The Routledge Companion to Drama in Education

Mary McAvoy, Peter O’Connor

When crises should go to waste, or how I learned to stop supporting disaster capitalism and love the classroom

Publication details

Kristin Hunt
Published online on: 24 May 2022

How to cite :- Kristin Hunt. 24 May 2022, When crises should go to waste, or how I learned to stop supporting disaster capitalism and love the classroom from: The Routledge Companion to Drama in Education Routledge
Accessed on: 14 Dec 2023

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.
WHEN CRISES SHOULD GO TO WASTE, OR HOW I LEARNED TO STOP SUPPORTING DISASTER CAPITALISM AND LOVE THE CLASSROOM

Kristin Hunt

I began writing this essay from home during the initial two-week social distancing period recommended for US-American residents by the Centers for Disease Control in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic. As a faculty member at a university boasting massive ambitions to create online learning “at scale,” this event has predictably struck some of my institution’s administrators as advantageous, an opportunity to “leverage” strengths in online learning. As I imagine many readers of this anthology did, I briefly despaired at the loss of my classroom communities before wrestling with the significant ethical dilemma of converting my classes to online formats in order to protect public health without compromising my pedagogical values. Lurking behind this dilemma was the specter of what Naomi Klein aptly terms “disaster capitalism” (2017). Taking the example of Hurricane Katrina, Klein describes how disasters enabled and exacerbated by neoliberal public policy (reduced investment in infrastructure, enervated social safety nets that stand more and more in permanent financial and physical precarity, decreased effectiveness of government agencies in service of tax savings) then become opportunities for revanchement of resources on the part of private industry and the super-rich who “must” step in to take over for the government, resulting in an inexorable cycle of suffering for the masses that leads to profit for an ever-decreasing proportion of the wealthy and powerful.

Disaster capitalist maneuvers explicitly aim at public education. Klein quotes Keynesian economist Milton Freedman’s pronouncement that the devastating effects of Katrina on New Orleans’s school system constituted not only “a tragedy” but “also an opportunity to radically reform the educational system” as a prime example of disaster capitalist thinking (2017). In Klein’s analysis, the main means of combating disaster capitalist maneuvers is increasing the public’s awareness of the phenomenon and nurturing a lasting commitment to respond critically and repeatedly with resistance in every crisis.

The logics of disaster capitalism hinge on survival: the scenario to be avoided is deadly, and thus all decisions can be contextualized in immediate precarity, stripping away nuance and time for considering long-term implications. Arguments about the deficiencies of teaching theatre for social justice online fall away in life or death contexts, after all. While I didn’t
think twice about moving my in-person classes into remote formats, I did so with a looming dread that pandemic measures would become everyday practices if a survivability metric for learning, a phenomenon I explain in detail below, ruled the day, as it seemed to at my institution. Yet, for the first time, rather than reading about online learning as a solution for some as suggested by people sending their own children to prestigious programs renowned for small class sizes, low faculty-to-student ratios, and intimate scales of active relational learning, during this crisis nearly all US-American parents, caregivers, students, and educators had to directly engage with the challenges and deficiencies of online learning. From parents gaining newfound appreciation for their children’s teachers to students protesting en masse for a reduction in tuition to reflect reduced access to quality learning opportunities, this crisis might yet manage to avoid disaster capitalist outcomes simply because the affective, cognitive, sensory, and relational tradeoffs of a purely efficiency-driven pedagogy are too apparent or too many to be ignored. However, this glimmer of hope for a future in which equal access to quality educational experiences becomes a widely shared social value is rife with opportunity for derailment. Thus, in this essay, I trace some permutations of the impacts of disaster capitalism on the classroom, along with ways the thinking behind drama-based pedagogies might help us to counteract it.

