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AUTHOR Alrutz, Megan
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ABSTRACT

The question of how to provide children with a set of core values and beliefs, while still allowing them freedom of choice or independence, permeates not only the family structure, but the education system as well. The educator/author of this paper, a teaching artist, justifies drama as promoting critical understanding and enhancing the ability to problem solve, and she strives to develop a classroom culture that encourages students to be open-minded, independent thinkers. The paper addresses how the drama facilitator promotes critical thinking, an explicit drama value, without promoting behavior which might subvert dominant values/ideology held by the school or society at large. With an interest in tying theory to practice, it provides an example of an actual process drama which, in conjunction with promoting critical thinking, also considers behavior/thinking not aligned with dominant school/societal ideology. Using Althusser's writing on ISAs or Ideological State Apparatuses, as well as bell hooks's commentary on critical pedagogy, the paper explores the drama facilitator's negotiation between promoting critical thinking and remaining true to the ideology of the education system, which situates educational drama work. Lists 13 works consulted. (NKA)

Should Kids Be Allowed to Burn the House Down?: Interrogating the Role of Ideology and Critical Pedagogy in the Drama Classroom

By Megan Alrutz

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How is one to find a way to let youth, with its idealism, its new knowledge, its at-homeness in a constantly changing world, try its wings and yet not destroy that which it is trying to improve, and can improve? --Earl Warren

Should Kids Be Allowed to Burn the House Down? Interrogating the Role of Ideology and Critical Pedagogy in the Drama Classroom

Do you remember being a kid? My parents used to ask me if I would *like* to sleep on the couch so that Grandma could have my bed, or if I *thought* I should go to the movie or study for my math test? They always couched questions in a way that suggested I actually had a choice in the matter. Of course I didn't want to sleep on the sagging sofa while Grandma enjoyed my comfy bunk bed with care-bear sheets; and as I got older, I don't think I once believed the math test was more important than going to the movies with friends. Yet, I always let Grandma have my bed, and when a math test loomed in the near future, I voluntarily relinquished movies. Looking back, I wonder how much choice truly existed. How did my parents grant me a choice in these matters, while still ensuring that Grandma got her bed and that math received sufficient attention? How do parents teach us the "right" answers, and simultaneously raise children who think for themselves? Was I thinking critically about my decisions, or naïvely regurgitating expected behavior? This question of how to provide children with a set of core values and beliefs, while still allowing them freedom of choice or independence, permeates not only the family structure, but the education system as well.

Based on my own experiences, educational drama seems to rest within a student centered culture that encourages critical thinking, paralleling my parents' efforts to allow me to make my own decisions regarding polite and responsible behavior. As a teaching artist, I justify drama as promoting critical understanding and enhancing the ability to problem solve. Furthermore, I strive to develop a classroom culture that encourages students to be open-minded, independent

thinkers. In equating drama with each of these qualities, I echo others' belief that educational drama rests within a culture of freedom, exploration/interrogation, and self-discovery (see Wagner).

In this paper, I address how the drama facilitator promotes critical thinking, an explicit drama value, without promoting behavior which might subvert dominant values/ ideology held by the school or society at large. With an interest in tying theory to practice, I provide an example of an actual process drama which, in conjunction with promoting critical thinking, also considers behavior/thinking not aligned with dominant school/societal ideology. Using Allthusser's writing on ISAs, or Ideological State Apparatuses, as well as bell hook's commentary on critical pedagogy, I explore the drama facilitator's negotiation between promoting critical thinking and remaining true to the ideology of the education system which situates educational drama work. How does the drama facilitator employ true critical pedagogy without promoting radical or subversive behavior?

Rastko Močnik, in his article "Ideology and Fantasy," writes that "ideology is absolutely necessary for any human relation to be possible" (141). Without an integrated system of assertions, theories, concepts, or ideas about human life and culture, individuals lack a basis for action or thought. Despite the necessity of ideology to human interaction, we rarely acknowledge the very ideas and theories that fashion our daily thoughts and actions. Any behavior we participate in (freely or not), ultimately rests within ideology(s) (dominant or otherwise). Allthusser further explains the circular nature of ideology: "There is no practice except by and in an ideology. There is no ideology except by the subjects and for subjects" (39). Participating in a fluid exchange, ideology shapes our actions, just as our actions shape ideology.

