All the School's A Stage: Critical Performative Pedagogy in Urban Teacher Education

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All the School’s A Stage: Critical Performative Pedagogy in Urban Teacher Education

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The authors of this article investigate how a performance module was integrated into a graduate course on children’s literature to provide teachers with a space to re-enact and challenge the institutional tensions that were impacting their work as multicultural educators. Based on a combined ethnographic and systemic functional linguistics analysis, this study investigates how performance functioned in the context of this course. Did teachers co-construct a collaborative and transgressive space to challenge the top-down discourses informed by deficit views of diverse students and communities in the school district? Data collected for the study include videotapes of course sessions, field notes, teachers’ written critiques, and curriculum materials. Findings show that the use of this performance module helped expose and challenge institutional power dynamics. However, the invoked heteroglossia of voices and perspectives also maintained deficit discourses about students and parents. Implications about how theater and other arts-based approaches can be integrated into critical teacher education curricula in ways that promote broader social change are discussed.

In the current climate of high-stakes school reform and accountability, urban school teachers have been forced in recent years to grapple with institutional policies, mandated curricula, and testing requirements that directly impact their autonomy in the classroom and relationships with their predominantly Latino and African American students (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Wright, 2005). In addition, compared to suburban school districts, urban school districts have limited financial resources, hire less experienced administrators and teachers, and often have high staff turnover (Ingersoll, 2003). As a result of these institutional factors, the urban school teachers in this study, which took place in River Town in 2007, often felt isolated and demoralized by the lack of administrative and financial support when they attempted to meet their students’ needs in meaningful ways (Harman, 2007).

To support language minority students and their teachers in River Town and a neighboring school district, a federally-funded, university-school alliance called ACCELA (Access to Critical Content and English Language Acquisition) was set up among university faculty, school...
administrators, teachers, and community members in 2002 (Gebhard, Willett, Jimenez, & Piedra, 2010). The ACCELA master’s program encouraged teachers to teach “against the (new) grain” (Cochran-Smith, 2001, p. 3) in their urban schools by designing curricular units that were academically rigorous and that incorporated students’ interests (Dyson, 1993; Nieto & Bode, 2008; Solsken, Willett, & Wilson-Keenan, 2001). The purpose of the final master’s course, “Critical Multicultural Children’s Literature and the Puerto Rican Community,”2 was to support teachers in reading and analyzing multicultural children’s literature and in connecting these analyses to the socio-political context and lived experiences of students, families, and teachers in River Town.

The course was co-taught by Ruth Harman (co-author) and Nelida Matos, another ACCELA instructor. Ruth also invited Kristen French, a performance specialist and her partner in several theater projects to help integrate a critical performance pedagogy (CPP) component into the course.

Based on previous uses of performance2 in teacher education courses and K-12 classrooms, and inspired by Boal’s (1979) conception of the Theater of the Oppressed, Harman and French conceptualized CPP as an embodied space where teachers could interrogate the socio-cultural context and institutional power dynamics of everyday lived realities in their school districts, especially as these realities related to the teaching and learning of students of color (e.g., Harman & French, 2004). Thus, this study is informed by a critical multicultural and social justice theoretical framework (e.g., Nieto & Bode, 2008; Zeichner, 2009). The purpose of this study is to examine discursively the use of performance in our master’s course with River Town teachers and reflexively evaluate and update our conceptions of CPP based on this and prior instantiations. Specifically informed by an ethnographic approach and systemic functional linguistic analysis (SFL), this study was guided by the following questions: How did teachers discursively appropriate the performance space to expose and/or challenge (or not) authoritarian discourse (e.g., as observed in terms of lexical, paralinguistic, and non-verbal choices)? How did the use of CPP promote, or inhibit, a hybrid space that challenged deficit discourses about students, communities, and teachers in the school district?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this study draws from three interrelated constructs: socio-cultural theories of dialogism and performance (Bakhtin, 1981; Goffman, 1974; Phelan, 1993), critical multicultural and social justice education (Cochran-Smith, 1999; Kubota, 2004; Nieto & Bode, 2008; Zeichner, 2009), and critical performative pedagogy (Boal, 1979; Greene, 2001; Harman & French, 2004, in press). In combination, these perspectives promote an approach to multicultural and social justice education that involves a willingness to investigate and challenge power relationships and social constructions of race, class, and gender in school contexts, and a reflexive exploration of biases and assumptions in our teaching and research practices (Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Zeichner & Flessner, 2009). Because these theoretical constructs have been appropriated and used in different ways, a working definition of each is provided below. In addition, we touch upon earlier CPP work (our own and others’), which has informed our continually developing conception of CPP.
Dialogism and Performance

For Bakhtin (1981), all texts and utterances are multi-voiced or “dialogic” in that they weave past, current, and future discourses into their mosaic; words, in oral or written discourse, are populated by the multiple accents of people’s different and often competing intentions. Bakhtin states:

At any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between different schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form. (p. 291)

For communicative and ideological purposes, the social heteroglossia of a particular community’s discourse may be muted. To communicate among their peers, for example, teachers use a shared set of meanings to describe students or their own work that often precludes alternative views. They often subscribe to a deficit institutional discourse that labels particular groups of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds as “at risk” or “underperforming” instead of investigating how these labels are socially constructed and informed by material conditions, such as high poverty, lack of good instruction, and school resources (Valencia & Solórzano, 2004). In the arts, on the other hand, the multi-voiced nature of the word or utterance is often celebrated and highlighted (Kristeva, 1980). Poets often play with phonology, graphology, and semantics in complex ways that celebrate multiple readings and voices. In other words, the dialogic nature of words, as defined by Bakhtin, is often muted in everyday contexts, such as in school administration contexts, and maximized in aesthetic realms, such as literature.