Of course, arguments drawn from drama for teaching and learning are by no means the only tools at hand. For instance, a 2019 expansion of a 2006 study demonstrating that ideal class sizes for pedagogical effectiveness should not exceed 18 (and should in fact be even smaller, no more than a dozen, if conducted online) provides a strong rationale for rejecting the pedagogy of the fire marshal (Tomei and Nelson 2019). However, in this essay I focus on drama-based pedagogies as both rhetorical and practical supports for good teaching and learning in the face of survivability logics, because efficiency alone must not be the basis for pedagogical decision-making. Basing all decisions on efficient achievement of learning outcomes, while a favorable alternative to the survivability logics I discuss below, remains a dehumanizing standard in that it erases meaningful differences between individual students and thus hinders the development of culturally relevant pedagogies. Indeed, as educational theorist Dr. Bettina L. Love argues in *We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom* (2019), such “accountability” measures are often used “to scare educators into spirit-murdering dark children” by reinforcing logics of scarcity, time pressure, and dehumanization in the name of measurement, efficiency, and progress (122). Furthermore, efficiency standards also predispose us to the think of the action occurring inside the classroom as entirely measurable and knowable, to discount intuition and emotion, to conceive of students as primarily potential workers (or, worse, as products), and to continue to convert human beings into numerical variables to be processed, transformed, improved, and ultimately banked. Thus, while the fact that even an efficiency-based standard cannot justify the pedagogy of disaster capitalism is clearly a mortal blow to the logic of survivability, I exhort fellow faculty to continue to invest in pedagogical arguments based in humanization and liberation.

In the remainder of this chapter I draw upon foundational figures in drama-based pedagogy including Dorothy Heathcote and Augusto Boal, both for specific tactics and as models of pedagogical philosophies that can serve as effective resistance to disaster capitalist and survivability-based pedagogies. At the core of my argument lies a reading of Paulo Freire’s classic *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and in particular his remarks about the centrality of love to effective pedagogy. It is important to note at the outset that educators in many fields, from Freire to bell hooks, have advanced this idea in crucial ways. Furthermore, I acknowledge at the outset that readers of this volume need no convincing as to the merits of these methods
and arguments, and particularly of the vitality of drama-based pedagogies. Rather, my interest here is to support our collective work by noting its renewed relevance in the face of disaster capitalist approaches and theorizing some ways we might name these maneuvers and effectively advocate for better alternatives based on practices we know, from experience, support robust and just learning environments. While individual faculty may have allied themselves with students, embraced problem-based and dialogic forms, and rejected the banking model as embodied by stereotypes of content-delivery driven instructional design, the notion of students as dehumanized vessels waiting to be filled with one-size-fits-all “scalable” knowledge and skills has intensified and metamorphosed into a model in which students themselves become units of capital. After being sorted, ranked, and accumulated by institutions, these student-units are then ready to be transformed into ideal workers creating capital for other large institutions, or building new institutions for the generation of capital themselves. Freire’s observation that faculty in the banking model serve as unwitting and well-intentioned bank tellers happily laboring away to execute transactions upon their student/subjects intended to maintain the status quo thus remains, albeit transformed. Therefore, while the urgency of radical and liberatory pedagogies cannot be denied, they are simply not enough if not matched with clear rhetorical and political advocacy for transformation of this model in administrative and curricular structures as a whole. Therefore, in the remainder of this chapter, first, I name a resistant model of pedagogy based in love, and second, I call out three specific permutations of survivability pedagogies that I urge us as a field to assiduously advocate against.

**Love as practical resistance**

In Chapter 3 of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire articulates three intertwined principles of dialogic education:

“No one can say a true word alone”

“nor can she say it for another”

“Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and is dialogue itself.”

(88–89)

Taken together, these three principles of dialogue necessitate an investment of time, space, and embodiment as the foundation of education. For true words to be said, true community must exist. For a loving foundation of community which allows dialogue to arise, the subjects to be known in the classroom must include not only prescribed content (methods, events, theories, practices) but also the positions, experiences, and material realities of those in the room, including students and instructors. Finally, ample time must be available for individual participants to articulate not only the foundations of true words but the words themselves.

Of particular importance in response to the problem facing educators today is Freire’s insistence on love. Audre Lorde echoes the radical nature of love, a word often downplayed in our contemporary education system as it connotes a familiarity at fundamental odds with the neoliberal posture of objective assessment of students-as-numerical-data. Arguing for the practical and radical “uses of the erotic,” Lorde points out that profit-oriented systems alienate workers by reducing work “to a travesty of necessities,” disconnecting us from our bodies, intuitions, and aesthetic and affective dimensions of living, resulting in a practice “not of self-discipline but of self-negation” (Lorde 2019, 30). The answer to this system of...
self-negation, for Lorde, is a turn toward love and pleasure that “empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives” (32). This deep self-awareness and focus on meaning, springing from the operation of pleasure in lived experience, resonates as well with Judith Butler’s focus on the right to appear, the insistent and persistent fact of being present as a strategy for resistance to repression (Butler 2015), adding the layer of pleasure alongside the element of bodily risk. Bettina Love reinforces this valuing of pleasure as a means of rejecting dehumanization and racial violence in our educational systems, arguing for an “abolitionist approach to educational freedom, not reform, based on criticality, civics, joy, love, refusal, creativity, community, and, ultimately, mattering” (Love 2019, 15).