According to Allthusser, ideologies, or "world outlooks" (37) manifest themselves in the "form of distinct and specialized institutions" (35), i.e. religion, family, and education, which "function by ideology" (36). The existence, and power, of these institutions resides in the ideas, cultures, theories, etc. that subtly interpellate us into an often subconscious perpetuation of the very same institution and its "world outlook." Allthusser labels these institutions Ideological State Apparatuses or ISAs; these institutions attempt to define and uphold the state (society as we know it), maintaining the power to do so through both subtle and overt perpetuation of ideology. Although the subtlety with which these institutions interpellate subjects may cause us to view them negatively, ISAs importantly offer us a framework from which to function. Foucault argues that while power/ ideology can be repressive, it more often serves to produce and enable:

If power was never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really believe that we should manage to obey it? What gives power its hold, what makes it accepted, is quite simply the fact that it does not simply weigh like a force which says no, but that it runs through, and it produces things, it induces pleasure, it forms knowledge, it produces discourse; it must be considered as a productive network which runs through the entire social body much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression. (Jagose 80)

Through the use of power, ISAs provide coherent ideas and theories on which to base our decisions about the world, ultimately giving shape to the actions we take, providing happiness and stability in our lives, while upholding the framework of society.

Althusser refers to an educational ISA, a power structure most clearly manifested in our schools. While schools vary in particular philosophies, they all participate in the "formation of

individuals as social subjects" (Allthusser 33). While education addresses the reproduction of various skills (reading, writing, calculating), it also reproduces submission to the rules of the established order: good behavior, morality, civic and professional consciousness, and perhaps most importantly, respect for the prevailing rules/ideology (Allthusser 34-36). As an Ideological State Apparatus, schools simultaneously function in two ways. First, the school sets up a framework of acceptable ideas, providing a basis for individuals to think and act. Second, it perpetuates ideas of good and bad, ultimately labeling individuals as right or wrong, and inside or outside the norm. Problems arise when people, and or their ideas, fall on the outskirts of an ISA's perpetuated framework. Ideological State Apparatuses simultaneously legitimize the lives and actions of some individuals/ groups, while illegitimizing others.

However, Foucault's model of power as enabling and productive, forces us to reconsider the idea of a stable binary (legitimate versus illegitimate behavior) as more of a fluid and ever changing continuum of discourse, one that both supports and resists the framework in which it rests. Foucault believes: "We must not image a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourses and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies" (Jagose 81). Although we may accept Foucault's position, once we try to pinpoint or discuss a specific ideological framework, the discourse, as well as its materialization, ultimately erects borders, resulting in some type of exclusionary hierarchy.

bell hooks, in her writing on engaged pedagogy, addresses this issue of exclusion in the schools:

Students who enter the academy unwilling to accept without question the assumptions and values held by privileged classes [perpetuated by ISAs] tend to be silenced,

deemed troublemakers. This practice reinforces the 'superiority' of students who fall under these categories [the privileged classes] while disempowering other students.

(Florence 91)

By their mere nature, schools assign value to bodies of ideas or knowledge, simultaneously enforcing a hierarchy of individuals who support those ideas. As an institution of learning, schools make decisions regarding the dissemination of those ideas, reinforcing particular values and assumptions which strengthen their existence. While bolstering support for education within a system of education hardly seems exclusive, hooks argues for an examination of which-- not to mention who's-- ideas and assumptions schools perpetuate. The problem, then, lies not in schools perpetuating ideology (for that is their very function), but more in the fact that we accept the ideology of schools as value free, or at least value laden in the most positive sense.

Where does this discourse on the power of the educational ISA place the drama facilitator? Critical thinking involves an examination of all sides of an issue, followed by careful judgement about how or why something does or does not work. It also allows for the possibility of arriving at different points of view. Importantly, the ISA operates differently, providing clear, and often singular, ways to operate in the world. This leaves the drama facilitator to negotiate between two cultures, that of the educational ISA and that of the drama classroom, with its critical, "questioning" pedagogy. Both systems of ideology provide comfort to its subjects: the ISA, by enabling students to feel confident in decisions regarding right and wrong, and drama, by broadening definitions and including an overlap of multiple perspectives and values. As someone responsible for student's education, the drama facilitator ultimately decides, through her teaching choices, how to promote critical thinking without discounting the ISA and its more fixed set of values. After all, educational drama still rests within the greater educational

Ideological State Apparatus. Placing this discourse in the context of a process drama that asks the drama facilitator to negotiate these two systems (educational ISA and classroom drama culture), highlights how these theories plays out in practice.

Last year, I participated in a process drama, entitled "A Fine and Private Place," which revolves around a Phoenix arson case. In January of 2001, the *Phoenix New Times* reported on a series of fires set to luxury dream homes, allegedly ignited in protest of suburban sprawl.