Performance (i.e., theatricalized improvisation) is by its very nature dialogic (Phelan, 1993). Through a consciously crafted use of gestures, intonation, movement, and other paralinguistic cues, performers portray discourses that regulate everyday practices (e.g., as teachers, parents, administrators) and simultaneously provide an exaggerated or playful counterpoint to these practices (Goffman, 1974; Phelan, 1993). Through these means, performers highlight the unconscious norms and conventions of everyday discourses (Butler, 1990). For example, when urban school teachers re-enact experiences from their everyday realities, these improvisations both re-inscribe and highlight the ways in which their bodies have been marked, tracked, and scripted by institutional power relations. Warren (1999) states,

The body performs as a site marked by political, ideological, and historical inscription in the classroom, yet also serves education as a highly informed source of experiential knowledge that can, through performative engagement, act as a canvas for creative alternative possibilities through bodily play. (p. 257)

In effect, the incorporation of performance as an integral part of social justice curricula may deepen analysis and discussion of the normative discourses that track and marginalize some groups of students and teachers and privilege others. In other words, the embodied narratives about everyday life can highlight how these discursive representations are not just individual stories but, instead, are informed by cultural and ideological forces that are heteroglossic and contestable.
Critical Multicultural and Social Justice Education

Intricately connected to this dialogic view of performance, multicultural classroom instruction (Nieto & Bode, 2008) is defined here as a heterogeneous process that acknowledges and validates the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of all students and critically analyzes the socio-historical context of normative literacy practices. Further, this close critical analysis needs to be accompanied by reflections on possible social action that relates to making positive changes in one’s community and the broader society. Specifically regarding work with culturally and linguistically diverse students, Kubota (2004) sees critical multicultural education as necessarily counter-hegemonic and grounded by the notion of praxis, which entails a recursive and continual connection of theory and practice (Freire, 1970). Similarly, social justice teacher education (SJTE) calls for explicit attention to issues of social inequity that relate to social class, race, gender, and other categories that mark difference among groups in negative and oppressive ways (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). In our view, CPP in teacher education programs may function as an embodied social justice tactic that challenges dominant ideologies and practices, acknowledges the social inequities in schooling, and positions teachers as change agents (de Certeau, 1984). In effect, our work as teacher educators needs to continually interrogate possibilities of collaborative social action that can challenge and change inequitable policies and practices (Cochran-Smith, 1999; James-Wilson, 2007).

As our experiences and those of researchers in the field of teacher education have pointed out, however, reflective practices in the classroom do not always challenge dominant practices (e.g., Fendler, 2003). In fact, SJTE educators may unknowingly recreate the inequitable discourses they seek to challenge. This study is an example of how educators can investigate their own practices through a retrospective and reflexive investigation of previous instantiations of their work. Indeed, as SJTE scholars informed by a critical perspective on power relations, social equity, and transformation, our work needs to constantly reflect how our practice in the classroom corresponds to or is different from what we theoretically espouse. In our work, we conceptualize reflection as a core element of praxis—that is, always existing in relation to action. Freire (1970) noted that reflection may lead to an awareness or understanding, but only in action are we truly capable of recognizing political connections between our selves, our practices, and broader contexts.

Along with questioning the discourses and ideologies underlying teaching practices, we feel that our arts-based work needs to constantly reflect on whether it contributes in meaningful ways to improving social equity for the participants in our classrooms and research. The insistence on reflexivity and social action is a key element in SJTE and calls for a culturally responsive praxis that attends to the collective, not only the individual, needs of participants in a particular socio-political context (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Critical Performative Pedagogy

Informed by Freire’s (1970) concept of praxis, which underscores the need to use action and reflection to challenge dominant educational practices, we define critical performative pedagogy (CPP) as a recursive educational use of performance and critical discussion that focuses on issues related to social equity. The development of CPP was influenced primarily by Boal’s (1979) Theater of the Oppressed (TOP) and by the work of Greene (2001). Boal used theater in
Brazil and elsewhere (e.g., France and the United States) to engage communities in embodying and challenging local social inequities. As part of TOP, Boal created Forum Theater, in which participants are asked to re-imagine oppressive conflicts from their everyday lives in verbal and non-verbal improvisations. When watching the scenes that revolve around collectively chosen oppressive issues, the Boalian “joker” (i.e., facilitator) uses “role reversal” techniques to engage the audience in thinking of other strategies to challenge the antagonist. Specifically, members of the audience, or “spect-actors” (Boal, 1998, p. 52), are encouraged to interrupt the scene’s key moments and take on the role of the protagonist when they feel they can embody a more effective strategy. This Boalian technique, along with others, is used to encourage spect-actors and actors to embody and subsequently reflect on what strategies are most effective in challenging oppressive power systems.

**CPP in Teacher Education**

The use of performance as both a pedagogical approach and a frame for conducting educational research has received increasing attention in recent years. Cahnmann-Taylor and Souto-Manning (2010) along with other colleagues have employed Boalian (1979) theater and performance-based focus groups in the context of a professional development initiative to support bilingual teachers. Their work has incorporated critical discourse analysis (Cahnmann, Rymes, & Souto-Manning, 2005) and suggested the use of theater and other arts-based approaches as powerful tools for data collection, analysis, and representation in multicultural educational research (Cahnmann-Taylor, Wooten, Souto-Manning & Dice, 2009). Broadly, these studies found that the use of Boalian theater and other performative approaches provided both researchers and participants with a space to embody and critically reflect upon the power dynamics at play in their unique educational contexts.

Most recently, McClure and Cahnmann-Taylor (2010) analyzed bilingual teachers’ performances that were based on challenges they faced as ESOL co-teachers who were mandated to “push-in” to mainstream classrooms. The teachers’ performances of their co-teaching experiences engaged humor, parody, and dramatic license to re-present and reconsider how to respond to dominant monolingual discourses that often resulted in oppressive teaching conditions marked by linguicism (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1988) and other forms of prejudice. These performances, like those in Rymes, Cahnmann, and Souto-Manning (2008), encouraged collaborative analysis and participation as opposed to traditional top-down approaches to teacher education that impose fixed solutions to challenging issues. Methodologically, Rymes et al. used critical discourse analysis to analyze the interactional and socio-historical orders of discourse in the performed enactments of bilingual teachers. Through analysis of the lexical choices, gestures, and paralinguistics cues of the performers, the researchers were able to establish shifts in negotiation strategies and identity over time.

