American* and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, why they turn to the Black or general audience newspaper for news, and the types of health stories they attend to in the papers.

### Data Transcription and Analysis

Each focus group audio recording was professionally transcribed. A research assistant used audio and videotapes to de-identify the records and to review the transcripts for accuracy. Verbatim transcriptions of all focus group sessions were entered into a Nud\*Ist6 database (QSR, Australia) to help organize in-vivo and open coding.

The principal investigator with the assistance of several research assistants developed an initial list of answers expressed in the participants' responses to each question. Following Braithwaite and Baxter's (2006) recognition that the meaning of something (e.g., perceptions of newspapers) rests with understanding its attributes or characteristics, data analysis focused on open and *in vivo* coding for "characteristics" of newspaper reading and newsworthy stories disclosed by women. As Lindlof and Taylor (2002, p. 220) recommend, recording instances of vivid language helped "anchor conceptual categories," and functioned to supply quotations for the analysis. After open coding that included the use of interview notes to ground interpretations, the researchers moved to axial coding (see, Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 220-221) to make connections between the categories, or the meanings of newspaper reading for African American women. Here, the researchers examined the "context" for newspaper reading, the "strategies" involved in women's newspaper reading and talk about the newspaper with others, and the "consequences" of the strategies that they identified. The identification of participant's orientations to newspaper reading was an inductive and iterative process, where the goal was to identify all of the salient meanings in the process. Integration through axial coding afforded the researchers to explore how the African American women describe their struggles to integrate differing orientations to Black and general audience newspapers: information-seeking and avoidance,

caution about newspapers as a mouthpiece for positive and negative news coverage of the community, resolve and reluctance to read “the good and the bad and the in-between news” in the *St. Louis American* and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, and the ways in which they believed the newspaper could be a source of health information. Thus, the sections which follow address these themes central to African American women’s orientations as newsreaders and their perceptions of the *St. Louis American* and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

### *Findings*

Among the women’s general observations, African American women reported appreciating the Black newspaper’s particularly accessibility as a context to their newspaper reading. Saint Louis readers focused on how it literally “touches” the African American community in the city because there’s “on almost every corner a stand that has the *St. Louis American* and it’s free” (Focus Group 2). Readers noted that it’s “displayed outside of church,” “on the corner by the post office” and “people pick it up as they go out the door” (Focus Group 1).

The features of the Black newspapers also led readers to explain how they uniquely enjoy reading the Black newspaper and deliberately seek the paper out. In comparison to general audience commercial newspapers, one participant noted that there is something in the Black newspaper for all readers:

It’s [the *St. Louis American*] very accessible to anyone. They have ... it’s free and it’s very accessible and it’s ... almost anywhere you go in the Black neighborhood, there’s a stand where you can actually get the paper. And it has entertainment, sports and so on and so forth, so the young, old and in-between ... all ... there’s something in there for everybody. (Focus Group 4)

The women also reported turning to the *American* for “a lot of writing” with a “different” perspective on the problems confronting the St. Louis Public Schools, employment possibilities, and news concerning the local economy (Focus Group 3).

These readers also reported selectively reading the daily (*The St. Louis Post-Dispatch*) paper for job ads and social information, although some often would read it on Sundays at their leisure in its entirety. For

these women, the *Post-Dispatch* complimented their reading of the *American* to help them keep up on employment information and events in the St. Louis region. Interestingly, although many participants detailed their “selective” reading of the *Post-Dispatch*, many had stories about how seeking the *St. Louis American* was an “active” process.

#### Black Newspaper Readers as Information Seekers and Avoiders

As exemplary of the ways in which women reported their “seeking” behavior with respect to the Black newspaper, one woman explained that although the large local daily commercial newspaper is online, and she seeks it out to look for employment advertising, she never looks for it in print. However, this type of seeking-behavior is normal for her with respect to the *St. Louis American*:

I'm looking at the stltoday.com every day. But it's like I'll glance through the first page, and then I go straight to like the job section ... I don't get as much out of it as I would if I had an actual paper, but then ... I think it's only what I'm looking for. I'll go looking for the *St. Louis American*, but I don't go looking for the *Post-Dispatch*. (Group 4)

Most participants reported that the Black newspaper was a unique, important and influential source of information in the Black community. Although some participants protested that it was unfair to compare the influence of a the weekly Black newspaper with the daily, large commercial paper, participants firmly argued that the *St. Louis American* was simply more influential in the Black community.

Participant 1: ... there's one almost every corner a stand that has the *St. Louis American* and it's free. So as per se to the *Post-Dispatch*, you have to pay, what, fifty cents daily every day of the week and then on Sunday it's a dollar twenty-five. So you actually are not spending any money buying the *American*. And then it has as much information in it as the *Post-Dispatch* does.

Participant 2: I don't think it has as much information.

Participant 1: I mean, as far as what's going on in the city of Saint Louis.

Participant 3: If we want to be specific and say if this is what you're looking for, just for the Black community, I would lean toward the *St. Louis American*. (Focus Group 2)

There were also uniquenesses to the Black newspaper that were noted by participants across the focus groups. First, participants argued that the Black newspaper plays a “positive” role in the community as a “Black owned, Black operated paper” (Focus Group 2). The notion that the *St. Louis American* reports on what’s happening from within the community on significant topics was very important to newsreaders’ sense of its influence, as well as its accessibility and due to its free distribution supported by advertising. As one participant noted:

I think that the *St. Louis American* [does] dig deep and they have good sources. They give a lot of information that Black people like. They go within the community. (Focus Group 1)

As a result, participants reported the unique cultural legitimacy given to stories found in the Black newspaper because of its news of interest to individuals within the community, by members of the community.

At the same time, one woman was careful to explain that its accessibility contributes to an even broader social influence:

It's [the Black newspaper] also accessible to not only African Americans, but to also whites, because where I work ... whites are really in to it. So it's not just appealing to African Americans. And it's very influential because you get to know a lot of things that's going on in Saint Louis. There might be important ... important people that you might want to meet or get to know what they're doing. (Focus Group 4)

A similar discussion highlighted how the Black newspaper could spark intercultural communication. Women reported passing them on to their white friends. As one woman explained:

... they have them everywhere. The grocery stores ... I mean, everywhere. We don't have them in my church so I always take a bunch to the church for people to get in a church that is an interracial church. So I try to take ... feed them as much as I can. (Focus Group 1)

Black Newspapers as a Mouthpiece for Positive and Negative News Coverage of the Community

There were several thematic explanations newspaper readers gave to illustrate the Black newspaper's uniquely positive role in the community. They relayed its specific significance to the Black community for its unique reporting of community issues:

Participant 1: ... it's influential to the Black community. I think it's more so than the *Post-Dispatch* if they go there to read information, see what all is going on with the school district. That's where they went to, *St. Louis American*.

Participant 2: ... I was going to say that [there is] news in the *Black American* that you don't see any other place and it just ... aside of the front of ... like the *National* and the *Final Call*, it is like the main thing for St. Louis Black Americans to see what's going on in the Black community. (Focus Group 1)

In fact, participants explained their interest in reading the Black newspaper, even when they do not have much time. As one reader commented:

I find it [the *St. Louis American*] to be very informative in a wide range of topics, like the ones that we've mentioned here today. Maybe every other week, and it's not because I don't want to ... it's just because ... sometimes it's just the time. But I think it's a very, very good newspaper, and it's a wide-spread distribution in the St. Louis metro. It's very informative. (Focus Group 4)

Beyond Black newspapers' attention to community stories that are personally relevant, newspaper readers turn to the newspaper for relevant "good news" featuring people that they know. As one participant remarked, "You see a lot of names and people's faces in the paper that you don't hear anything on KTVI or radio that they did." (Focus Group 3). Another participant echoed the view that she had "this feeling that they have stories that are more related to Black Americans, you get interesting stories other than crime, race and things like that. Things that is of interest to us, as a people" (Focus Group 4). This was

consistent with the expressed sentiment that this is because it's "positive" and "about us and our community" (Focus Group 2).

Another reason why participants recounted seeking out the free Black newspaper is for its reporting on issues of personal relevance, entertainment and educational value. As one participant explained, "I believe that when I read it, I enjoy it. It's educational, it's like she say, for your health and everything, and since I've gotten older, I try to keep up with my health and try to ... to find something that is pertaining to me" (Focus Group 4). Participants pointed to the health and social information as reasons to read the Black newspaper and to share the newspaper with others, particularly with their children.

### Black newspapers report "the good, bad and in-between news"

A clear reason many women reported they 'seek out' the *St. Louis American* is for their detailed coverage of community news. One woman remarked:

I think they give more details when it's about Black people than they would in the *Post-Dispatch*. They give more details about whatever happened. The *Post-Dispatch* maybe would have headlines saying one thing, not too much about it. But in the *St. Louis American* they would explain things to you more ... more details in the story. (Focus Group 4)

A lively discussion ensued in response to the moderator's question of whether they felt that the Black newspaper reported on issues that mattered to the African American community. As one woman explained, "they report the good, bad and in between news. They also report the achievements within the Black community from the young and old and important to me" (Focus Group 4). Others expressed the view that the *St. Louis American* was "more about Blacks" and "... it's so in-depth with the Black community that it [covers] more issues in the Black community than the *Post-Dispatch*" (Focus Group 2). Focus group participants expressed that beyond the depth of coverage, they felt there was also balance and additional perspectives in the *American* that helped them keep up with the happenings in their community, the issues facing the public schools, and obituaries of loved ones and former teachers from "grade school" (Focus Group 3).

Black newspaper readers distrust the coverage of the general audience newspaper

The trust these women have for the Black newspaper stands in contrast to the ways in which the general audience paper is met with suspicion for its negative tone in news coverage affecting African Americans. As one woman indicated, “I think the *Post* is more of about sound bites and shock factors to sell papers. They like to give headlines that shock you and upset you, and they have sound bites on what they want you ... they try to influence your thinking” (Focus Group 4).

Across focus groups, the women articulated the view that the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* provides a dominant interpretation of community events, as well as historic ones such as the 1904 World’s Fair, that asks the readers to accept its frame of reference. Moreover, the women in the fourth focus group together discussed the bias apparent in the *Post’s* reporting of the Fair that left out the perspectives of the cities’ significant African American population. These Black newspaper readers used the *Post’s* coverage of the 1904 World’s Fair as a case study of its privileging a white perspective in its reporting when it effectively generically described how “The St. Louis people enjoyed it.” As one participant explained, “Well ... no we didn’t” (Focus Group 4).

When comparing the local Black newspaper to the city’s large commercial daily, some participants explained why they have stopped reading the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, but continue to read the *St. Louis American*. Others believed that the *Post-Dispatch* had been cutting its coverage of the Black community in support of a national news focus targeting its larger (white) audience. One woman argued:

They [the Post] done cut down the Metro, where they put most of the Black in the Metro and put the all-over, like the whites, in the front page. They put ... and then they don't cut that down. The Metro cut down to about two pages, two or three pages. And then little bitty articles you might bypass.  
(Focus Group 2)

The felt bias of the general audience newspaper meant that many Black women did not read the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* in the same way that they read the *St. Louis American* was detailed in the focus group discussion. As one exchange revealed:

Participant 1: I can only say what my experience is. I think some people really don't read the Post because they don't think it addresses Black issues fairly.

Participant 2: That's true.

Participant 1: That's not necessarily my experience with it, but the people that I associate with and talk to.  
(Focus Group 3)

This view resonated across focus groups. As one woman indicated, “I used to be a daily reader, but not anymore. Sometimes the news to me is a bit slanted, and there are so many other sources to get information from” (Focus Group 4). The women explained how the paper’s style targeting a general audience at times influenced their ability to enjoy reading the paper.

### Black Newspapers can be a Tool for Health Education

As a tool for education in the community, Black newspapers clearly spark conversation about health and disease in the community. Many women reported looking forward to reading the *St. Louis American* and identified the recent addition of its health news “section” as an important source of health information. Sometimes health news was delivered in a ‘pullout’ format, although other times health news was embedded in columns and articles, particularly about African American celebrities. Some women described the news and health recommendations found in the *St. Louis American* to be informative and “crucial” to their health.

Women’s trust in the information in the newspaper may have spillover effects when it comes to how they read health information. One woman argued that she finds the stories in the Black newspaper to be more believable. She said:

I just think the information there is usually so good and I trust the American. Sometimes when I read things in the Post, I kind of wonder, where is this coming from? What slant is this coming from? Especially when they're reporting AIDS/HIV. Where are they getting this information from? So I guess there's a [Inaudible - trust] with the *St. Louis American*, I look forward to what I read there. I believe it.  
(Focus Group 1)

Women also report reading the health information in the Black newspaper, noting that recently the *St. Louis American* did an article on Nellie (the rap artist)'s sister with leukemia in coordination with its coverage of Nellie's local concert. Such reporting resulted in African American newsreaders learning that there was a need for African American "bone marrow donors. Across focus groups, participants agreed that the *St. Louis American* has done a good job of "focusing" those "in the Black community," and recently "the need for donors" and specifically, Black bone marrow and organ donors.

There are multiple ways news readers felt that the *St. Louis American* made health information more relevant, both personally and to their community. Often, women in the groups told a bit of personal history while explaining the personal relevance of the *St. Louis American*'s health news coverage. One participant indicated:

Because I'm a double cornea recipient... those kinds of things, they do affect me. And my girlfriend has just recently been diagnosed with breast cancer, so that's another issue. My brother-in-law had prostate cancer, so that's another issue. There are a lot of things that the *St. Louis American*, like I said, the health ... the health paper that they have inserted in there, to me is crucial. It's crucial that we pay attention to what is going on, and they hit on a lot of subjects that you can sit and read, that you don't have to get a medical textbook to understand and I like that. It's just basic information and it should make you stop and think. There are a lot of good articles in there about health. (Focus Group 4)

Readers responded to the ways in which the newspaper made health information personally relevant by framing health disparities in the case of HIV with information about prevention. More importantly, participants recognized the ways in which the messenger of the news story was, perhaps, important to the credibility of health news delivered by the Black newspapers. One participant said:

I think they do an especially good job of talking about HIV prevention in the *St. Louis American*. When it's printed and African Americans read it in The *St. Louis American*, I think they may kind of be able to be pulled in through it, better than if they saw it in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. I don't

know if they would think that, this is like pointing a finger at them or what ... I don't know. (Group 1)

The readers also reported noticing regular columns written by local doctors that they relied upon as credible information that they could talk about with their doctor or loved ones.

### *Implications*

Given the ways in which African American women report using news gathered from their local Black newspaper, the *St. Louis American*, there are several implications for journalistic research and practice. First, these focus group conversations reveal how African American newsreaders prefer the news storytelling practices of the *St. Louis American* as compared to its general audience counterpart (*The St. Louis Post-Dispatch*). A case study approach to understanding readers' responses to local newspapers highlights the complex and sensitive process of such women's engaged news reading practices. Women clearly felt that the Black newspaper contained more community and personally relevant stories that they enjoyed reading in comparison to the general audience daily paper. Moreover, women felt that the Black newspaper often reported news that "you can use" in every day life. Beyond information about community events and job opportunities, women recalled specific health stories that provided portable knowledge that they passed on to family members, friends, and loved ones.