So what does resistant, joyful, radical love look like in a classroom? What does it look like as a rhetorical or practical response to administrator demands? I argue that love may look much like waste to an efficiency-minded economic model of teaching. Love in the classroom means “wasting time” on foundational principles of creating community. Love in the classroom means “wasting space” that could be filled with additional bodies. Love in the classroom means “wasting energy” on listening. And finally love in the classroom means boldly rejecting models of teacher subservience to administrators in favor of teacher reclamation of professionalism and authority to assess the cultivation of successful learning communities: love means, in this sense, speaking true words both in and on behalf of community. Drawing on Freire’s insistence on true words spoken in community as a foundational practice of love, I begin my own resistance to these pedagogical dilemmas by narrating the true stories of my own encounters with them. In naming these phenomena, I aim to strip them of the air of naturalness and inevitability that underpins their power, instead marking them as phenomena created, nurtured, and available to be either actively or tacitly agreed to or resisted at each moment in which they are encountered. I note my own complicity and non-action in the face of these narratives of survivability, and I invite readers to imagine more loving ways to respond, including ways in which teachers might truly recognize our own power, our own responsibility, and our own voices as capable of articulating loving resistance. In the following section I narrate three scenarios common to contemporary neoliberal pedagogies, before laying out possible avenues of resistance to their attendant survivability logics in my conclusion. My approaches are by no means the only possibilities, and I invite readers to dream other, more radically loving modes of resistance.

**The pedagogy of the fire marshal: recognizing survivability logic in the classroom**

I peek into the door of my classroom for next semester’s theatre history course. Finding the room empty, I stride toward the corner where several mandatory elements of the Arizona public university classroom are clustered. Beneath a US-American flag, copies of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights signal the room’s fealty to the nation, print tiny but legible. Near these is a map marked with the number I need: a classroom’s legal safe occupancy limit. Upon reading the number, 63, I breathe a sigh of relief. While designing in-person drama activities for a class of 63 will be a challenge, it is within my capacity as an instructor. I will be able to supervise small groups, afford supplies for design experiments, provide handouts, and accomplish sharing of individual creative projects for this number of students within the time frame of the semester. Had I been assigned a larger room, I might have had more space for students to do physical acting exercises, but if the room could hold more students, I might have been forced to expand my class size beyond what I can reasonably supervise, necessitating reducing the number and variety of active learning options I could provide.
The anecdote above illustrates a new step in my pre-semester routines – the assessment of my assigned classrooms not only in order to understand their media capacities, furnishings, and layout but to understand how many students I will be teaching. At my large public research university, classroom capacity has become the de facto limitation on class size, with administrators routinely urging (or simply increasing by fiat) class sizes to match classroom fire code limitations. I call this neoliberal development in course scheduling the pedagogy of the fire marshal, and I suggest that the first action any teacher should take in resisting this development is to name it and call out both its insidious promotion of a standard of mere survivability for classroom spaces and its negation of foundational practices essential for effective pedagogy. My argument is simple. Teachers, myself included, must actively resist administrative moves to replace learner-focused objectives used to design and assess effective pedagogy with a standard of survivability. With awareness of and respect for our individual and intersectional levels of empowerment and our highly differentiated experiences of relative precarity, educators must continually resist the pedagogy of the fire marshal, which fetishizes a minimum criteria of conditions that allow our students to survive the classroom, inevitably positioning and realizing the classroom as a space of threat, of cruelty, and of magnification of injustice and inequity. Instead, by harnessing the rhetorical and practical resources of drama-based pedagogy’s historical and contemporary practices, and by committing to solidarity with fellow educators and students, we can insist upon an approach that acknowledges students as embodied participants in a scenario of learning that cannot and must not be evaluated primarily based on economic values.