Other educators in recent decades also used performance in teacher-education contexts on a systematic basis. For example, Harman and French (2004, in press) integrated performance into multicultural teacher education courses and middle school classrooms. In one preservice teacher education course, performance provided participants with a negotiated embodied space where they enacted and reflected upon the discrepancy between the “real” history of the Rosa Parks story and the distorted version of her history found in children’s literature (Kohl, 1995). In similar
ways, Goldstein (2004) drew on ethnographic data and works with students to collaboratively write and perform fictional plays that address intersections of language, culture, and power in educational settings.

In this study, while we are interested in the transformative potential of performance in pedagogy and research contexts, we have also broadened this inquiry. Informed by Baktinian theories of dialogicality, we are interested in how the teachers discursively appropriated the performance space and how participants’ improvisations and discussions challenged (or maintained) deficit discourses about teachers, students, and students’ home communities.

METHODS

This study was conducted in the school district of River Town, a mid-size, economically struggling city in Western Massachusetts with one of the highest proportions of Latino and African American children under the poverty line in the nation (O’Hare & Maher, 2003). From March to June, 2007, the following data were collected: videotapes and field notes of a 15-week course; transcriptions and detailed observations of a three-day performance module; written feedback of teachers; and course materials and assignments.

Participants

In spring, 2007, Ruth Harman, an Irish born and raised language researcher and teacher, co-taught a multicultural children’s literature course with her colleague, Dr. Matos (2008), an experienced Puerto Rican educator. Maria Eugenia Lozano, a Colombian bilingual researcher, assisted them in teaching the course. Harman invited her theater collaborator, Kristen French, a Blackfoot American Indian, to develop and teach the performance part of the course. Nineteen ACCELA teachers from mainstream, ESL, and special education classrooms participated: 1 was African American/Cherokee, 6 were bilingual Puerto Rican teachers, and 12 were Caucasian Americans.

Data Analysis

An ethnographic approach was used in the collection and analysis of data (Carspecken, 1996; Dyson, 1993). In the first phrase of analysis, we conducted a broad content overview of contextual data (i.e., River Town district policies, ACCELA courses, and local K-12 classroom interactions). This initial analysis helped us explore the factors that were impacting multicultural teaching practices in River Town classrooms and how these factors were shaped by larger social issues, such as high-stakes school reform (e.g., Fairclough, 1992). In other words, an overview of the local socio-political context was pivotal in investigating the ways in which the teachers’ improvised scenarios connected to macro-level issues at local and state levels.

In subsequent phases, throughout the duration of the 15-week course, a broad thematic analysis of the interactions and performances of teachers and instructors was conducted. For example, discussions related to social equity issues in the district (e.g., bilingual and ESOL policies, co-teaching relationships, high-stakes testing) were coded and tracked throughout the course.
Second, transcription conventions to note contextualization cues and turn-taking procedures (Cameron, 2001) were applied to the nine-hour CPP performance module. Systemic functional linguistics (SFL) analysis was then used to investigate patterns in the oral discourse.

As compared to more traditional and static views of language, the social and functional oriented theory of SFL conceptualizes language as a pliable repertoire of choices used to make meaning in different social contexts. In discussing how the interplay of genre and register function in a particular context, Halliday and Matthiesen (2004) discuss three register variables—field, tenor, and mode—that are used simultaneously to convey a particular representation of reality, enact a relationship with the audience, and reflect the medium or mode of the text (e.g., face-to-face versus written mode) for a particular communicative purpose. Specifically, analysis included looking at the lexical choices, appraisal (i.e., implicit and explicit evaluation), and paralinguistic cues (e.g., intonation), and how these patterns construed a particular stance toward the audience and subject matter. In addition, these patterns were analyzed regarding whether or not they established or heightened affiliation among participants in this particular discourse community (Eggins & Slade, 1997; Martin, 2004; Martin & Rose, 2003). Semiotic marginal cues, such as laughter and silence, also were analyzed to see how they functioned to heighten affiliation or to signal disapproval during the performances (Knight & Cleirigh, 2007).

Thus, analysis of modals and other words of appraisal in the oral discourse (e.g., use of “would,” “could,” “will;” use of modifiers, such as “really,” “probably”), along with gestures, intonation patterns, and other paralinguistic cues, helped determine the type of social identities and affiliations that the performers and audience established and negotiated in the improvised scenarios and in subsequent discussions. Analysis also helped to establish how a particular range of lexical and appraisal choices constituted the identities of other members of the school district (e.g., administrators and students).

**Instructional Context**

In the final course of their master’s program, ACCELA teachers were required to read and analyze a range of children’s multicultural literature and discuss how these literary representations connected to the socio-cultural context and lived experiences of students and their families in River Town. To illustrate, in discussing Puerto Rican culture, the group read representative literature and analyzed the socio-political context (e.g., *The Red Comb* [Pico & Ordóñez, 1994]; *Felita* [Mohr, 1979]). This literary investigation was then connected to real-life experiences of the community by viewing and discussing documentaries about Puerto Ricans in Western Massachusetts and New York. In the final part of the course, facilitated by Dr. Matos, an expert on building family/school relationships (Matos, 2008), the in-service teachers were asked to design a family collaborative project that would encourage students and family members, primarily from Puerto Rican communities, to create cultural texts about their own lives in their home languages and in English.

**CPP Module**

In the sessions prior to the performance module, we used theater games to become accustomed to moving around and playing in improvised and unstructured ways. We then dedicated three
sessions in the middle of the course (approximately 9 hours) to performance. Figure 1 summarizes the different stages we followed in each session.

As illustrated in Figure 1, after engaging in some initial Boalian theater activities, the in-service teachers were encouraged to free write about particularly pressing conflicts they were experiencing or had experienced in their school district. They then shared these stories with a group of five teachers who decided which of the stories they would improvise for Forum Theater. Class instructors also participated in this process. The participants selected the four following story lines: a scenario that enacted power dynamics between a veteran and new teacher when the principal positioned the younger teacher as the more qualified educator because of improved high-stakes test scores; a scenario that explored the tensions between a mainstream and ESL teacher who were expected to co-teach without any guidelines or training (see McClure, in press; McClure & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2010 for more details on ESL co-teaching); and two scenarios that focused on tensions between the principal and teachers in an increasingly hostile environment of high-stakes school reform and limited budgets.