An importance on this type of personally relevant news coverage to African American women potentially indicates the differential impact of newspaper coverage on these women as media stakeholders. Although the inherently subjective nature of these qualitative interpretations is limited by the recognition that women shared multiple, and sometimes conflicting, expectations and experiences with St. Louis media, the focus on understanding women's different perspectives and interests is of vital interest to media producers. That is, although a case study approach provides merely one set of 'local facts' to observe, it also uncovers some of the basic principles and perspectives of how Black female newspaper readers interpret and encounter newspapers in a broader media environment.

Thus, these data illustrate the notion of Black newspaper readers as “information-seekers.” Women reported deliberately seeking out the Black newspaper as a unique source of information about their community. Women turned to the Black newspaper to find stories about women who they could identify with as African American women. Furthermore, their expectation to find stories about people like themselves in the Black newspaper stands in stark contrast to their expectations of what they would find in the city’s large general audience daily newspaper. As one woman noted, even in the metro section – where there is the “Black news” – the stories are shorter, less positive, and less community-oriented than similar stories she would find in the Black newspaper.

Third, African American women report having a complicated relationship with the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* - their local daily, general audience paper. Although they laud the paper for its employment and lifestyle sections, including its “Get Out” schedule of events feature section, they often find themselves actively negotiating the news stories covering African Americans. Furthermore, many see the reporting as ‘slanted’ or as portraying the Black community of St. Louis in a predominantly negative light. In contrast, the *St. Louis American* offers such readers a different perspective, covering the “good, the bad, and in-between news” that matters to them.

For these reasons, often Black newspaper readers turn to the press to read in-depth stories that they can use in their everyday lives – whether to communicate with members of their church across racial divisions, to learn about the achievement crisis affecting the public schools, or to find out more about a disease such as breast cancer that has a disparate burden on their community. Such stories help define issues, such as education and access to health care, as important ones for their community. Furthermore, many women, as careful readers, reported responding to stories that help give people in their community agency.

Finally, this study supports the conclusion that the Black press remains an institution serving certain public functions for its readership that general audience newspapers do not. By addressing issues that are especially important and relevant to African American women as well as their local communities, readers continue to turn to such newspapers for news they can use. Furthermore, these readers share the belief that Black newspapers have a unique and positive role to serve in the community.

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**Millennial Students Meet Baby Boomer and Generation X  
Teachers: The Learning Curve for a Successful  
Educational Intersection**

*David A. Wendt & Lora L. Wolff Ph.D.*

**Abstract**

*The impact of the millennial generation is being felt throughout our society. The vastly different philosophies of the Millennial Generation, Baby Boomers and Generation X'ers can cause tension in an educational setting. Instructional strategies, acceptance of differences and educational implications will lead to a successful educational experience for all involved stakeholders.*

“School didn’t teach me to read-I learned from my games.”  
(Anonymous Student)

“It’s not just their gadgets - it’s the way they’ve fused their social lives into them.” (Choney, 2010)

Each generation exhibits specific personality traits and of course, each generation has a name. Current teachers are generally labeled Boomer and Generation X and are considered strong individualists. Enter the students (a.k.a. Millennials) who are team-oriented, sheltered, confident, conventional and pressured. Students who truly consider themselves ‘special.’ The 2006 Cone Millennial Cause Study found that 61 percent of Millennial students or ‘Echo Boomers’ feel personally obligated to make a difference in the world. Can the ‘old school’ theory of individualism and the ‘new age’ idea of pluralism unite together to discuss the future of our society? Can this daily educational intersection provide the necessary environment for the students to be productive citizens of the future? Can this experience fulfill the satisfaction factor of the educators? To better understand what is happening in classrooms, the ideology of each generation must be explored and analyzed. ‘Generational change happens almost imperceptibly, but it does happen and often comes from behind and bites us in the ego’ (Abram 2004).

Numerous sources have indicated the given nicknames and major influences of past generations to include:

<b>Generation</b>	<b>Born</b>	<b>Major Influence while Coming of Age</b>
G.I.	1901-1924	Depression and WWII
Silent	1925-1942	American High of Prosperity
Boomer	1943-1960	Consciousness and Revolution
Generation X	1961-1981	Culture Wars and 90's Boom
Millennial	1982-2002	Media and Digital Communication

The G.I. and Silent Generations are linked together and are called 'Traditionalists.' Their characteristics are patriotism, faith in institutions and loyalty. They tend to work for one company throughout their career. This influence comes from their memories of American military dominance during World War I, World War II and the Korean Conflict. Values of this group include: logic, discipline, dislike of change and each person wants to build a legacy for the future.

Baby Boomers characteristics include: idealism, competitiveness, and the question authority. This influence comes from the dream of the suburban life style, impact of early television, the impact of drugs in our culture and the Human Rights movements. Their values tend to come from the 'Me' generation and center around money, titles, recognition and wanting to build a stellar career.

The title of the Most Misunderstood Generation is given to Generation X members. Their characteristics include: resourcefulness, self-reliance, being distrustful of institutions, highly adaptive to change, being familiar with technology and being a bit eclectic. The major influences on this generation include: Sesame Street, MTV, Game Boy and personal computers. Two social influences of this time period was the increasing number of latch key children and the national divorce rate that tripled in number. The values of this group include: balance between work and life, having a sense of freedom, having a portable career and being flexible and motivated.

The globally concerned Millennials are realistic and cyber-literate. They consider their personal safety a number one concern. This group is heavily influence by the heavy influx of technology, increasing numbers of natural disasters, increasing awareness of gang-related issues and diversity training. "Some 24 percent of Millennials say technology

use makes their generation unique, far more than the 11 percent who identified music and pop culture. By comparison, a 12 percent plurality of Generation X chose technology use” (Krigman, 2010). Their values concern solving the social problems of the previous generations and wanting their work to be meaningful.

Our information-based society clearly impacts the traits of Millennials. “43 percent of students say e-mailing friends or family is their favorite activity, followed by 31 percent who cite playing games and 17 percent who say they enjoy listening to or downloading music” (Whelan, 2004). In 1983, 38% of our society relied on information for career success as opposed to the 71% in 2007. “The technological revolution has exacerbated the situation. The advent of the Internet, supercomputers and high-speed connections is driving massive change in the ways companies do business. This has put a greater divide between the generations who grew up with technology and the ones who are playing catch-up” (Lancaster, 2002). The information boom of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century forever changed the lives of the citizens of the world. This surge of available information impacted nearly every corner of the world. Easy information exchange could bring knowledge from the world’s leading nations to the hard hit third world nations struggling to feed the people, where poverty is the only known concept of real life. It is hard to imagine that the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989 changed the immediate foundation of our society in a short time frame by opening the entire former Soviet Union controlled portion of the world. The knowledge of that oppressed segment of the population that was primarily influenced by a socialist government enhanced the current information of the rest of the free world. Combined with the fact that the worldwide web started in 1989 and there is no doubt about the exponential adds validity to the quick growth of information. The visual imagines of the Challenger explosion, the Columbine shootings and even the 9/11 disaster still lingers in the hearts and minds of this generation’s childhood memories. The instant globalization and acquisition of world knowledge since 1989 has impacted the education of this generation. Teens of today have easy access to information via technology that previous generations learned through encyclopedias, periodicals and other research publications. “Millennials and Gen X-ers now cite the Internet as their main source for national and international news as Baby Boomers cite television. Only 24 percent get most of their news from

newspapers. In contrast, TV is the primary news source for 76 percent of Baby Boomers and 82 percent for the Silent Generation” (Choney, 2010). With the click of the mouse on a valid search engine, the entire world is open to anyone with a desire to seek out answers to questions. “Technology has allowed today’s teens to be ‘free agents’ in choice. Camera phones, interactive TV, downloadable music, instant messaging...teens have seamlessly integrated technology into their lives. Technology is part of the social currency of being a teen” (Helmrich 2004).

Most teens find it difficult to believe that there was a recent world that did not rely so heavily on personal technology for survival. “They expect computers to facilitate daily life, both personal and professional, in a way that’s still a little off-putting to other generations. Boomers wore book bags or backpacks to school, while Millennials, wear iPods, carry cell phones, and lug laptops” (Carey, 2008). Today’s Millennials are the first generation to have total access to technology since birth. “Our young people generally have a much better idea of what the future is bringing than we do. They’re already busy adopting new systems of communicating (instant messaging), sharing (blogs), buying and selling (eBay), exchanging (peer-to-peer technology), creating (Flash), meeting (3D worlds), collecting (downloads), coordinating (wikis), evaluating (response systems), searching (Google), analyzing (SETI), reporting (camera phones), programming (modding), socializing (chat rooms) and even learning (Web surfing)” (Premsky, 2006). As personal technology continues to evolve, today’s multi-tasking teens have the adaptability to easily adopt to the new devices of their future. Few of today’s classrooms allow students to utilize these skills on a regular daily basis, even though these personal devices are a constant in the comfort zone for most students. Why have these futuristic tools been left out of many classrooms, when computer use is infused in curriculum on a daily basis?

This easy instant access to information has been incorporated into the curriculum in most school districts. The 21<sup>st</sup> century skills assessment calls for all high school students to be fluent with technology, therefore, most high school educators will persuade their students to use the Internet for all research-based assignments. This gentle persuasion needs little teacher input as students seem to have forgotten the knowledge that is stored in books. The former time intensive style of

research of the past has been regulated to a shortened number of research class days before the assigned due date. Unless authentic sources are required, classroom research days appear virtually unnecessary. The immediate response by most students to research assignments is to surf the web or ask Google for help. The immediate concern would be for motivated students who do not have Internet access at home to complete research based assignments. “83 percent of teens say that the loss of Internet access would have a negative effect on their schoolwork, and 79 percent say that no Internet access would affect their personal lives” (Whelan, 2004). This is definitely true, as this student states “Almost every single night there’s a bunch of us online doing homework together,” said Drew Layton, a 17 year old senior in Plano, Texas. “We IM constantly.”

This overall freedom of knowledge and seemingly deeper understanding of the world gives a sense of empowerment to Millennials as they can surf the web and have an answer in seconds. “They’re empowered beyond any generation of teenagers before.” Todd Schrader, Vice President of Strategic Planning in Sony’s personal mobile products, says “Instead of leaving a note on the fridge, they send an e-mail.” However, this easy access to information and information overload provides numerous opinions, as well as, the facts of the plethora of websites available on each topic of study. Too many invalid web sites are masked as valid fact-based ethical sites from well-documented groups. Therefore, it is paramount that students are instructed how to validate web sites to gain true knowledge and evaluate the opinion of potentially unethical web masters. In a sense, many students struggle with this information overload. “There is no sense of right or wrong-only gray. The Internet is their geography-a world with no rules, false identities, and downloading with the press of a button. In a world of ‘reality’ TV based on lies, teens today are more likely to see the spin. They learn to play all sides” (Helmrich 2004). At an early age, elementary children must be taught how to evaluate web sites. Students must develop an internal value system that will become the foundation of a decision making process as they receive multiple opinions on daily topics of discussion. This dependency on technological devices and a quick-paced society pushes students to use their time in an efficient manner by completing numerous tasks and sometimes make important decisions in a short amount of time.

Multi-tasking is a way of life for Millennials. The Boomer mentality of focusing on one idea or task at a time seems boring and obsolete to this generation. “The average college graduate will have spent less than 5,000 hours of reading, but over 10,000 hours of watching and playing video games and over 20,000 hours of watching television” (Prensky 2001). Visual stimulation is a psychological key for media and advertising during the Millennials many hours of viewing. “Steeped in digital technology and social media, they treat their multitasking handheld gadgets almost like a body part-for better or worse” (Choney, 2010). It is common to watch a high school student listening to their I-pod, sending lengthy text messages to their friends on a cell phone and discussing a teen related story to another friend at the same time. This may seem impossible to a Boomer or Generation X crowd of adults. Though older adults may cringe at the continuous multi-tasking activities, they realize the teens can obtain the information much more quickly. However, “65 percent of kids say their parents ask them to surf the Net for information about products or services” (Whelan, 2004). This concept seems prevalent as many parents and grandparents wait for the kids to come home from school so that new technology can be installed in the proper manner. Also when a DVD recorder needs to be programmed, the teen is asked to perform the task and does so without hesitation. Also, the goal of preparing students for the work force of tomorrow demands the skill of multi-tasking as we currently have a “a job culture that demands always-on connectivity is flooding our days and nights with the clipped conventions and I-want-it-yesterday expectations of the workplace” (Dudley, 2010). The ability to effectively multi-task and the personal lack of fear of adjusting technology will definitely be prized workplace qualities. The advancement of our culture depends upon the quality of the future work force. Future employer demands will range from specific job expectations to a solid foundation of information that stems from easy access through technology to extended personal availability.

This personal availability can range from appearing on the job during traditional work hours or cyber availability on social networking sites. “Over the last five years, Millennials’ use of social networking sites exploded compared to older generations. In 2005, only seven percent of Millennials used social networking sites; now 75 percent do. In that time frame, Gen X-ers’ use of social networking sites grew by 43

percentage points, Boomers (ages 46-64) use increased by 25 percent points, and the Silent Generation, seniors over 65, only increased their use by four points. The rapid rise of social networking use has vast implications” (Krigman, 2010).

Personal time and space are viewed different today by Millennials as they are available 24/7 with their personal technology. Chat room dialogue cuts across time zones and national borders. Multi-hour chat room discussions can cut sleeping hours for teens most nights of the week, which could account for a decline in homework production. “Now 78 percent of 12 and 13 year-olds who own cell phones have gone to bed with them at their sides. That figure rises to 86 percent among teens 14 and older. And young women take things even further: 21 percent of those 18 through 34 check Facebook in the middle of the night” (Pew, 2010). The prized commodity of the personal down time was reinvented with the advent of numerous social networking sites. These sites have dramatically increased in popularity, redefining the thought of personal information dissemination. Network users feel personal freedom as they declare their relationship status, daily emotional meltdowns and their pet peeves of the day. “About 75 percent of Millennials have created a profile on a social networking site and one in five has posted a video of themselves online. But their look-at-me tendencies are not without limits. Most Millennials have placed privacy boundaries on their social media profiles” (Choney, 2010). What private information that once was taboo to a large group of strangers, is now public domain for thousands on Facebook, My Space and Twitter. Millennials prefer to contact their peers by personalized home pages and texting. “We’re moving to an era of ‘public by default, private by effort. This is an inversion of the past. The key thing to understand about social networking sites is that they are first and foremost about connecting with people you already know” (Krigman, 2010). However, the constant concern about a lack of interpersonal contact and personal etiquette remains steadfast in the minds and hearts of the parents and teachers of a different era. “Millennials are accustomed to collaborating: remember, these are the kids who even went to school dances in groups rather than one-on-one dates. They’re used to working on group projects and approach new technologies with confidence rather than anxiety,” says Harbrinder Kang, director collaboration technologies for Cisco Systems, Inc. (Carey, 2008). Is the art of face-to-face communication in fear of

extinction? Will the value of a smile or the strength of a hand on the shoulder remain the same for future generations? “Millennials are also more likely than older adults to say technology makes life easier and brings family and friends closer together” (Choney, 2010). As teens develop cyber friendships from across the world, how much do they learn about positive development of interpersonal relationships? Is the on-line persona an accurate portrayal of the true self? Can teens develop an effective evaluation for personal safety from cyber predators?

