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Imagining a Liberal Education

Critically Examining the Learning Process Through Simulation

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Transformative pedagogy and a learning-centered paradigm are at the heart of a liberal education. In this article, the authors present a case study detailing a simulation they created in an interdisciplinary course in one university's core curriculum. Although the simulation and the larger course appeared to have engaged the students, after years of socialization to be passive receptacles of information, they seemed to find it difficult to break out of the traditional classroom experience; indeed, they had difficulty even imagining alternative forms of learning. Such resistance suggests the need for more innovative and transformative learning experiences as central components of today's liberal education. The sharing of ideas and practices to strengthen oppositional teaching cultures is suggested to mitigate the cost of engaging in transformative pedagogy.

Keywords: liberal education; oppositional culture; oppositional teaching culture; pedagogy; simulation; transformative pedagogy

Introduction

To be liberally educated includes a number of competencies, but at its heart is students' ability to "learn how to learn and develop a zest for learning that will last them a lifetime" (Goldenberg, 2001, p. 15). Today's liberal education "develops just those capacities needed by every thinking adult: analytical skills, effective communication, practical intelligence, ethical judgment, and social responsibility" (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2002, p. 26).

Learning without disciplinary boundaries and overcoming a rigidity of thought allows individuals to be critically aware, which can lead to self-empowerment

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175

(Gamson, 1984). Yet this self-discovery within the learning process is hampered by many trends in higher education, including specialization (Holton, 2002), the treatment of universities as businesses (Bok, 2003; Van Valey, 2001), and the “McDonaldization” of higher education (Ritzer, 2000). Although not causal, such educational shifts are correlated with passive student behavior, leading to outcomes such as student failure, negative self-perceptions, and alienation (Travis, 1995).

As Kuh (2001) noted, students generally

want to acquire the skills and competencies that will allow them to prosper economically and live self-sufficient lives after college. They also want to learn things about themselves, others, and the larger world that will improve the quality of their thinking. (p. 298)

Thus, students value liberal education and exposure to new ideas (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). National associations such as the National Panel of the Association of American Colleges and Universities share these sentiments and recently called for higher education to help college students become “intentional learners who can adapt to new environments, integrate knowledge from different sources, and continue learning throughout their lives” (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2002, p. xi). Scholars have identified an interdisciplinary curriculum as a key factor in fostering intentional learners who are critical thinkers with high levels of civic and social values (Astin & Antonio, 2004).

In this article, we describe a role-play exercise with incoming 1st-year students enrolled in an interdisciplinary core course designed to encourage them to become such intentional learners, to envision alternative educational environments, and to become self-reflexive about their own educational journeys in the pursuit of intellectual freedom. We describe a cross-cultural role-play simulation we developed, our students’ responses, and the overall difficulty—but we believe necessity—of resisting institutional shifts toward efficiency.

Overview of the Course

The overarching shift in higher education has been toward the business model, yet this strategy coexists with a few innovative changes that are less about efficiency and more about learning. One such significant recent change in university curricula is the shift to interdisciplinary courses. Some universities are implementing such changes in the core curriculum, hoping to provide students a seamless and integrated educational foundation (see e.g., Abrahamson & Kimsey, 2002). Rather than keeping the current distribution system (Gamson, 1984) where students take an assortment of unrelated classes from the humanities and social sciences, the idea for the new core at our institution was to bring together disciplines and faculty in single-themed courses. Our course, *American Education and Society*, was one of two yearlong courses for incoming 1st-year students that were taught in the interdisciplinary core’s pilot year. The course, developed by

four faculty members in sociology, education, justice studies, and women's studies, examined the historical development and contemporary phenomena of American education. As core faculty, our charge was to develop an exciting and interesting course that would intellectually engage students in a collaborative community of learners (Twale, Schaller, Hunley, & Polanski, 2002) and facilitate a sense of belonging to the university community, which in turn might improve retention (Gamson, 1984).