Before moving on to additional scenarios in which the neoliberal metric of survivability surfaces, I take a moment to discuss the insidious nature of survivability metrics. Certainly fire codes, public health measures, and public safety in general are obviously crucial elements of a just society. But the neoliberal focus on notions of scale, harvestable capital, and efficiency as a means to achieve economic benefits reverses the thinking behind these measures, turning them from guardrails for a complex range of behaviors which are also governed by other concerns such as ethics, aesthetics, and yes, even or often especially hedonic pleasures, into the only limitations observable in a perpetual scaling up in pursuit of ever more capital. The survivability standard not only replaces pedagogical, aesthetic, and ethical concerns with the lower standard of biological survivability, it also ossifies and in many cases exacerbates existing inequities that make even a robustly learning-centered classroom a challenging space for many students.

For instance, a survivability logic that crowds students into a small physical space with limited and uncomfortable seating options more deeply affects students with physical and emotional needs that necessitate flexible spaces in order to fully participate in learning activities. A classroom in which faculty members and students are unable to move freely without incidental physical contact with one another makes it far harder to maintain rigorous protocols around consent-based contact and easier to write these measures off as hindrances to efficient work. A classroom in which students struggle to see, hear, or attend to one another especially disadvantages students entering the space with fewer resources of well-being, time, and patience, due to factors ranging from working multiple jobs, managing illness, caring for family members, working to cultivate joy in the face of racist oppression, and the myriad challenges that students face alongside the rigors of academic work. When faculty members do not acknowledge, or worse, endorse, institutional pressures to treat the classroom as a place to merely be survived, we reinforce a situation in which the classroom cannot be a crucible of learning in which ideas and techniques are fired with passion and emerge for the entire group more clearly as a result. Instead, it may become an obstacle course of limitations,
How I learned to love the classroom

cruel testaments to the system’s rejection of one’s body as unfit or abnormal in the eyes of the institution, and thoughtless or even intentional reminders of one’s lack of value in the eyes of the state. From such a space only two things can emerge: alienated individuals for whom the experience is not designed (who must then muster additional resources to sustain themselves in spite of the cruelties of the classroom), and those who entered well-resourced, comfortable, and successful and leave with a stamp of completion. In other words, classrooms based in the survivability metric may simply be spaces for sorting students along intersectional lines of race, gender, economic class, physical ability, and other markers of marginalization and acceptance.

Returning to the anecdote that opened this section, I propose that my enactment of this ritual itself constitutes a reification of the pedagogy of the fire marshal. How might I instead resist this narrative? Drawing on Freire, a loving model founded in truth would insist on dealing honestly with both my colleagues and my classroom community. To borrow a phrase from Bettina Love, to resist the pedagogy of the fire marshal, I must articulate to colleagues, administrators, and to students that I insist on the classroom as a space in which we all do “more than just survive.” This may mean many things in practice, but at a minimum it requires naming this pedagogy, articulating its unacceptability, and refusing to let it guide my instructional practices, as I discuss further in this essay’s conclusion.

Don’t ask what you should do; ask what you can do: unpacking the reverse Frankenstein

Keys click, papers rustle, heads disappear behind the scant cover of laptop screens. A general sense of dread fills the room, interrupted by a few flickers of optimism. The slide blinks forward to the next agenda item: maximizing course enrollments. Referencing fire codes, the administrator at the front of the room indicates that classes are insufficiently full; more people could survive in this space during the hours designated for learning, ergo the spaces are not adequately populated. Furthermore, classrooms themselves are scarce. Finally, the program’s budget depends entirely on FTE (full-time equivalency), a metric by which student bodies are converted into a measure of capital. While resources such as classroom space either remain static or decline, FTE must continually increase in order to avoid budget cuts triggered by efficiency standards set by the university. The faculty has no choice, the administration insists, but to eschew the selfish practice of teaching in-person classes of fewer than twenty students. In order for more students to access our services, and to make those services cost-effective, we must accept not only the pedagogy of the fire marshal but the directive to move acting classes online, where horizons of survivability are theoretically infinite and bodily needs of students seem to evanescence, intangible and prone to disappearing before they are truly seen. After more clicking and rustling, a single faculty member raises a hand: “I already enroll as many students as I can possibly mentor within the time period allotted for class work. With additional students I will need to reduce the quality of my instruction.” The response, in an inspirational tone accompanied by a slow head shake: “Don’t ask how should we do it. Ask how can we do it.”