With the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills agenda, school systems must combine the concerns of the past with new futuristic concerns. In an interview with USA Today, UCLA neuropsychologist Elizabeth Sowell said, “Human brains change rapidly in early life and animal research shows that stimulation can ‘rewire’ the brain” (Yan, 2006). How can schools teach elementary students to be safe from cyber criminals, as well as, not being hit by a vehicle while crossing the street? How can students be taught to de-escalate potential cyber bullying? How can students be taught financial literacy to negate potential bankruptcy and avoid being swindled by an on-line scam artist? How can students be taught correct on-line banking procedures while learning to avoid the lure of products on eBay? How can self-esteem be fortified when cyber personalities may be a façade of a villainous human being? As technology advances, the fact remains that ‘kids will be kids’ and will make mistakes. The fundamental component of education must be a common sense approach as “... an abundance of studies have shown that adolescents use a different part of the brain when they are asked to do more complex thinking—a part that is used in childhood for decisions and functioning but is not as good at adult thought processes. Only later do they start to put the adult part of the brain (the prefrontal cortex)—the part where strong executive function takes place—to work fully” (Paterson, 2010). Current school systems were constructed so that students would have the opportunities to build skills in facilitate the development of the brain as they progress from elementary to high school. Should the current instructional practices be evaluated for critical thinking skills and complex problem solving opportunities to help enhance a mature thought process at a quicker pace?

One question that looms for each educator is how to accurately assess students’ abilities to analyze and apply information while maintaining a sense of strong student engagement. A strong assessment

program could give immediate feedback on the basic application of knowledge into practical 'real life' situations. Rubric development could follow to determine the standards and benchmarks of the academic instruction component of the analysis. Formal literacy skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening and thinking) must be stressed as the basic functions of our society depends upon to effectively communicate ideas on an interpersonal level. "Our thinking, our evaluation of the world-psychologically and morally-depends enormously on our ability to grasp and present concepts, and for this a developed sense of language is essential. A culture that has grown linguistically slack is susceptible to every sort of rhetoric and demagoguery" (Birkets 2004).

### **Classroom Implications**

So what are the implications for today's classrooms? What can Boomer and Generation X teachers do to accommodate Millennial learners?

- \* First and foremost, educators must be ready to think and educate differently! "The key to teaching is keeping kids involved," says Ryan Ritz, a computer science teacher. "They like everything being electronic, it's speaking their language." (McHugh, 2005). This is going to require significant changes.
- \* School districts need to develop an information system and a mediation system for helicopter parents. The term, helicopter parent, was first used by Foster W. Cline and Jim Fay in their book – *Parenting with Love and Logic: Teaching Children Responsibility*, to describe parents who try to resolve their children's problems and keep them out of harm's way often using extreme measures. Many parents of Millennials appear hypersensitive in the areas of academic achievement, extra-curricular activities, and college entrance information.
- \* Because children of today have been brought up in a total immersion of media influence, basic media literacy needs to be taught in all content areas. Teachers must help students understand the construction of various media messages, persuasion and propaganda strategies used to influence people and why the message was sent to the audience. For help contact the Action Coalition for Media Education ([www.acmecoalition.org](http://www.acmecoalition.org)), Alliance for a Media Literate

America ([www.amlainfo.org](http://www.amlainfo.org)) and The Center for Media Literacy ([www.medialit.org](http://www.medialit.org)) among the many other available web sites.

- \* Because failing is a part of learning, educators need to use failure as a center point of instruction. Many students want to forget or downplay their failures. However, it is important to the learning process to dissect the failure and then reshape the solution for success. This concept is a direct result of video gaming philosophy. Consequences for failure can lead to celebrations of success!
- \* Lessons should incorporate higher order critical thinking skills on a daily basis. “Research has shown that when learners are left completely free to solve a complex problem, they may hit on creative solutions. But these solutions may not necessarily help them generate good hypotheses for solving later problems, even easier ones.” (Gee, 2005). Solving complex problems on a regular basis will build the confidence in critical thinking skills for the future.
- \* Consider the idea of incorporating current knowledge and ‘future’ knowledge. With the ever-changing pace of technology, new information and careers develop daily, it is important to keep students focused on the future. This is particularly important for students who have not found their niche. It is imperative that their personal focus remains on potential careers and tasks that may not be developed at this point in time.
- \* Boomer and Generation X teachers should learn the new dialect of the Millennial Generation. Understand the text messaging jargon and shortened symbols for words and phrases. Examples: RUOK? for “Are You OK?” or BCNU for “Be seeing you.” Remember that typing in all capital letters equates yelling. When developing a classroom blog or website, select a cool name that will show the students that you understand their world.
- \* Develop a classroom Facebook site. Assignment explanations, point values and dates can be available 24/7 for both students and parents. Students can become fans of the site. Various school events, community activities and cultural events can be posted for all members.
- \* Keep up-to-date with popular culture icons. Know the names of the students’ bands, performers, popular actors, products and terminology. Incorporate these pop culture icons into assignments.

Do not let the students perceive you as out of touch or judgmental concerning their personal choices of culture.

- \* Work to effectively dispense information in a concise manner. “Kids are bombarded by media. They’re completely high tech, and they don’t know a different way. When you hand them a book, they’re going to say, ‘Is that all there is?’” (McHugh, 2005). Teens may appear to lack the ability to focus and attend to detail as they expect some entertainment value in the subject matter. Problems can arise as certain subjects appear to be of less entertainment possibilities than other subjects. “Knowledge connected to disciplines-such as investigative research and writing-serves as one of the most fundamental tools for making sense of the world and acting effectively in it.”(Barab, 2009). Boomer and Generation X instructors were encouraged in their teacher education programs to base the curriculum primarily on textbook information. “Currently, the curriculums of the past-the ‘legacy’ part of our kids learning-are interfering with and cutting into the “future” curriculum-the skills and knowledge that students need for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” (Prensky, 2006).
- \* Add a reflective component into each assignment. “One key area that appears to have been affected by the intense use of technology is reflection. Reflection is what enables us, according to many theorists, to generalize, as we create ‘mental models’ from our experience. It is, in many ways, the process of learning from experience.” (Prensky, 2001). Reflecting on each learning opportunity should be encouraged. These moments of reflection help to establish the core values and ethics of individuals as they understand the personal context of ‘right and wrong.’
- \* Adding school appropriate video games into the classroom is one way to meet the learning needs of the Millennials. Educators must start to consider that the information exchange in the classroom must be similar to a video gaming situation. Children are constantly entertained while learning. Teachers must begin to realize that they ‘in a sense’ become entertainers for their students as they learn the information. This possibly dramatic change of style will take time to learn. However, once the change in methodology occurs, the speed of the style change will increase. “When we deter our kids from ever playing electronic games, we are disabling them from acquiring

the skills that they will need for their future.” (Abram 2004). The future world will most assuredly be dependent upon the ability to manipulate and use technology. Therefore, our children must be functional in all technological arenas. “In transformational play, students become immersed in activities that engage them intellectually and push back on their thinking and actions. Rather than working on problems in which they must imagine the implications of their decisions (as in most project-based work), students experience consequentiality.” (Barab, 2009).

- \* Adopt multi-source reading research assignments. Utilize both on-line and classic reading sources. Help the students understand the advantages and disadvantages of all sources of knowledge. Cover the definition of authentic sources and discuss the importance of their value. “Since 1982, the percentage of the U.S. population reading literature has dropped more than 10 percent, from 56.9 to 46.7 percent; literary reading by educational category has dropped sharply at every level.” (Birkets 2004). Encourage the value of quality reading in all careers tracks from college bound to vocational and from military to professional.
- \* Consider incorporating Skype into the classroom. Establish a connection with a classroom across the country or across the world. This easy-to-use software, a microphone and a webcam can bring lectures to life. “Such moments of human contact make geography, culture and language real for students.” (Cutshall, 2009). Skype can be downloaded at [www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com).
- \* Use Podcast or Wiki Lectures. Allow students to interact with professional experts on every classroom topic. “Before, I was always complaining that I never had time to go in-depth and talk with my students,” said Assistant Professor of Communication Maria Dixon, “Now they come in much more informed about a subject than they would have if they had been assigned a reading.” (Young, 2009).

One instructional strategy that appears to be very futuristic, but utilizes traditional skills:

- \* Consider incorporating a comic book segment as a literary unit. Most students love to read and look at comic books. “In creating a comic, you have to do an extra-ordinary amount of planning,” says

Michael Bitz, cofounder of the Comic Book Project, “You have to think about what the plot is, who the characters are, what the tone of the comic book will be, the sequence, what the characters learn, the conflict and the resolution—pretty much everything that would apply to a narrative generally. Also, all the core components of English language arts—like spelling, grammar, punctuation, sentence structure”.

### **Conclusion**

One visual example of the realistic view of Millennial thinking is seen at the National Building Museum in Washington D.C. in 2001. A caption on an exhibit describing the history and future of the American Office states: “Companies come and go with the lightning speed of a computer’s delete button.” This simple, true statement is a realistic indication of the thought process of the Millennial Generation.

When true systemic change occurs in current educational philosophy, then there will be the possibility of increased student engagement. When the comfort level of all students is achieved daily in classrooms through the inclusion of personal technological devices and applications, students will see that the rigor and relevance of the curriculum is necessary for their personal academic success. Students must see that education is a foundation for a successful future. Teachers need to use the tools of the Millennials to help them learn. If this change is made, students will no longer close their minds as they walk through the doors of the school building. “It is ironic that young people today are often exposed to more creative and challenging learning experiences in popular culture than they are in school. The principles on which video-game design is based are foundational to the kind of learning that enables children to become innovators and lifelong learners.” (Gee, 2005).

“Millennials are ground-breaking in the sense that its members have come of age in a both politically and socially tumultuous period with constant bombardment from various media outlets. As the first generation to have easy access to the Internet, ways of thinking have changed rapidly.” (Yan, 2006).

Each generation possesses personality traits based upon the major influences of the time period. The educational intersection of generations will continue as older generations attempt to educate the

younger generations. Educational success will occur when the passing generation begins to learn and analyze the traits of the future generation to find effective strategies to pass on the wisdom of the ages.

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## **Integrating Teaching and Interdisciplinary Scholarship to Enhance Student Learning Outcomes**

*Traci M. Cihon Ph.D. & Christopher J. Stephens*

### **Abstract**

*A behavior analysis professor and a communications/theatre professor have collaborated in multiple studies applying techniques of behavior analysis to the acquisition of second language and to the theatre rehearsal and performance process. Findings will be discussed regarding their implications for and applications to: closing the achievement gap, the scholarship of teaching and learning, participation in extra-curricular theatre activities, global studies and the development of lifelong learners.*

The current article describes a model of interdisciplinary scholarship as applied to teaching and directing to enhance student learning outcomes. Professors Cihon (Assistant Professor in Behavior Analysis) and Stephens (Professor in Theatre/Communications) began their collaboration in October 2009 when Cihon joined the Italian Studies Learning Community (ISLC; formed by Stephens in 2004) at St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley (STLCCFV) and Stephens joined the Direct Assessment, Teaching, and Analysis (DATA) lab in the Department of Behavior Analysis (DBA) at the University of North Texas (UNT). Cihon and Stephens have conducted three studies with implications for the Communications and Theatre curricula (two focusing on Italian language acquisition and one documenting the effects of Learning Communities and the theatre performance process on student learning and behavior).

### **A Call for Research**

Globalization has increased the need for students to develop cultural competency and to learn new languages. Many education systems have increased the foreign language requirements necessary for graduation to somewhere between one and three years of coursework.

Furthermore, educational settings are becoming more diverse with a growing population of students and teachers from different ethnic backgrounds who speak different native languages. There is also a call for teachers to be more culturally competent as the number of languages taught in schools grows (Pratt-Johnson, 2006). Data from Modern Language Association (MLA) showed increases in language enrollment for the top seven languages: Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Russian, and Spanish (Goldberg, Lusin, & Welles, 2004) throughout the United States between 1998 and 2009. The need for language learning may vary from academic purposes to occupational purposes to language learning for specific purposes (LSP), or a, “need-based, pragmatic, efficient, cost-effective and functional” (Belcher, 2006, p.134) approach to second language acquisition.

### **How Theatre Offers a Unique Context for This Research**

A theatre production process, by its very nature, is a learning community. In an academic setting, creating a production involves teaching and learning, intercultural communication and collaboration toward the achievement of a common goal. Additionally, the rehearsal process allows for intensive observation of student behaviors and interactions over an extended period of time. The authors had already established a research collaboration at STLCCFV studying second language acquisition when work on an international theatre project began that involved collaboration between one of the authors, students from Florissant Valley, and a choreographer and her students in Italy.

### **The Current Collaboration**

*STLCCFV ISLC and “Worlds Apart...Ma non Così Diversi”*

Learning Communities “involve a deliberate structuring of the curriculum in which students and faculty are engaged and work together for longer periods of time” (Stephens & Florini, 2010, p. 114) and “many learning communities explore a common topic and/or common readings through the lenses of different disciplines” (Stephens & Florini, p. 114). Short-term Learning Communities may be established for specific study abroad opportunities (Stephens & Florini). The term Learning

Community will be defined as “any interconnected group of students and/or instructors, collectively engaged in a thematic learning experience that they will complete as a cohort” (Stephens & Florini, p. 114).

The ISLC at STLCCFV was created to involve an intergenerational group of students, faculty and community members in a short-term study abroad experience. This interconnected group of learners, individually and collectively, pursues research interests relating to a region of Italy that is selected annually by the leader. Participants enroll in a capstone course (IDS 201: The Global Experience) and a global studies course (GLE 101: Italian Language and Culture) into which an immersion experience in Italy is embedded during spring break. Professors offer their disciplinary expertise to the group while also participating as learners seeking to enhance the global nature of their courses. Disciplines typically included are Theatre, Fine Arts, Music, History, Psychology, Communications, Dietetics, Mathematics, Business and Italian. Students identify areas of inquiry which they will research in the classroom, observe first hand in Italy, and write about upon return. All participants study the Italian language to develop basic fluency in preparation for the immersion experience.

The above-mentioned international theatre collaboration, which resulted in a play titled “Worlds Apart...Ma non Così Diversi”, was also established as a Learning Community. Some of the students involved had participated in the ISLC, and some had performing experience. The majority had very limited, if any, experience in either category. The project began with the two groups of performers working separately: the American students worked on the development of a script and the casting of it (from within the already-established learning community) at STLCCFV; the Italian students developed choreography (as the script was being shared with them electronically by the American students) in Italy. The American students, music director and director then traveled to Busto Garolfo, Italy, where they spent 7 days collaborating with the Italian students and choreographers on the rehearsal and further development of the play. Following this process, the play was performed three times in Italy (in Italian) over the course of a week before the entire group traveled to the US to perform in three Midwestern cities over the course of two weeks. In each country, the students were housed by the families of their counterparts to provide for additional cultural immersion opportunities. This 30 day cultural exchange occurred during July, 2010.

