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Goodbye to All That!: Juried Ethnodramatic Performance for the 35th Annual Ethnography in Education Research Forum, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

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Goodbye to All That!

**An Accomplished Teacher's Last Year in the
Chicago Public Schools:**



Performance: Alexandra Miletta, Brandi Weekley, Charna Lacey

Response: K. Nicola Williams & Audra Slocum

Music: Andrew Babson

Written and Directed: Charles Vanover

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<https://www.facebook.com/InquiryTheatre>

Juried Performance for the 35th Annual Ethnography in Education Forum

The University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education

March 1, 2014, 4:30-5:15 pm Room 121

Songs in Order of Their First Performance

Kruder and Dorfmeister: "Trans Fatty Acid"; Archetype: "Null and Void"; La Chatte Rouge: "Affaires a Faire"; Global Communication: "807"; Archetype "MetaMorph; Bidi: "Detroit Ghetto";
Jeff Mills:"Reverting"; Archetype: "Red Shift"; Craig/May: "Frustration";
Archetype: "Persistence of Vision"; Jeff Mills: "Automatic"; Jeff Mills "Black is the Number";
Bola "For Casa 3"; Jeff Mills: Metamorph; Tangerine Dream: Love on a Real Train

Imagine Credit: Java EP by Jeff Mills

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Good Bye To All That!

This Group Session inquires into the possibilities and affordances of ethnodrama as a means of evoking field-participants' experience and supporting inquiry into the social structures that shape people's lives (Denzin, 2003; Kazubowski-Houston, 2010; Saldaña, 2011). My collaborators and I have organized the session as a community-building forum. The transformative power of live theatre is used to build intellectual and emotional connections between community members and engender conversations about issues that matter (Mitchell & Freitag, 2011; Norris, 2009; Turner, 1986). Ethnographic texts are presented to raise questions and support audience-members' efforts to make sense of the way the world works (Snyder-Young, 2010).

The heart of the session is a 45 minute, ethnodrama that expands stories shared by an accomplished, National Board Certified teacher after her final year in the Chicago Public Schools. This short show is constructed out of verbatim texts voiced in the original order they were spoken. The texts were transcribed from four semi-structured, narrative interviews I conducted using interview techniques adapted from Weiss (1995) and Benner, Tanner, and Chelsea (1996) intended to help teachers tell stories about their teaching.

Addison Ashland, pseudonym, the teacher whose interview will be performed in the show, chose the Chicago Public Schools as her first job out of college, and she spent a decade working in the system before she resigned from the board the morning before our last interview. Addison started in an elementary classroom in a magnet school and grew into her practice (Lampert, 2010) under the direction of the school's senior teachers. About five years into her career, another principal was appointed, and he got into conflicts with the senior teachers and drove them and, eventually, Addison, out to other schools.

When I interviewed her in Chicago in the summer of 2004, Addison taught remedial Mexican students in a self-contained sixth/seventh grade classroom in a large K-8 elementary school in what was, then, one of Chicago's most violent neighborhoods. As a culturally responsive teacher (Gonzales et al., 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Addison cared for her students, but she was also burning out (Price, Mansfield, & McConney, 2012; Santoro, 2011). There were moments in her interview when her lessons became, almost, too authentic, and similar to the teacher in Monroe and Obidah's (2004) case study, Addison's instruction moved into landscapes that would be inappropriate, if managed by a lesser professional. One of the show's dramatic high points is a unit Addison improvised on Paula Fox's book, The Slave Dancer. Addison was a teacher with tremendous heart (Grant, 2012; Palmer, 2007), but this unit, and other events that year, pushed her to the farthest edge of her practice.

Can teachers care too much and instruct too deeply?