As the social scientists on the teaching team, our contribution to the curriculum and to our colleagues was to emphasize educational inequalities and the relationship between education and society (including the bureaucratization and rationalization of education) and to examine interactions within schools. As teachers interested in the transformative possibilities of education, we engaged in an ongoing reflective process through casting a critical eye toward our own thoughts and actions, toward students, and toward the institution itself. As we engaged in critical dialogue with one another, we began to clearly see the paradoxes embedded in a bureaucracy that prevents students from embracing liberating educational practices and environments (Gamson, 1984).

In our classes, we explored the structural impediments to claiming one's education, focusing on the bureaucratic structure of schools through readings and discussions. Students identified many factors that hinder them from claiming their education, including the traditional lecture format that positions them as passive recipients of knowledge, what Freire (1972) referred to as the banking model of education. Although we did engage in some lecturing, for the most part our classrooms were structured to elicit discussion and dialogue. Our pedagogy was premised on the idea that "college is a time when faculty and students can explore important issues in ways that respect a variety of viewpoints and deepen understanding" (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2002, p. ix) and that "methods of teaching largely determine what learning occurs" (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2002, p. 32). To bring the readings and larger concepts to life for our students, we developed many pedagogical innovations that included Internet assignments, scavenger hunts, and field trips, among others. One of these pedagogical innovations was an exploratory simulation we created and employed to allow students to model, experience, and critically reflect on the banking model and innovative educational practice.

Transformative Pedagogy: Claiming an Education

Rather than embracing a pedagogy where faculty transmit knowledge to students, a transformative pedagogy is one "that relentlessly questions the kinds of labor, practices, and forms of production that are enacted in public and higher education" (Giroux, 2001, p. 18). Theoretically inspired by the work of Adrienne Rich, Henry Giroux, and other critical theorists and in pursuit of an educational experience in which students act as self-reflective participants with an ability to think critically, we embraced the theme "claim your education" as the course

motto. Early in the term, students read Rich's (1979) classic essay in which she explained the important distinction between receiving and claiming an education:

The first thing I want to say to you who are students, is that you cannot afford to think of being here to receive an education; you will do much better to think of yourselves as being here to claim one. One of the dictionary definitions of the verb *to claim* is: to take as the rightful owner; to assert in the face of possible contradiction. *To receive* is to come into possession of; to act as receptacle or container for; to accept as authoritative or true. The difference is that between acting and being acted-upon. (p. 231)

Rich's concept of claiming an education is synonymous with critical pedagogy that provides students

with the competencies they need to cultivate the capacity for critical judgment, thoughtfully connect politics to social responsibility, and expand their own sense of agency in order to curb the excesses of dominant power, revitalize a sense of public commitment, and expand democratic relations. (Giroux, 2001, p. 20)

Our goal was to create a learning environment in which claiming one's education was a real possibility, where students could make the connection between academic study and personal life, and where each student felt empowered to claim agency over his or her personal life and self.

Education Simulation: Whyville and Omega

Simulations and role plays have been used for some time in various fields of education. Educators from various disciplines including business, medicine, geography, sociology, and psychology, among others, use this pedagogical tool to help students learn concepts in experiential ways. One simulation that has been used by a variety of disciplines is a cross-cultural role play in which students interact with different groups of people with unique values and practices. For example, Tomcho and Foels (2002) used such a role play to help students understand the process of acculturation. Likewise, businesses often use *Ba'fa Ba'fa*, a role-play game, to train managers to be more effective leaders in cross-cultural situations. Whereas such simulations have been used to facilitate empathy and cross-cultural effectiveness, the effectiveness of such simulations in helping students develop a critical awareness of learning environments has not been addressed. Thus, we developed a simulation to create two communities with clearly different ideologies, histories, political economies, and school systems as a way to contrast what was educationally typical and what might be possible. The simulation itself was contextualized within readings on the relationship between political economy and education to assist students in realizing that schools do not function outside of society. We wanted students to understand that changing schools in significant

ways was not feasible unless the larger societal structure and ideologies were also challenged.