### *UNT DBA DATA Lab*

The UNT DATA lab is a faculty supervised research laboratory that consists of undergraduate and graduate students obtaining degrees in behavior analysis or a related discipline. Members are particularly interested in identifying the behavioral interventions that help people learn new skills. The research emphasis in DATA lab is on teaching verbal behavior (cf., Skinner, 1957), research that explores variables that produce effective instructional strategies for college students, and the manipulation of variables that improve the acquisition and instruction of language, including foreign language.

#### Behavior Analysis (BA) and Single-Subject Research Design

Behavior analysis is a scientific approach to the study of human behavior (cf., Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 2007; Skinner, 1938). Specifically, behavior analysts study behavior from a functional perspective meaning that we look for the causes of an individual's behavior in the environment. Specifically, we look at what happens before (the antecedent) and after (the consequence) the behavior of interest to identify patterns in these variables that help us to determine what the individual is likely to do in similar situations in the future. In essence, the study of behavior from a functional perspective allows us to *predict* what will happen next if the conditions stay the same and *control* what will happen next if the conditions differ. The scholarship in behavior analysis occurs primarily in the context of single-subject research design.

Single-subject research design is an experimental arrangement that allows us to analyze the effects of independent variables (IV) on dependent variables (DV), just like between-group research design. The primary difference between single-subject design and between-group design is that in single-subject design, each individual (rather than each group), serves as his/her own control (Hersen & Barlow, 1976). As a result, each individual who participates in the research experiences each IV that is compared to his/her performance (DV) prior to the onset of the IV. This experimental arrangement is much like the one used to evaluate students' learning in a classroom environment. Students' grades, the DV, change as a function of different IVs such as the teacher's instructional method(s), study time, number of responses, amount of feedback, etc.

Single-subject research design allows one to easily assess the individual differences that emerge as a function of the environmental changes arranged experimentally.

Single-subject research methodology lends itself well to empirical questions that look to identify patterns in how individual learners are affected by salient environmental events. Behavior analysts are often constrained by the limitations of theoretical approaches and very specific applications of their technology (i.e., teaching individuals with developmental disabilities; cf., Marcon-Dawson, Vicars, & Miguel, 2009) and, the documented benefits of participating in Learning Communities and study abroad programs have been based on qualitative data or anecdotal reports (cf., Stephens & Florini, 2010). Behavior Analysis presents a set of teaching, measurement, and research tools that can help to better understand what happens as a function of participating in interdisciplinary, cultural immersion Learning Communities. Such an application of the learning community offers behavior analysis a much larger and more complex medium to explore behavior-environment interactions of importance to understanding the human condition. Our interdisciplinary research collaboration in this concentration area sought to reconceptualize the research in the respective disciplines in an integrative manner in an effort to obtain quantitative data to document the impact of participation in an interdisciplinary Global Learning Community and theatre production.

### **Rationale for the Interdisciplinary Collaboration and Ensuing Research**

Both authors shared common interests in assessing educational outcomes, improving teaching and learning through scholarship, globalizing the curriculum, and interdisciplinarity. Moreover, we recognized the objectivity that ensues from interdisciplinary collaborations and the exponential power of multiple perspectives to attack a problem. We discovered several close relationships between theatre and behavior analysis. Specifically, we recognized the benefits of applying a behavior analytic framework to integrate research and measurement in the teaching and directing process.

### *The Context*

The research took place in the contexts of the STLCCFV ISLC with and without the theatre performance component (i.e., “Worlds Apart...Ma non Così Diversi”). Our first study served as a pilot study to assess the effects of using See the Sound/Visual Phonics (STS/VP) as a mechanism to produce Italian reading repertoires in native English speaking students. Our second study revised the procedures used in our first investigation to specifically meet the needs of those students who would soon be asked to perform a play in Italy, in Italian. Our final study sought to set the occasion for the development of a framework for identifying and quantifying the effects of interdisciplinary learning communities and participation in a theatre production with a short-term study abroad component on students’ learning and behavior.

### *Description of the Research*

#### STS/VP study I

STS/VP has its roots in deaf education. STS/VP was originally created by the International Communications Learning Institute (ICLI; Narr, 2008; Montgomery, 2008; Morrison, Trezek, & Paul, 2008; Woolsey, Satterfield, & Roberson, 2006) to teach learners who are deaf or hard of hearing to read phonetically and to learn to speak. STS/VP includes a hand sign and corresponding written code for every phoneme in the English and Spanish languages. The hand signs are unique because they mimic the mouth and tongue movements one makes when producing particular phonemes. The written codes look like the hand sign and can be used to code text, cueing the learner as to which sound to emit while decoding text (e.g., a play script; cf., Montgomery, 2008; Morrison et al., 2008 for the history and origins of STS/VP). STS/VP has been effectively used to improve the reading skills of deaf and hard of hearing youth (Trezek & Malmgren, 2005; Trezek & Wang, 2006; Trezek, Wang, Woods, Gampp, & Paul, 2007) and typically developing children who are at-risk for reading failure (Cihon, Gardner, Morrison, & Paul, 2008; Gardner, Cihon, Morrison, & Paul, accepted for publication).

We ran our first STS/VP study with members of the 2010 STLCC Italian Studies Learning Community. Our purpose was to evaluate the effectiveness of STS/VP as an intervention to teach native

English speaking undergraduate students to decode Italian words. Five students participated and five phonemes were selected for instruction. Each participant received instruction on at least three of the five phonemes in a multiple baseline across design (Baer, Wolf, & Risley, 1968) across phonemes. The results suggest that each participant acquired some of the target phonemes following STS/VP instruction; however, some of the phonemes emerged outside of STS/VP instruction (i.e., without instruction). These findings, and the needs of the ‘Worlds Apart...Ma non Così Diversi’ cast prompted our second study. In essence, we knew that students who were native English speakers were going to need to learn the accurate production of Italian phonemes in order to perform well in a bilingual theatre production. Applying STS/VP within a single-subject design framework allowed us to demonstrate the effectiveness of our teaching on a skill set we could identify prior to the onset of the project in a rigorous fashion.

### STS/VP study II

The purpose of our second study, then, was to compare the effectiveness of STS/VP to the effectiveness of modeling (see letter(s)-hear sound/say sound; Binder, 1996) on native English speaking undergraduate students who were learning to read Italian. Each participant’s Italian reading repertoire was assessed across fourteen phonemes. Eight phonemes were selected for instruction. Five learners were placed into one group (Group 1) and five learners were placed into another group (Group 2). Each group received instruction on four phonemes using STS/VP instruction and four phonemes using echoic-textual discrimination training. Sounds were counterbalanced across interventions for each group and examined in an alternating treatments design (Barlow & Hayes, 1979).

All participants acquired each of the target Italian phonemes regardless of the instructional approach used. The results indicate that four phonemes did not produce difficulty for any of the participants regardless of the training condition to which they were assigned as evidenced in the acquisition of each phoneme in only one teaching session. However, four additional phonemes produced significant difficulties across participants, also irrespective of the training condition to which they were assigned. These data suggest that additional controls for sound difficulty need to be in place in future studies. Nevertheless,

following the performance, several native Italian speakers noted the fluency with which performers delivered their lines in Italian.

### Student outcomes in a global theatre performance

In preparation for launching the joint rehearsals for “Worlds Apart...Ma non Così Diversi” we knew that there would be changes in the students’ behavior that we wanted to capture. Stephens had been observing the impacts on students of theatre performance and the rehearsal process, participation in interdisciplinary learning communities, and engaging in short-term study abroad opportunities for several years. He now had the opportunity to explore a unique combination of variables involving all three experiences. Nevertheless, he knew that he would be busy functioning as a group leader, director, and teacher. He approached Cihon for assistance. He asked her to document what was happening to the students before, during, and after the experience using the measurement tools available to behavior analysts. While behavior analysts are savvy at capturing and documenting behavior of all sorts, this project posed somewhat of a challenge - to date, our tools have been best applied to more discrete instances of behavior in much less complex environments. As a result, this piece of the research became rather organic.

Cihon began by observing rehearsals in the US. Initially, she began to attempt to identify areas of interest in which to center her observations (e.g. how the students were responding or not responding to Stephens’ cues as a director and under what conditions the best responses occurred). She began to look at this from a functional perspective in terms of what was happening before the response occurred (antecedent), what the response was, and what happened after the response (consequence; this sequence of events is hereafter referred to as the three-term-contingency). It was fast. Some people would respond and others would not, typical problem behavior began to occur (mostly emotional in nature). One person would respond one way (follow the cue) and another would respond differently to the same cue (move in the incorrect direction or forget a line). Cihon then tried another approach, to code based on the interlocking behavioral contingencies, in which a two or more individuals can only receive reinforcement based on their combined actions (cf., Skinner, 1953). In essence, she tried to follow the sequence of behaviors and surrounding contingencies based on how each

person's behavior led to or followed another person's behavior. What emerged was an extremely messy diagram of events that did not lend itself well to prediction and control of human behavior - the essence of behavior analysis. She continued to apply a variety of other coding strategies available to behavior analysts (e.g., recording total verbal episodes (cf., Skinner, 1957), using Mechner's notation system (cf., Mechner, 1959), using frequency measures, duration measures, attempting to document response latencies)...nothing seemed to capture the changes in the behaviors of interest. She was missing a target behavior definition and was, therefore, unable to measure what was clearly happening to the students - they were learning, but it seemed an impossible task to document this learning.

Cihon recruited the assistance of a former graduate student, Erin Guzinski, who agreed to travel with the group, observing the students during the stay in Italy and during subsequent work and scheduled performances in the US. After several frustrating observations, Cihon arranged a meeting with Stephens to discuss the challenges associated with the task he had assigned and to propose a solution. When behavior analysts are unsure as to what they are going to measure or how they are going to define a behavior, they step back and watch. We call this a descriptive analysis. We simply try to capture everything that is happening, in an anecdotal fashion, and attempt to make sense of it as a sort of pilot study in an attempt to further refine our measurement procedures for subsequent, more rigorous analyses. Stephens agreed. Moreover, he recognized that through this type of observation and analysis, we might also be able to provide input to improve the students' responses to his directing, thereby, making the rehearsal process more personally and aesthetically fruitful.

With notebooks in hand and cameras nearby, Cihon and Guzinski began the arduous task of recording as much behavior and context as possible. Cihon focused on the molar perspective of events while Guzinski focused on the molecular perspective. Specifically, Cihon watched the behavior of the groups - both the Italians and the Americans; Guzinski observed the American students individually - identifying, defining, and assessing instances of problem behavior that were interfering with the rehearsal process. Stephens, Cihon, and Guzinski met daily in Italy to debrief, to describe what we were seeing, and to develop action plans for the following day.

Every director that has ever staged a play understands the necessity of playing simultaneously the role of artist, manager, technician, psychologist and communication specialist. The novelty of this project--bilingual text, an ensemble with a language barrier, culturally different performance aesthetics, student performers working in a foreign environment--brought even more challenges to the primary work of developing and mounting a production. The enhanced understanding of the various environmental stimuli/response/consequences and ensuing interactions among performers that resulted from daily research discussions allowed Stephens to alter his directing approaches immediately to achieve and enhance desired outcomes. While Stephens effectively prepared his performers before arrival in Italy to integrate artistically, his admonitions to be ready to have less focused attention from him while working in Italy were not adequately comprehended. Once the work in Italy began, there were multiple instances of confusion, frustration and emotional reactions by the American students. It was determined that these were due to a seeming lack of directorial attention as Stephens focused on the larger task of staging the entire work (by way of a functional analysis, an analysis common to those who practice behavior analysis). He then set up dyads of performers--Italians paired with Americans--asking the Italian dancers to coach movement and pronunciation of language by the American actors and musicians. Among other changes in his approach, this helped to accelerate integration of the two casts--artistically, linguistically and culturally--while giving the American students focused attention and direction that would still allow Stephens to accomplish his necessary tasks. These were the molecular implications. We had yet to analyze the molar implications.

Following the seven performances, Stephens and Cihon began to meet regularly. Cihon had transcribed her hand written notes into type and had emailed them to Stephens. Following each conducting an independent review of the observations, they agreed that there were two broad categories of impact. First, there were impacts related to student behavior. Second, there were impacts related to instructor/director behavior.

The data suggest that students were impacted in several ways. First, students learned Italian. Of particular interest to the researchers was that students were observed to use lines from the script to initiate

conversations in Italian. On the first day of the trip, conversations between American students and Italian students resulted in one-word utterances, centered around those topics that each had gleaned from one another's Facebook pages (e.g., pets). Each offered a word here or there in the native language and conversations were either maintained through gestures or stopped abruptly. Initial rehearsals seemed very separate, the Italians on one side of the room and the Americans on the other. Within two days, each group was interacting with the other - perhaps this was due to Stephens placing the students in dyads, perhaps it was due to the script. American students were frequently observed to state, "Io ho bisogno di [noun]", a line from the script which translates as "I need..." when in need of a coffee, water, or the restroom; the Italians responded accordingly (in behavior analysis terms, the American student response was reinforced and would therefore be repeated). It was.

Second, the students established relationships with each other. What began as a faceless interchange on Facebook, quickly evolved into lifelong friendships. Those students who once could only note that each, respectively, had a dog, now began to form friendships. Following the exchange, these students could be observed to interact weekly on Facebook. In fact, many American students took subsequent trips to Italy over the holidays or extended the subsequent ISLC trip in March 2011 to spend additional time visiting their host families. Moreover, while international relationships were established, students in each respective group became closer. Members of the STLCC ISLC and cast of "Worlds Apart...Ma non Così Diversi" started to refer to themselves as the, "Fab Five." They became inseparable.

Third, these students became lifelong learners with broadened educational and cultural interests. Those who subsequently participated in the following ISLC exhibited greater engagement in the cultural learning while in Italy. They attended Italian theatre performances; interacted on personal levels with the Italians they met, and sought out individual learning opportunities. They have since engaged in research for and participated in the St. Louis Italian Film Festival. They have organized outings to attend theatre performances. They have asked for suggested reading. They have regularly participated in two Italian-American educational/social clubs in St. Louis, one of which conducts its gatherings in Italian.

Finally, performance skills were enhanced. It is common to witness growth in skills among student performers during a play rehearsal process. The progress of these students was noticeably greater. The researchers suspect that it is a combination of variables that produced this impact: increased confidence levels after collaborating within language and cultural barriers; maturation as a result of the high levels of self-imposed and other-imposed expectations of success; performing successfully in a variety of theaters in a variety of cultural settings; and observation and application of behavior analytic interventions by the researcher and director.

Stephens became a better director. While already skilled in his chosen discipline, when in the midst of a project, Stephens can still lose sight of the minor interpersonal dynamics that when given time can emerge into major performance challenges. As mentioned in previous sections of the manuscript, Stephens began to look forward to and welcome the feedback that resulted from a functional analysis of his directing behavior and the resulting student responses. What might have become negative outcomes were quickly turned positive and he was able to intervene in a proactive manner (due to his ability to predict and control behavior) rather than in a reactive manner (as one might be forced to do if unproductive patterns of behavior continue). The project was a success and much had been learned - from instructor, director, student, and researcher perspectives.