Structure of Symposium

The performance makes use of a set of collaborative structures familiar to those work for change in urban schools (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; MacDonald, Mohr, Dichter, & MacDonald, 2007). My goal is to use ethnodramatic techniques to expand data (Feldman, 2005) taken from interviews I conducted with teachers in the Chicago Public Schools, and to ask audience members to participate in protocols and other forms of structured conversation to engage in dialogue about the stories the teachers told. The productions are aimed at academic and professional audiences (Beck, Belliveau, Lea, & Wager, 2011), and they have been put up at sites including the University of Chicago, the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, Northwestern University, and the Penn Ethnography Forum. During these Inquiry Theatre productions, the sessions' facilitators greet audience members at the door and give them a program that contains excerpts of the verbatim transcripts that make up the playscript—an example of these handouts is included in the appendix. Audience members discuss these texts before the performance in order to take an inquiry stance towards the issues raised by the texts. After the performance, members return to the texts and discuss them in relation to what they learned from the show. Professional problems thus come to life on stage and remain alive within the conversations of members of the community (Donmoyer & Donmoyer, 1995; Turner, 1986; Vanover, 2013; Vanover & Saldaña, 2005).

Our production is intended to raise questions, not to provide answers. No judgments are rendered; no blame is assessed. Addison spent ten years working for change in the Chicago Public Schools. The challenges she describes speak to the consequences of the unpaid debt owed to people of color (Ladson-Billings, 2006) and the joys and costs of working for change.

Can teachers care too much and instruct too deeply?

Interview 1: The Story of Your Teaching

Please come to the interview ready to tell the story of your teaching this past school year, from September 03 until June 04. I am interested in learning how the year began, how it ended, and the important incidents that happened in between. I would like to know about the successes that made you proud and the mistakes you learned from. I hope you will share some of the joy of life in the classroom while not forgetting the hard work and difficult moments that are also part of life in school. You are welcome to bring notes, samples of student work and other materials that might help you narrate. As you tell your stories, I would like you to focus on the following questions:

- Please tell a story about a student, or a group of students, for whom your teaching made a difference during the 2003-04 school year.
- Describe a unit or a group of lessons where you made a difference in your students' lives.
- Describe moments during the year when you felt you had learned something new about your teaching or your students.
- For experienced teachers:
 - Tell a story about a particular moment when something you learned from the your efforts to become accredited by the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards helped you become a better teacher, or instances when this knowledge made it more difficult for you to serve your students.
- For beginning teachers:
 - Tell a story about a particular moment when something you learned from your student teaching or teacher education classes helped you become a better teacher, or instances when this knowledge made it more difficult for you to serve your students.
- Tell a story about any obstacles that got in the way of your teaching.
- Tell a story about a particular event that illustrates what you believe teaching is all about.

My goal as interviewer is to ask you to describe specific events and incidents. Throughout the session, I will ask you to expand on your stories by asking you to "Tell me more about that." or to "Walk me through what happened at that moment." or to "Describe a specific incident that illustrates that idea." In order to focus the time we have on your teaching I may also ask you questions such as "Could you tell me specifically how that event or person affected your teaching?" All of these questions are designed to help you tell your story in your own way, and in your own words.

Please don't worry about telling your stories in the specific order that they happened. My goal is for you to feel relaxed enough to speak naturally about the work you've done. Feel free to move forward and backwards in time and to come back to incidents that you've brought up before. I hope you will feel comfortable enough to tell your story to me in the same way you would tell it to teacher you trust.

The pilot interviews for this project ran from between an hour and an hour and a half. I would like you to have 90 minutes free so that you can speak freely without feeling rushed.

Excerpt 1

In this excerpt, accomplished teacher Addison Addison¹ answers the third question in the first interview. Please read this story and be prepared to share its meaning with other members of your group.

ADDISON: But, as far as teaching, I don't think that I've (5 SECOND PAUSE) grown. I don't think that I have really learned anything new.

For a moment, ADDISON looks down at her notes;

When I read that question I'm like,

'What have I learned?

'Holy shit! I haven't learned anything.'

I was like embarrassed. I'm like,

'Oh God, I'm not doing anything differently. I'm not doing anything differently. I haven't changed this. I haven't changed that.

I mean, I did a unit on slavery because I realized that my kids didn't know anything about it, and, I guess, that was different. But, as far as changing how I teach—how I go about planning and curriculum, that's all the same. How I—I mean—I don't think that I have learned anything new. Because when you learn something, it is usually through reflection and then you change. I don't—Like, there have been little things

'On their exit cards they told me they like this, or they didn't like this, and so, then, we did this.'