**FINDINGS**

The combined ethnographic and systemic functional linguistics analysis of the performances and group interactions highlight how, through patterns of lexical chaining, appraisal, and non-verbal gestures (see Eggins & Slade, 1997), the teachers positioned themselves as antagonistic to the

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**Phase 1:** Choosing emotions that resonated for teachers and teacher educators when thinking about their work in the district

**Phase 2:** Body Sculpting Exercises with a partner that embodied these emotions

**Phase 3:** Free Writing about event in school triggered by these emotions

**Phase 4:** Small group sharing and negotiation about what journal event to rehearse and perform

**Phase 5:** Rehearsal of scenario

**Phase 6:** Performance of scenario

**Phase 7:** Brief analysis of scenario by group

**Phase 8:** Boalian techniques used in second and third improvisations of scenario

**Phase 9:** Post-performance discussion about role playing and different strategies

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**FIGURE 1** Stages in CPP process.
institutional forces at play in River Town and as oppressed by a top-down management discourse. Comparative analysis of the classroom interactions before and after the CPP module also shows that participants engaged in more discussion of the socio-cultural context of their teaching practices after the performances. However, in the re-enactment of institutional conflicts in their schools and during post-performance discussions, teachers often perpetuated deficit discourses about students and parents. Using one of the teacher’s scenarios as illustrative data, the sections below elaborate these key findings.

CPP Scenario: A Principal/Teacher Interaction

We have selected one CPP scenario and post-performance discussion to represent how teachers took ownership of the performance space. The story, improvised by four teachers, was a re-enactment of what happened to Mrs. Hand, an African American/Cherokee Nation elementary school teacher. In the scenario, Mrs. Hand and the other teachers enacted a conflict that involved a parent volunteer in her classroom. When some of the children started acting out inappropriately (i.e., moving desks around), the parent immediately went to the principal and complained. Mrs. Hand was promptly called into the principal’s office and reprimanded for not having good class management skills. In a post-performance discussion, Mrs. Hand described this as “the last straw” in her relationship with the school administrators. She moved into the role of classroom assistant teacher in her next school appointment. The dilemma of Mrs. Hand mirrored the concerns and experiences of many teachers in River Town who felt that the climate of high stakes accountability had made school administrators increasingly authoritative and unsupportive (see Harman, 2007).

Throning and Dethroning the Principal

In the scene, the role of the principal was played by Ms. Portes, a Puerto Rican human resource specialist and former bilingual teacher. Donned “Dr.” Portes in the improvisation to highlight the power dynamics between teacher and administrator, her performance elicited laughter, loud comments, and noises of approval from the audience. At one point, for example, she told Mrs. Hand that she would send someone to her classroom to monitor her and that she needed to attend professional development in the district. She punctuated her dictates with dramatic gesturing, such as the raising of her right index finger. (see Appendix A for explanation of line breaks, transcript conventions, and the full transcription of the scene.)

Dr. Portes: But I want to assure you

that I will ((raises right index finger)) send somebody to your ↓[classroom]

Mrs. Hand: [Oh]

Dr. Portes: to ((raises right hand)) to monitor the progress

and ((raises hand)) ensure

that you are ((gestures with hand)) emm implementing effective
effective classroom management strategies
and I want to recommend that you [participate]
Mrs. Hand: [Oh]
Dr. Portes: in the professional development opportunities offered in the district
((Laughter from audience))

Through a carefully orchestrated set of gestures, tone, and lexical choices, Ms. Portes impersonated the role of an authoritarian principal who had little time for the remonstrations of the protesting teacher. Similarly, as evidenced in the scene below, when a spect-actor came on stage to take the role of Mrs. Hand and resist the principal’s positioning, Dr. Portes’ heightened use of dramatic gestures and authoritative lexical choices indicated there was no room for negotiation. For example, when questioned by the spect-actor about her decision to call her to the office, she tells her: You are fired!

Spect-Actor: I have some safety concerns ↑too
like what my kids are doing right now
while you called me out in the middle of my class
to talk to me about ↑this?
Dr. Portes: Well, my expectation would be
that you would have someone in there right now
Am am I ↑correct?
((laughter from audience))
Spect-Actor: (right now)
and I just ran
((loud laughter))
Dr. Portes: ((pointing at Spect-Actor)) You are fired (laughter)
((laughter and applause))
Dr. Portes ((turns to audience)): Get me out of here!
((laughter))

In addition, the laughter, seen by SFL linguists as both a behavioral and semiotic cue (Knight & Cleirigh 2007)↑, construed and reinforced the affiliation among the teachers. Teachers in the audience, for example, began to make comments, such as, “She’s good!” Indeed, laughter and applause punctuated Dr. Portes’ most authoritative use of language and gestures. In other words, the laughter and comments of appraisal (e.g., She’s good) throughout Ms. Portes’ performance highlighted how the teachers appreciated her orchestration of the tone, gestures, and attitudinal stance of the top-down discourse of administrators in the district.
Indeed, discussions with the teachers, especially after the CPP module, often revolved around the dismissive stance and power wielding of school principals and district leaders. In a previous critical ethnography, Harman (2007) found that teachers in the district were often afraid to speak about institutional issues, even in the context of their multicultural master’s program. Facing threats of pink slips (consistent district layoffs) or administrative intimidation, they remained silent about all issues they were facing as teachers. The findings from our discourse analysis in this current study show that performance functioned as a collaborative space for the teachers to embody and challenge specific authoritative discourses they were experiencing in their school district.

A micro SFL analysis of Ms. Portes’ performance, for example, highlights how she simultaneously parodied the authoritative discourse that she enacted. Through exaggerated intonation, gesture, and pacing of action, her performance served both to inscribe the normative authoritative discourse of principals, recognized so promptly by the teachers, and also to dismantle it. Figure 2 illustrates how this dialogic process was achieved.