## **Discussion**

The results of the three studies we conducted may seem to have little external validity. How many of our readers are teaching Italian? How many of our readers are working in the context of interdisciplinary learning communities with short-term study abroad components? How many of our readers have access to a behavior analyst to take data and provide feedback on teaching/directing behavior? We believe that it is not so much the specific procedures in the specific contexts that our colleagues can take from our work; rather, it is the approach of teaching as scholarship, of approaching our work as lifelong learners - as scientist-practitioners - that is of importance to our readers. Our research does not produce much in the way of answers. We cannot tell you how to achieve the same outcomes as the experimental control which we have

established is convoluted. We manipulated too many variables simultaneously. However, we produced results. Our students learned; we learned. In fact, our research generated many more questions than it did answers. Fortunately, we have used what we have learned to influence our next set of studies. Moreover, we have added a dimension to our research.

We are still unsure as to how STS/VP may impact learning how to read in a second language and we are still faced with the challenge of bringing the ISLC students to a level of language fluency quickly (i.e., within 8 wks). We will continue to evaluate our teaching methods to determine the most efficacious strategy for teaching language. We currently have two studies in data analysis. One study further isolates those variables of the Italian language that make reading difficult (e.g., what sounds, in what context, with which learners) and which interventions produce the best results (i.e., pronunciation rules, modeling, STS/VP).

The second study was directly influenced by our observations of the American actors' use of the script as a mode to begin conversations with the Italian dancers. We arranged an experiment in which students were provided with either a vocabulary bank or a contextually appropriate scripted conversation (e.g., you are having dinner at a restaurant in Italy. You want to try the local specialties. One of you is the guest and the other is the server. Begin.) and were asked to have a conversation. We are currently in the process of evaluating the relative effects of each mode of instruction. For behavior analysts, further exploration of second language acquisition may yield an increased understanding of verbal behavior, particularly in how it develops. While not to discount what behavior analysts have learned about the acquisition of verbal behavior in individuals with developmental disabilities, few would argue that additional analysis of language acquisition in typically developing individuals would be fruitless. However, anyone who has attempted to study first language acquisition in typically developing individuals can report the challenges to doing so. It takes a few short observations of a typically developing five-year-old engaging in verbal behavior to see the numerous recombinations of specific verbal units into novel units. Capturing this change in repertoire within stringent experimental preparations is nearly impossible. For example: a child, who is about to receive a haircut says, "I don't want a haircut. If we cut

my hair, what if we just use the scissors instead of the hairinator. It freaks me out.” Without prior knowledge that Dr. Doofenshmirtz, a character in *Phineas and Ferb*, the Disney cartoon, frequently creates machines to take over the tri-state area with the suffix “-inator” (e.g., the destruct-inator created to collect and destroy all of the garden gnomes in Danville) one may not be able to obtain the sources that control this novel utterance. This is not to say that typically developing second language learners do not emit similar recombinations of verbal units; however, the preexisting repertoires are smaller, at least at the initial stages of acquisition, and are therefore easier to measure in an experimental paradigm. For example, if a second language learner is taught the phrase, “Io ho bisogno di cibo” in Italian (equivalent to “I need food” in English) and subsequently says, “Io ho bisogno di acqua” (and acqua [water] was a word that was specifically taught in the context of a vocabulary bank) one can readily assume that the recombination of verbal units was a result of an experimentally manipulated variable.

Our third study, perhaps the most important thus far, extends our descriptive analysis into what one might call an exploratory analysis. The previously described research suggested that students were benefiting from participation in the learning community, study abroad experience, and theatrical performance in cultural, historical, and environmental contexts. In March 2011, we adapted a version of Professor Rosales-Ruiz’s constructional student mentoring log (based on Goldiamond’s (2002) exploratory approach to counseling) to obtain self-report data from Learning Community members regarding the salient environmental events and subsequent behavior changes members might experience. Logs were filled out weekly before and after the study abroad opportunity and daily during the study abroad experience. Data are currently being analyzed and experimenters predict a follow-up study that will seek to further refine the assessment tool, allowing for stronger conclusions regarding the role of interdisciplinary learning communities with short-term study abroad components on the learning and behavior of undergraduate and graduate students and participating faculty members. We expect the results of this line of research to contribute to the research that supports a positive correlation between participation in learning communities and higher retention and graduation rates. The use of this tool and the conclusions it supports can be applied directly to the academic theatre setting. It is our goal to identify the pedagogical

approaches in learning community theory that can be refined to further enhance student achievement and be applied in other interdisciplinary settings to help bridge the achievement gaps.

As described throughout this article, this work has helped us to attain some important goals. Interdisciplinary teaching and learning requires a reinvention of the way that content is delivered. As colleges and universities continue to move toward interdisciplinarity in instruction and research to meet student learning outcomes of the future, scholars will need to develop new approaches to the delivery of instruction. While the authors have a breadth of experiences in experimenting with interdisciplinary teaching, more research is necessary to assess the effectiveness of the methodologies utilized. For the discipline of Behavior Analysis, the studies heretofore described allow for the expansion of the use of empirically proven assessment tools and the basic concepts and techniques of the science of human behavior into new disciplinary areas. For academic Theatre, the collaboration with behavior analysts facilitates better understanding, documentation and enhancement of effects that we have only anecdotally known prior to this work. As we continue to wrestle with budgetary constraints and arts advocacy issues, evidence will lend larger credence to our cause. Additionally, the impact transcends the positive effects on our students. In terms of our professional development, this collaboration has been enlightening and invigorating and has helped us to chart a path for continued growth and improvement of the work we do with students.

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## **Perfect 10: Crafting the Ten-Minute Play**

*David A. Crespy*

### **Abstract**

*This essay explores an effective strategy for teaching the ten-minute play to elementary and secondary level students. The ten-minute play form has become the premier competitive playwriting form in various original play festivals across the United States, including such major events as the National Ten-Minute Play Festival of Actors Theatre of Louisville, and the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival. Using the principles of kick, point, and arc, student can learn to write behavior-driven drama that is engaging, alive, and connected to their fundamental need to express the ideas about which they feel most passionate. The essay includes several practical exercises that will form the basis of a rigorous hands-on workshop in basic playwriting technique.*

The ten-minute play has become one of the premier competitive forms in various ten-minute play festivals across the country, beginning with the National Ten-Minute Play Festival of Actors Theatre of Louisville, and coalescing into one of the premier new play events of the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival with over 800 entries each year (see <http://actorstheatre.org/participate/submit-a-play/national-ten-minute-play-contest/>, and [www.kcactf.org](http://www.kcactf.org)). Ten-minute plays are typically 10 pages long (and to fit within the ten-minute time-frame, closer to 8-9 pages long), and are usually produced in festivals of 6-8 plays per evening. The ten-minute play offers young dramatists a perfect introduction to the dramatic form—it is compact and do-able, but also offers the possibility of serious dramatic explorations of plot and character. Superficially, it seems to be a fairly easy form—ten pages of dialogue with a beginning, middle, and end. Since it's often produced with several other plays, it requires minimal props, setting, costume and sound, and a focus on a simple conflict situation resolved in ten pages. But the reality is that it is a tough nut to crack dramatically, because for students it can easily devolve into a funny sketch, rather than a play that has something important to say.

Two of the creators of the ten-minute play form were Jon Jory, the former artistic director of Actors Theatre of Louisville, and his literary manager, Michael Bigelow Dixon. The two read literally thousands of ten-minute plays over the years after ATL's National Ten-Minute Play Festival was introduced in 1989. Over the course of that time, Dixon observed that successful ten-minute plays work grew from how well student playwrights applied the notions of “kick, point, and arc” in their writing. These terms address fundamental aspects of good playwriting, and they are useful for teaching the art of writing a great ten-minute play.

### **POINT: Creating Compelling Characters in a Conflict That Matters to You**

Young playwrights must learn that they are writing plays because they have something important to say. “Point” means exactly that—what is the point to your play? And more importantly, why do you need to say it? Point is driven by compelling, complicated characters desperately striving against an impossible obstacle. They must be caught in a conflict tied to the playwright's own deep-seated feelings and beliefs. Key to the notion of point are the following items.

- i. Your central character must have a desperate desire or need that moves her/him to do something she/he has never done before. Today is one of the most important days of his/her life. Every character in your play must have a real, concrete, urgent powerful desire that drives them to do what they must do *now*. It can not be a *rhetorical* question you're raising—it must be a situation that has real *stakes*. The characters must also be complex and have a full back story—spend time exploring your characters until you know them well enough to write them.
- ii. Your characters' desire must connect to you emotionally; *it must cost you something emotionally to write your play*. Take a moment and do a *credo*—a list of deeply felt personal, spiritual, political, and philosophical beliefs. Ask yourself what is important to you right now—what issue, what incident has moved you deeply, more than anything you've felt in a

- long time. Plays are built on a *major dramatic question*—and that question is tied to your most deeply felt beliefs.
- iii. Explore your characters first; get them to talk to you in a milestone exercise (see exercises below), or have them reveal their innermost thoughts to a best friend, or have them work on a secret or private activities that reveals them to you. Find the ways that your characters contradict the stereotypes of who and what they are. Find aspects of your characters that are conflicted, complex, and idiosyncratic.
  - iv. A ten-minute play must have the same depth of character and seriousness of story or plot as in a full-length play—but it must be revealed *quickly, effortlessly, and powerfully* within the real “ten-minute moment” of a character’s life. Your play is about a real human being who wants something *desperately*, faces impossible obstacles to get it, and real consequences if she/he doesn’t succeed—*the stakes are very high*.

The most important thing to remember with regard to point is something that Edward Albee says about great writing, that it should “hurt a little”—it should cost you something to write a play. If there is no point to your play, if it doesn’t cost you something, it runs the risk of being a “Saturday Night Live” skit—something that may be facile and funny, but says nothing.

### **ARC: Use a Structure for the Telling of Your Story**

Every play must have a structure of story-telling to it—and our ideas regarding the structure for plays traditionally date back to Aristotle’s *Poetics* (350 BCE). Aristotle points out that a traditionally built play should have a beginning, middle, and end. This is the arc of a play, and it can also be compared to the sonata structure in music: exposition, development, and recapitulation—or even easier, set-up, struggle, and solution. However, there are many kinds of structures for plays, and what most important is that the play have some sort of structure to the dramatic action—traditional or not. Without some kind of structure, a play fails to move forward in time. It feels listless and boring; even a non-realistic play needs an arc. We should have a sense

that the play has organization to it, an artfulness that we can appreciate, and to that end, keep in mind the following:

- i. It doesn't matter whether it is a linear three-act (setup-struggle-solution) or a non-linear (dream-like, formalistic, game-like) piece; the most important part to the telling of your theatrical story is that you choose some kind of structure. This is the heart of story-telling—setting up expectations, a hook, a moment of wonder, and helping us to care about what happens next.
- ii. For the linear play, you need to start in the middle of the conflict—Late-In, Early-Out and we need this by Page Two! *If your play doesn't feel like it's going anywhere, sometimes the best thing you can do is discard the first five pages, and start your play at a point in the middle of conflict of your current draft.* In other words—cut to the chase—start in the heart of your conflict and take it from there.
- iii. In a ten-minute play, you don't have time for a lot of exposition. What little exposition you do have must do three things: 1) explain the past, 2) energize the present moment, 3) point to some future possibility. If your exposition doesn't do this, cut it!
- iv. Your audience must want to know: What's going on? Who is this? What do they want? What's at stake? And most importantly—what will happen next? The audience must be *hungry for next.*
- v. Complicate things as you go, so we have no idea how things will turn out—make life miserable for your protagonist, think about doing this at pages 3, 6, or 8. Complicate no more than about 2-3 times.
- vi. Resolve the play! Make a choice about how things will end—whether it's for the worst, the best, or somewhere in between. Make up your mind to conclude the play, and give the audience some kind of pay off. This is your moment to make your final statement about the world of the play.
- vii. If it's a non-linear play, choose a structure that offers some kind of pattern, whether it's cyclical, like Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*; variations on a theme, like David Ives's *Sure Thing*, or dream-like, like Adrienne Kennedy's *Lesson in a Dead*

*Language*, or built on some kind of structure that grows out of some other performance-based ritual, a religious ceremony, a game, or even a geometrical pattern. Language playwrights like Mac Wellman or Len Jenkins play on structures from popular culture like game shows and detective stories.

Remember that you must choose a structure that lives within the “ten-minute play moment” or in other words, an action that could realistically work within the temporal limits of ten-minutes. There are certain structural actions that are believable and do-able within ten-minutes, and others that are not—choose wisely, if you overreach, your audience will fall out of the play because they don’t believe it.

### **KICK: Theatricality – Telling Your Story on the Stage with Magic!**

Kick is just another word for something theatre folk know by instinct—theatricality. What makes something theatrical? It’s generally one of two things—something is theatrical if it instantly engages an audience, and something is theatrical when it uses the conventions of the theatre creatively and imaginatively. Think about this for a moment—what engages an audience member instantly? Perhaps a loud noise—a scream, or thunder. But sometimes a whisper can engage an audience—as they scoot closer in their chairs to hear. Theatricality can also be thought of as the magic of the stage—the moment that a tiny beam of light becomes Tinkerbell in Peter Pan—it’s the one aspect of the ten-minute play that sets it aside from the other dramatic forms. When is a simple chair on stage much more than a chair? When is it a throne, or an airplane cockpit, or even another person onstage? It’s much like the tiny plot twist at the end of an O’Henry short story like *The Gift of the Magi*—something that catches our eyes and our hearts. Think about the following questions to make theatrical choices in your plays:

- i. Why must this story be told on the stage? How can you use the magic of the stage?
- ii. How can you seduce the audience into using its imagination? Can you take advantage of the “poor” or “story” theatre technique—and using simple props and furniture create magic? Can two people on separate ladders pretend to be in bedrooms

- in separate houses as in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*? Can actors create a river or trees with their bodies?
- iii. Why must your story be told through live performance? What can there be that is surprising or magical or amazing with the physical world you put upon the stage?
  - iv. Theatricality is also defined by techniques that surprise and engage an audience—ghosts work, metatheatricality works (breaking the fourth wall), an inexplicable noise, a lighting effect, costuming choices—all these add magic and theatricality to your play.
  - v. Consider your dreams—what makes your dreams bizarre—morphing characters, shifting landscapes, inexplicable juxtapositions, special abilities, etc. All these may add theatricality to your play.

Theatricality can also be found in riveting, exciting dialogue. Keep in mind that one of the first, and perhaps most perfectly structured “ten-minute plays,” is the wonderfully *behavior*-driven dialogue in Ernest Hemingway's short story, “Hills Like White Elephants.” Behavior is a Stanislavsky-based term which means the emotional and action-driven subtext the flows beneath language. It is well worth having your students read Hemingway's short story aloud to learn something about behavior-driven language.

In the story, which is mostly dialogue: a pregnant young woman, traveling with a companion in Africa, and momentarily held at a train station, is convinced by her lover to get an abortion—but in the story, the word “abortion” is never uttered? Instead the young man finds countless other ways to talk about the procedure without ever asking her directly—talking about their drinks, about their future together, in the most general of terms. It is a story worth reading out loud, and is a wonderful introduction to the ten-minute play, because its action is driven by behavior. Though nothing is stated directly, we can see the man manipulate the woman, and we see her reaction—not in the dialogue, but in the behavior around the dialogue.