But, that's not really learning something new about me as a teacher or me in teaching.

Excerpt 2

I gave my two years. I paid my dues. We'll see. I am going to look. See what's out there. There is so many things. I told [my principal]

'I can pretty much work anywhere and do whatever I want. And I might just choose something totally different.'

She's like

"But, you're so great."

I go

'You think I'm great. You haven't even seen me at my best.'

¹ Addison's part in the playscript is constructed from verbatim transcriptions from interviews conducted by the author. All names are pseudonyms. Words have been cut from the original transcripts, but no words have been added unless indicated by brackets.

Excerpt 3

In this excerpt, accomplished teacher Addison Addison shares incidents from a unit she improvised on Paula Fox's book, The Slave Dancer. Please read this story and be prepared to share its meaning with other members of your group.

ADDISON: I try very hard to let them know the performance descriptors are based on the Illinois Learning Standards.

“Okay, you have to know this. That’s the law.”

There’s no like, “I don’t know. What’s the point of this?”

I try to tie in all the subjects with my units. If we’re learning about sailing on a slave ship across the Atlantic Ocean, then we’re going to do all the sailing terminology—we’re going to learn about “leagues” and the different measurements. Just the real life skills that you need to know to sail a ship, and a lot of them have to do with math.

Sometimes I would just have them do like, “Write a math problem that would be—about a real life situation that you might encounter on a ship. Like if Jessie needed eight gallons of water to do this, whatever. Just be creative and use a situation that Jessie, the main character in Slave Dancer, might come in contact with.” Or, “If the slave hold is this big and they pack this many slaves, how many inches did each slave get?” I mean, but that’s—they did want to know stuff like that. I’m like, “Well, figure it out. [The book] tells us how big the hold is. So, we have an approximate size—we know how many slaves, and we know how big the slave ship is, and we know about how big the hold was in comparison to the whole ship. So, we can sit and figure out how much room each slave had.”

Which was not very much.

So, that kind of stuff.

There’s math, and then we’re also getting a perspective of what it was like to be in a slave ship. It was hard for them to understand the concept of being kidnapped and taken away from everything that they know. They had a really hard time with that.

And they had no idea. I mean, you think of slavery, and you think of the slave trade, and you’re not going to have good images or good feelings about it, but they never really had any idea. So, the more we learned about what [the slaves] experienced, the more they wanted to know. It was very, very motivating for them. I mean they were disgusted—thank goodness—and they were outraged, and they were like,

“Why didn’t somebody do something!?”

I said, “Money.”

They were like, “What?”

I'm like, "Well, that's what makes the world go around. Money makes people do bad things. We wouldn't be in this country without slavery. Or, maybe, we'd be here but the country would be totally different. I mean, who knows what would've happened?"

We kept track of everything that happened in the novel on these big, huge charts we made, and we hung them up in front of all the windows. They were all different colors. So, one chart was all the different examples of conflict throughout the story. There was "man versus man," and "man versus nature," and "man versus himself." Those were the different ones we were focusing on, and so every time we came across one—we'd read a section and then we'd talk about—someone would raise their hand. "Okay, what kind of conflict is that? Okay..." So then we put it on that chart.

And then we had this huge "slave" web: "Slavery." Every time we read we would add to the web whatever thoughts. There'd be things like "cruelty," "evil," "blood." --just words shooting out of the center: "Slavery."

And that was really interesting. "Pain," "chains," "bondage," "dark," "scared". All these different words. Each time we read, more would be added. Then we had one where it was all the predictions. Every time we read, [we'd talk about] what was going to happen next. And then every time something would happen that we predicted, I'd put a star by it.

That was a big chart.

We'd come up with like a class summary of the main ideas. We'd do this stuff after they responded in their response journal. They would summarize the main ideas for each section after they responded to the literature, like how they felt about what happened. And then we would do our class talk and add to our charts.

Okay, we had that going the whole time. We had a vocabulary wall with our words. We put a game together for the different vocabulary. And then we had our literature circle jobs. All these things helped them understand what it was like to be a slave.

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