I call this maneuver the Reverse Frankenstein in honor of its valorization of setting aside judgment in favor of exploring the horizons of the possible. Always guided by the will of administrators operating under the survivability logics of the fire marshal, the Reverse Frankenstein poses unique challenges for teachers eager to accomplish ostensibly highly desirable missions of access and inclusion and accustomed to tackling the impossible again and again in their practice. Replacing should with can, an inversion of the typical moral of speculative fiction like Shelley’s Gothic novel, redoubles the logic of the fire marshal by treating not only individual classrooms but also entire pedagogical contexts as spaces to be optimized, productivity wrung from them through “innovation” and “disruption.” The problem, the
Reverse Frankenstein insists, is not that teaching acting online renders inert many of the core values that animate relational pedagogy. Rather, the problem is that teachers suffer from a lack of imagination and an unhealthy attachment to their pedagogical values. Perhaps in an ideal world we should do it this way, the Reverse Frankenstein acknowledges. But how could we teach it online? The first requirement for answering this question is, of course, to set aside core pedagogical objectives. Rather than focusing on collective exercises of the breath and body, on connection to one’s personal body and experience, and on a sense of ownership and love of one’s body as a willing instrument of and inspiration in art practice, perhaps we could focus on text analysis. Rather than focusing on intimate partnered exchanges in person, centered in listening that encompasses not just exchange of language but a fully embodied connection with a fellow student, perhaps we could focus on monologues and on learning what casting agents want to see us present ourselves as in order to land coveted roles. As soon as a faculty member operating in good faith tries to solve the problem posed by the administrator, they are through the looking glass, operating within the logic of the Reverse Frankenstein, their pedagogical values set aside. Importantly, the Reverse Frankenstein demonstrates the incompatibility between a practice of loving dialogue and survivability metrics, which typically preclude loving dialogue in that they fail to operate in good faith, or to speak truth in community. While often presented in the guise of “hard truth,” disaster capitalist maneuvers such as these purposefully obscure the conditions that produce the precarity that they purport to solve. Stopping the conversation and rejecting Reverse Frankenstein logic is made to feel nearly impossible. Insisting on a pause to engage in loving acts of listening, investigating, and speaking truth together in community, while necessary to resist the Reverse Frankenstein, may appear to be a waste of time in a disaster capitalist system due to manufactured precarity that surfaces as urgency. Nevertheless, I argue it is the only way for practitioners of drama-based pedagogies to operate in good faith in conversations such as these.

The back to the future: time manipulation and survivability pedagogy

We sit behind rickety drafting tables, long ago repurposed as drawing surfaces since students now create ground plans, elevations, and light plots in programs such as AutoCAD and Vectorworks. Swivel chairs squeak as some of us spin to glance at the person speaking. The production meeting is nearing its conclusion, each area having discussed their plans and challenges for the week as we move into technical rehearsals for Finegan Kruckemeyer’s The Snow. The director, a graduate student in the Theatre for Youth and Community program completing a thesis focused on trauma-responsive practices, raises one additional point of discussion, the implementation of trauma-responsive practices in the technical theatre space, including opt-out areas, altered schedules to account for student well-being, and check-in and check-out procedures. A faculty member cuts her off. “I understand the need for this kind of thing,” he offers, “but our technical theatre students barely have time to learn about the equipment, much less to add on procedures to make people feel better.” After the meeting, the student and I speak on the phone. She asks me how it is possible that a production exploring trauma-responsive practices could lead to this kind of conversation. “How can students learn technical details if they are not safe and well?”

As I tried to answer this question, I reflected that our definition of creativity itself was falling victim to a pedagogical model of temporal pressure: we cannot dream the methods we need because we do not have time to look up from our light boards, computer screens, or annual evaluation forms and imagine. The consequences of this pressure were massive. But where was the pressure itself coming from? And were we truly subject to them, or were we subjecting ourselves and our students to them through a failure of imagination, a refusal?
How I learned to love the classroom

to dream? Why were we allowing ourselves to be positioned in a perpetual not-now, unable to imagine the future because we were late to the present, always behind the moment we ought to be in due to never having enough time? Why couldn’t we, who entirely control our production calendars, build more time into our processes? What was stopping us from rethinking the future end-points we set for ourselves at the beginning of each year or semester, if the pressure to reach them was too great in such a short time for us to even pause to consider if we were safe and well during the harried itinerary we set for ourselves and our students? Like Marty McFly in the film I reference in my section heading, the Back to the Future positions students and educators to take extraordinary actions, to accept risk and pain, only to maintain the status quo, and always in a terrible hurry. And at the conclusion of this fraught journey, we remain exactly where we started, though perhaps with a more polished resume (Marty finds his parents are improved versions of themselves, in economic terms, for instance).