When writing great dialogue, think about the following things:

- i. Great dialogue IS theatrical—sometimes that's all the magic you need. You need to develop a good ear—and it's best to do

- that by listening closely to what people say to each other.  
Learn to be a professional eavesdropper!
- ii. The best dialogue grows out of character; each of your characters should have a *different way of speaking*. Consider the jargon they use from their jobs, their educational background, their tastes in music, their ethnicity and where they lived geographically, consider their age and the slang they use, consider their economic status and the kind of people they associate with all day.
  - iii. Good dialogue grows out of normal speech
    - a. It doesn't follow grammatical rules
    - b. It sounds as if it's being coined as it goes along.
    - c. It's not complete; things are hidden, and unspoken.
    - d. Listen to the SILENCES between the language
  - iv. Practice: Overheard Voices Exercise
    - a. Listen to what people are saying, find a conversation to overhear, desperate situations are always good!
    - b. Don't record it, go somewhere and write it down, try to capture the rhythm of it, the errors in syntax.
    - c. Notice how little speech will convey what people want.
    - d. Try to write a few more lines of dialogue, following the same speech patterns of the people you've been listening to—add a plot twist.
  - v. Playwrights don't write words, they *wright behavior*
    - a. Characters must *earn* their right to talk through their need
    - b. People use language to get what they want, not necessarily what they actually feel or think—Characters lie. Talk is cheap.
    - c. Good dialogue *isn't real*, but it sounds real and has desire flowing underneath—it leaves spaces for the actors to act.
    - d. Always ask what does my character want? What does my character need? What will they *say* to get what they *want*?
    - e. How can my character get what she/he wants without saying it directly? Nobody ever says anything directly - if they do, they're blurring out their *subtext*. **Submerge all subtext!**

- f. Give the character something distracting to do, a physical activity, a real urgency, a project to complete—anything to keep them from blabbing *subtext*.

One of the toughest problems to avoid in playwriting is *spoken subtext*, which occurs when characters speak everything on their minds, even though in real life that character would *never* tell the other character what they're feeling. Spoken subtext can steal the life out of the scene because the audience isn't given the chance to figure out what is happening on their own—they're told everything. So the basic tenet of all writing is applicable here: *show, don't tell*. Force your characters to reveal what it is they are feeling by cutting back the amount language they can speak—less is more. Suddenly your dialogue will come to life as your characters reveal themselves through behavior, not language. Remember that, as the great acting teacher, Sanford Meisner used to say: "An ounce of behavior is worth a pound of words."

### **Your Own Ten-Minute Play Workshop**

A great ten-minute play workshop for your students should be built on "Writing on Your Feet" concept of Young Playwrights, Inc. Young Playwrights Inc. is an organization sponsored by composer/lyricist Stephen Sondheim. Sondheim brought a brilliant playwriting teacher from England, Gerald Chapman, to teach young playwrights in New York City's toughest neighborhoods. Chapman's technique is a combination of improvisation and writing that has proven to be an infectious way to help young writers write interesting, powerful new plays. His book is listed below, and check out the Young Playwrights, Inc. website (<http://www.youngplaywrights.org/>).

In setting up your workshop, you should begin with basic exercises that explore the notion of conflict. The first two exercises, Conflict #1 and Conflict #2 are best for that. To make the most out of those two exercises, have the students do the improvisations first. When improvising, it's best to keep the improvisations short and to the point—don't allow an improvisation to go on too long—just long enough to give the students something to work with. As soon as the improvisation is done, give the students a Six-Line Dialogue Exercise—and it's simple—they must write six lines of dialogue, or three exchanges between

Character A and Character B. As soon as they have written six lines of dialogue—have them hand their page to the writer on their left. That writer will read what has been written, and then write six more lines of dialogue. You can do the exchange one more time after that, and once you are done; bring the same two actors who did the original exercise up in front of class. You'll now have your first play reading session—those two actors will read the dialogue that has been written for them. Guaranteed it will be a thrilling (and funny) experience for all those writers!

Once you've done the basic conflict exercises, the next step is to teach the students about how to write behavior—it's time for the *Did You Bring It?* Exercise below. Set up the improvisation as described below, and then again, have the students work on the Six-Line Dialogue Exercises, working, once again, collaboratively to come up with a few pages of dialogue. Again, do the play reading presentation—you'll discover a new subtlety in the students writing, and the beginnings of real playwriting technique.

### **The Play Idea Card**

The next step is to have the students work on play ideas—and my suggestion here is for each student to write a Play Idea Card. The Play Idea Card is based upon the Play Idea Worksheet discussed by Buzz McLaughlin in his book *The Playwright's Process*, a book that should be on every playwriting teacher's shelf. On the Play Idea Card the students should come up with the following items:

- 1) Tentative Title
- 2) Central Character's Brief Description (interior/exterior)
- 3) Central Character's Need
- 4) Central Character's Obstacle
- 5) Additional Character Descriptions
- 6) Brief "What Happens" Plot/Conflict Statement
- 7) Setting/Scene Description
- 8) **Point:** What is the major dramatic question?
- 9) **Arc:** How will you structure the play?
- 10) **Kick:** What theatrical choices will you make?
- 11) **Resolution:** How will you resolve the conflict of the play?

### Character Study

Once your students have come up with their play ideas, they need to learn something about their characters. Edward Albee, the three-time Pulitzer prize-winning playwright, explores his characters by putting them into as many different situations *outside* the world of the play as possible. He keeps exploring the characters until he feels he knows them as well as he would the real people in his life. This is called character study, and Michael Wright, the author of *Playwriting In Process* (another great book for your playwriting teacher shelf), calls these playwriting exercises *character etudes* or character studies. An etude is basically a five-finger workout for your playwriting chops—similar to the way a musician “works their chops” with their musical instrument. Here I recommend that students explore their characters by coming up with a back story using the *Milestone Exercise* and by exploring the characters’ behavior through *Character Conflict Scenes*.

### Plot Exercises

Finally, after exploring the characters, and before writing the play itself, it is very important that your students come up with a plot treatment for their play. I believe that young writers really need to think through their plots before they write their plays—otherwise they will get lost. The basic idea is to work out the plot using *Plot Cards* first, and then to write out a *Plot Treatment*, once they have explored their plot using their cards. Both are described below.

### Writing, Performing, and Critiquing the Plays

Once the students have completed the above assignments, it is time for them to write their plays—give them a firm deadline and stick to it. In order to give them ample time to revise their work—so you should give them deadlines for their first, second, and final drafts of their plays. And you must schedule in-class readings of their plays after each revision if at all possible. Hearing the plays out loud is *imperative*, and is a very exciting part of the process.

At each stop on this part of the journey, it is important to teach your students about the critiquing process. And it is here that the notion of *point*, *arc*, and *kick*, become very important tools for learning how to improve your students’ work. After each student has her/his play read,

they must come to the front of the class to receive their criticism—with the teacher serving as the discussion leader.

The young playwright *must* have specific questions about their play—and they must have control of the discussion—with the teacher’s help. Keep in mind that the best questions are *open* questions—not simple yes or no questions. Avoid the question, for example, “did you like my play?” Better to ask: “How did you feel about this particular aspect of the play?” Once the student’s specific questions are answered, then the teacher can ask the students the following questions:

- What was the *point* to this play?
- What was the *arc* to this play?
- Where was the *kick* to this play?

Additional questions would include:

- What didn’t you understand in the play?
- Where were you most engaged in the play?
- Where were you the least engaged in the play?
- Who was the most interesting character in the play and why?
- Who was the least interesting character in the play and why?
- What were the feelings you had after the play ended and why?

A few fundamental rules for critiquing new playwrights are these:

- 1) Don’t tell the playwright how to write their play—just answer the student playwright’s questions and respond honestly to what you experienced.
- 2) It is important, especially for young playwrights, to keep things *positive and nurturing*—the rule of thumb should be that if a young writer gives up writing because of something you have said, you have failed that writer as a teacher.
- 3) It is equally important that you and your students are *honest* about what they have received from the writer. If they fell out of the play, and it was boring, they need to tell that playwright where they fell out of the play. If they don’t understand a moment in the play, they need to tell the playwright.
- 4) You fail a young playwright by being too hard on them, and you fail a young playwright by not being honest—the art of critiquing is doing both, and at the heart of this process is giving the student playwright *agency* or *power* during the

critiquing process, and making sure that the focus is on answering the playwright's questions about their own play.

### Performing the plays – The Concert Reading

Once you are past the in-class reading and critiquing part of the process, it is time to have your play-reading festival. The best way to handle this is to have the students cast their play with students from the class, or if you're working with a dramatic club in the school, have auditions. Make sure that the playwrights have a strong say in the casting and attend all rehearsals. The teacher should be the director for each of the plays—not the student playwright. If you have older students, then you may use student directors, but again, don't allow the playwrights to direct their own play. It is important for the playwright to focus on writing and rewriting if necessary, not directing.

Keep in mind that the focus is on the writing of the plays, and the language of the dialogue—this is more important than the acting or directing of the plays (for now!).

The plays should be *read* not memorized; and the students should perform the plays at music stands, as if in a musical concert. This is called a *concert reading* because it is similar to how new operas are performed—in *concert performance*. It will feel like a performance, rather than just a reading, and because the students don't have to memorize lines, the playwrights can keep adjusting and rewriting their plays up to the last minute.

It is important to treat this event as a formal performance—so invite parents, write up a program with casting and settings, and watch how the audience uses its imagination to fill the stage with costumes, lighting, and sets. Concert readings are very similar to radio plays—the audience focuses on the language and can picture the plot, characters, and setting in their minds.

Even at this stage, it is not a bad idea to schedule one of the performances with a “talk-back” so that students can get feed-back on their plays—you might want to designate one of the performances as a “talk-back” performance. Keep in mind that you'll have to educate the audience about the notion of “point, kick, and arc,” and it's very important to keep the critiquing along the same lines as discussed above.

EXERCISES: Teaching Your Students to Write Plays on Their Feet

Several fundamental exercises listed here are tied to the notion of “writing on your feet” – in other words, using improvisation to get the ball rolling. Do the improv first, and then have the students write six lines of dialogue based upon the scene—have them end it anyway they like—just give them the first line or two from the improve. A fundamental exercise for young people is a basic conflict exercise:

Conflict Exercise #1: *Waiting for the Train, or Watch Out for the Thief!*

Two people wait for a train; one is a business person distracted by the important presentation she/he needs to make and drops a wallet. The other is the thief who picks up the wallet as the business person runs to catch their train. In a moment, the business person appears, and sees the thief with her/his wallet—and confronts the thief. What will happen next?

Try this improve two ways—the first way the thief immediately confesses and gives back the wallet. That’s the “no conflict” version of the play (it will be deeply unsatisfying). Then do it again, and make sure that the thief refuses to give back the wallet—and then watch the sparks fly—there will be an instant play. Also, with younger students insist that no hitting is permitted—the business person must get her/his wallet back, but only by using persuasion and verbal actions.

Conflict Exercise #2: *Making a Salad, or You’ve Been Messin’ with my Boyfriend*

This exercise is a bit more mature, but can be adapted for younger or older students—you have two men or two women making salad together. They are best friends. Have the students mime this action—one person can be tearing lettuce, the other can be chopping or peeling a carrot or cucumber. The event is a party that is being thrown for one of the two salad makers to celebrate their engagement with their boyfriend/girlfriend. The party is in just a few minutes and they need to get the salad done now. It is a festive occasion marred only by the fact that one friend has slept with the other’s fiancé. And the wronged party must find out what happened right now. The only rule is that neither can talk about the incident directly—they can only talk about salad and vegetables. At no time can the actors talk about the incident—but only about cutting and tearing salad and vegetables. Watch the sparks fly!

### Writing Behavior Exercise: *Did You Bring It?*

The “*Did You Bring It?*” Exercise is a keystone behavior exercise—it is built on the notion that we’ll engage with a scene even if we don’t entirely know what is going on! The rules are as follows:

- 1) One character wants something desperately and needs it right now. The other character has what the other character wants, but has equally desperate reasons for *not* giving it to the first character.
- 2) Character A asks: “Did you bring it?” without ever telling the first character what *it* is! Neither character can ever discuss what *it* is—it will remain a mystery throughout the exercise.
- 3) Character B responds with whatever she/he wants, but may not discuss what it is or give it to Character A.
- 4) The improv continues about six lines or so, and then the teacher ends it abruptly—hopefully on a funny or shocking moment!
- 5) Students use this exercise to do the collaborative writing as described in the workshop above.

### Character Study Exercise #1: *The Milestone Exercise*

This exercise helps you explore a character’s back story—the events that happened in a character’s past—we are shaped by the events that happen to us in our lives. The more you know about what happened to a character, the better you understand why and how she/he behaves.

- 1) Write down the character’s full name, including nickname, and their place and date of birth. Write down the physical and emotional details of that birth on that day.
- 2) With a timer set for 3 minutes, free-associate all of the major events of that character’s life without editing or censoring them in anyway. Write down just a word or two, something to set a “tab” on that event. Shoot for thirty milestones. Don’t worry about chronological order at this point. Stop with the timer.
- 3) Look over the list. On a fresh sheet of paper, and with the timer set again for three minutes, come up with eight of THE MOST IMPORTANT EVENTS of the first thirty events you wrote originally. Again, don’t worry about chronological order.

- 4) Now, on a third sheet of paper, put the eight events into chronological order, and for each event describe the circumstances surrounding it, using *all five senses* to paint the world of the event. You should write **AS THE CHARACTER, WITH THE CHARACTER'S POINT OF VIEW, IN THE CHARACTER'S VOICE**, and allow each description to become a kind of short monologue. How do these sensory moments tie into the **EMOTIONS and FEELINGS**, the character experienced during the event. Who were the other characters that were part of this event, and how does the character feel about them?

### Character Study Exercise #2: *Character Conflict Scenes*

The next step, after you have explored your character's past, is to see how that character behaves in action—and in order to keep these scenes behavior-driven, you'll need to follow the following rules:

- 1) In each scene, the character must want something desperately
- 2) The other character may not give that character what they want or must present an obstacle of some kind
- 3) Neither character may talk about what it is she or he actually wants and cannot ask for it directly.
- 4) The characters must be doing a physical activity that is difficult and requires their full concentration
- 5) Characters must get what they want by the end of the scene somehow.

Now consider the following possibilities for your scene:

- 1) **Age Exploration:** Write a scene that explores the characters at ages before or after the actual setting of the play you want to write.
- 2) **Prop Exploration:** Write a scene that explores the character's relationship to a particular prop
- 3) **Best Friend:** Explore a scene with the character's best friend
- 4) **Secrets/Secret Behavior:** Explore a scene that reveals a secret or secret behavior of your character
- 5) **Other Attribute:** Consider a scene that explores your characters alternate or conflicting attributes – if your character is a villain, explore your character's nice side; if your character is a good person, explore your character's flaws.

- 6) Extreme situation: Write a scene where your character is thrust into an extreme physical situation—with disaster just around the corner—what will your character do?
- 7) Character Interview—interview your character, and ask your character some personal questions—or have another character interview your character.