Along with watching numerous film excerpts showing the challenges of attaining—let alone claiming—an education, the students in both classes read a large amount of material, including the book *A Hope in the Unseen* (Suskind, 1998). The book follows one ambitious, poor, African American boy's struggle to survive and succeed in a public school in the inner city. Despite many challenges, the main character manages to graduate from high school and attend an Ivy League institution of higher education. As most of our students came from middle-class, predominantly rural backgrounds, they had virtually no experience with the frustration inherent in such impoverished systems. Students also read *Woman on the Edge of Time* (Piercy, 1976), a science fiction fantasy that describes education in a futuristic world called Mattapoisette. In this society, education is embedded within everyday transactions and helps transform individuals to become diverse and contributing members of society. Our students read the texts and used them to discuss the relationships among schools, the economy, and different ideologies and to characterize our historical and contemporary educational situations. After completing the books and contrasting societies and educational philosophies and experiences, we engaged in the simulation.

The simulation involved two classes of students taught by each of the authors. Each class was assigned to construct a society and an educational system that replicated the educational structure in *A Hope in the Unseen* (Suskind, 1998) or an alternative vision such as the one described in *Woman on the Edge of Time* (Piercy, 1976). The class physically transformed the educational space as much as possible given the bureaucratic constraints. Each class organized a community, describing and planning its ideology, political economy, and schooling. Students were socialized to behave according to the culture's norms, interacting with one another in pursuit of their culture's goals, and then students were sent in small groups to briefly experience and visit the other culture. Although the simulation itself lasted just 1 hour, the preparation time for these activities required three class periods. We now turn to a discussion of the culture of each learning environment.

CULTURE 1: WHYVILLE

One of our teaching goals in the course was to develop thoughtful students who would habitually ask critical and difficult questions about social life. The operational definition of a thoughtful person as defined by Meier and Schwarz (1995) is someone who habitually asks the following questions:

- How do you know what you know?
- From whose viewpoint is this being presented?
- How is this event or work connected to others?
- What if things were different?
- Why is this important?

We encouraged students to imagine a society in which such questions were expected and encouraged. Accordingly, students named their culture *Whyville* to reflect their curiosity about why things, particularly schooling, are organized the way they are. Informed by the community described in Piercy's (1976) novel, *Whyville* was one of many villages that coexisted peacefully in students' simulations. The villages were self-sustaining. All villages grew their food (with the help of technology) in ecologically sound ways and traded when necessary for a balanced diet. In addition, each village was required to adhere to the noncapitalistic economy. No village could overproduce goods to sell for profit. In fact, villages only made what was necessary to survive, and any luxury, unnecessary items were shared among the villages through a trading system. Technological knowledge was shared equally among the villages, which led to the elimination of boring, tedious jobs. Computers and robots did most of this work, including washing clothes and dishes, factory work, and so on. Each village constructed its own institutions and structures, including its educational system. The educational systems were very different than our own and reflected the villages' ideologies and political economies. No structured school system existed in *Whyville*. Instead, *Whyville* emphasized life-long learning in the context of everyday life. Learning occurred when children and adults were engaged in observing, working, and interacting with others. As such, there were no official teachers, no hierarchy; each person was viewed as an intellectual with strengths to offer the community at large. Each community member valued knowledge, yearned to increase his or her knowledge, and considered all knowledge equivalent in importance.

Students transformed the classroom by adorning the room with posters and flyers and moving large desks to the side to encourage movement and shared space. They organized what they called *learning centers* and polled one another to identify areas of knowledge that could be shared in learning stations. Students developed learning centers for golf, medieval dance, judo, and drawing. In addition, there were stations with games that students could play with one another to stimulate ideas, language, and interaction and food and drink to help create an atmosphere of enjoyable learning and sharing. Students drew colorful posters and flyers emphasizing creativity, freedom, and individuality, which they posted around the room.