Despite issues of danger and legality, this radical form of protest encountered some support:

'Stop urban sprawl!' 'Burn the rich!' 'An acre an hour is obscene!' Is it any wonder some are rooting for the arsonist? "Happy hunting," says a communiqué claiming responsibility for the firebombing of nine luxury homes encroaching on the Phoenix Mountains Preserve. The mysterious hit-and-run arsonist has violently reduced each house to a scorched effigy of suburban sprawl. And with the latest damage estimates surpassing \$5 million, the FBI's anti-arsonist task force is decidedly unhappy. (Hibberd 1)

This situation divided the public on issues of environmental politics, personal property rights, and radical means of protest. Based on this real-life conflict, one of my professors led a group of graduate students through a series of dramatic exercises exploring various ideologies at play in the Phoenix arson situation. Modeling the personal process that homebuyers might have gone through in saving money for, and eventually building, their dreams homes, the drama asked us to empathize with those whose homes were torched in environmental protest. We developed sympathy for the right to work hard in pursuit of personal dreams and to create a safe and comfortable home for our family. Similarly, the drama also walked us through scenarios highlighting the other side of the issue. We developed attachments to the Phoenix land preserve: some of us hiked there as children, others proposed to spouses on the very land where wealthy

homeowners threatened to build. Furthermore, we tried to stop land development through "proper" legal channels and came out empty handed.

In a final series of exercises, we took on the role of hikers faced with the fact that the building of private homes terminated our access to the mountain trails and treasured nature hideouts for our families. Our professor, also in role as a hiker, led the group and eventually offered arson as a last resort for protecting the preserve lands. The group grew quiet as each of us critically considered the proposition, as well as the grave consequences of choosing to burn the houses or allow private citizens to take ownership of the land. Time prohibited us from fully realizing a decision within this drama, however, some serious questions surrounding the role of the drama facilitator in such scenarios took root in my mind.

What happens if we take children through this drama, to the brink of such a grave decision, and ask them to think critically about issues of responsibility and morality? We prompt them to weigh and interrogate their desires, and examine systems of economics, power, and justice--systems that ultimately stabilize our country as we know it. What if participants decide to burn the houses down? Do we, as drama facilitators working within the education system, allow students to realize (albeit through dramatic play) this decision? How do parents and schools react when informed of this critical thinking exercise? What if this drama revolved around another critical issue, such as race, abortion, religion, or gender? Is it possible to get students to think critically about any of these issues without allowing them: 1) to recognize that multiple view points and ideologies come into play, each with valid concerns, and 2) to make their own decisions and conclusions, even when those decisions undermine educational ISAs which aim to keep us safe and happy? Does promoting critical thinking in its truest sense mean allowing for students who, after much thought, decide the best decision is to burn the houses

down? As a responsible drama facilitator, I worry that my critical thinking exercise might be perceived as a torching of family values, the school system's ideology, laws, and even morals. The drama facilitator must consider her position as a subject of seemingly opposing institutions, reflecting on how to avoid the perpetuation of uninterrogated ideology as well as irresponsible exploration of possibly immoral or unethical behavior/thinking. Perhaps responsible exploration becomes key here.

Our facilitator provided us, as participants in "A Fine and Private Place," with the opportunity to exercise careful judgement and evaluation, or critical thinking, about our positioning on a real-life dilemma, within a drama setting. This setting created a safe space where our voices were heard and our positions carried weight. Addressing issues of empowerment, bell hooks writes, "honoring students' voices deconstructs the concept of a 'privileged' voice" (Florence 91). The drama facilitator empowers her participants by encouraging their voices, ideas, and decisions to be played out in role. She presents no single decision as having *the* right answer, instead offering authority to the students. This shift in authority, from the educational ISA to the students, leaves room for interrogation of the ISA. More specifically, when the drama facilitator legitimizes a student's decision to burn the house down, the ideology of the school-- namely, the promotion of non-violence and adherence to the law-- faces opposition. Interrogation of the ISA ultimately means questioning a system of power, which not only offers stability, but to reiterate Foucault, also enables and produces pleasure, power, knowledge, and discourse. If committed to true critical thinking, the drama leader must accept an interrogation of these systems (possibly her own systems) of comfort, as well as asking that of her students.

No state would consciously and deliberately foster a universal compulsory institution that openly challenged its dominant value, belief, and knowledge systems; or set up and/ or sanction an institution likely to produce the kind of future citizens who might overthrow the very state that formed or socialized them. (Florence 137)

If aspects of the drama classroom culture, i.e. critical thinking, require an interrogation of the educational ISA, what moral, ethical, and responsibility issues exist for the drama facilitator? We find ourselves at a possible border crossing; because we come from a culture that values freedom and exploration (the drama classroom), and simultaneously reside within the educational ISA, drama leaders are in a position to gently push the boundaries of the educational ISA without destroying it. Giving voice to young people means opening up ISAs, including those that we deem good and necessary, to interrogation and possible criticism. bell hooks believes that "Reification of official knowledge relieves teachers of handling otherwise controversial issues" (Florence 101). As drama facilitators we find ourselves negotiating this balance between safe, official knowledge, or that which we find comfortable, and anything which holds the possibility of controversy.