Ms. Portes used exaggeration to parody the principal’s authoritarian discourse. For example, she used the term “numerous” when talking about the complaints from parents. Since the audience knew that only one complaint had been received, the lexical choice was a decision made by Ms. Portes to highlight how the principal distorted facts to ensure teacher compliance. In addition, Ms. Portes quickened the pacing of the action at the very beginning of the interaction to highlight how the principal changed in a split second from being conciliatory with the complaining parent in the previous interaction to being imperious with the teacher. The exaggeration and simultaneous re-enactment of everyday institutional practices in River Town accompanied by laughter from the audience provided the teachers with a space to re-enact and challenge how they were positioned by administrators in their schools in a climate of high-stakes school reform. Similar to the role of the carnivalesque in medieval Mardi Gras rituals, which mock the king and other authorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Encounter</th>
<th>SFL Analysis (see Appendix for complete transcript)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>((Parent leaves office)</td>
<td>Authoritative Discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Portes: ((dials phone)) Mrs. Hand</td>
<td>Mood: Exclusive use of non-negotiable imperatives and declaratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>((plays with pen on desk)) Could you please come to the office immediately</td>
<td>Appraisal: Highly charged attitudinal lexis and intonation (“immediately”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>((Laughter))</td>
<td>Parodying Discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Hand ((enters)): Hello Dr. Portes: Did you call me</td>
<td>Paralinguistic Cues: Gestures, intonation, direct looks at audience, pacing of action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Portes ((gestures to Ms. Hand)) Yes have a seat</td>
<td>Lexical Choices: To construe intended understanding, such as exaggeration (e.g., “numerous”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>((Mrs. Hand sits down))</td>
<td>Semiotic Marginal Cues: Laughter from audience, pacing of action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Portes: Mrs. Hand I wanted to ohm bring to your attention</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Hand: Mm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Portes: that I’ve had numerous complaints from parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>((Laughter from audience))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**FIGURE 2** Authoritative and parodying discourses.
while also honoring them, Ms. Portes’ performance both thrones and dethrones the principal (see Bakhtin, 1993). Directly after the improvisation, Ms. Portes turned to class instructors and said:

((General Laughter))

Dr. Portes: You ↓ guys ((gestures with right hand)) are "making monsters out of us"

Joker: I take full responsibility

((General laughter))

When Ms. Portes used the term “monsters” in describing their performance, she indicated an understanding of how the joint parody of the principal and teacher in the scenario captured and questioned normative everyday lived practices. Similarly, Bakhtin (1981) states that the gestures, language, and style in performing parody functions to “provide the corrective of laughter and criticism. . . . to force men to experience beneath these categories a different and contradictory reality that is otherwise not captured in them” (p. 59).

Disruption of Institutional Power Dynamics

SFL analysis of this scenario also shows a dramatic difference between the hyperbolic performance of Ms. Portes and the subdued and steadfast performance of Mrs. Hand, who re-enacted her own lived experiences as an aggrieved teacher in this scenario. Through a strategic set of lexical choices, cohesive chunking of talk, and accompanying gestures, Mrs. Hand effectively challenged the authority of the principal several times (see Appendix A for complete transcript). Figure 3 below, through a short excerpt of the interaction, illustrates and analyzes these patterns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mrs. Hand’s Resistance Discourse</th>
<th>Analysis of Resistance Discourse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Portes: In the professional development opportunities offered in the district ((Laughter from audience))</td>
<td>Mood: Repeated use of assertive declarative statements, modal adjuncts (e.g., “very highly”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice from audience: Oh, God</td>
<td>Paralinguistic Cues: Gestures, pacing, overlapping, strangling of principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Portes: Because I believe it to be ((looks at audience)) very appropriate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>((Laughter from audience))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Hand: = Excuse me I have a lot of professional development</td>
<td>Cohesion: Repeated use of first person as theme of clause, and repeated use of lexical chains (e.g., “I have;” “She told me”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have been working <em>for seven years</em> as a teacher and</td>
<td>Interactional Structure: Extended sequence of narrative and explanatory clauses (e.g., “I have been working...”; “I know what to do...”).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m very highly ((gestures with)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 3  Resistance discourse in performance.
When Dr. Portes essentially ordered Mrs. Hand to participate in the professional development opportunities in the district, Mrs. Hand interrupted her in the way described in Figure 3.

Through her use of “Excuse me” (see Figure 3), Mrs. Hand disrupted the expected power dynamics in a principal’s office. Instead of complying with the dictates of the principal, she interrupted her, seized the floor, and proceeded to construe herself as a very experienced and caring educator. Through a long sequence of explanatory and evaluation clauses, she effectively undermined the principal’s claim that she needed professional development and classroom monitoring. Throughout Mrs. Hand’s turns of talk, the audience remained quiet. Similarly, when the spect-actors took Mrs. Hand’s place, the audience remained silent, whereas they frequently laughed with, and at, the bossy principal. Analyses of the role of semiotic marginal cues such as silence and laughter indicate that silence served to show empathy and understanding of a character’s role, whereas laughter showed alienation from it. In contrast to the laughter that accompanied the principal’s performance, the silence that accompanied Mrs. Hand’s performance functioned as recognition of the legitimacy of Mrs. Hand’s resistance discourse.

It was only at the very end of the scene that Mrs. Hand abandoned the serious tone used in her enactment of the indignant teacher and joined in the explicitly transgressive mood of the improvisation. Symbolically, the scene ended with her strangulation of the principal!

Dr. Portes: Excuse me (\(\text{raises her right index finger}\)) a \(\uparrow\) minute

I feel (\(\text{gestures with raised hand}\)) that you are being very \(\downarrow\) insubordinate

so I will (\(\text{gestures with right finger}\)) speak to you later

I think we should (\(\text{gestures with raised hand}\)) schedule another appointment

And [and speak further]

Mrs. Hand: [Well that’s fine]

Dr. Portes: About the situation (0.3)

So now you can go (\(\text{gestures with hand}\)) back to your classroom (0.1)

and make sure that (\(\text{taps desk}\)) those kids are safe

and that they are engaged (\(\text{gestures}\)) in \underline{positive} learning experiences

(not)

Mrs. Hand (\(\text{steps over and pretends to strangle Dr. Portes}\))

After the initial performance by Ms. Portes and Mrs. Hand, the CPP facilitators asked members of the audience, the spect-actors according to Boal’s (1979) definition, to take the role of Mrs. Hand. The two spect-actors that decided to come on stage, replacing Mrs. Hand, and confronting Dr. Portes, contributed to the symbolic dethroning of the principal by amplifying the strategies used by Mrs. Hand. Overall, in this scenario, participants collectively used the performance space to release their pent up anger about the top-down administrative approach in the district and to challenge this authoritative discourse by positioning teachers as legitimate heirs to the throne.