CULTURE 2: OMEGA

The second class was organized to replicate the limitations of traditional school practices, including the banking model of education still in existence in the United States. More specifically, the second class was set up to reflect a modern-day, inner-city high school, similar to the one vividly portrayed in *A Hope in the Unseen* (Suskind, 1998). The educational institutions in Omega (the instructor chose the name without giving the students the opportunity for input) were stratified with tracking mechanisms and resource inequalities. The Omega community was situated in a capitalist society, and the school suffered from a severe lack of funding and resources. Students were informed that they were there mainly to receive the credential of a high school diploma and possibly training for

a low-skill job. College was viewed as a possibility for a select few. The simulation goals for the Omega community were as follows: to reflect structural inequality in American schools and education, to reflect the ideology of meritocracy, to illustrate tracking and the competition for scarce resources, to emphasize conformity and control of students, and primarily, to provide an opportunity to experience the frustration all too common in disadvantaged classrooms across the United States.

In preparing for the simulation, students spent time reflecting on the educational experiences and inequality portrayed in *A Hope in the Unseen* (Suskind, 1998) and in the work of others such as Kozol (1991) and MacLeod (1995). In the Omega classroom, students were grouped into simulated educational tracks by choosing a playing card at random. The cards were used to place the students into one of three groups—gifted, intermediate, and remedial. All students were asked to come to class on the day of the simulation dressed in black and white, the generic “school uniform” for this society. In addition, students covered the walls with large pieces of paper over which they scribbled graffiti—some of it, interestingly, showing frustration by attacking the more privileged, “gifted” students. Posted on the door and in several places throughout the room were “Omega Rules of Conduct.” Those rules were as follows:

1. No weapons
 2. No violence
 3. No spitting
 4. No smoking
 5. No eating or drinking
 6. No cheating
 7. Follow the dress code
 8. Do your assigned work
 9. Do not speak out of turn
 10. Respect the teacher
- Hard Work = Success!

These rules purposely had little to do with education and everything to do with controlling a captive population. The nod to the idea of meritocracy came in the last line, almost as an inappropriately enthusiastic afterthought.

During the simulation, students in each group were given a task to complete: The remedial and the intermediate groups were given mundane photocopied assignments and told to share because there were not enough copies to go around. The small group of gifted students was allowed to choose their own project, and they spent their time with a video camera interviewing students and producing their own documentary. Students were closely watched by the teacher and a classroom monitor; a “discipline chair” was set up at the front of the classroom where students were sent as punishment for infractions. When students from Whyville joined Omega, they were immediately tracked (told only that the card they chose simulated standardized testing) and placed into the appropriate group. They were told to ask the other students for help in getting caught up and were then left to

their own devices. If they brought food or drinks with them, they were told to throw them away upon entering the room.

STUDENT BEHAVIOR AND REFLECTION

Our analysis of students' responses to the simulation was based on participant observation of interactions during the simulation, a focus group discussion, and student response papers. The classes were combined for one class session and served as a focus group with both instructors serving as facilitators, who posed questions to stimulate discussion and reflection. Specifically, students were asked about how they felt and behaved in each educational environment, the degree to which they learned material, and which environment they preferred to be in and why. Because focus groups are interactional with the group as a unit of analysis, the outcomes of such focus groups are collective narratives of experience (Smithson, 2000). Knowing this, we also asked students to first individually reflect on and evaluate the simulation through a writing assignment. Students were asked to write a paper in which they reflected on the educational practices and experiences of each learning community and to specifically argue for which type of environment was the most conducive for learning. We provided students with questions to consider when writing their essays, including which learning environment they preferred, which seemed most realistic, which they thought they could learn more in, which made them feel like a valuable intellectual, and which stimulated their interest and curiosity.