### Plot Exercise #1: Plot Cards

You should prepare a series of index cards with each card representing an event or scene of your play. Give each card a title, a brief description of the scene, and the characters involved. You should start with the following six cards—these will be your “anchor cards.”

- 1) *Inciting incident*: The event or character that triggers the conflict
- 2) *Complication #1*: This is the first major crisis your character faces after the inciting incident; it should take place at about page 3.
- 3) *Complication #2*: (turning point): This the second major crisis your character faces, and it will cut off most options your character has to get what it is she or he wants; it should take place at about page 6.
- 4) *Climax*: This is the moment that decides whether or not your character will get what she/he wants; it should take place about page 8.
- 5) *Denouement*: This is the falling action of the play, it should take place somewhere between pages 8 & 10.
- 6) *Resolution*: This is the final outcome of the play; it should take place about page 10.

After you write these six cards, write as many events as you think will take place in the play in addition to these moments—the more you write, the better your treatment will be. Make sure you give each event a title, a description of action, and the characters involved in the scene.

Once you have all your cards completed, arrange them in the order that seems to work the best for you—give an order number to each card. Once you have the cards arranged in order, then write out an outline with just the titles of the cards. This will be your outline for your plot treatment.

### Plot Exercise #2: Plot Treatment

- Write the Treatment in paragraph form, not as an outline or a scene by scene breakdown. It is a narrative of the play unfolding before your eyes. Imagine you're sitting in the ideal theater (proscenium, thrust, or in the round) with the ideal cast on Broadway or Off-Broadway in a black box theatre. Keep in mind that your plot treatment is a map or guide to the writing of your play—it's not the last word. You can always allow your play to go where it needs to go, but now you have your map.
- Try to visualize the other audience members, the stage, everything. Then have the house lights go down, the stage lights come up, and as the play begins write everything down in the order it appears before your mental eye.
- Make sure you describe the character in her/his initial appearance.
- Don't write down much dialogue, but describe what is said, and what is running underneath it. If you have to use dialogue, use only snippets.
- The Treatment is to grab the visual eye of a producer, so it should appeal to the five senses. The treatment should sparkle. This is not a point of making it flashy and Hollywood, but suggestive, crisp and interesting.
- The Treatment should use active not passive verbs, colorful adjectives, and tell the story of the play, not just the physical actions, locations where they happen, or which character is entering and exiting.

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## **Make-up & Lighting: A Theatre Primer**

*Louise Herman*

### **Abstract**

*Though theatre is a unique collaborative art form, its visual elements utilize the same principles as do other art forms - of how highlight and shade define form, and how the use of particular color and line choices can create specific reactions in the viewer. Understanding these principles and how their application can elicit predictable responses is the basis for the process employed by actors when developing their makeup and theatrical designers when developing their designs. An actor applying stage makeup uses highlight and shade on his/her face to reinforce their features or create the optical illusion that something is there that actually is not. In this way, they can enhance their facial features and give their audience visual indications that define their character. A theatrical designer uses the most influential visual elements of color and line to establish the environment of a play with the set, visualize character with the costumes, or influence focus and mood with the lights. By understanding the impact of these two design components and how they are perceived by the audience, a designer can make more effective choices and achieve a more successful result. What follows is a discussion of the cause and effect of these principles and their influence.*

### **COLOR & LINE THEORY IN THEATRICAL DESIGN**

#### *Design Theory – Color & Line*

The ultimate purpose of all theatrical design is to create compositions that imply specific meanings. The basic communicative qualities of theatre design are the same as in any other visual art and create the same emotional responses. Design for every aspect of a theatrical production's visual elements is created using basic color and line theory. The fundamentals of these theories are founded in generalized responses to both natural and traditional connotations. This means that people usually react in a similar way to various elements

found in nature, though these reactions can be tempered by cultural references. It is possible for these responses to vary some based on long-established cultural references.

**Color** is the strongest visual element and has many components. It can be warm or cool, bright or dark, complex or simple. The stronger the contrast of a color scheme, the more vitality, directness and forcefulness it implies. The more closely related the values and hues, the more subtlety, calmness, and repose it suggests. Warm colors are reds, oranges and yellows. They denote energy and excitement and are active, expansive and tend to come forward in a composition. Their ‘warm’ connotation comes from nature – the color of the sun and fire. Cool colors are blue, purples and greens, though purple and green being secondary colors with warm components can move toward the warm spectrum. Cool colors generally, denoting calmness and rationality, are less active and tend to recede in composition. Their ‘coolness’ relates to the sky and water. In general, light or bright colors of any hue are associated with happiness and energy while dark or dull colors are more subdued and somber. A bright yellow green expresses youth and freshness as in a budding plant, while a dark green conveys older establishment as in the leaf of a mature tree.

Red, a warm primary color, can convey passion, anger, power, love, excitement, gaiety, defiance, aggression and/or danger. Yellow, also a warm primary, is the only color in its saturated form that is still a relative pastel. This influences its connotations which are cheerfulness, youth and innocence. Blue, the only cool primary color, can symbolize calmness, logic, purity, serenity, security, passivity, strength, sadness, dignity, loyalty and/or honesty. The secondary colors, purple, green and orange, are by nature of their being a mix of two others, more complex in meaning. Purple can denote aristocracy, luxury, dignity, stateliness, sadness, melancholia and/or flamboyance. Green can imply restfulness, youth, freshness, illness, hopefulness, dignity and/or evil. Orange is the most active color since it is made of the two warm primary hues. It can convey energy, merriment, hostility, happiness, irrationality and/or stimulation. As is apparent by the often contradictory meanings that can be expressed by a hue, the specific qualities of that particular color, such as saturation, tint, shade and purity, impact its effect. This is especially true with secondary colors whose meaning is influenced by which

primary they are closer to – a redder purple has a different connotation than a bluer one.

In addition to the primary colors and their combinations, there are colors referred to as neutrals. These are white, black and brown. As with other colors, neutrals also acquired their meanings because of their association to certain natural elements. White, considered a warm neutral, denotes purity, innocence, cleanliness, serenity and/or emptiness. These meanings are derived from snow and clouds. Black, a cool neutral, conveys sorrow, melancholia, dignity, unhappiness, distress, fear, age and/or death. These connotations developed from inclement weather and darkness. Brown, a warm neutral, implies simplicity, security, comfort, sorrow, agreeability, naturalness and/or friendliness. These characteristics come from wood and the earth.

**Line** also produces emotional connotations based on natural and traditional associations. In composition it can be real or suggested. A suggested line is simulated by the eye as it follows a sequence of elements, such as trees in a line or pictures on a wall.

Horizontal lines, found in a calm sea or meadow, denote tranquility, serenity and restfulness. Vertical lines, as those created by large trees, convey stateliness and strength. A combination of horizontal and vertical lines, the basic shape of most buildings, symbolizes equilibrium and stability. Related to these two lines is the quality of a straight line which suggests stability and rationality. Diagonal lines express action and excitement. They are found in nature in the silhouette of mountains and in things leaning which are neither as solid nor strong as they would be when vertical or at rest as when they are horizontal. Diagonal implies something not stable and thus communicates a sense of motion and energy. Angled lines, associated with diagonal lines, can also denote tension and conflict as a result of unresolved energy. Rays or lines emanating from a center indicate energy and vitality. Circular lines represented by the sun and moon, signify unity and completeness. Curved lines, found in rolling seas and hills, indicate grace and gentleness.

Line as a path of action takes on direction and becomes movement. This movement can apply to elements of a composition or to the motion of an actor. When involved in the movement of an actor, the attributes of such a line can help define certain traits of the character

portrayed by that actor. When used in a composition, a line may be a dynamic force with a sense of violent action or as a static force with a feeling of strength and stability.

### *Theatrical Design*

Theatrical design is the visible expression of the playwright's ideas as they are interpreted by the director who determines the concept and style of the production. The concept is the idea to be presented to the audience. It is the point of view taken by the production on what the play is about. The style of a production is the visual way the concept is to be conveyed to the audience. It is a set of artistic and philosophical characteristics to which all elements of the production adhere. The stylistic plan, to which all parts of the design subscribe, should have some type of logical connection with the conceptual core of the production. The design style is a visual theme bringing unity to the whole and is aimed at stimulating an intellectual or emotional response in the audience. A representational style is lifelike and as near to its natural form and color as the technical skill of the artist allows. A nonrepresentational style is ornamental, and because its goal is sensation, the interplay of sheer form and color becomes important. In this case, the designer does not attempt to create a form that bears any resemblance to natural or manmade objects. Between these two extremes lay as many degrees of realism, symbolism, and abstraction as theatre artists care to define. Because of the collaborative nature of theatre, theatrical design is not completely expressed until all the elements are on stage and presented to an audience.

**Scene Design:** The purpose of scene design is to create an appropriate environment for the play. It should also provide visual reinforcement of the production concept through the chosen style. Awareness of the necessary movements of the actors and any specific directing techniques helps the designer create a proper environment to support the action of the play.

The first basic function of scene design toward creating an appropriate environment is to fix the action of the play in time and space. Influenced by the chosen style of the production, the scene design should provide historically accurate visual clues that will help identify the

period of the play. Time of day and seasonal indications are most often expressed through light and costume design choices but can be seen in elements of the set. Scene design should also give some indication of what sort of characters inhabit the environment of the play. The action and/or characters are not always in harmony with the surroundings but may be in opposition or contrast to the environment. To accomplish this relationship, coordination with the costume designer is necessary.

The second function of scene design is to establish in the visual elements of the environment the dominant atmosphere or mood. Mood is the prevailing emotional tone. It can be described as the quality of the play that creates a state of mind and emotional response in the audience (i.e. cheerful, gloomy, violent, or mystic). Out of the mood can come the overall tonality and color of the environment.

**Costume Design:** The purpose of costume design is the visualization of character. In conjunction with this is the visualization of the relationships between characters and to the environment. All of this must be done within the context of the concept and style of the production.

The costume worn by an actor profoundly affects the audience's perceptions of the character being created by that actor. Therefore, it is important to work in conjunction with the director and actor to convey appropriate personality traits. The costume designer's job entails the manipulation of the design to project some specific personal information about that character. The actor, not the costume, is the primary vehicle for conveying a character's nature and personality. The use of design features that hint at the true nature of the character, rather than stereotypically proclaim it, allows the actor to develop the character with the aid of the costume, rather than being upstaged by it.

Costume design also establishes historical period, cultural group, socioeconomic status, sex, age, climate/season, and possibly time of day. The costume design also needs to accommodate the movement of the actors, while retaining the appropriate historical or cultural silhouette and line.

**Light Design:** The purpose of light design is to create selective visibility, focus, and mood or atmosphere. It can indicate climate and is also the most effective way to determine time of day. The control of

light available to the modern light designer allows for the greatest momentary flexibility of any of the other design elements other than sound. This permits various subtle emphases and influences on focus and mood throughout the production. The qualities that the lighting designer can control are distribution, intensity, movement, and color. Angle refers to the direction from which the light approaches an area, actor or object; distribution refers to the shape and size of the area the light covers; and the quality of the light, its diffusion or clarity. Intensity is the actual amount, or level of brightness of light that strikes the stage or actor. Movement is primarily the timed duration of the light cues, but can also refer to the movement of onstage practicals and followspots. Color is determined mainly by the use of colored 'gels'. Color in light differs from color in pigment or dye. In light, the primary colors are red, blue and green and the secondary colors are cyan, yellow and magenta. Though the basic connotations associated with colors are still valid in lighting, strong consideration needs to be given to the surface the colored light will fall upon. A yellow green which in pigment is youthful, if projected onto a person's face will create a sickly effect.

## **STAGE MAKEUP APPLICATION AND DESIGN**

### *Theatrical stage makeup*

There are two purposes for stage makeup. The first is to emphasize the structure of the face under stage lights. This is necessary because one of the goals of stage lighting is to achieve visibility and in doing this lights are focused on the stage from various angles which remove the normal shadows which define the contours of the face. Therefore, the actor must re-establish these contours to make their features visible to the audience using stage makeup. The second purpose of stage makeup is to visualize the character being portrayed by the actor. To accomplish this most effectively, the actor needs to be familiar with physiognomy, which is the study of the relationship between personality and physical appearance. It is necessary for an actor to know this because in the theatre the actor is responsible for designing and applying his/her own makeup. There are, under extraordinary circumstances, occasions when the makeup will be designed for the

actor, such as for a production of *Cats* or *The Lion King*. Even in these circumstances however, the actor will, perhaps after initial instruction, be expected to apply the makeup and achieve the desired effects themselves. In addition to being a required skill, designing the makeup of the character an actor is portraying, offers the actor the uniquely qualified position of choosing those qualities which most completely define that character and determining which to make visible to the audience. Thus, the actor has the ability to enhance his/her performance by using this non-verbal form of communication.

### *Basic Principles*

The principles used in the creation of stage makeups are the same as those used throughout the centuries by artists in drawings and paintings. Instead of the flat surface of a piece of paper or canvas, the makeup artist uses the three-dimensional surface of the face as the foundation upon which to create optical illusions. These optical illusions are achieved by using highlight and shade with specific placement, intensity and blending to produce the appearance of something existing on the face that is not necessarily actually there. Highlight is a color approximately three tones lighter than the base or foundation color or white. It is used to make areas appear more prominent or larger. Shade is at least three tones darker than the base color or dark brown and is used to make areas recede. [Note: even on dark skin, black should not be used for shade because there is no warmth to it as there is in skin tones.]

### *Straight Makeup*

The first step in emphasizing the structure of the face is to locate the placement, shape and angle of the cheekbone. This is the most important bone on the face and highlighting the top or most prominent part of the bone is necessary for most stage makeup designs. By highlighting the top of the bone and shading in the hollow between that bone and the jaw bone, the actor can reestablish the contours of the face that the stage lighting has minimized. To emphasize other elements of the face which can be lost under stage lights, the eyes should be brought out with mascara and/or eyeliner, the lips with the application of a natural color, and a healthy appearance with the application of rouge on

the fleshy part of the cheek. Because stage lights are usually balanced by using both warm and cool gels, the placement of the rouge is important. The pink shade of the rouge will become dark under many colors of cool gels; therefore, it is necessary to apply the rouge under the cheekbone highlight so that it does not nullify the effect of the highlight.

### *Corrective Makeup*

While focusing on making the features of the face visible, it is also possible to create the illusion of differently shaped features using the principle of highlight and shade. While simply painting on the natural contours of the face that are lost under stage lights is referred to as Straight Makeup, creating the illusion of differently shaped facial features is referred to as Corrective Makeup. To reshape his/her features as they choose, an actor can use the principles of highlight to enlarge or make more prominent, and shade to decrease or suggest a hollow. The forehead can be expanded vertically or horizontally through the use of highlight blended at its edges. The reverse can be accomplished by using shade. When reshaping the nose or jaw line it is important to realize that shade on a bone will tend to look like a smudge of dirt, because the bones of the face are revealed as a person talks and uses their facial muscles. Therefore, if reshaping of a bone is desired, the shade color used must be a subtle tone, darker than the base but not as dark as the regular color of shade. On the jaw line, it is more effective to use highlight to imply an increase of the size in a particular area. Narrowing is possible by bringing a subtle shade color up over the natural edge slightly. To reshape the nose, the actor must focus on adjusting the natural ridge of their nose. The ridge is the line formed by the top plane of the nose, which is usually lighter due to overhead lighting, meeting the side plane of the nose, which is usually darker due to its not receiving as much direct light. To narrow the nose, a subtle shade color is put on the top plane of the nose adjacent to the ridge to create the illusion that the ridge is closer to the center of the nose and that the top plane of the nose is narrower. To widen the nose, highlight would be put on the side plane of the nose adjacent to the ridge to create the illusion that the ridge is farther from the center of the nose and the top plane of the nose is wider. Using highlight and shade to adjust the apparent placement of the ridge can also be used to create the illusion of a crooked or straighter nose.