In our analysis of the teachers’ discourse throughout the term, however, we also noticed that the collaborative challenges to authority in the performances or discussions tended to steer away
from any open investigation of the representations of racial, gender, or class tensions, despite the inherent impact of such in district administration-teacher as well as researcher-participant relationships. In other words, the positionality of the participants in the group was not investigated in ways that clearly articulated how each of us stood in relation to questions of class, race, and gender issues (Takacs, 2002). For example, Mrs. Hand is a Cherokee/African American teacher, but we never addressed the possibility of the double marginalization that she might experience in the context of this scenario and others. We failed to consider how social constructs of race and class may have informed Mrs. Hand’s firm and sustained resistance to the principal in her performance. Similarly, the group did not question or discuss how these constructs informed the performance of Ms. Portes, a bilingual Puerto Rican, in her portrayal of a Euro-American principal. In addition, our own positions of power as facilitators and as academic faculty from a range of ethnic backgrounds were not interrogated or challenged in our post performance discussions.

In other words, although we provided participants with a “critical reflection sheet” that encouraged them to think about the socio-political factors that informed the tensions in the scenario, both the participants and we as facilitators failed to acknowledge and take up these issues in discussion. In effect, the performance space provided catharsis and collaborative bonding but did not serve to push back against some of the macro-level factors that were informing the social construction of teachers and students in the classroom (see Harman & French, in press). This differs from the findings in the study by Rymes et al. (2008), where the bilingual teachers openly discussed their experiences of linguistic or racial discrimination.

The next section explores these weaknesses in our CPP work by specifically looking at how students and their families were constructed in performances and post-performance discussions. We discuss the implications of these findings in our closing section.

Deficit Discourse in Performance

Analysis of the scenarios and discussions shows that in rallying against the principal in the above scene or a domineering co-worker in another, the teachers often participated in negative constructions of parents and students. In the first part of Mrs. Hand’s story (not analyzed above), the children were portrayed as bad-mannered and out-of-control, and the parent was portrayed as interfering and untrustworthy. In another scenario, the out-of-control child was identified in a post-performance discussion as the antagonist who directly impacted the principal and teacher relationships. When provided with this performance space, in other words, the teachers participated in a transgressive re-assertion of their power in the classroom by disrupting the authority of the administrators, but they also perpetuated negative constructs of their students and families, predominantly from low-income communities of color.

An example of the complex heteroglossia of disruptive and normative voices can be seen in one particular moment of the post-performance discussion. During the discussion, teachers continually talked about the dangers of allowing parents to come to class. In the following excerpt, one of the classroom instructors, Dr. Matos, tried in dialogic ways to counteract this deficit discourse. Dr. Matos is a highly experienced bilingual Puerto Rican educator who worked for over thirty years in the River Town school district. In responding to Dr. Matos, however, Mrs. Hand resisted shifting to a more global discussion about the diversity of parents.
Dr. Matos (to Mrs. Hand): But you know
“These things happen” and this is real life
but hmm I wouldn’t be discouraged
because one or two parents did that
because there are many different kinds of parents.
And now that you have to do a project with parents
probably you’re going to feel a little bit scared
of inviting them into the classroom =
Mrs. Hand: = But I’m
I’m a support teacher
I’m not a classroom teacher

In this interaction, Dr. Matos conveyed a dialogic attitudinal stance through paralinguistic cues, modality, and appraisal (Martin & Rose, 2003). For example, she used modals (e.g., “I wouldn’t be discouraged”) and graduation (e.g., “a little bit scared;” “many many parents”) to show inclusion of Mrs. Hand’s perspective and also a broader view of what parent participation could look like in the district. However, when Mrs. Hand continued to return to the individual story of the parent betrayal, Dr. Matos complied by participating in her reconstruction of the story (through backchannels, such as, “yeah,” and “hmm”). In other words, she recognized that Mrs. Hand needed to retell this story. In the following part of the interaction, Mrs. Hand and Dr. Matos reconstructed the narrative:

Dr. Matos: Did you talk to that parent
before she emm to that person before she was helping you
Did she have a task to do?

Mrs. Hand: I know yeah. I knew the parent really well
I mean we talked all the time ’cause she came to pick up her son every day
so we had like a very good relationship
She was always a very nice parent.

Mrs. Hand, a teacher of color who often felt silenced in teacher education courses, effectively used the post-performance discussion to relive and gain more collective support for what had happened to her in a particular institutional setting. The support she felt during the performance galvanized her further into taking the floor for an extended time in the post-performance discussion, something which she had not done previous to the CPP module. Indeed, she had often remained silent during her three-hour master’s course class periods.

At the same time, the performance and post-performance discussion among the teachers and instructors conveyed negative views of parents (and of students and co-teachers in other
discussions) that were part of the deficit discourses that we were trying to analyze and deconstruct through the course. The use of performance did not necessarily include more dialogic views of the community. Instead, to dismantle what were perceived as the oppressive forces, such as principals and co-teachers, deficit discourses about students and their home communities were maintained and sometimes even amplified.

On the other hand, analysis of the overall course showed that the family book project, which was an integral part of the course, encouraged teachers to develop curricula (and present their findings in our course) that validated children’s cultural and language backgrounds despite an environment that is increasingly hostile to other languages and cultures (e.g., English-only policies adopted after 2002 in Massachusetts). For example, one bilingual teacher documented how a second grade student, who had been ashamed to write in Spanish, wrote and presented her family story in both home and school languages at a community celebration.

In sum, the use of performance, and other arts-based approaches (e.g., the family book project), had negative and positive outcomes in terms of our SJTE approach to teaching and learning in a multicultural context. We discuss the implications of our findings for teachers and researchers in our concluding section.

IS CPP FEASIBLE AS A SJTE PRAXIS?