We then analyzed their essays and focus group comments and compared our observational notes on the similarities and differences between the student populations of Whyville and Omega. In trying to gauge the learning that took place in the creation and acting out of the simulation, we found ourselves generally gratified, sometimes surprised, and a bit dismayed by our students' observations. We were pleased to see how deeply engaged students were in the simulation. Not surprisingly, their cultural immersion resulted in expected behavior. Whyville students mingled with others, moving from learning center to learning center. There were multiple conversations occurring, and visitors were greeted with open arms and invited to participate in a number of activities. The Omega students also quickly got into the spirit of the simulation in their own community. They became sullen and angry, fighting over copies of the handouts, unwilling to share with each other. Some sat quietly, reading magazines or trying to tape insulting signs on the backs of other students without getting caught. They started throwing wadded up paper around the room, especially targeting the gifted group, the teacher, and any new students walking in the door. There was clearly no learning going on: The classroom had become a virtual war zone.

Analysis of the focus group discussion and students' papers indicated that the simulation facilitated learning in three significant ways. First, students realized the power school structure and culture had on shaping individual experience and identity. For example, Amanda noted in her assigned essay that she felt "like a valuable intellectual in the Whyville society more than I did in the Omega society

because they categorized everyone by their standardized test scores. In Whyville no one's knowledge was more valuable than anyone else's." Nikki, a member of Whyville, visited Omega and was immediately tracked through a random procedure. Tracked into a low-level ability group, Nikki felt "reduced to a number. I felt dehumanized and worthless. I became a number without a face, without an identity." She characterized the group she was assigned to as a "mass array of chaos" where "spitballs flew, people called each other names, and no one learned." Such realizations made it possible for students to better understand the low achievement scores and low motivation of marginalized groups they had read about. Laura, a student who earlier in the semester had a tendency to blame individuals for low achievement scores rather than examine structural factors, seemed to shift her analysis following the simulation. She noted,

Once we enforce rules, label kids with disabilities, and shove them into a classroom where they all must perform at the same speed, we take away their natural learning abilities. . . . The Omega society hurt students by stifling their natural learning curiosity and abused them by labeling and tracking them.

Gannett, a member of the Omega society, preferred Whyville because of the way it made him feel as an intellectual equal and contributor. He wrote,

The Whyville society made me feel more like a valuable intellect in the first five minutes than the Omega society ever did. No matter what I had to say, the Whyville people took immediate interest and gave me their full attention. I don't think I could have said anything to capture the Omega society's interest.

As we compared students' papers after the simulation with their earlier work and reflected on their overall classroom discussions before and after the simulation, we noticed a heightened awareness of the complex relationship between school structure, individual identity, and academic performance. Even though the students had studied this relationship, the simulation brought it to life.

Secondly, students became more aware of the relationship between ideology, political economy, and schooling. Although we had discussed and analyzed educational practice in terms of this analytical framework, the relationship had been studied in the abstract. The simulation allowed the relationships to become real through experience. For example, Kelly, a member of the Omega society, recognized the inherent contradictions in Omega's stated ideology and the reality of his educational experience:

The individual had no voice or encouragement to act in a manner that would signify him as something other than a test score in a group. The only glimpse of meritocracy was the quote "Hard work = Success" mocking us from the bottom line of the rule list at the front of the room. The practice was "Group, do this . . . Group, do that." Only by acting out and being disciplined was an individual able to get some personal attention.

Krissi, a member of Whyville, noted that “due to the egalitarian nature of Whyville, I felt much more like a valued person, deserving of the respect I need to succeed.” She argued that the nonbureaucratic and noncapitalistic structure of Whyville made it possible “where all were equal and all knowledge was respected.” Dustin, another member of Whyville, argued that the practice and “ideology of equal opportunity and collective learning promoted everyone in society.” He noted that no one “outshined anyone else because of the value of equality. Everyone in Whyville had something of educational value to offer, whether it was judo knowledge or the ability to converse well with others.”

Finally, the third realization made possible by the simulation was the critical reflection on our own society. Pam felt as if she had lived in Omega for most of her life: “After living in a dominant Omegan like society for the past eighteen years, I was given the opportunity to be part of the Whyville society for 55 minutes.” Students who had previously been cautious in their critique of their own educational experience were more likely to see the U.S. educational system in Omega. Dustin argued that “Omega is much more realistic . . . the ideologies of Omega are found in our own schools.” The Omega students too found their society all too familiar. They recognized the structure from their own educational experience and quickly fell into their roles. As Emily explained,

Participating in the Omega society made me realize how frustrating it must be to go to an inner city high school. Even though it was a mock situation, the classroom was set up so well that it became real. I was able to act resistant because it was so frustrating that I couldn't have an assignment because of the “lack of funds.”