So what are the practical consequences of examining ideology, or employing critical thinking in the drama classroom? Disagreement with dominant ideology may manifest itself outside the safety of the drama classroom and the drama facilitator could be held accountable for disruptive, radical, or even violent behavior. In addition, the act of "cultural preservation," or maintaining the values held by an ISA (educational, family, etc.), may be fractured (Ladson-Billings 298). However, critical drama pedagogy also offers students voice, validation, and possibility. "If drama can hold up images of unrealized possibilities, it can also encourage men and women to work for their realization. People can come to know their unfreedom and in so

doing break through petrified social reality" (Doyle 82). Furthermore, granting students the opportunity to play out their own thoughts and decisions fosters self-discovery and independent thinking. "As educators we might not always like what students say, but it is their voice. [...] by setting up an environment where students are free to speak [w]e can then take their comments and build reflection into them" (Doyle 130). In the end, we must ask ourselves if creating a generation of independent, critically minded youth is worth an interrogation of the systems and comforts to which we have grown accustomed.

I acknowledge that my own ideology, and thus this conversation, rests heavily within the culture of drama. My strong belief in employing exploration and critical thinking in the classroom does not allow me to accept a wholly negative view of student investigation into controversial issues, despite possible deviations from dominant ideology. In fact, "Drama seems to offer fertile ground for a critical examination of a variety of entrenched educational thinking" (Doyle 66). However, must a paradox exist between employing true critical pedagogy and maintaining the educational ISA. As drama facilitators, can we (and should we) strive for both?

It seems clear that some new institution is needed [...]. It should be an institution in which the vision, the dream, the innovation, the daring of youth is brought into contact with the mellow practicality, the concern for possible danger, the weighing of unnecessary risk characteristic of maturity. (Warren 280)

I agree with bell hooks' assertion that this requires teachers to adjust their general perceptions of students. "The bottom line assumption has to be that everyone in the classroom is able to act responsibly [...]. All too often we have been trained as [teachers] to assume that students are not capable of acting responsibly, that if we don't exert control over them, there's just going to be mayhem" (Florence 140). Exploration forces students to think, and it seems logical that critical

thinkers are less apt to act without thinking a situation through. Drama does not stop at the exploration of possibilities, but also encourages participants to consider the consequences of taking various actions and points of view. Critical thinking means not just looking at problems in the system, but seeing all sides and interrogating that which seems to work, make our lives easier, and enable us to live productive lives. In educational drama, students investigate new or rebellious ideas within a protected, yet honest, setting--a setting which allows for a multiplicity of views as well as an examination of those views for "moments of repression and resistance" (Doyle 94).

It is said by some writers that children have to rebel, as a butterfly has to break out of its cocoon. It is said, too, that if anyone tries to break the cocoon as the butterfly emerges, he will hurt it; for the struggles and agonies through which the butterfly passes in the change from the caterpillar stage help to develop the wings it needs to fly. (Warren 277)

Young people thrive when discovering ideas for themselves; exploration through drama allows them to "safely rebel," always offering the option to change one's mind. It is not my intention to label the Ideological State Apparatuses as entirely repressive, or to suggest that education, or the perpetuation of certain official knowledge, has little value. My charge, as a drama facilitator, is simply to find a balance. "Drama is not and can not be immune from the normative interests behind schooling. However, if these interests are allowed to be examined as opposed to being simply accepted by teachers and students, then there is hope for transformative education" (Doyle 76). While I want to provide young people with a forum to think critically about controversial issues and decide where they stand on things such as environmental politics, a complete overthrow of the educational ISA leaves us with no ground on which to stand.

Imagine, if you will, a spectrum of education: at one end rests the ISA and at the other end, true critical pedagogy. If the drama facilitator, situated somewhere in between, stretches her arms out long and wide, we may begin to bridge the gap.

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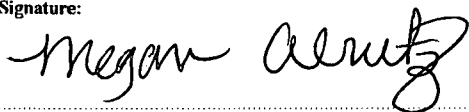
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Printed Name/Position/Title: Megan Alrutz, Ph.D.
Candidate, Theatre for Youth, Arizona State
University

Organization/Address:

1413 E. Redmon Dr.
Tempe, AZ 85283

Telephone: 480-897-4255

Fax:

E-mail Address:

malrutz@asu.edu

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