Our findings in this study contribute to the findings of a growing number of studies that point to the power of the arts and performance as critical tools that can be used by participants to embody collective social concerns and challenge institutional power dynamics (e.g., Cahnmann-Taylor & Souto Manning, 2010; Harman & French, 2004, in press; hooks, 1994; McClure & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2010). Similar to Cahnmann-Taylor and Souto Manning’s findings, for example, our analysis of the different scenarios and the post-performance discussions highlighted how the use of everyday stories from the teachers’ lived experiences disrupted normative patterns of interaction in our teacher education classroom. Instead of remaining within the comfortable confines of textbook theory, facilitators and teachers explored how oppressive lived realities could be challenged through subtle shifts in discourse and styles of intervention. Mrs. Hand, for example, was able to watch and see how other spect-actors interacted with the principal in the re-enactment of a painful experience. Analysis also highlighted how the use of performance afforded the teachers and facilitators with a collaborative and alternative space where they discussed and questioned district-wide policies, a space largely missing from regular teacher education courses or increasingly monitored urban schools. One teacher wrote in a post-performance reflection, “This CPP experience/activity connects and relates dead-on with the experiences of most River Town teachers. Most of us related either directly or indirectly to every scenario that was presented.”

However, our findings also showed that this hybrid performative space did not recognize the multiple voices of teachers, students, communities, and teacher educators in transformative ways. Instead, the spaces that the teachers inhabited were both transformative for teachers (as in Mrs. Hand’s use of the performance space and discussion) and regulatory (as seen in the discourse regarding parents and children). This corresponds to Bakhtin’s (1984) interpretation of the role of the carnivalesque where the dethroning of social hierarchies disrupted and maintained authoritative discourses. What this finding implies is that the use of performance and Boalian
(1979) rehearsal techniques alone are not enough to challenge and speak back to top-down discourses in school districts that marginalize students, teachers, and communities of color.

In our work, additional elements along with the use of performance and discussion are needed to help ensure that CPP serves to challenge normative discourses that we ourselves inhabit as teachers and teacher educators. In other words, it is easier to identify the authoritative discourses that inform the actions of administrators or others identified as “antagonists” in the district but more difficult to identify our own discursive “habitus” and ways of seeing the world that clearly manifest in how we perform and discuss our lived experiences (Bourdieu, 1991). Turning attention to how we, as teachers and teacher educators, respond and act when wearing the crown of power is essential in moving from identifying oppressive discourses in performance to working to change them beyond the relatively safe space of our classrooms. To address this issue and improve our CPP practice, we outline below elements that we continue to develop and integrate into our teacher education and community work.

Improving CPP: Suggestions for SJTE Educators

Based on what we learned in this study and on the praxis we have developed since our work as SJTE and multicultural educators, we suggest that SJTE educators consider the following three strategies as integral additions to offering CPP in their university or professional development courses.

Reflexive Practice Regarding Positionality

CPP facilitators and participants need to incorporate a reflexive practice that continually questions positionality, power relations, and cultural capital. Unless facilitators engage in this type of reflective process with participants and course materials, they may perpetuate the power dynamics they are attempting to dismantle. Educator-researchers need to engage in an analysis of how their social positioning shapes how they view the world (Takacs, 2002). In doing so, they model the need for their students and research participants to do the same. In heterogeneous groups, such as our group of participant-teachers, who came from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, open discussions about positionality and how this shaped all of our epistemological stances on issues of power needed to be an integral element of the performance/arts-based process (Takacs, 2002). In line with this suggestion, Fischer (1994), for example, notes that Boalian theater performances supported her students in integrating readings, discussion, and experiences that could help break oppressive cycles they encounter. However, the student performances also reproduced some of the same race and class equity power dynamics that her course was attempting to deconstruct. Fischer reports that putting activities in place that require students to reflect upon their role playing and role reversal decisions in the improvised scenes helped to counteract this trend.

Joint Facilitator/Participant Performance Analysis

In our opinion, collaborative critical discourse analysis of the performances, conducted by facilitators and classroom participants, is a powerful tool that can be used to reflect upon positioning
and how it shapes attitudes regarding inequitable power relations (Rymes, 2008). In Harman’s current University of Georgia (UGA) courses, the in-service and preservice teachers transcribe Forum Theater scenarios and conduct analyses of the types of discourse strategies and ideologies embedded in the interactions. They subsequently present their findings to the group and listen to dissenting opinions about their interpretation of events. Lavon Smith, a veteran ESOL teacher and UGA doctoral student, said the following about this current CPP process: “By transcribing our scenario, looking for evidence, analyzing it, and eliciting comments and suggestions from the class, we experience more directly the benefits of critical discourse analysis and critical performative pedagogy.” Another graduate student and future teacher, Leigh Griffith, stated, “The simple act of owning a particular interaction and remodeling it to a hypothetical and possibly more fruitful dialog helps us self-scrutinize our own discourse patterns and communities.”

**Transformative Education Reflection and the Arts**

Informed by a critical multicultural and SJTE education framework, CPP needs to be inherently concerned with taking individual and collective action to change inequitable practices and structures. How does “rehearsal for the revolution” (Boal, 1979, p. 122) in locally contextualized scenarios translate into social justice action for change in local and broader contexts? How do the alternative empowered actions arrived at during performance translate over into real lived contexts? In her performance, Mrs. Hand effectively resisted the authoritarian discourse of her principal and demanded more humanizing relations, but we are unclear as to how her participation in this performative space influenced her daily practice. Furthermore, what do we do about the macro level inequitable practices that are highlighted in these performances? For example, several discussions and one of the performances focused on the lack of policies around co-teaching with ESOL and mainstream teachers? How can our collaborative work in class help challenge macro level policies that directly impact the lives of students and teachers in under-resourced urban schools?

We believe that to conform to the ideals of social justice education, CPP work necessitates working with teachers in addressing these issues outside the confines of the teacher education classroom. The authors and the classroom instructors in this study (i.e., French, Harman, McClure, and Matos) are all engaged in collaborative social justice work with multicultural teachers in their local communities. Longitudinal studies that explore how teachers respond to CPP and other arts-based processes in SJTE courses and programs need to be conducted to see how teachers incorporate these approaches into their own classrooms, how these approaches have galvanized shifts in how students are learning in multicultural classrooms, and how local collaborative social action has developed from grassroots initiatives that develop from these critical performative practices.