Aaron was fortunate to be one of Omega's “gifted” students, but even so, he much preferred education in Whyville: “In the Whyville society, everyone was a gifted student that brought different skills to the classroom that were seen as important skills.” Jessica felt that Whyville was a fantasy world: “I think that anyone could learn more in the Whyville society because they get to learn what they want, when they want and it's all hands-on learning. . . . The Whyville society made me more curious about social life.”

As professors accustomed to chafing under the constraints of working in bureaucratic institutions of higher education, we envisioned Whyville as educational paradise. To us, it represented a learning environment completely free of constraints, where all knowledge was valued and individuals could learn in the ways best suited to them at their own pace. It was meant to be in stark contrast to the misery of the Omega system. We felt confident that our students would see these differences, and although they would recognize Omega as being similar to America's educational structure, we assumed that they would prefer the freedom and choices of Whyville. The Whyville students enjoyed creating their society and embraced all that it had to offer in the moment. Yet during the focus group and writing assignments, they, along with the Omega students, found that Whyville was too far out of the realm of possibility and found it difficult to accept its basic

tenets. The main narrative that emerged in the focus group discussion was the insistence that structure and hierarchy were necessary for effective schooling. Another theme that emerged during the focus group was the difficulty students had in conceiving that valuable learning could occur outside of the realm of schools. The conclusion that emerged from the focus group was that Omega—even with its many flaws—was the better system. Focus group themes were consistent with individual student papers. For example, Gannett, who was quoted earlier, made the following observations:

Although the Whyville society wasn't very realistic, I liked it more than the Omega society. While I was participating in the Omega society, I found that it was more like a jail cell than a schoolroom. Not only did I feel like I was being treated like an inmate, but it seemed like the room was modeled after a real jail cell. We had graffiti on the walls, and it seemed as if the room was a lot darker than the Whyville society's room. I think that you would have had a better chance to learn something in the Omega society, but only if you were in the right track. . . . I wish my learning experience could have mirrored the Whyville society, but I really don't think you would go too far in life with the skills that you would learn there. *Although it wasn't the most fun way of learning, the Omega society was probably the best way* [italics added].

Other students seemed to agree. Anna, a student who excelled in the traditional classroom, wrote that,

In the Omega society, the learning was more structured and in many cases that is for the best. In Whyville, everyone kind of did their own thing. Eventually there would be some who were slightly versed in many different areas and some who were very knowledgeable in only a few.

In addition, even as we attempted to illustrate the myth of meritocracy in American educational settings, students held tightly to the fundamental ideas of individual effort and achievement. Margarita came from an educational background filled with competition and inequality; she felt uncomfortable in Whyville, explaining,

I personally feel that in the Omega school you would learn more, even though not everyone else would be able to, but those who try and force the system to see them and their work, they will learn more. In the Whyville schools, I felt that everything they were learning was unnecessary, nothing very important was going on, every one was busy having fun.

Her use of the term *schools* in discussing her experience in Whyville is instructive. Even though Whyville was set up as an educational environment without schools or formal systems of education, our 1st-year students were so socialized to the structure of American education that even after a year of trying to get them to view educational structures more critically, they still could not envision a

meaningful education without the familiar comforts of a school building, rules of conduct, standard core curriculum, and hierarchical authority.