If the practical solution to disaster capitalism starts with awareness of the phenomenon, then I propose, returning to Freire, educators must abandon the façade of status quo professionalism that unites us with institutional objectives by holding us back from openly critiquing or describing their impacts to our students. Instead of maintaining a false neutrality in the face of questions like those my student posed above, I must consider these moments of institutional critique in the classroom a critical opportunity for honest dialogue to catalyze action. This moment is an opportunity for the time-intensive work of rehearsal for the revolution, Boal’s term for theatrical collective imagining of both problems and solutions, which includes development of bodily and emotional awareness and collaboration in envisioning new futures. While I can facilitate a short image theatre exercise in response to a student complaint, inviting students to visually and physically explore and manipulate operations of power in the classroom through a ten-minute physical exercise followed by a discussion, for instance, I might have the impulse to avoid this work because I know that the conversation often spills past the allocated time, “distracting” students from the work I planned for the day. Furthermore, indulging students’ curiosity about this work might involve acceding to their requests for more exercises, working on knowing the body or on partnered image creation and interpretation. Opening up this can of worms might lead to losing control of the direction of the class, and that might lead to a reexamination of my pedagogical capacities, my efficiency, my standing in the eyes of peers and evaluators. In order to resist this logic, in other words, I must decouple my definition of success in the classroom from that of my employer. Therefore, at the conclusion of this essay, I turn toward a famous example of a figure who deftly managed the separation between employer and employee I must cultivate to nurture a more loving pedagogical practice.

Bartleby the teacher: the resistance of not doing the impossible

Like Herman Melville’s famous clerk, I suggest we must rehumanize ourselves by refusing to equate our employer’s demand with our own initiative. We must recognize that the pedagogical maneuvers I have been describing cannot be enacted without our consent, and as we recognize and name their problems, we must withhold our consent accordingly. Inside the classroom, whether virtual or in-person, I urge faculty to follow the logic of Boal and Heathcote, who famously refused to compromise the time it takes to complete essential phases of their work nor to compromise the principle that each facilitator must lead within, rather than erase, their own personal capacities (Heathcote [1971]1984). Heathcote’s pedagogical logic involves not only love of teaching and of students but also, crucially, self-love,
a value that cuts against the optimization rhetoric of the pedagogy of the fire marshal. When Heathcote exhorts teachers to look deeply into their capacities and understand what they need to succeed, be it small groups or large, close quarters or open, she is urging a starting point of self-love reminiscent of Freire’s exhortation that one’s truth, a basis of love, cannot be substituted for another’s (Freire 2000, 63–69). Loving (thus honest) practice refuses to substitute “how could we” for “how should I,” nor hide economic values within pedagogical values, nor repackage pedagogical sacrifices as opportunities. If we feel Boal’s concept of knowing the body is an essential function in a drama for social justice course, we must be willing to look at the time that it takes to know the body in a large-format course as a built-in limitation on our curriculum. If it takes weeks to accomplish this task, then we must build that time in. Cut days devoted to assessment. Cut readings by white academics. Tell students what choices must be made and enlist their participation in making those choices. Invite them to imagine a course with the resource of a full physical space and allow them the space in class to think of ways to advocate for that resource together.

Like the nameless narrator of Melville’s story, administrators may be perplexed in the face of calm refusal. In the face of this perplexity, which may create an important, lovingly wasteful, time-consuming pause, we can draw upon our skills as facilitators of dialogue, storytellers, and dreamers. Like Bartleby, we reaffirm our power by declining to explain our refusal. Instead, we can demonstrate the value of our own pedagogy by starting then and there to build the foundations of loving dialogue Freire insists upon, inviting everyone in the room to join in building the necessary conditions to speak true words together. The Reverse Frankenstein, which cannot persist in such a space, may find itself floating away on an ice floe into the dark.

References