Perhaps most importantly, we must not lose sight of the fact that CPP is firmly grounded in the arts; it is a dynamic pedagogy that incorporates creativity and improvisation into the process of teaching and learning. Greene (2009) noted that the arts often provide the nudge needed to see things from a new and enriched perspective. We believe performance and the possibility for dialogue through CPP can create this shift in perspective and perhaps a move toward action as well.
CONCLUSION

Critical performative pedagogy, in the context of multicultural and SJTE education, aims to develop strategies of resistance to oppressive daily realities and to explore how local power relations are dialectically connected to broader institutional and societal practices that marginalize students and teachers based on race, class, and gender and other markers of difference (Nieto & Bode, 2008; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Despite the challenges described in this study, our hope is that this embodied practice, the imaginative playing out of our roles in physical and concrete ways, can lead to a heightened awareness of social justice issues when coupled with analyses of the social discourses that inform daily performances (Gee, 1990). Because our praxis is still a developing one, we cannot predict the longitudinal effects of our approach on students in teacher education programs or its effect on their relationships with their students. However, similar to our own praxis in CPP, we expect educators who are immersed in this pedagogy to be continually moving from reflections on schooling and societal systems to embodied teaching practices and social action in an ongoing and dynamic process (Freire, 1970).

NOTES

This study developed from collaborative, critical, performative work and continual dialogue with Kristen French, a committed critical multicultural educator. We also thank Nelida Matos for her inspiring praxis in family/community relationships.

1. All names of teachers, school districts, and schools are pseudonyms in this document.
2. The course was originally designed by Maria José Botelho and Sonia Nieto for the first ACCELA cohort of teachers in a neighboring mill town.
3. The term “performance” is used in our work instead of “theater” because it highlights the connections of improvisation to everyday performed realities (see Butler, 1990, and Reinelt & Roach, 1992, for more details).
4. SFL theorists see laughter as having a semiotic function among members of a discourse community. Similar to other interpersonal functions, laughter expresses attitude and affiliation (Knight & Cleirigh, 2007).

REFERENCES


Ruth Harman is an assistant professor in the Language and Literacy Department at The University of Georgia. Her research focuses on genre based pedagogies, critical performative pedagogy, and social equity in multilingual K-12 classrooms.

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APPENDIX A

Transcript Conventions

Line Breaks: To analyze the patterns of meaning in the discourse, the transcripts were divided into message units (similar to clauses in written speech) that are bounded by contextualization cues, such as falling intonation, gestures, or pauses.

Latch: =

Simultaneous: [ ] on line below/above

Pauses: (.) (0.1)(0.2)(0.3) etc.

Speeding up: < >

Slowing down: * *

Emphasis: _____ (underlined text)

Inaudible: ( )

Non-verbals: ((sits down))

Falling intonation (at end of message unit): ↓

Rising intonation (at end of message unit): ↑

Elongated vowels: ha:t

APPENDIX B

Transcript of Second Half of Phase 6

The scene below is the Forum Theater version of a teacher’s conflict with her principal, which was adapted from Mrs. Hand’s experiences in a River Town school.

1. ((Laughter))
2. Dr. Portes ((dials phone)): Mrs. ↑ Hand ((plays with pen on desk))
3. Could you please come to the office ↓ immediately
4. Mrs. Hand ((enters)): Hello Dr. Portes
5. Did you call ↑ me
6. Dr. Portes((gestures)) Yes have a seat
7. ((Mrs. Hand sits down))
8. Dr. Portes: Mrs. ↑ Hand
9. I wanted to eh bring to your [attention]
10. Mrs. Hand: [Mm]
11. Dr. Portes: that I’ve had numerous complaints from ↓ parents
12. ((Laughter from audience))
and they are very concerned about the safety of their children

and as you know I take

Mrs. Hand: = Mm Excuse me Dr. Portes but

Who are these parents that are talking

Saying things (mean things) and complaints about me

Dr. Portes: Well, I’m not at liberty to

Mrs. Hand: [Because I] haven’t had any complaints

in the past

No no parent has come to me

And said (gestures with hands)

Mrs. Hand: there are issues

So I’m just wondering (whose are the complaints or what are the complaints)

Dr. Portes: Well, I’m sorry

But I’m not at liberty at this point to disclose that

But I want to assure you

that I will send somebody to your classroom

Mrs. Hand: [Oh]

to (raises right hand) to monitor the progress

and (raises hand) ensure

that you are (gestures with hand) implementing effective classroom management strategies

and I want to recommend that you participate

Mrs. Hand: [Oh]

In the professional development opportunities offered in the district

(Laughter from audience)

Voice: Oh, God

Dr. Portes: Because (I believe it to be)

(looks at audience)

very appropriate =

Mrs. Hand: = Excuse me

I have a lot of professional development

I have been working for seven years as a teacher

and I’m very highly qualified

I have had lots of experience

teaching to children in the 1st grade

and I know what to do about classroom management

Some of the kids

I know a parent came this morning

and told me she was going to help

and I don’t know if that’s the parent that came to your room

and is complaining in the office

and is complaining

but you know

She told me that she was going to come and help
57. She didn’t say
58. that she was going to come and talk to you
59. And she didn’t have any concerns ((gestures with hands))
60. when she was talking to me ((gestures with hands))
61. She said that she was going to help me out in my ↓classroom
62. And so
63. Dr. Portes: Excuse me ((raises her right index finger)) a ↑minute
64. I feel ((gestures with raised hand)) that you are being very ↓insubordinate
65. so I will ((gestures with right finger)) speak to you later
66. I think we should ((gestures with raised hand)) schedule another appointment
67. And [and speak further]
68. Mrs. Hand: [Well that’s fine]
69. Dr. Portes: About the situation (0.3)
70. So now you can go ((gestures with hand)) back to your classroom (0.1)
71. and make sure that ((taps desk)) those kids are safe
72. and that they are engaged ((gestures)) in positive learning experiences
73. (not)
74. Mrs. Hand ((steps over and pretends to strangle Dr. Portes))