Students weren't the only resistant parties. At several points during the semester, we received complaints from other faculty and staff in nearby offices concerning the noise level emanating from our class. On more than one occasion, other faculty complained about the difficulty of entering the core classroom at the scheduled time, arguing that they weren't able to access it until the moment their classes began. Regrettably, this is somewhat true. The traditional classroom structure was evident in the core classroom with large, heavy desks in rows facing front. We often restructured the classroom space, moving desks and chairs so that we were facing one another or during simulations, moving them to the side to open up interactive space. This of course entailed time and muscles, making it difficult to depart from the classroom immediately after the class ended. Importantly, the critique of others indicates our violation of normal classroom behavior. Freire's (1985) language of possibilities is best employed here as we prefer to identify our classroom noise level as an indication of student engagement while others negatively characterized it as loud and unruly.

Conclusion

The preeminent goal of a liberal education is to help each student claim his or her education and to become "an individual who is intentional about learning and life, empowered, informed, and responsible" (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2002, p. 25). Given this, the notable student disengagement and withdrawal from educational cultures that facilitate such intellectual growth and freedom should not be taken lightly. Students' propensity to embrace traditional, hierarchical, and passive learning environments is a reflection of years of socialization and alienating schooling experiences. In our simulation, although students enjoyed their time in Whyville, they had difficulty imagining that learning could occur in such environments or that the real world could be similarly organized. Ultimately, we argue the practice of imagination and the experience of educational freedom is a worthwhile endeavor regardless of students' resistance. In fact, according to Freire (1994), the first step in a progressive "pedagogy of hope" is to imagine alternatives "in a way that enables one to act in the present as if this alternative had already begun to emerge" (Simon, 1992, p. 4). Our dismay and frustration toward students' responses is mitigated by our memory of their active and engaged experience of learning in the culture of Whyville. Students invented a supportive and engaging learning environment and in doing so, momentarily discovered a sense of agency and freedom. The cross-cultural role-playing simulation provided students with an occasion to imagine and experience intellectually freeing educational contexts. It mirrored Giroux's (1983) point that "Students should learn not only how to weigh the existing society against *its* own claims, they should also be taught to think and act in ways that speak to different societal possibilities and ways of living" (p. 202).

This case study reveals the difficulty of teaching in the context of the business model that emphasizes productivity and efficient methods of teaching, assessment, and curriculum. We argue that like students, teachers experience a sense of estrangement from the transformative possibilities of innovative pedagogy. As Becker (1995) noted, innovations are complicated and difficult to implement. Teachers who innovate cannot use “off-the-shelf products” that publishers provide but instead must construct their own products. Such actions consume time and other resources. Given the expenditure of time, Becker argued that the problem is “not whether there are such people but whether their ideas will be incorporated into the workings of the rest of the package, whether the changes will be institutionalized” (p. 306).

Although not yet institutionalized, a small but growing group of teachers in research institutions are engaged in innovations and have developed an oppositional culture (Serow, Van Dyk, McComb, & Harrold, 2002). This opposition to efficiency in favor of transformative learning is a difficult journey for teachers given the institutional constraints of time and the devaluation of teaching over research. To facilitate pedagogical experiences that provide liberating visions for students and liberating teaching experiences for faculty, collaborative communities composed of like-minded teachers are important resources that must be fostered. Networking and growing this culture of teachers is made easier with institutional opportunities to collaborate. The shift to interdisciplinary, team-constructed core courses that some institutions of higher education are engaged in is an opportunity for a cultural shift. Such opportunities fuel our willingness to embrace the complications, ambiguity, and conflict that emerge in our continuous journey to assist students to claim their education. Our core teaching experience has led us to contemplate how we as conscientious teachers can innovate in ways that allow and encourage students to claim their education in the face of bureaucratic pressures. As Becker (1995) noted, “You can do anything you like, but the cost is high” (p. 306). Whereas we believe the cost of innovative teaching is high, we argue that abandoning transformative pedagogy is even more costly, and so we continue to share our experiments on how to best transform educational practice and culture using the ironies and paradoxes of our teaching situations as fodder for future innovations. Given the costs and rewards of our own experiences, we encourage our fellow teachers committed to creating transformative educational environments to pursue and share simulations and creative learning exercises in an effort to challenge bureaucratic inertia and to engage students in claiming their own liberal education.

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