## *Age Makeup*

The visible signs of age on the face are created by loss of elasticity in the skin, which causes wrinkles, and gravity, which causes sagging. Wrinkles can best be achieved by creating a fine dark line using the chiseled end of a brush in one stroke. They should follow the actor's own wrinkles so that as he/she moves their facial muscles, what they have drawn on their face is not contradicted by their own skin. The ends of the wrinkles should fade away which can be accomplished by gently pulling the end of the line out with a figure. Care should be taken not to have wrinkles appear even or symmetrical, as this will give the appearance of stripes drawn on the face. Actual wrinkles are narrow cylinders and are sometimes shaded thus, with the dark crease at the bottom blended upward and a blended highlight toward the top of the middle of the 'cylinder' to indicate light from above. This effect is difficult to achieve in the small amount of space between wrinkles, so it is recommended that the dark line of the crease be all that is done to indicate wrinkles.

Sagging that is created by gravity has a dark edge, again using the chiseled edge of a brush, at the bottom and blends upward. Often the first effect of gravity is the nasalobial fold which starts with a slight hook around the nostril and extends downward following a natural crease made when the actor smiles. This fold grows in depth and length with age. For most, the widest part of the fold is at the top near the nostril, though due to variations of the fleshy part of the cheek, the widest part can be lower. Another fold or sagging area is the eye bag or pouch. It starts at the inner eye (the end near the nose) and curves down then back up toward the outer eye but farther out, where the edge of the eye socket is. Again, the shading has a hard edge at the bottom and blends upward. The shade is widest under the middle of the eye and will be darker at the inner eye where it starts than the outer eye where it aims for but not always reaches. With enough age to complete the bag to the outer eye, it often becomes part of the lines at the corner of the eye that are referred to as 'crow's feet'. For both the nasalobial fold and eye pouch, the hard dark edge of the crease can be emphasized by placing highlight next to it and blending it out. Because the purpose of this highlight is only to emphasize the edge and not enlarge or make prominent it needs to disappear into skin tone completely.

Another pouch that appears with age is found above the eye. It is caused by the flesh between the eyebrow and the eye sagging. It can be suggested by drawing a hard dark edge some distance in from the nose from the eye brow curving down to follow the crease at the back of the upper eye lid and then curving down to the outer eye and a bit beyond. It, being created by gravity, is blended up from the hard dark at its bottom edge. Highlight is used under the brow to support the illusion of the blended shade that there is sagging skin. Because much of this pouch is hidden behind the eye lid, the blending of its outer end and the corresponding highlight above the blended shade determine its effectiveness. The inner eye, the area between the nose, brow and pouch edge should be shaded to make it recede and help the upper eye pouch become more apparent by contrast. The hard dark edge of this pouch can be extended to become another line of the 'crow's feet' at the outer end of the eye.

### *Designing Character Makeup*

To understand what choices to make when applying a makeup, the actor must first analyze the character they are portraying. What environmental or health issues would be apparent on the face of their character, what fashion makeup would their character wear; would disfigurements be appropriate; and what is the visible age of the character? All these components combine to create the character makeup, but the most important determinant of physical appearance to consider when designing a makeup is personality. When the analysis is complete, an understanding of the personality of the character emerges. An easy and effective way to decide how to best visualize personality is to make the expressions most often made by the particular character and see what impact those expressions have on the face. Are there specific wrinkles formed - between the eyebrows, on the forehead, or at the end of the eye? What is the resulting shape or angle of the eyebrows or is there a change in shape of the nostrils? The emotions most often felt by the character - anger, joy, fear, sorrow, create specific changes in the face's features and by 'painting' these on to the actor's face, he/she will be conveying personality without uttering a line.

Other notable determinants of physical appearance are environment and health. Environment would include indications of weathering and time in the sun for those with an outdoors life style, or paleness and relatively smooth skin for those who spent most of their time indoors. An outdoor or weathered look can be achieved by stippling with colors which are more reddish and darker than the skin tone to produce a ruddy complexion. Health, when good, would follow the principles of straight makeup with defined features and good color. The visualization of bad health would depend upon the causes of it and could range from darkness under the eyes for a character who is simply tired, to an emaciated prisoner or decease ravaged victim with facial lesions. While the look of someone who is gaunt can be achieved by accentuating the bone structure with highlight and shade, research would most likely need to be done into how a person with a specific decease or other type of infirmity would look.

Additional elements of physical appearance can include whatever fashion makeup is appropriate for the character. This not only requires understand the character, but also understanding the fashions of the period in which the play is set or the fashion to which the character would adhere. Another element is disfigurement. This can be the result of the life the character has led, such as scars, bruises, or a broken nose, or the result of genetics, such as birthmarks or warts.

### *Conclusion*

Thus, the two purposes of theatrical stage makeup are the visualization of facial features and the visualization of character. The actor uses highlight and shade following basic artistic principles to create specific optical illusions on their face giving it more definition so their expressions are able to be seen by the audience. The actor also uses those techniques to 'paint on' the dominant emotions of their character in order to convey personality and thereby enhance their performance.

EXPRESSIVE EYEBROWS FOR USE IN MAKEUP DESIGNS



HAPPY EXPECTANT OPTIMISTIC



STERN ANGRY SEVERE



CONNIVING SHREWD DEVIIOUS



SAD DISTRESSED REGRETFUL



EVIL MALICIOUS FORBIDDING



SORROWFUL MOURNFUL DESOLATE

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## **The Use of Oral Interpretation in the Secondary Classroom**

*Susan P. Millsap Ph.D.*

### **Abstract**

*In order to excite students about their learning of any subject the use of oral interpretation is offered as a teaching tool. This article discusses the advantages of using dramatic techniques in the classroom including the fostering of creativity and independent thinking in students as well as encouraging cooperation and self-motivation. All of these elements are essential to the development of critical thinking. Specific suggestions on how to approach the curriculum, the classroom environment, and the students in order to have a successful learning experience are provided.*

One of the challenges for teachers of any subject is how to excite students about learning. Teachers understand the importance of their subject and why students need to understand the concepts involved. Getting students just as excited about the subject matter can be a challenge. This article presents a method of teaching so that students, required to take certain courses and read specific literature, can get excited and experience the subject under investigation. To achieve this goal literature is used to help students create an experience that will have an emotional impact and thus a more lasting influence in their lives.

Think about a favorite book, poem, or play. You probably have read it multiple times and favorite sections even more often. How does it make you feel? You have an emotional response to the literature every time that you read it. We want to share this experience. If the literature is connected to the subject matter being taught the student will connect that experience to the subject and result in an experience that increases the possibility of learning that subject. The literature is the cause for experience. Teachers involve students with the subject matter through the literature with multiple levels of dramatic presentation. Through the use of oral interpretation and dramatic techniques the students learn to ask questions and experience the subject on a more critical and personal level. As Lynda Delo (2008) points out "When students read literature that connects science to their everyday lives, the science becomes more

interesting and relevant, and in turn, students are motivated to gain a better understanding of the subject matter” (p. 33).

Teachers of the Arts have long known that drama helps foster creativity and independent thinking in students as well as encouraging cooperation and self-motivation. All of these elements are essential to the development of critical thinking. The advantage of the use of drama is that it can take you to any time and any place. When students stretch their thinking process to ask the how and why something happens they make a more personal connection to the subject. The California Department of Education has also endorsed this idea. “Reading and the use of literature are of great benefit beyond the boundaries of the language arts classroom. Teachers can enrich their student’s understanding through an integration of quality literature selections into the science and mathematics lessons. . . . [giving students] the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the subject matter” (Literature for Science and Math: K-12 Standards). With this strong endorsement of the integration of literature into the classroom this paper presents a methodology for teachers to use to reach this goal.

The prospect of getting students truly engaged in what they are studying is very exciting. But before embarking on this interactive method the teacher needs to take a careful inventory of the curriculum, the environment, the students, and themselves.

What does the established curriculum require you to cover in your class? We acknowledge that in this day of standardized testing teachers are responsible for covering certain subjects and making sure that the students have a certain knowledge base. However, a more engaging teaching method can help the students to remember potentially dry facts by involving them in an experience directly related to the subject. For example, if you are covering the *Great Depression* in History or reading *Grapes of Wrath* in Literature or discussing food supply in Social Studies, you could ask students if they have ever been hungry. What did it feel like? What did you think about? Why were you hungry? What if there was no way for you to relieve that hunger? Reading poems or plays that are related to the theme helps to enlarge a student’s experience and adding a dramatic presentation can add even more impact. But before a teacher can plan these experiences they must clearly identify what concepts must be taught and how much time they have to cover a subject. Making a clear list of concepts, ideas, and goals

can be helpful to this process. Below is a sample curricular inventory to help give you focus and aid in the planning process.

### Sample Curricular Inventory

What concepts are you teaching? Character development and prejudice

Literature Used	Methodology	Emotional response	Assessment
To Kill a Mockingbird  Poem Poem	Read book Identify one trial scene to explore Stage the scene Add music	Stereotype Exercise What is prejudice? Have you ever experienced prejudice? How did it make you feel? Anger, shame, frustration	How many students actively participated?  What was the level of participation?

Once a teacher realizes what must be covered they then need to look at the physical environment available to them. What is the size of the classroom space? Can the furniture be moved around to create different space? What type of technology is in the classroom? How much noise can the space handle? What resources are available for your use? The answers to these questions will directly impact the choices you make in what methods you will be able to use. This text will give you multiple methodological approaches to hopefully meet the various classroom settings available to teachers. But a thorough evaluation of the space you have to work in will add greatly to the success of the chosen method and decrease frustration on the part of the teacher and the students involved.

### Sample Environmental Inventory

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sit in a Circle</li><li>• Use chairs</li><li>• Appoint John to come in and arrange chairs before class</li><li>• Appoint Sally to record ideas on the board</li><li>• Appoint Sam and Jenny to straighten room when we're finished</li><li>• Hang snowflakes from the ceiling</li><li>• Have Louise decorate doors for entrance and exits</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Unobstructed</li><li>• Audience will be located towards windows.</li><li>• Place chairs under windows</li><li>• 3 Break out areas for group work</li><li>• Mark center stage with taped X</li><li>• Bring in boxes to create a platform</li><li>• Invite Mr. Carter to see a rehearsal on Thursday to give feedback</li><li>• Bring in rope for prop</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Time available : _____</li><li>• Reserved the space on 2-28-08.</li><li>• # of audience seats _____</li><li>• Tape off chairs that cannot see the performance</li><li>• Check overhead projector is working</li><li>• Invite Mrs. Wilson's class to attend</li><li>• White wall available for background projection</li><li>• No off stage space so secure hallway for entrance and exits</li><li>• Will borrow lights from Theatre Department</li><li>• Meet the actors after show in the cafeteria</li></ul>
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Note that the above inventory indicates how the environment can be manipulated with students identified to help organize the space. This makes it easier on the teacher and involves the students in all aspects of the learning task.

Finally, teachers need to take a good look at what they are willing to try. Adding dramatic experiences to the classroom means that the teacher must be willing to shift some of the control from delivery of knowledge to students finding their creativity; which means that sometimes the direction that an experience takes is not what the teacher initially imagined – and the teacher is okay with that. Are you willing to give the students the freedom to be creative? How much are you willing to include yourself in the dramatic experience? While initially you may find yourself uncomfortable with a new method, once you see the results in the learning that takes place and in the engagement of the students that you will quickly find your own comfort with the teaching method.

Now that we have taken a careful inventory to establish some basic parameters let's begin creating experience! The Vehicle is what is used to get the students to the goal. In this case it is the literature. How can the literature give the students the experience they need?

### **Creating a Positive Environment**

As a general rule, the older the students the more inhibited they become. There are exceptions to this depending on student personalities and previous experiences but no matter what their background teachers need to consider the students and their experiences as they prepare them for an experience. Since most students have some inhibitions you will probably need to start off with exercises that do not put them in too strong a spotlight too quickly. Beginning with something easy to read like a Dr. Seuss poem, helps to create a positive environment that will help students find more confidence in presenting their ideas.

Creativity requires the freedom to try ideas. A student will only try a new idea if they feel safe. To establish this feeling the teacher needs to demonstrate from the first day of class that students need to speak in class and that all students need to listen to each other. Students are free to disagree with ideas out loud if they can explain why they disagree. This behavior keeps the focus on the idea and not on the person. Teachers should model this as well. All people and ideas are to

be respected. No one should ever be allowed to say an idea is stupid or wrong. And no one should ever label a person as stupid or wrong. We are helping students to find their Voice.

Older students are familiar with the tedious exercise of reading literature aloud in class. One of the reasons this is tedious is because few people can read well out loud at first sight. Some people can read a child's bedtime story well out loud because they are familiar with the story. To ask a student to put the same inflection and excitement in a cold reading of something they do not know is asking the impossible. This does not mean that teachers should not have students read aloud in class. In fact, we believe that reading aloud can be the beginning of an exciting experience. But first students must learn how to read well aloud so that the literature can become an effective vehicle. Using that same children's poem that was suggested above, have the students read it showing different emotions or taking on different personalities. This helps the student discover how to use their voice and gives them some confidence in reading aloud.

To help the students make the transition from reading aloud to performance give them an object on which to focus. For example, if you are reading Hemmingway's *Old Man and the Sea*, give the students a rope to work with. If you are reading *The Elves and the Shoemaker* give them some shoes. Students may initially find it easier to act and react to an object than to another person. Once action is centered on the object it will naturally move to interaction with the students.

As students begin to explore the ideas of the literature the teacher needs to be sure to compliment students on good ideas, encourage students to demonstrate what they are trying to say, and ask other student's opinions. The teacher truly takes on the role of facilitator in this method.

At the end of the experience the teacher needs to take the time to perform a thorough evaluation. Ask the students to write anonymous evaluation of the experience. Ask them to specifically comment on the how they felt before, during, and after the event. Ask them to identify things they liked and things they did not like. The teacher needs to do the same. Make these as written notes that you can refer to before you embark on your next experience. Also ask for feedback from other faculty who attended the final product or worked with you in the development of the experience. Keep good records on student

achievement and test scores on the unit as evidence for administrators that this method really does work.

The use of literature and drama in the classroom is acknowledged as being a valuable tool for student learning. This paper has provided a method for teachers to embark on this experience. Getting students involved in the learning activity increases their excitement about the subject and in turn increases their learning. And this is the goal of all education.

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